

10-21-2011

Interview with Alex Fabros

Alex Fabros

California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ohcma_chinatown

Recommended Citation

Fabros, Alex and California State University, Monterey Bay, "Interview with Alex Fabros" (2011). *Chinatown Renewal Project*. 8.

https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/ohcma_chinatown/8

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History and Community Memory Archive at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chinatown Renewal Project by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

CSUMB Oral History & Community Memory Archive
Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Alex Fabros
Interviewer: Jorge Flores
Date of Interview: October 21, 2011
Duration of Interview: 1:12:51

Alex Fabros 00:00
Okay, no problem.

Jorge Flores 00:03
Okay. Hello, my name is Jorge Flores. I'm here with Dr. Alex Fabros. It is Friday, October 21, 2011. We're here to discuss Dr. Alex Fabros' life story, his family, and his connections to Chinatown for the purpose of the restoration project going on today. Do we have your permission to record this?

Alex Fabros 00:22
Yes, you do. I also have to make one correction. I'm not a doctor. Everything's done except I've decided not to take to the Ph.D.

Jorge Flores 00:30
Excuse me, Mr. Doctor Fabros— Mr. Fabros. I'm sorry. Why didn't you?

Alex Fabros 00:36
Why didn't I? It has to do with— there's a reason for it, and we'll explain off camera.

Jorge Flores 00:44
Okay, so first, I'd like to start by asking you about your family and how they came to the area.

Alex Fabros 00:50
My grandfather came here in the 1920s. After he got through with his military service in the Philippines, he came here in the 1920s and was a labor contractor. And then, around 1929, my father, instead of going to college, decided to come here to the United States. He ended up in a quarantine ship up in Seattle, didn't arrive until late October or early October. So, my grandfather set him to work out in the fields. They sent him to a place near Visalia, a place called Exeter. And then, from there, he went to Palermo, so he was at Exeter. And then he went to Palermo. And then he came here to Salinas to, where he entered Hartnell College and he spent his two years of college at Hartnell as a journalist, spent his time in Salinas area, World War Two, joined with the Filipino regiments, went to the Philippines, got married, came back to the United States, again, was stationed here at Fort Ord, Believe it or not, then he bought a home in Salinas, we'll talk more about that later. So that's been pretty much my home. I've been raised in Salinas. I consider it my hometown— I used to. Now I've got a 40-foot sailboat at Pier 39. That's my hometown.

Jorge Flores 02:13
Do you have any siblings? Any other brothers or sisters?

Alex Fabros 02:15
I have a brother that's in Washington State. I have a sister who was one of the first rebellious Asian Americans at Berkeley in 1966. They started the Asian American movement at Berkeley. And then I've got a younger sister.

Jorge Flores 02:35

Okay, so your dad was actually also born in the Philippines, also right?

Alex Fabros 02:40

He was born in the Philippines. He was a US citizen when I was born. So, I got my citizenship through him, although I was born in Philippines,

Jorge Flores 02:47

Okay, so you were also born in the Philippines?

Alex Fabros 02:49

Yes, I was.

Jorge Flores 02:50

And what year were you born?

Alex Fabros 02:50

1946.

Jorge Flores 02:53

Do you remember—do you have any memories of the Philippines?

Alex Fabros 02:55

Oh, I've got a couple. I remember waterfalls. And then I remember them hanging up on these old army duffel bags would you carry your clothes in and that was my playpen when I got too frisky they just picked me up and dropped me into a duffel bag until I went to sleep. I remember the trip coming to the States, I was little bit almost two and a half years old. I remember the ocean I remember my dad playing cards. I remember a Filipino cook in the galley and he would feed me all excess kind of food come back with a sandwich. My dad would ask, "Where did you get that from?" I'd say, "Oh, one of the uncles gave it to me".

Jorge Flores 03:35

How old was your dad when he brought you to the Philippines coming to the United States?

Alex Fabros 03:38

Oh, he was in his late 40s. He was one those guys that married late because they didn't have women here for him to marry. Well, that will he was interested in at that time for marriage.

Jorge Flores 03:50

Do you have any childhood memories that stick out to you from here to there?

Alex Fabros 03:55

Well, for Fort Ord, I lived in Ord village from about age three to about age five. I remember when they were still building the key part homes that they've just torn down. I remember Chinatown. We lived here but my dad would take me to Salinas on the weekends. And of course, we go down to the old Manila barber shop. And that's when I still had hair, I'd get to these haircuts and I remember like two occasions; I was sitting there one time and all of a sudden, I saw these horses walking by you don't see this anymore in Salinas but they used to have on Saturdays at least. During the daytime, the rodeo performers would ride the horses down Main Street, come up Market Street and then go up by the Chinese Filipino church and then head up the back entrance to the rodeo grounds. They just don't do that anymore. I guess for insurance purposes. Then I remember when the circus came to town and it came right by Chinatown at that time I think we're in a restaurant or something, and my dad goes,

"Come out and see a lion!" And so, it's there's elephants out there. And I go, and I go "no, no, no, no." I was about four or five years old, I'd seen the picture books. No lions in the United States. I went out there. And sure enough, there's all these lions and everything else. And behind the elephants were the last in line, I remember that. And my dad said, "you see that man over there?" And there's this guy, there's like three guys are pushing these white barrels, and they're scooping up poop. My father says, you're going to start school, if you don't finish school, you're going—that's your job. So, I still remember that elephant and pooping scoop, and that's sixty years ago.

Jorge Flores 05:44

Wow, is that outside the barbershop

Alex Fabros 05:47

Right outside of Manila barbershop. That was run by Vic Calderon and a bunch of other guys that because there are Filipinos, they couldn't—and they were educated; here in states! college education, but they couldn't get jobs because they're Filipinos.

Jorge Flores 06:03

Now, I'd like to ask Mr. Fabros, can you tell us something about yourself or your life story, wherever you'd like to begin.

Alex Fabros 06:08

Dang, it's hard to—you know as an Army brat, okay, let's just say I was an Army brat until I was age 14. So, we traveled, we lived in Germany. I grew up in Germany. group of German kids spoke German, learnt German, on the streets with them.

Jorge Flores 06:27

Do you still know them?

Alex Fabros 06:29

No, I don't. like what I hear, it comes back. For me to pull it out. I can't do that. We lived the Fort Carson, Colorado, we lived off base, we lived in a segregated area off base where all the poor people lived, although our parents were in the military

Jorge Flores 06:44

Why was that?

Alex Fabros 06:45

You know, you didn't live in white areas. Sometimes. It didn't matter who it was. I remember all the kids a bunch of my friends are white kids or dads in the military. And they lived in a nicer part of town and all of us Asian kids, Filipino kids and black kids, Mexican kids we lived in on the on the other side of Carson Boulevard or Colorado Boulevard. And so, they were maybe about five, six blocks down there was nicer neighborhoods, and we were down in this area. It had never dawned on me. I thought my dad just wanted to hang around with his friends. You know, then we get to— then we get to Fort Carson. And that's when he started hanging around. And so, we got integrated there again. It's just that being back in Germany, it didn't matter what your color of skin you were or what your dad's rank was. All the kids hung together. My dad retired and we came back to fort Ord to spend his last 3 years in the military. We lived in Salinas. In the house my dad had bought. And way down—[phone rings] That's mine. You wanna cut that for a second or? Just go ahead and just go ahead and um [phone ring ends]

Jorge Flores 07:50

Okay.

