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Interview with Frankie Littlewood

Frankie Littlewood

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Frankie Littlewood
Interviewer: Mary Flynn
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Duration of Interview: 52:52

Mary Flynn 00:00
Okay, so my name is Mary Flynn, and I am here with Frankie Littlewood. And it is October 8, 2011, in Salinas, California. Frankie, do I have your permission to record?

Frankie Littlewood 00:16
Yes.

Mary Flynn 00:17
Okay. Well, I first want to let you know that I'm honored to be interviewing you and to hear your story. I'd like to start by asking you about your family and how they arrived to Salinas.

Frankie Littlewood 00:30
Okay. Well, my father was [unclear]. My mother was Trinidad, and my father came in from the Philippines to Hawaii, then from Hawaii to California through San Francisco. And my mother came in from the Philippines to San Francisco as a nanny for a captain on the US Navy. And anyway, they knew each other way back when in the island of Bohol. And they met up here. They got married, and they opened a little store on California and Market. And this was money earned through working out in the fields, and she did cooking for the people. And they saved their money and bought this little store, which was located actually near Chinatown. There's a little alleyway, and then there was a little building, and that's where they bought their first store. And they purchased their second one, and that was the first time that I heard about prejudices, because at that point in time, there was nobody that would loan them money, except this one person—I still remember as clearly as she told me—his name was Mr. White, and he worked for the National Bank of Salinas. And he was the one that loaned him the money to open the store on California and Market. And that's how they got started in the grocery store business. And about five years or so later, my father got his labor contractor's license, and he opened a labor contracting business, and he opened a labor camp, which is still on Market Street, that was, like, four or five blocks down. And so, he did labor contracting, plus the grocery store.

Mary Flynn 02:23
So, when did your parents reconnect in California?

Frankie Littlewood 02:28
Well, my mother came here, and she met with my grandfather. And my father was working out in the fields. Matter of fact, I believe he said in Boronda. And at that time, the Filipinos were kind of isolated from everyone, and so they all congregated in Chinatown, and my mother was cooking there, and that's how they reconnected, because he went down there, I guess, at one time and had dinner at [unclear], and that's how they met up again.

Mary Flynn 03:00
So, did your parents—so your dad worked in the labor fields in Salinas?

Frankie Littlewood 03:05
Yes, he worked up and down California. You know, the grapes in Delano or wherever there was fieldwork. It was seasonal, and so that's, you know, most of the Filipinos, that's—but they were here. They were labor contract—I mean, they were laborers. And they worked out in the fields until they can save enough money either to send home or save enough money to get out of the fields. A lot of them became cooks in the Salinas area, you know, so that's basically where our roots come from, is from the field.

Mary Flynn 03:38
So, did you ever work in the field?

Frankie Littlewood 03:41
Oh, yeah. That was so—[laughs]

Mary Flynn 03:42
Can you tell me about it?

Frankie Littlewood 03:43
—very interesting. I didn't have to. I mean, I either worked in the store, or I helped my mother in the labor camp. But this one time, my dad came to wake me up to work in the store. It was the weekend, and I wouldn't wake up. And so, the next—it was the summertime, and he woke me up on Monday and said to get ready. And where was I going? He says, we're going to the field. And oh my god, it was lettuce, and at the time, it was legal to have the short-handled hoes. And oh, at the end of the day, you could not sit. I mean, your back was bent over. I think that was the time that I made up my mind I wasn't going to end up in the fields, you know.

Mary Flynn 03:43
How old were you?

Frankie Littlewood 03:43
I was about thirteen, fourteen, feeling my oats. I was a teenager. I didn't think I had to do anything. You know, I can do what I wanted to do. But yeah, that was really an experience, but it was— I think about it now—was a good one, because it motivated me to at least get my, you know, high school diploma and go on to a portion of college. You know, so I think that was his—that motivation was for me to realize, you know, how hard it is out in the fields. It's not easy. But thinking about it now in comparison to this generation, we had a lot of fun in the fields, because there was a bunch of young teenagers, young kids. And, you know, we had lunch, we played in between hoeing and everything. And nowadays, it's so structured. They don't have time. You just have to work, work, work, and then you have your lunch, and then you work straight through. Way back in the 50s or so, you know, it wasn't that way. It was like a family thing. You know, everybody knew everybody, you know. So, it was a good experience.