Alex Fabros 07:55

Well I'm gonna set the stage for you. Okay? It's 1950, my dad has—I remember this as a memory because it's very distinct. My dad took about 60 days off of the military and went out and worked out in the fields. And the reason I remember this

Jorge Flores 08:10

Here in Salinas?

Alex Fabros 08:11

In Salinas. Over there by Spreckels, one of my uncles had a strawberry farm. So, he thought he'd come over and work. So, I believe my father worked roughly about two months that's at least what he told me. He would go out there he'd pick strawberries, my mother picked strawberries, I picked strawberries. I'd get sick from eating too many strawberries. But my dad took that money plus money that his friends gave him. One that we used to call our uncle, okay. And he bought a house in Salinas. 130 Williams Road in the LSL. Now back in those days, they had a thing that's called a covenant. People don't understand this, but covenant said that you can only sell your house to a person based on certain deals. And that house had a covenant that says you can't sell it to a person that's not white. You cannot sell it to a Mongolian or a Malaysian, Japanese, Chinese or Filipino

Jorge Flores 09:15

As part of the Asian Exclusion Act? Or—

Alex Fabros 09:18

I have no idea. well, it dated back to that deal. And we had to be in a white neighborhood to I mean, all our neighbors on both sides were white. And they were sort of like at that time, you'd call maybe like middle class. So, there were major protests. I remember one time, we just moved in. And I was sitting down, it was in my bedroom. Somebody threw a stone and broke our window. And, you know, imagine being five years old, okay. And then a couple of nights later, there was this big fire in front of our house and somebody had gone out and they threw gasoline on the front—on our lawn. And then I remember, my father had to go to court, because they're trying to say my father was not entitled to purchase that house, he had taken the guy that had built the home to court and my father to court to see if they can force a covenant so that non—Asians or non-Americans couldn't live in that home. They were trying to force us out nonwhites. Yeah. So, the biggest problem was that my dad grew up in Salinas. Okay. And the judge happened to go to school with my dad at Hartnell college in the 1930s. And so, when it came time to for our court case, I remember seeing the crowd in the deal. I was five years old sitting in the court for the first time. The people, the plaintiffs had brought this to court, and they said, they stated the case. And then my dad's lawyer, introduced himself and my dad. I remember, I believe his name is Judge Brazil. That's the name sounds familiar—sounded like a nut. But that's the reason I remember it. But my dad stood up, said, Alex, how's it been? My dad says pretty good, since you have to play a little tennis or basketball. When we get through with this thing today. He says well, depends on what happens. He says don't worry about it. [laugh] And so they threw it out. We were allowed to stay in that neighborhood. [unclear]

Jorge Flores 11:24

How did your neighbors feel about that?

Alex Fabros 11:26

Kind of pissed off. And then the harassment continues on a couple of times. Finally, there's, there's a kid I'd go to school that's going to school at Fremont school, kindergarten. It wasn't that far. Just like one block up, make a left turn, go up about four blocks walk to school. And one day I came home my

dad, I said, Hey, Dad, what's a jap? He looks at me. Where'd you hear that? And so, I said and what's a Ching Chong Chinaman? Said well where'd you hear that? I said well these kids were calling that to me when I was coming home today. You're not a Ching Chong, Chinaman. You're not a jap, you're Filipino. So next time somebody calls you that name you hit him. So, I came home the next day and had a bloody nose. He's like what happened I said somebody called me a ching chong chinaman so I said I was Filipino. he says, doesn't matter. and so, I hit the kid. So, all three of them hit me back, but I just kept on hitting. So, my dad says he needs boxing lessons, they taught me how to box. So, it's like I never took crap from anybody from that point on. And another time was about the same time my dad was getting ready to go to Germany at that time. And so, he did say he's gonna build a fence around the house, to protect us from our neighbors and everything else, the kids. He saw me one day running, just right down the street. And this dog was chasing me. And I finally made it to the house and I got a stick and I hit the dog in its nose. The dog took off. he says what's going on? So those kids up the street, every time I walk by there, they had this dog chase me. That's not good. I was, like, I can't hit the dog until I come here, pick up a stick and hit it. So anyway, that weekend, all the uncles had come to the house. And they're helping build this fence

Jorge Flores 13:07

From your father's side?

Alex Fabros 13:08

Yeah, from my father's side. His uncle's, my uncle, as you'd call them. And they came over. And they started building a house. And I remember that. So, I'm about five, five and a half years old at this time. somebody knocks on the door and my mother answers it. And there's like these police officers there and they go, can we talk to Mr. Fabros. And my mother says sure he's in the back, and I'm following my mom holding her skirt and I know what's going on. And so, the police officer comes up to my dad says are you Mr. Fabros. My dad said yes. Why? Said we have some complaints. What is it? Well, a dog's missing. Well dogs are always missing. Well they're saying that you cooked up his dog. And my dad goes, no, no. That's a stereotype you have. Well we're building something here for my family, building a fence. And in the Philippines, we do something like this. You bring the community together, you get a couple of goats. And you roast them and this is called it we're roasting two goats here today. And the guy says, oh, okay, you guys are Filipinos and my dad say that yeah, we're all Filipinos. The guy says I served in the Philippines and World War Two. So, then my dad said all these guys are veterans. We all served in the Philippines, World War Two in the first Filipino regiment . the guy says oh Yeah, I think I was with one of your units. You know, they started talking about [unclear] and everything else. And finally, my mother comes over says would you like some Filipino food? The guy says oh I remember that. So, my mother goes over she gets some ponzu she gets him some lumpia and my father says would you like to have some goat and the guy says you sure that's goat not a dog. It looks like a German shepherd to me. It's my dad goes to the garbage can opens up the top and pulls out the head and it's a goat head on it, it's got the horns and everything else. The guy says Okay, I guess that is a goat so they cut it off and so they Get some cold and everything else and the guy sat down they ate it. And my mother wrapped up some food for them to take home, put wax paper on it. And they left. And I think after everybody's gone, my mother looked at my dad says, you know, Alex, what if they asked to look for the second head. And my dad says that dog is not going to chase my son anymore. So that's things my dad used to do. There was another time when he got during this whole period. My dad was so pissed off. They had they pulled up my mom's rose bushes. Okay. And they did she had planted these flowers and everything else is somebody come out in the middle night, and he has ripped up everything on the front of house. I mean, this is total harassment. So next day, this is the 50s. 1951. No, this isn't it. 1952 when it happens. so, my dad comes home. He's got a 45 He's got a gun. I don't know what it is. Okay, it's a gun. I'll call it 45 today—must be military gun. Remember, it's early evening he's going around in there, but he's mad, he's banging on the doors. He knows who these people are that have been harassing us it's like, like three or four houses down from us they're—I don't know. So,

he goes there he bangs the doors. So, you guys want to screw with my family? You got to screw around me first you do this again. I blow your heads off. He had his gun you know. so, somebody must have called the police. They came over. My father says they asked my dad what's going on Mr. Fabros? You know, this what's going on? And I'm just trying to protect my property here. The guy says, Well, you shouldn't be doing this. My dad goes, Okay, no problem. So, they left. But you know, after my dad did that, that he stood up for us. No one ever bothered him again. That's why sometimes I have a chip on my shoulder. When you start to screw around with me. I get that from my dad. He taught me as a kid that I have certain rights. I have certain things that I can do and can't do. I have to respect people, but I have to be respected and returned. So, I learned that from my dad. Those are things I learned as a five-year-old, six-year-old growing up in Salinas.

Jorge Flores 15:45

This is in the 50s? Do you think these were attributes taught from his father or from the military or just personal [unclear]?

Alex Fabros 17:13

Nah, we're Filipinos we get pissed off at all people. We're territorial. I'm serious. [laughs] But there's lots of things growing up in Salinas. I remember coming back from Fort Carson, my dad retired. He's worked here at Fort Ord at one time and had his meningitis breakout. And so, all of a sudden, all the civilian workers here at fort Ord were laid off, no work period to close down the base because of meningitis. A couple of young soldiers had died from it so all of a sudden you got all these people out of work, can't find anything. My father goes out works out in the fields, we started helping out. We used to bring boxes of onions over to the house. We finished working, and finished with our schoolwork. We'd have dinner, then we'd sit on the back porch, bunching onions, cleaning onions, I think he gets like 10 cents a dozen, right? And our goal was each a bunch 100 bunches, and then we go to sleep. And sometimes you go to school the next morning and smell like onions. And it used to be really bad because I only had one pair of jeans at that time and my jeans were wet the next morning because I washed them at night. I couldn't go to school till my jeans were dry. So, my dad writes these notes for me says, "Alex had to go to see the doctor this morning." And I was sick a lot for a couple of years in the mornings. But you know growing up, there's a lot—there's a sense of community here that I mean, everybody was part of a community. It's because I think that's because we were isolated from a lot of things. I don't know if we isolated ourselves as a Filipino community because we couldn't join the other groups. For instance, in Salinas, you have the American Legion. We had American Legion posts in Salinas. Well, the primary reason they had an American Legion Post is because Filipinos cannot join the white American Legion Post, which you can have your own American Legion Post. that's why we had so many of these ethnic Legion American Legion posts around this area. You can take a look at it. And you have them because it was established back in those days if you if you couldn't do it. working in the fields every— almost every kid I knew up through high school worked in the fields. I tried to when the first McDonald's opened up in Salinas. I was about 16 years old. I went down to apply for a job. I was told I was the wrong color. Oh, wait a second, I just want to work in the back peeling potatoes! I want to make minimum wage 75 cents an hour. I don't want to stand up there in the counter selling stuff.

Jorge Flores 19:53

What year was this?

Alex Fabros 19:54

About 1963 I believe when the first McDonald's came to town—62, 63, 64. I tried to get a job at Kentucky Fried Chicken, wrong color, you just didn't see it back in those days. If you weren't white, it was a totally white deal. And upi had jobs compartmented just because that's where you're at.

Jorge Flores 20:15

You were pretty much limited to labor.

Alex Fabros 20:17

Pretty much unskilled labor for a lot of us, manual labor. Now, one of the things I had was I had this ability to write, if you go back to Salinas, California this summer, and on spring of 1963, I found out that the Salinas California would pay me roughly, I think it's 25 cents or 50 cents per inch of copy that I submitted for any kind of an event at my high school. I said, Really, the guy says, Yeah, you know, if you want to write an article, please bring it. So, I said, Okay, great. I went and wrote this article about the Filipino—or not Filipino, but their Salinas High School track team for 1963 as their opening, no 196—yeah, 1963 is their opening up the season. And it came to about 32 column inches. That's too much, isn't it? He says, "No, no, all this is great. And they ran it a newspaper that was \$8. I said, this is great. This is how you get another article bring it in next week. And so that's how I made money that summer, just writing that's where I developed my writing skills. I found that the more I wrote and I call the guys over and say you want to be in the paper? they say what, I says well if you buy me lunch, I'll write something about you. So now these athletes, I think there's an article in there about the long brothers. They didn't do well. And but I put something in there. A friend of mine Ray Cordoba, he didn't do well in one of the events. But I mentioned the fact that he did a great showing and that had gotten better you would have been he would have prevailed. But you know, these little anecdotes, about all these people just so you buy me lunch, but I found that I could make money doing things like that. There're alternative ways. My father used to send us out to the fields during the summertime to work

Jorge Flores 22:12

What're the conditions working in the fields?

Alex Fabros 22:16

Just like being in the Army. [laughs] That's why when I when I went to the military, it wasn't that bad. I think myself and about three of my buddies from Salinas. We went down to Gonzalez no Soledad to work. This is between a sophomore in our junior year. We actually lived on a farm, the whole summer, and we would come home on the weekends Saturday afternoon and go back Sunday night. We would get up around four o'clock in the morning, make a breakfast and our lunch. And we have pancakes sandwiches, you know they make the sandwiches, or they make these pancakes and you roll up your roll up your scrambled eggs in there along with the bacon and sausage, sausage sandwich. Or they take your tortillas and they do the same thing and they just roll it up and we wrap it up in wax paper and that's what we eat. And then we make our sandwiches or whatever it is. And then we get finished maybe about five o'clock, take a shower, six o'clock, go to sleep by eight o'clock and you did this whole time and then you take your money and you put in the bank and you save it. I can't remember how much I made that summer but it was it was it was a good amount. And then also during some of the I remember Chinatown. That was always a bad experience Chinatown because My dad loved to play poker. And I was a little bit older at the time. Maybe about 16 years old. But you know a lot of the bachelors if you understand the Filipino migration pattern for farmworkers okay. They would basically start on imperial and then had this route to come up to

Jorge Flores 22:41

At 16 years old, to Imperial Valley.

Alex Fabros 24:07

They move up towards Coachella Valley and then head up towards the coastal valleys, up through Lompoc through Santa Barbara, come on up here. Santa Maria San Luis Obispo southern Salinas Valley then come on up here they follow the crops the as the crops ripen, they followed up. And then there'll be a summer period without work. They'd take off to different places, Idaho, Alaska, other places

and then they come back. And then when the whole season was over, they winter over some places. Now Salinas at one time used to be a wintering over place. So, all Filipinos then would head to like Salinas or Stockton. So, he takes Salinas as an example. In Chinatown, he used to have downstairs you had the restaurants, you had the bars. Upstairs you have boarding rooms. Sometimes you get four to six Filipino in a room up the in the boarding rooms and basically just bunk out. That's all they needed a place to hold over the winter. So, the recreation that most of the Filipinos had during that timeframe was wine, women and song. I mean, it's like well you can really call that— they had their girlfriends to show up. But they gamble my father was not a good gambler. My dad got a good hand he would smile. You knew it. You just now he just did not if he got his if he got his card, you would not you would not if he didn't get one, you know, just double down on him and my dad would do just there back up, up above. Well, I developed a knack for playing poker. And so, my dad goes in there and he'd spend his whole paycheck. And so, I go in and there was like a \$2 stake and about six hours later have all the money back plus my uncle's.

Jorge Flores 25:54

So, you'd go and make your dad's money back.

Alex Fabros 25:56

I'd make his money back and it takes some away from the uncles. So, if you don't want me to do this to you don't play poker with my father.

Jorge Flores 26:04

What—where would you play poker, what establishment?