Mary Flynn 05:34
Do you remember any, like, discrimination?

Unknown 05:37
Hold on, let me—it's having that radio thing again.

Mary Flynn 05:39
Oh no.

Unknown 05:41
Yeah.

Frankie Littlewood 05:42
Did you work in the fields, Grace?

Grace 05:43
Yeah, I worked—I grew up in the fields. [laughs]

Unknown 05:47
Probably have to use the audio from there. I can't hear it on the other interview, so I don't know why it's doing it now.

Frankie Littlewood 05:54
It don't like me. [Mary laughs] I broke it! [all laugh]

Mary Flynn 06:14
[laughs] So we are—it's getting a radio, so you're—

Unknown 06:28
It's, like, really really faint. Put it down over—

[Pause in interview as audio issues continue]

Mary Flynn 07:49
Well, now back to —

Frankie Littlewood 07:50
So, where were we?

Mary Flynn 07:51
I was asking you about labor—working in the field. Let's retract. So, you remember your parents going out to the field— into the fields to work?

Frankie Littlewood 08:04
Well, I remember my father, you know. My mother, I remember her making meals, taking them out to the fields so that they can eat. Also, when they were in the labor contracting business, my mother did all the cooking. She'd wake up about two or three in the morning, cook everything, and then they would deliver it out to the fields. At the time, they had the Braceros, the ones from Mexico, and they lodged them at the boarding house. And she would feed them lunch and dinner. And on weekends, it would be three meals. But they were very hard working. I know she got up at two. Sometimes she didn't get to bed until ten at night. My dad would be in the store. He'd come home, and he'd sleep, and she'd go and take over for him, and that's how they worked things out.

Mary Flynn 08:54
So, when you would work in the field, or if you overheard your parents talking, was there discrimination in the field amongst the workers?

Frankie Littlewood 09:05
Workers? No, it was like a family. I mean, it was hard work, but they enjoyed it. They had the camaraderie of all the Filipinos that were there, the kids and everything, so there was no prejudice, you know, that I could see.

Mary Flynn 09:19
And how old were you when your dad, or your parents, bought the market?

Frankie Littlewood 09:25
Oh, when they bought the market, that was in their—I guess it was the late 40s.

Mary Flynn 09:33
Can you describe the market? Like, paint a picture for—

Frankie Littlewood 09:36
It was on the corner. It had bay windows in the front. It was like a super mom-and-pop store, and they had a butcher shop, and then they had the grocery and the vegetables that, way back when, they could set it outside. And, you know, they had them in bins, and the groceries in the inside, and then there was a butcher shop on the side. Just a typical mom-and-pop store.

Mary Flynn 10:03
And just your family worked?

Frankie Littlewood 10:05
It was just a family that worked. Sometimes it would be my uncles that came in from the Philippines that would help. And they would work there also. And it was just family-oriented. Everything was family-oriented.

Mary Flynn 10:17
So do you have siblings?

Frankie Littlewood 10:18
Oh, yeah, I have five—no, actually, there's twelve of us. There's six of us living, and four in California, and there's two in the Philippines—three in the Philippines right now.

Mary Flynn 10:32
So your parents purchased the market, and then how long after did they purchase the labor camp?

Frankie Littlewood 10:40
I think it was about two, three years later. But when they—I take that back. When they purchased the second store, it was around World War II when it started, because I remember her talking—the money was so fluid coming in that my uncle and them would count the money at the end of the day, and take—I mean, bags. They were talking about bags they would take to the bank. And they paid off that second store in just a few years. But I remember my uncle and them talking about it. They would go to the back of the store. There was a safe. I remember the safe. And they would put the money in there, and the next day, they would take it to the bank.