Alex Fabros 26:07

I can't recall the names. But all those places, all those restaurants and all those bars, he had a backroom, on sold out Street, okay, they had all these back rooms. And they had a, you know, when the police would come in, they'd knock on the door and had little bell in some of the places. When the police came in, they had all these bells, and then all of a sudden, the poker chips come off the table and start playing gin rummy. And as soon as the cops left, they ring the bell again, and then they're back to playing poker. And all the other games can win a deal. So, it's, I developed a state where I can play poker, I can play blackjack, I play anything. I'm good at it. But I don't do it. Personally, I don't do anything anymore. Drinking, basically loves to opiates used to get drunk. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's because it's they had nothing to do. to ease the pain. And so, he had his rather depressing condition that he's hoping for living in when they were wintering over in Salinas. But because Friday night or Saturday night, there's a transformation of these Filipino bachelors. Now what Salinas used to have is right around the corner from Chinatown is the Salinas Valley Community Center. The different the different Filipino clubs and organizations in town would hosted dance, you had the fraternal organizations, they would host a dance. You'd have these Queen contests and you'd have they're running for like Miss De Le Salon, Miss Rizal lodge Miss Ballantine. And so, you have these campaigns for about 5, 6, 7, 8 months going on. And they finally have a queen.

Jorge Flores 27:42

Just for one ethnic group, or is this for—

Alex Fabros 27:44

Just for Filipinos. And what happened then is that these Filipino men on Friday night would take a shower, shave, they look good, put on the best clothes, on Saturday, and they go to these Filipino dances. And then the families would come in and they would be there then they bring their young daughters, the ones that are 14, 15, 16 years old. And these guys would dance with these young girls. And then they would have these box socials where they would, or social box where they'd bid on a girl's

box or gift. And then the one who made the most money was the queen for the night. And then the group that was sponsoring the, the dads would get one half the money and the girl's family get the other half. Now, when we were growing up, we used to think well, you know, that's awful. That's just terribly awful. But when I was doing my research on this, I was interviewing a lot of people. This actually started back in the 30s as a way of the Filipino community, helping out families that had children. You'd have these, you'd have these social events. You have these Queen contests. The families would have a daughter, the daughter would go there, and she would didn't matter if she came in first place or last place. The family got some money for the evening. Okay. Imagine back in the 1930s. If you brought home \$20 a week now that was a lot of money. But how do you support a family? You can't do it on 20 bucks. So, you have these social events. The guys who have entertainment, they dance with these young daughters, young girls, the family take home maybe 15, 20 bucks

Jorge Flores 27:52

From dancing?

Alex Fabros 28:23

From dance back to the 50s and 60s, 70s and 80s. You get this thing all of a sudden, it's like a—let's rewrite history. Let's rewrite what the thing is. This is the exploitation of these women. Okay? You get to the women's issues where all of a sudden, these things are being brought up as well as a woman's issue as a, you know, whatever it is you name it. Because people just don't understand the function of some of the events that Filipinos were doing.

Jorge Flores 29:51

Sacrifices for the family.

Alex Fabros 29:52

And the families helping out the worker still the Bachelor of society helping out and you have entertainment people is a social I think that you brought your children there, you brought your daughters who are the ones who are 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. And, of course, you know, as young kids the standard background, we'd be looking at the girls and, you know, one of these days she'll be mine. Okay? But that's the way it worked. But somewhere along the line, the social boxes, from whatever it is the of the women's movement issue, they basically demonized completely, never really fully understanding why these box socials were there to begin with, originally, it wasn't there for old men to group these young women. Well, you know, towards the end, it was, that's where it looked, because these guys had grown old. But it had begun in the beginning to help families with children to help families that, you know, these men that had had married women and had children. You could make enough as a farm worker for yourself. And if you live in a camp, that's plenty, you get married, you're gonna need to have a place for your wife, your kids. You have to have extra money to feed extra miles you're not going to do that. You can't get extra money. There're no extra hours in a day. So yeah, the social events and that's how they earn that extra money for the families.

Jorge Flores 31:11

You will attend these events while you were in high school.

Alex Fabros 31:12

I generally have attended since I was a kid. Let me tell you. I remember one time I was—I think I remember this because I spent the whole day making sandwiches. Yeah, we were—we went down early and to get a piece of bread put mayonnaise, you put mustard and put lettuce. You know, I would I would have worked in a restaurant. And when those fast food places you put the cheese on you put the piece of meat close over the top, you cut it you put one of the black paper bags, you stack them you had them all that right you get a Filipino rice case to Beco and your kind of the putting the wax paper in

your sack and here. So that's what us younger kids used to do is to help out in the kitchen, because again, these events at the Salinas Community Center was a way to bring the families together and all of us participate in some way. And it is a way of involving us kids into the community. But as we got older, a lot of us alike especially in high school. We started feeling I don't know maybe you're starting to feel that we weren't really Filipino that we shouldn't be Filipino. We started to be ashamed that we were Filipino I remember one time there was this one girl. A really cute girl. She knew how to dance wine dances, and she swore up and down that she was not Filipino. She was Hawaiian. I'm from Hawaii. I'm Tahitian. I'm Polynesian.

Jorge Flores 32:38

Was that at a higher social status at the time?

Alex Fabros 32:40

I have no idea. She does not want to be called Filipino she goes I'm Polynesian. Tahiti, or so most of all? I am. I'm German. I'm French. I'm Irish. And I got a little Filipino blood in me. And I'm gone. You're dead. But yeah, it's there someplace in the 60s, all of a sudden, we started realizing that we're having this. You know, years later, I started realizing that a lot of kids were having these identity issues. I remember going to or used to call. You go to the cafeteria, right? And so, you have the line that goes through for the food and you can have a tray and you go through and for 45 cents. You got your milk, you got your pie, you got everything that's supposed to be on that pyramid that's supposed to make you grow up tall and healthy. Look at me, it didn't work. But it was just the way it was done. And all the white kids said this right? And some of the white kids would bring sandwiches. No problem. Good friend of mine, Byron Conte. Everyone day says Alex, we're gonna have some chicken, as it really says. Yeah. Give me 25 cents I said 25 cents for chickens. Yeah, that's it. Okay. We collected I guess about \$2—\$3. It's about 1962. He ran down to I guess Chris or Woolworths. He bought one's rotisserie chickens. And it comes back and we're sitting over there in the cafeteria. This is the chicken he says Yeah. I said, Well, let me go get some knives and forks and spoons and some plates. By the time I was back, the chicken was gone, the guys were using their hands to eat. And so, I did a couple of us guys felt embarrassed because we quote—unquote, acted like savages. I remember going to my fourth period class and one of the girls goes. You people use your hands. says no, we just didn't have any knives forks and spoons at that time. You know, it's those kinds of deals, you know, and sometimes I know when times are bad because the Fort Ord had closed. A lot of Filipino kids started bringing their food to school with them. And they sit over the corner now. Now there's two kinds of Filipino kids back in those days. You had kids that were born and raised in America or basically raised American migrants, okay. Did he have another group of kids, their fathers, they had grown up in the Philippines and came to the States from the young teenagers. There was a language problem, they spoke a Filipino language. They like to hang around with each other. We tried to gravitate towards the white society, because that's where we were born and raised. You know, sometimes they would bring Filipino food to eat, they open up these little bowls, and there would be rice. There, there'd be chicken leftovers from yesterday, and stuff like that. And they'd, put it on the plates and eat it. To them. It was like sharing food. And I remember one time there was this God awful smell, it was like, we used fish sauce, [inaudible]. And it really makes the food taste good. Once you get used to it. It's really good to eat if you got a cold because you can't smell it. But you can taste it. The kids that don't cook the bottle of a gong and they put it out there and are making rice they're using hands rice balls in and dip it in some[inaudible]. And they take a little fish and they put in their mouth they're eating it. They're happy. And I know three of us basically hung their heads out, we walked out because we were ashamed of it. But when you think about, you know, here I am years later, I sit back, I look back into Samson, do you know who was really the Filipino who really maintained their identity? was it the small group of us that walked out of there and shut baskets? Or was it that group of young kids that had a great time around that table? Eating food like a community? I think those kids beat us out. You know, we had identity issues. I remember that. I had problems at school. So, my senior year in high school, I had major