Mary Flynn 11:27
And that money that they earned through the market was how they purchased the labor—

Frankie Littlewood 11:33
Through the market. Yeah, that's how they purchased the labor camp.

Mary Flynn 11:36
And what was the labor camp like? Can you—

Frankie Littlewood 11:41
It's still standing.

Mary Flynn 11:42
Really?

Frankie Littlewood 11:42
But it's—yeah. It's a boarding house now. It's 289 East Market. I still remember. And it was long. I mean, just long, and we had three bedrooms, a bath. And the kitchen was, like—Jesus, how would you say it? It was like going to a cafeteria, because that's where all the laborers ate. And that's where my mom cooked. Next to it, she had another building, a two-story building, where she housed the workers. And at the end of the block on Sun Street and Market, there was another building that she had, where they housed all the laborers. And what they did, especially with the Braceros, they would come, they would work, and they would go to the store to purchase whatever they needed to purchase on credit, then pay it back and send the money home. But yeah, that's how it worked. It worked with the, you know, labor camp in conjunction with the store.

Mary Flynn 11:49
And what was your mom's, like, day to day for the labor camp. Like, she would rise—

Frankie Littlewood 12:11
She'd get up about two or three in the morning, because she'd have to have breakfast. We had a cook that helped her, and dishwasher. And by the time she's done, you know, they're off to work by six in the morning. And so, she would start with lunch. And they would deliver the lunch. The driver would take it onto the field, delivered the lunch. And by that time, it's time for dinner, because they get back about five o'clock. And there was about 200 of them that she had to feed, you know. And so, her day really didn't end till about ten o'clock. In between that period of time, if she had time, she would go to the store and work the store, or one of my uncles would. When we got old enough, then we would, you know. But her schedule, it was—I don't know how she did it, you know, with the kids and—well, we had a nanny. I take that back. We did have a nanny, so she didn't have to worry about us. But just the hours that she had to keep, and this was basically cooking seven days a week, you know, because the guys have to eat, even if the weekends—if they're not working, they still have to eat. So, she's there for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Mary Flynn 14:03
And she didn't have any help. It was just solely her cooking?

Frankie Littlewood 14:05
It was just her and, well, we had a cook that helped her, and then we had a dishwasher. And then she had a nanny for us. So, you know, she was really, really busy. My dad was busy with the store. And also he would go out to the field, you know, as a foreman to monitor the work there, so in between all that, I just—it still boggles my mind how they were able to do that.

Mary Flynn 14:31
It's amazing that they worked in the field, and now they're owning the market and—

Frankie Littlewood 14:36
Right.

Mary Flynn 14:37
You know—

Frankie Littlewood 14:37
And it was—it wasn't really that long a period of time that they accumulated all this. You know, but it was a lot of work. They—I mean, they were really hard workers. So, but they also found time to—family time, or they would even take the workers. We'd load them in the bus, I still remember, and we'd go out to the beach, and they'd have a big—at that point in time—

Mary Flynn 15:01
With the laborers?

Frankie Littlewood 15:02
Yeah. At that point in time, we could have the lechón. We could take raw pig out there and just roast it, and have a big 'ol barbecue. They'd go, you know, into the ocean, and they would get abalone, and just a big 'ol barbecue, you know, and it was great. They had to—after the Bracero program ended, they had the Filipinos come in from the islands as laborers, so she had them for a while, and a lot of them, you know, went to other types of work, restaurants or whatever, because they weren't really held to a contract, whereas the Braceros were for about a year or so. After that, then the Hawaiians came in.

Mary Flynn 15:50
This is like around 19—in the 1950s?

Frankie Littlewood 15:52
This is about the 60s, 70s, that, you know, they each came in, but, you know, it was per group, but with the Hawaiians and the Filipinos, there was really no contract. You know, they just came over, and they work—they all congregated in one place.

Mary Flynn 16:07
So, does that mean that they could lose a job really easily, or they're free to—

Frankie Littlewood 16:18
They were free to do what they wanted to do once they got into labor camp, you know, and a lot of them just stayed, you know, because that's all they knew. They knew the field work, but then a lot of them took off and went to San Francisco and, you know, different areas. And actually, that was about the period of time when all of the contracting had stopped, you know, so the labor business wasn't really—oh, and Cesar Chavez came into the picture. You know, so the labor contracting business wasn't really that lucrative anymore. And I know with us, we all went our different ways. You know, we didn't want to work in the store. We didn't want to work out in the fields and all this, so we went our separate ways and found our own careers. So, and it's kind of sad, because a lot of these traditions that we have is all gone. I mean, once I'm gone, I mean, it's really gone. My children know some of the story. My grandchildren know nothing. And we've all integrated into different marriages. So, you know, different cultures.

Mary Flynn 17:32
Can you tell me any stories about the market, like any memories that you have of, like, people coming in?

Frankie Littlewood 17:38
Oh, yeah, that used to be—I was small then. But even when I got married—we called them manongs. These were the original Filipinos that came from the island to work the fields. And they would come to the store almost right after work, or on the weekends, and that's where they congregated. In the back of the store, there was a little kitchen, and they would go there and they would play cards. They would stay there all day and play cards. We called them manongs, because they were older than us, and as respect we called them manong. And they would sit—a lot of them would sit in the front of the store on crate boxes, and just sit there and tell stories. And that was, you know, that was their life, because they

would either send money home to their families—and they had nobody in the states except the Filipino community. And at the store, that's where they all congregated. Sometimes on weekends, they'd go to the labor camp, because like I say, in the kitchen, it was like a big cafeteria, and they would all congregate there and play cards all hours of the night, you know, from Friday to Sunday. And, you know, that was their lifestyle. They had—I remember they were talking about dime a dance, and for their entertainment at times they would go to a dime a dance. And at that point, that's where I heard about the prejudice, as my mom used to tell me stories about that.

Mary Flynn 19:10
At dime a dance?

Frankie Littlewood 19:11
At dime a dance. Because it was mostly white girls there—

Mary Flynn 19:15
Okay.

Frankie Littlewood 19:16
—you know, and you'd go—you pay a dime and you get a dance, you know. But then there was a lot of interracial marriages that took place, you know, a lot of them.

Mary Flynn 19:26
Where was this at—the dime a dance happen?

Frankie Littlewood 19:28
It was here in Salinas somewhere, but I don't know, you know, where it was situated, but I know my mom was kind of down on it. You know, she didn't think that was a proper place to be, but that's where all the men went, because there were no Filipino women here. They were all back home. And so, I think that's where a lot of the interracial marriages started. So, but as far as the store is concerned, they—we had Filipinos coming in from Soledad, Sunol, you know, around the Salinas area, that would come, and they'd just congregate there and have a good time.

Mary Flynn 20:03
Did you sell Filipino food?

Frankie Littlewood 20:08
No, she didn't sell—

Mary Flynn 20:08
Like, ingredients, like, or—

Frankie Littlewood 20:10
Yeah, she did. As a matter of fact, she sold rice, the noodles, pancit, [unclear]. What's the other one? They call it ginamos. Do you know what ginamos is? [laughs] No? Yeah, it's like a fish paste.

Mary Flynn 20:29
Hmm, yum.

Frankie Littlewood 20:30
Yeah. And then they also call it buwad, which is a dried fish, and they'd pan fry it. But the odor is stenching. But anyway, it was one of their staples. And they would cook in the back of the kitchen. I mean, there would be about ten—

Mary Flynn 20:30
In the market?

Frankie Littlewood 20:50
Right.

Mary Flynn 20:51
Okay.