problems, health and some other issues. So, I was gonna drop out of high school. I just didn't want to stick around school anymore.

Jorge Flores 36:59

What year did you graduate in high school?

Alex Fabros 37:01

Since high school?

Jorge Flores 37:02

What year did you graduate?

Alex Fabros 37:03

1964. And there's a wonderful guy, George Morris. He was the principal. He says, Look, Alex, you've got enough units to graduate, you only have to take three classes. And I can let you off the whole afternoon, you take PE, you take your American History course or military—political science course. You take a third course that you like, that's all you have to do. And you can graduate with your class. So, my senior year, I'm only going to school half the day and I'd get my old Rambler, go surfing and what have you. And pretty soon it got pretty lonely, because no one else could do it. So, about that time I took up photography, some other stuff. But he got me out of it. I went to Hartnell College had some issues. I think I dropped out before they can kick me out. So, my dad says, Well, you're not gonna stay at home. You're gonna go work out in the field. So, he farmed me up to my grandfather, Dan Soledad so I was about 18 years old. Farming me off to them. Farmed me off to anybody would take me this is a 64. Spring of 65 I ended up on an Asparagus crew down in Gonzalez. And you do not ever want to work on an Asparagus crew. Because from the time that you get out in the field, you're out there four o'clock, and when you've got to cut that asparagus before it wilts in a day, you got to get it when it still has juice in it it's hard and stiff. You're down to your back is bent over and you're cutting, you're cutting you're cutting, there's a rhythm that you use, and you lay down your stock. You got one row, another row up row back row, and you do this is totally monotonous. And finally, right around three o'clock you stopped. But you've been working almost 10 hours you've been working since four o'clock in the morning. You get three minute break for lunch, maybe 10 minute breaks first for whatever it is. You try to delay yourself when you get to the ends, sharpening your knife so you can take a longer break, but you know they'll get you moving again. And so, asparagus season was over we at that time we hit there's a we actually had a strike that was my first experience of the strike 1965 April.

Jorge Flores 39:16

It was Salinas Valley?

Alex Fabros 39:17

Salinas Valley. It's the first time I've ever been on strike. And so, the Filipino said hey, we're gonna go on strike because what does that mean is that we get two cents more an hour three cents more, five cents an hour and more.

Jorge Flores 39:26

So, the Filipino community initiated the strike

Alex Fabros 39:28

The Filipino workers, not the community

Jorge Flores 39:30

Filipino workers.

Alex Fabros 39:32

So, they initiate a strike. I said, this is great. I heard about the automobile strikes. You know they were gone for two weeks, three weeks. The steel strikes gone for like three weeks, two months. I was looking forward to a long strike. So, I said okay, great. No problem. The strike was over in two days. Because you have a perishable product, it's got to be harvested. So, we finished that I went to work in the sheds and tried to unionize the sheds. The teamsters Are Filipinos working in shifts and I want to belong to the teamster's unit.

Jorge Flores 40:03

What was your impression on the strike?

Alex Fabros 40:04

The first strike? Well, you know, the fact that the Filipinos withheld their labor and the growers capitulated. I thought it was pretty good. You know, it's like, okay, my, my labor, the work I do with my hands has got value. But it's not worth much by myself. But if a bunch of us get out, then it's worth something. You know, there's strength in numbers. So anyway, server comes around, my dad, one of my uncle's says hey I'm going to Coachella, they got some grapes, table grapes, you want to come? I go how much do they pay, and I forgot how much we're making. But it was more than cutting lettuce. I said sure I didn't even know where Coachella was at. He said it's close to Palm Springs. I had these images of palm trees and everything else. It was hot. So, we're out there cutting it and the guys went on strike. And so, I think I forgot maybe about three, four days, and we got our pay raise. The issue there was that there's a two tier system. The Filipinos were making, I think maybe about \$1.20 an hour. And at that time, it was the end of Bracero period or something like that. The other workers making \$1.40 an hour. So, we're trying to make a difference. So, we can be equal these guys. Yeah. And so—

Jorge Flores 40:05

The side is not American.

Alex Fabros 41:28

No, no, they're Mexicans. Yeah. So, the Mexican crews are making \$1.40 Filipinos making \$1.15—\$1.20 till they went on strike and equalized our pay. Okay. So, seasons done down there. I come back up here for a couple of days. And my uncle says we're going down to Delano. This is early August 1965. We go down to Delano. And we're working for a couple of weeks into the same pay inequity there again, you've got one group that's making more money, we've got our group, we're not making enough money. And we're always well, we're making what \$1.40 \$1.40 an hour down at Coachella, we should be making \$1.40 up in Delano. Man, we're asking for better labor. We're still doing it out in the field so that you see it out there, you get you get 100 degree heat 110 degree heat, the farmer wants you to work harder, he's not going to give you water doesn't give you a tent to get under to give you a shade from the sun. He sees you standing there and your heads against that. against that rootstock on the grapes. He wants you to work faster. He doesn't want you to break he's, he's more interested in his grapes than He is in human life.

Jorge Flores 42:41

This is an incident last year of a 10 year old pregnant girl died because she was not permitted to drink water drink. She wasn't getting a break.

Alex Fabros 42:52

Right

Jorge Flores 42:53

With her pregnant child.

Alex Fabros 42:54

That happens. So anyway. My uncle said, you know, we're going to a meeting tonight and it says, Okay, great. What's that all about? And says how we're thinking about going on strike. How many days? Do you think we'll be gone? Two, three days. So, I said, Hey, Uncle, can I borrow the car? I wanted to come up, see my friends up in Salinas and Watsonville and said, Sure, no, go go, you know.

Jorge Flores 43:15

You saw these strikes as a kind of vacation almost.

Alex Fabros 43:17

It was because you know, we break and you come back to work, right? Well, this time I didn't go home, I decided that heck, it's I don't want to, you know, we'll all my friends are there doing something else are off to work. And so, I stayed around. They said, Yeah, we'll go straight for it and go on strike. And I remember they said, Well, you know, we got these Mexican workers, if we go out on strike, you're going to take our jobs. And I remember someone says, Well, you know—

Jorge Flores 43:45

The scabs, right?