Frankie Littlewood 20:51
Yeah, because the kitchen was in the back, and it was closed off, but the odor still comes through. It's just—you know, but there would be about ten people in the back, and they're all cooking or playing cards or whatever. You know, so yes, she sold some Filipino food, but they always cook Filipino. Today, I still—that's all I do is cook Filipino food, because I don't know—I can fry meat or, you know, make fried chicken, but most of it is descended from the Filipinos. Because that's what I learned. And with my parents, like I said before, when we went to school, we didn't speak English, because she spoke to us in Bisayan. And eventually the school called and told her not to speak to us in our language, because we had a hard time learning English in school. So, but my mother and dad, they tried to ingrain a lot of the Filipino traditions in us. But now with all the integrated marriages and all, it just falls to the wayside. And it's kind of sad, because I had real good—it was very happy, innocent times, family-oriented times, that my children never knew, and my grandchildren will never know.

Mary Flynn 22:05
So, families—you remember having—dining and hanging out and celebrating with other Filipino families?

Frankie Littlewood 22:12
Right, with other Filipino families. We all congregated on weekends. I remember when we went out, we went out with our friends, or basically cousins. All the cousins went out together. And they were—while my cousins were in Soledad, they'd come to Salinas. You know, and we'd all go out together, even after we were married. You know, the brothers, the cousins, and a lot of our friends, you know, we just stayed close. But now it's not that way. You know, I see long lost friends every once in a blue moon, but we're still close. We're not together all the time, because the way the nuclear family is, you know, I'm in Clovis, some are in Salinas, some are in Sacramento. But then once we get together, it's like we've never been apart, you know.

Mary Flynn 22:12
So, those—going back to the labor camp, sorry. So, they would sleep in—where would they sleep?

Frankie Littlewood 23:10
The manongs?

Mary Flynn 23:12
Yes.

Frankie Littlewood 23:13
Well, they go to the labor camp, or sometimes they'd just—

Mary Flynn 23:15
And what was it like inside? Just a lot of beds and—or no beds, or—

Frankie Littlewood 23:19
No, they had beds and everything, but those are for the laborers.

Mary Flynn 23:23
Yeah.

Frankie Littlewood 23:24
If they came, they would just bring a blanket or whatever and lay on the benches in the kitchen. And they would stay there until it was their time to play cards, and they'd get up and they'd go play cards. You know, so, but, you know, that was their whole life. They had to stay within the Filipino community. That's where they were safe. You know, that's where they were accepted, you know. So, they were always, always around. It's just sad that they're not anymore. They were very family oriented, you know, and they were very close. So, they always took care of each other.

Mary Flynn 24:07
So when you and your cousins would go out, would you guys go out in Chinatown or—

Frankie Littlewood 24:11
Oh no, we wouldn't go up—by that time when we—Chinatown had just barely started where, you know, there weren't that many Chinese there anymore. And all—no, we would go down to the capri clubs, Marina, to a different club or whatever. You know, the only time we really got close with Filipinos is if we'd go to a Filipino function or the family had a function.

Mary Flynn 24:35
Were—when you were younger, like, do you remember Chinatown when there were Chinese and Japanese around?

Frankie Littlewood 24:45
Oh, yeah. In China—that used to be our second home. I mean, from the store, Chinatown was just at the other end of the block.

Mary Flynn 24:53
Right.

Frankie Littlewood 24:54
And we would just run down to Chinatown. We'd go to the Republic restaurant, pick up our food, or sometimes we'd go to the Green Gold pool house, because my dad would play pool. And we'd hang around there. It was very safe. Very—you know, it was a lot of—the Chinese was very prevalent then, and Filipinos, and Ahtyes were the only Japanese members that I know of. But yeah, that was our second home. It was safe. Everybody knew everybody. You know, so if you're down the street doing something that you're not supposed to, you can be sure your parents will find out or somebody will come and get you, you know. So, it's not—but it's not the same anymore.

Mary Flynn 25:37
Was your home right near the market?

Frankie Littlewood 25:40
Our home was about three blocks away from the market, you know, on the east side. And that's where the labor camps were. There were three Filipino labor camps at that time, and that was my parents, [unclear], and the Reyeses. And we all knew each other. We all went to each other's functions, you know, go visit, because they all had—we all had—they all had kids about the same age, you know, so we'd all run around together. But I'm glad for this interview, because it brings back a lot of good memories.

Mary Flynn 26:20
What are your favorite memories about Chinatown? Like, what was your—

Frankie Littlewood 26:23
The Republic restaurant—I remember that because we all went there. And, you know, the whole family would go. And we would just eat dinner, and just have a good time there. We would sit there and talk, or the parents would sit there and talk and we would take off and run around Chinatown and have a good time. And they didn't even worry, you know? So, but that restaurant is gone now, so hopefully it'll be restored. [laughs]

Mary Flynn 26:23
Were your parents—did you ever hear your parents talk about the business or talk about the market in, you know, financially, if it was unstable or, like, did you end up hearing them talk about things that were happening in Chinatown and around Chinatown?

Frankie Littlewood 27:13
No, not really. They were pretty much, I don't know, complacent about it. But see, their main goal wasn't to have that business there forever. Their main goal was to send their money home, and that's what they did. They sent everything home. All the money that they made, they sent back home, and they purchased land there. To date, that land is still there, and it's been named after them because they bought such a large amount. So, I still have property there that I've never even seen. But I saw on YouTube where they had a documentary about [unclear], and they'd call it, I forgot, balikbayan or something, Balilit. But it's a large parcel of land. But that was their main goal. Their main goal was for all their kids to go back to the Philippines, live around them, but—and they did the purchasing of the land and all this, but there's only three of the kids that are living in the Philippines, and the rest of us are here.

Mary Flynn 28:31
Do you keep in contact with them?

Frankie Littlewood 28:33
I do every so often. You know, my oldest sister is eighty years old now, and the other one's eighty-two. And they're still pretty active. And, you know, but it's a different lifestyle altogether. One sister worked here, so she retired over there, so she's fine. And the other sister, well, they're fine, too, but, you know, her lifestyle is a lot different from us. She's trying to get over here to the States. I think her daughter's gonna bring her over. But that was about it as far as the [unclear], because like I said, it's not their lifelong goal to stay there. They wanted to retire in the Philippines, but my dad passed before that, and then she passed after he did.

Mary Flynn 29:16
When did your—when did the market close?

Frankie Littlewood 29:21
Oh, it had to be in the 70s, I think.

Mary Flynn 29:27
Was that sad, like, difficult or—

Frankie Littlewood 29:30
No, it was kind of a relief, because my mom and dad were getting pretty old at that time, and they really didn't have any help. Every one of us had jobs elsewhere, and the hours are just too long. And that was the time everything was changing, especially in Chinatown. Everything was changing. It wasn't the same type of people that were there anymore. It was, like, you know, your homeless, the real indigent people, and then the violence that was there. So, it was a relief that, you know, they closed it up and got out of there.

Mary Flynn 30:10
And the labor camp?

Frankie Littlewood 30:11
The labor camp started slowing down about the 60s or so, late 60s or early 70s. Yeah. And then my mom held on to it, but she boarded, you know, she sent—she had boarders. And the kind of boarders that it attracted, you know, weren't really paying, so, you know, it was just too much for her, so she sold and moved out to North Salinas. I mean, she was—but now the building is still there, and it's—it has boarders. And the kitchen is still—a matter of fact, about three months ago, we went and did a walkthrough. The guy was able to let us walk through. Everything's basically the same, the structure and what have you, but, you know, different furniture and whatever. But it was nice to go through there because we had good memories there, too.