Alex Fabros 43:46

Right. You got the scabs come in and take their jobs. And I remember someone said, what would we get the Mexicans to go out with us? Then maybe we're not gonna have this problem. Well, years later, I found out later that years later, I discovered that the Filipinos had actually gone up and talked to Larry at least now Filipinos have been on strike for about a month before Leon went to talk to Cesar Chavez and his group okay.

Jorge Flores 44:12

And who is Larry Leon?

Alex Fabros 44:13

Larry Leon was the person who started the strike. He was actually the leader of AWOC is agricultural workers Organization Committee, which is the group there AFL CIO recognize union so they started their strike. Filipinos were out there August long for Cesar Chavez and the way the story goes, and I remember that we were down there, they'd have these meetings and the young kids would be out there like us you know, the 17, 18 year olds. We are throwing pennies against the wall you know, we're not really interested in labor organizing. We just want to work you guys would come on okay, we're going on strike. Larry's gonna go talk to the to the Mexicans So we're out there on strike line and says we're having a meeting tonight. So, what's going on? So, well we are gonna ask the Mexicans if they don't come out and join us on the strike. Because, you know, it's I don't know if you see the films and videos but the police, the sheriffs are actually beating Filipinos in—

Jorge Flores 45:15

Pretty brutal.

Alex Fabros 45:16

It was bad. Okay. It was bad there was no coverage at the time. It wasn't a major item. It wasn't it became a major item when Cesar Chavez got us national attention. So, Cesar Chavez at first, he says, No, I don't want to join the strike because I planned to go on strike in three years. I remember the story goes well If you go on strike in three years we'll be the scabs. So, we should do it all now. Let's do it.

And I guess Cesar talked to his friends to this committee. They decide, yeah, let's go out and strike together, let's support the Filipinos. And they did. They actually went out and they support the Filipinos. This happened sometime in September. Well about and then we had the United. I really liked the Mexicans and they came up because, you know, I used to get this Filipino food. You get tired after a while. And the Mexicans have come out. They had their rice beans frijoles, they'd have now carnitas tacos, burritos, it was a change of pace and food. I'm sorry to say this. But that's why the results gladly wrapped. Their picket line is supposed to last only like two or three days, but it went longer. And sometime around, towards the end of the month, I got a notice I had to go to the military. So, I came up to Oakland induction center, then I headed

Jorge Flores 46:43

This was a draft letter?

Alex Fabros 46:44

Yeah. Back in those days, you had to go in the military whether you like not because I wasn't in college. Okay, so I don't have a college permit. So, I gotta go to the military. So, this guy comes out because the Marine Corps is now authorized to draft and we have a quota of 30 I still remember the speech. I give it to you right now. May I dream about this once in a while. The United States Marine Corps is now authorized to draft maggots into its ranks. There are 31 in this room I need 30 volunteers. You I don't want you the other 30 Step over here. Nobody had heard listen contracts. I've dealt with their names on it. I got fabros I go Yes. Take a look at the contract says two years and I'd say it's Marine Corps. That's it. Sign here. You've now fulfilled your obligation. We were all there. And then they took us down to the San Francisco Airport put us on an airplane and we flew down to down to San Diego and you know back in those days, get on an airplane they don't check your name, your ID card, they know that you're going into the military, they'll sell you booze. I came out there a plant I must have had to my nose tanked. But when I got down to San Diego, they brought us over to MCRD and MCRD Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, that's where they sent all the young men on the west coast to be for boot camp, much like Fort Ord used to be a boot camp area. So, we went in there and I mean they treated everybody badly. It didn't matter what color your skin was that you find out the humor universal color in the Marine Corps is red. That's the color of your blood. Okay. There's still discrimination Marine Corps because they treated everybody the same. I can I can discriminate against this guy if you treat him the same as this guy, right? Well, one day, so they're cleaning my rifle. I hear this voice and it's laughing I go, damn, that's my cousin. And I walk around the Quonset huts. And now what are you doing here since I am in the Marine Corps. Here's what happens. I got my draft notice too. So, the two of us were in the same unit going through boot camp a couple of times when we got picked on okay. I remember we were going to hand combat. We're gonna get four hours to learn how to fight hand a hand. Okay. Number I told the story when I was a kid my dad taught me how to fight to fight. Yeah. Well, Mel grew up in San Francisco. And back in the 60s and 50s, there was a film that came out called West Side Story.

Jorge Flores 49:31

The Musical?

Alex Fabros 49:32

Right, so every kid in high school in San Francisco decided they want to be the sharks. They want to be the Jets. They want to be the, you know, you name it. It's everybody join these gangs. And Mel, you said the jacket turned up with a collar turned up. He was a member of a local gang. So, the kids knew how to fight they were street fighters. Well, we got the hand to hand combat. And a drill instructor says I have just come back from Vietnam and let me tell you, those sneaky little gooks. When you get close to you, they will fight you, and they will kill you. Because you don't know how to fight back. and they're silent? And none of this voice at some place goes. Drill Sergeant. What did him gooks look like? I knew

it was coming. I knew it. He turns around it says why they look like them two gooks right over there. And he got these 200 eyeballs. 200 people locking on us. And someone says kill gooks and I'll say here this chant two hundred Marines kill gooks kill gooks

Jorge Flores 50:44

How'd that make you feel

Alex Fabros 50:47

First it felt shitty. Second, I was, like, damn, how the hell am I gonna get this? I've never been in a fight with 200 people at one time. So, he says come on up on stage. So, my cousin Mel and I we came up on the stage. So, Mel and I were up there and says for the next four hours, I want to demonstrate to you how to kill gooks. So, he gives us these bayonets that our shield. These are jackasses. I look at Mel. He says, let's do it. So, I went after a guy. He grabs me and he throws me. Now the problem is that I learned some jujitsu and tai—was not, we didn't have taekwondo. We had judo. And that learned up on once on sandboard row, there used to be a little, little studio some guy had spent time to open up came back open up a little studio and taught us. So, we got over there. I knew how to fall. I knew some holes, some bars, everything else. This guy was not using any technique it was all physical and Mel got the same thing. And so, you know, over the course of the next three hours, he was using us as punching bags. And one thing he never noticed that Mel and I were landing, we were absorbing our lands. He'd throw us and boom, we were absorbing everything we were not. We were not being damaged when we were rolling.

Jorge Flores 52:10

That's one of the judo training.

Alex Fabros 52:11

That's right, you learn how to fall. And in fact, there were a couple of times when he wanted to throw us he didn't quite have us in the right position. So, Mel would just put himself in the right position so he can get thrown properly. So, his arm wouldn't get cranked up right. So finally, the demonstrators say okay, we've had four hours of hand to hand combat. Let's put this all together. Everything that we've learned. says okay, you two come back at me. So, Mel looks at me and He winks. I said, Okay, so I go up there and I think this guy is not paying attention. All of a sudden Mel's got him from behind. There's a chokehold on the guy throws him over his shoulder.

Jorge Flores 52:52

This is a drill sergeant Did you ever see combat.