Mary Flynn 31:09
What kind of people came into the market besides—just Filipinos, or—

Frankie Littlewood 31:14
Well, it was the Filipinos. There was not too many Chinese, but Filipinos, Mexicans, blacks, you know, that came into the market. And then it's basically the same type of—same person. So you get to know their names, you know, and talk to 'em and what have you. So, at that point in time, you kept the same, you know, people kept coming in.

Mary Flynn 31:38
What kind of Filipino activities as an organization that happened? Did you attend any? Did you—

Frankie Littlewood 31:44
Oh, they had—the Filipino was really active in the 40s, 50s. I remember a lot of the 50s. We had drum corps. They had the Filipino community where they had dances, and they also had social box. And social box at that time, was when they would get these girls. They would offer their services to dance, and, you know, the men would pay so much, or whatever they wanted to pay to make the dance, and then at the end of the dance, they split up the money. And, you know, a lot of the girls used for education or for clothes or whatever.

Mary Flynn 31:44
Did you?

Frankie Littlewood 31:48
No, I never did. But then they had the—they had a lot of sports. They had volleyball tournaments. They had volleyball. They had basketball. And that was all over California. We would have tournaments. Salinas may hold a tournament, and everybody from all over California would come, and then each city would take, you know, each year a tournament. And let's see what else we had. Oh, we had the Filipino Youth Club, where we all went, and we had dancing, and it was just so, so much activity that we had. It was so much fun, and we never worried about anything. We just went and did our thing, you know.

Mary Flynn 33:12
Can you tell me any particular story that went along with any of those activities?

Frankie Littlewood 33:17
Well, there was one. There's a Filipino youth club, and we just started that. And the Filipinos, the elders, they really—they liked social box. We didn't like social box. You know, we wanted to have our own dances, and you'd pay at the door, and that was it, you know. And this one Filipino man who was—I can't even remember his name, but he fought that for the longest time. So finally, we did have our dance, and he was at the door, collecting the fee or the money, because we also got a band and whatever. But to the side of that, I didn't—we didn't realize that he had set up social box. And, you know, he was getting these girls to do their—and telling them, you know, well, you get half the money or whatever. And as it turned out, once the social box was over, all the kids are really, really upset, because they set about an hour's time, you know, maybe ten minutes for each girl to dance, whatever, that we—took away from our time, and then the guy kept the money and put it in the Filipino community fund. [laughs] He said that, you know, that was for the community, for us using their facilities.

Mary Flynn 34:36
Yeah.

Frankie Littlewood 34:36
So, but after that we had maybe a couple more dances, and then that was it. Just stopped it. But they had a lot of Filipino activities for the youth.

Mary Flynn 34:49
Were your parents involved in any Filipino organizations besides running the labor camp?

Frankie Littlewood 34:53
They were involved in only one that I know of, and it was called de Dimas-Alang. It was like a fraternity. But they never attended. They, you know, just paid dues or whatever, but they were so busy working, that they really didn't get active in any of that.

Mary Flynn 35:10
You said your dad had an invite to a type of organization?

Frankie Littlewood 35:15
But, you know, that—I know it was some type of Filipino, supposedly secret, organization or club, whatever. But I know that my father declined it, because he said he didn't believe, but I do believe it has something to do with the protection of the Filipinos. I don't know how you would explain it—to protect them from being abused or taken advantage of.

Mary Flynn 35:45
So that was very prevalent. Do you remember that?

Frankie Littlewood 35:49
Yeah, I do remember that.

Mary Flynn 35:50
The abuse of Filipinos?

Frankie Littlewood 35:52
No. Oh, that? No, I don't. I just know the stories that my parents said.

Mary Flynn 35:56
Like?

Frankie Littlewood 35:56
You know, like, they would—when they were working in the labor contracting business, you know, they would get the laborers into the camps and whatever. But then when they would go to the different—it depends—the different stores, you know, to get what they need to provide for that, like mattresses and things of that nature, you know, they would come against some prejudices. Like, you know, they didn't have the mattresses, but then he can see in the back that there were mattresses there. So, some businesses wouldn't sell to Filipinos. You know, and if they did sell, it had to be cash on the line. There was no credit, you know, available to them. Except, like I said, for that one person that I distinctly remember—Mr. White from National Bank, when they purchased the store. But I guess there was a lot of prejudices from what I understand and from what I've heard, but I really never experienced it. And I was exposed to outside the Filipino community, you know, but either I was too ignorant to acknowledge it, or to even know that it existed, because I never felt it.