Alex Fabros 52:53

He's down on his back, BOOM. The guys down like this. And Mel comes in and he does a thing to the side of the neck. Instead of down here. He does bam just like that. And then he goes to the guy solar plexus. And instead of open hand he does the palm down. The guy's all ears on this guy and all of a sudden, his legs were spread wide open. I'm looking at this Mel, Mel don't do it. Mel's got a smile on his face. And he shoves that drill sergeants' gonads BAM, right back into his body. He was laying there. He was moaning and groaning and thinking oh my god, we're going to go to jail for this. We're going to go to jail for this. And Mel gets up. And he looks at these 200 Marines. They're startled. Because all of a sudden, when a drill sergeant said these sneaky little gooks are gonna kill you. Mel looks at him. And he goes. Oh, I never noticed before. He was so good. he is Number one instructor. He teaches me everything I never noticed before he good. And in that fashion, he said it just like that. It's just like Charlie Chaplin. You know, Charlie Chan or something like that. And Mel and I walked off the stage. And nobody fucked with us when we went to boot camp. No one. we had a great time, you know, growing up in the farm Yeah, we saw combat. I remember different deals. I ended up here in Monterey

at the language school. I studied Chinese Mandarin for one year. I went to the intel school learn to become an analyst and an interrogator. Then I learned how to speak Vietnamese also. So, I went to Vietnam. I had a different experience than Mel. Mel was a combat guy. I was a combat interrogator interpreter I worked. The Marine Corps at that time had a thing called Special Operations. We call it Special Operations today. We had a CAT program civil affair. He lived in the villages where you work to the Vietnamese. I wasn't a combat soldier per se, but I go if you captured a prisoner, I come out there and I'm interrogating for you. I had a team of Chinese, Vietnamese because I spoke Mandarin, we can speak in Mandarin to each other. And then because I learned a little Vietnamese, I could talk to them Converse. And then we would interrogate the prisoners.

Jorge Flores 55:34

How did you do History of the United States and the oppression of minority communities? How did you feel fighting for the United States and doing their bidding in Vietnam?

Alex Fabros 55:44

You know, back in those days, we didn't have those issues. You're United States Marine Corps, you've got an enemy, you're fighting and defending your country. Those issues didn't come into being until I'll get to that in just a second. But I remember the first time I went into my first combat patrol. Yes, yes. My first one I remember walking through this village and people were gagging going, oh, man, that that thing stinks. It smells and we just completed our sweep of the village. I went to one Mamasan. I took my military sea rations. They gave us a box and they had like cigarettes. I don't know what it was in there. Ham and lima beans, had some cookies. And some of the guys have stuff. They didn't want so I went up to this lady and I gave her that plus me about five American dollars. And she looked at me and I pointed out some stuff, and she said, Okay, so I walked back I had this god awful stinky stuff that these guys didn't want. I had a bucket of rice. I had some fish. I had some vegetables. I sat there I squatted on my helmet. And I was eating Filipino food. That smelly stuff that they had with Buggle the fish sauce to Filipinos love to eat. And I sit there and I balled it up on my hands. And I dipped it in that sauce and I was eating it I was in heaven. The odors of Vietnam were just like, the village orders, okay, amongst the peoples. It's like growing up in my house. The kids make connections, I can make connections to these guys. Because basically, that's what I started realizing about race type of deal, right? I sometimes we'd run to the indigenous guys that are what we call mountain yards. Okay. This had a special forces camp that is located on China beach. The cap base was located north of China Beach is an old French Foreign Legion port that's on the South China Sea. Every once in a while, I go down to China beach and you run across these guys. They look like Filipinos you know they're short. They look physically like my ancestors in the mountains. If you look the fishers in the Philippines I'm a Gudang. I'm somebody asking me Are you Filipino? I say no, I'm Gudang, which is my mother's tribe. Okay, their tribe of headhunters. And I look at these guys, and they just look like that Same phenotypical attributes? same deal and deal of differences. Now they're working on American cheetahs, but they run around the base. They got that thing wrapped around, they got the loincloth. I did that a few times just for the heck of it. Just to feel it. You know, a couple of times I went out the fields for the guys on civil affairs missions. And I'd walk through the old man, the old man with a cone shape that they'd be walking through this field behind a water buffalo and go Dang. I get behind him. I take off my boots, and I walk right through all that. That excrement that was in the water. And I just I was like, dang, you know, my father hadn't come to the States when he did. I'd have to be doing this. Because I can only stand for me but you know, not that long. But you know at that time, that's my first connection. I remember going to when you're coming from the United States, I was a senior sergeant came out and says like 22 years old, I was a sergeant in the Marine Corps, okay. And we've got okay, we had this. We had to we had to bypass we had to land in at Clark airbase instead of walking out because there was a typhoon going on. So, all the senior staff NCOs they disappeared. So, I'm left for 200 Marines. I'm the Senior Sergeant. And I have to march all over the base. I had to march into Chow, I had the marching orders. We're gonna go swimming. All 200 Marines go swimming together. And I remember we're standing out

there's this big quad just like these buildings and he had the mess hall. And I was giving the commands like you normally do company attention. Prepare your men for Chow and the guys who give all the orders and I'm standing out there and the guys go off the chow this Filipino man comes up to me he's one of the workers I guess he's a little bit on the ragged side. He says to me something like you look kind of Tagalog, some languages, I understood something like, I don't know Filipino, or you Filipino. In the UK or Filipino. I looked at me smiled and said, Sir, you have the power. I couldn't figure what that meant until later that they had never seen a Filipino in charge of 200 men telling them to do something. That was something you know? That's when I started learning more about this this when it starts, you know, the stuff like this start becoming part of my psyche at that time. Why is why are certain things happening? Why is it that I always wanted to see the Philippines Okay, as a kid. So, this worker I went up to him and said, Look, let me have your ID card. I'll give you 20 bucks for your ID card. So, he gives me his ID card. So, then what's your clothes too because You know, I can't go out and base because my clothes my civilian clothes, looked at your American civilian clothes here you have my civilian clothes. Let me have your Filipino clothes. And you know didn't local people that their clothing is tailored differently. So, I walked through the deal and flashing my ID card and a guy let me off the base. I walked up to Angeles city and you know, I was a clean cut American all American Filipino kid, right? I had never seen vices in my life. I had never gone down to Tijuana. A place like that I had never seen sin like this had ever seen people pimping their sisters I'd never seen bars, we had scantily clad women that looked like my sisters and my aunts and my friends deals. But you're standing in the front, these bars being pimped off by other Filipinos for these American soldiers in the vulgarity of some of the language. I after about they even went to this one place to get some Filipino food and I asked for make eggpuuyang and the guy didn't know what Eggpuuyang was like scrambled eggs with beansprouts became something didn't look like something I ate in San Francisco. And so, I just I probably no more than an hour. I just turned around, walked back and I was really disappointed with what I saw, I just never went back off base again. Because all I saw in my little slice of Angeles City was a pimping of, of, I guess what I felt myself, my people. As he started, I started seeing these things and start, you know, just building up the psyche, in the mind, these memories. So, it was it was a rather interesting thing. Now, one of the interesting things about being in the military, working in military intelligence. And studying Southeast Asia, I actually learned a lot about the Philippines. I learned about the history I learned about stuff I never learned in school, I learned how the United States took over the Philippines. They had these books that I read, you know, and I learned about the colonial experience. So, I learned all of this and I read it and then

Jorge Flores 1:03:06

This is after your service or

Alex Fabros 1:03:07

During the service 1976 to 1970.

Jorge Flores 1:03:11

What was your last year in service?

Alex Fabros 1:03:14

1971. But one of my friends were saying Tell me at the time says Alex, what are you gonna do when you get out? This is I have no idea. I just bought a sailboat I want to go sailing. It says you know you got the GI Bill right he says Yeah. Well you can go to San Francisco State. They're teaching Filipino studies over there, Filipino history. You know more about Filipino history than these guys too. had I known [laugh] the opportunities that are available because between you meet a lot of the guys are teaching ethnic studies back in those days didn't have college degrees. It's a story that we can talk about later. But that's how ethnic studies got study you got you got guys that were basically students

teaching students at San Francisco State, so that was a last opportunity I decided I was gonna go sailing

Jorge Flores 1:04:05
Late 60s early 70s

Alex Fabros 1:04:08

Yeah, I came back to Salinas. I lasted for about nine months. I tried to do things for the community. It didn't work. I had some of my uncles were asking me about the they're having issues with the United Farmworkers. When I came home, a lot of my uncles were no longer working at the farm that have been working on for 20 years. Because I guess sometime in the 70s or early 70s 60s the Filipinos have been they've been kicked out the farm by UFW, new hiring rules. But you know all kinds of stories and silliness.

Jorge Flores 1:04:48

Mr. Fabros, I pretty much have one more question for you. You've seen a lot in your life and you seem to know a lot about the Filipino community. I'd like to ask you, what would you like to leave behind for future generations of Filipinos to know about the Filipino community in Salinas and in California in general?

Alex Fabros 1:05:11

Well, you know, the Filipino American civil rights movement began in Salinas. There's a group of men who lived in Salinas in the 1930s. Delphine Cruz, Bucha calron, Alex Fabros, Giorgio Kino,

Jorge Flores 1:05:34

Alex Fabros being your father?

Alex Fabros 1:05:35

Yeah, a lot of other guys, plenty of these people. But 1934 when they're deciding if the United States was going to eventually give the Philippines their independence, what to do with Filipinos here, in the United States. The first offer was to ship us all back. And now that was on the table. The second option was to let us stay here United States, but we can never become citizens.

Jorge Flores 1:06:01

Legal residents?

Alex Fabros 1:06:02

Legal residents. So, the second option is actually what came to pass and those who want to go back to the Philippines will pay your way, but you can never come back again. Very few people took advantage of that. So, we're over 70,000 people, Filipinos, I guess you can say voted with their feet and decided to stay here in America. Well, I brought up a problem that if you're not a citizen, you don't have rights. You really can't buy property. You can't do certain things. You can't vote you can't marry because if you're white, you got a white girlfriend. You can marry her. So, this group of guys needs to be done in Chinatown. By the way. Some of the restaurants. They decided let's fight for our civil rights.

Jorge Flores 1:06:49

Do you remember which restaurant that was?

Alex Fabros 1:06:50

Well, Republic didn't come in until the 40s. But maybe what was before the Republic that was in there, get some of those old restaurants. But these guys actually fought for it. If you go back into the

newspapers read Delphine Cruz's newspaper, you read all the different newspapers. People talk about Carlos Bullosa. He was late to the party. When it comes to civil rights. He just wrote a book. He's like to but he published a newspaper Delphine Cruz, all these other guys in Salinas, Marc Cuelo they actually fought for a civil rights bill; citizenship for Philippines. And they went across the United States. Every year, they would travel to Washington, DC by train, go to Chicago, Louisiana. There was a senator Louisiana. I think it was Huey Long before he got assassinated, of course, but he supported citizenship for the Filipinos. There was a senator Huey Long, but not as long as it was Senator Long.

Jorge Flores 1:07:51

Huey, it was Huey.

Alex Fabros 1:07:52

Long, yeah. He. I can give you another anecdote about the black fathers in law and deal, but he was he was for it. There was like four or five senators and congressmen from the east that they had convinced and they would actually put forth a Filipino civil citizenship bill every year, they would support these movements, and Cruz and all these guys they'd collect money and it go there. And my dad was telling me it like around 1938 He made the trip. And he was he was impressed. They walked down the halls and they go, excuse me, sir, where can I find Senator so and so? And he remembered somebody saying, Oh, are you applying to be a houseboy? And my father said, Well, I'd like to be an American citizen house boy. [laugh] So he, so they walk, they walk the halls, they walk in and they'd say, respectfully, Sir, can I have some of your time? And Cruz and my family, my dad and some other people would walk down, they'd sit down, explain your position. If you go back and look at some of the laws that were introduced, you see, eventually there's this progression of support for citizenship for the Filipinos or some sort of, you know, keep our mothers niblet song.

Jorge Flores 1:08:47

They were making these trips throughout the 30s

Alex Fabros 1:09:14

30s. Yeah. And then they get all the communities together that the community has a meet in San Francisco, go to Chinatown. Go to Stockton, meet at the at one of the large halls go down to LA meet down there. And they talked about and something that was really riveting, but I'll start in Salinas and Chinatown, the civil rights movement. A lot of our labor movement started down there is a guy by the name of Pablo Manato but he came from Hawaii. He was a major labor leader, the 1920s in Hawaii 1924, the ADA Hanapepe massacre, roughly about 16 people were killed. He was tried for it. He got exiled. He came to the United States, Pablo Manato was a lawyer. Now if your lawyer in the United States in one state, you have the ability to practice law in another state, okay. Malapot was a Filipino lawyer licensed to practice in the United States before the US Supreme Court. Now, if you go back and look at a lot of the major cases that we have for racial discrimination, especially anti miscegenation, where Filipinos and white women were involved, Pablo Malapot was involved. But if you want to know why all of a sudden in the early 1930s there's this labor unrest is because Pablo Malapot. He came up to Salinas one time he came up and visited all the time. He said, You guys need to get organized. And he organized the Filipino workers. So, we know down the road, if I'm going to if I'm not here in the community says, Well, what the hell that Fabros leave here, the history is here, go look for it. It's available. I mean, my family we put out close to \$100,000 out of our own money at San Francisco State to create effects our Filipino American Experience Research Project. We've taken all the Filipino newspapers we digitize as much as we can. You can run an index route. We send kids all over the place before these old men die Trinidad Roho we've got it on tape, we got PC Bharati on tape, talking about their experiences as labor organizers. Long before Lariat Lyon, you know, we information's here if you want to know who you are and what you are and what your roots are. You have to go looking for it. But when you look for it, you got to remember that there was a bunch of young men who looked just

like you. They had the courage to stay in the United States and stay and fight to become US citizens. And for that if you can't not understand that you have certain rights that you have to defend. And if you start to let go of those rights, and let someone else abuse you, you're embarrassing those people. Everyone here in America that was a legacy is love to me, my dad. When I was a kid, someone calls you a ching chong chinaman beat the hell out of them. Because you Filipino

Jorge Flores 1:12:20

Well, that's some very powerful information. Mr. Fabros, I want to thank you for your time, no problem. And I just need your signature here. For the release form. It's pretty much for archival purposes. Okay, if you have any questions

Alex Fabros 1:12:34

you still have an archive here at

Jorge Flores 1:12:35

Not at Fort Ord

Alex Fabros 1:12:38

No, for Monterey, Cal State how they established some sort of an archive here?

Jorge Flores 1:12:44

We've established the archive for the communities in Chinatown, so all committees are part of that.