Mary Flynn 36:07
So, going back to Chinatown—and maybe place yourself back in the 50s. Besides going to the Republic Cafe, what are some other favorite places or spots or memories that you have down there?

Frankie Littlewood 37:27
There was, like I said, the Green Gold. I think it was a pool hall, and—

Mary Flynn 37:32
And you would just sit there while your dad would play pool or—

Frankie Littlewood 37:34
My dad would play pool—well, then they had a restaurant too. [unclear] had one. And we would go to the restaurant there and—

Mary Flynn 37:41
What did that look like?

Frankie Littlewood 37:43
It was like—how would I explain it? It's like a diner. You know, a real small—just a portion of that building that she had—that they did the cooking, and then she would serve. And they had card games going. You know, I mean, that's one of the—

Mary Flynn 38:03
And what kind of people were in there? Was it just Filipinos?

Frankie Littlewood 38:06
Filipinos. Most of them were all Filipinos and, you know, the laborers, they would all go there. And like I say, that's where they would go on the weekend. Either that or the dime a dance, or, you know, or they'd go to the labor camps to play cards. You know, that was their main thing. And I think a lot of that, you know, once the children started coming, or they remarried and whatever, and the integration of marriages, a lot of that was lost, because a lot of the kids moved where the jobs are, so they weren't that close. When we grew up, everybody lived nearby. Nobody ever thought of getting a job in LA or, you know, down south, the north, Sacramento. You know, everybody was here. Nobody ever moved. Well, after that, you know, then you had to move to find the jobs or whatever. So, the family structure changed, you know, and like I was mentioning to Grace, my kids don't even know who their cousins are anymore, you know, because they lived so far away, and if they met in the street, they wouldn't know who they were. So, I just wish they had more Filipino functions where the kids can go to and, you know—

Mary Flynn 38:14
Do you have any particular stories about Chinatown that you would want your children to know about, or your grandchildren to know about?

Frankie Littlewood 39:31
Just the fact that it was so family oriented that we could go anywhere, and, you know, we would be taken care of. We wouldn't worry, and it didn't have to be just the Filipinos. It was, you know, the Chinese that were there. And it was such an innocent era, that what they live with now, they'll never know how we grew up and how innocent it was for us. You know, right now they grow up—well, you can't talk to this person because he might grab you or whatever. And so, right away, they've got a negative value as far as people talking to them, you know. And we didn't have that. We didn't even think about that, you know, the memories of Chinatown and the pool halls and the old men and the women that were there. It was so friendly, you know.

Mary Flynn 40:33
What kind of women were there?

Frankie Littlewood 40:34
It was, like, there—well, I can remember [unclear]. She was very boisterous, very loud, but she can cook, and she had the restaurant. There was one lady that was there, I remember. I can't remember her name, but she would always be there. And one of the things the Filipino women, a lot of them would smoke is Toscanelli. It used to be—oh, Tuscany was like a tobacco that was wrapped up like a cigar, and the women had Toscanelli, and they would smoke that. And I remember that distinctly. My mother used to smoke Criss cigarettes inside out, you know. And but that's the only kind of memories I can think of. It was just so—

Mary Flynn 40:34
Did you ever end up smoking?

Frankie Littlewood 41:18
No—oh, yeah, I ended up smoking cigarettes.

Mary Flynn 41:33
Not those? Yeah.

Frankie Littlewood 41:33
No, those were just too much for me. But, you know, I—they were just so good times. I mean, I don't know how to explain it. You know, as much as I can see that the way that kids are being brought up now and what they're exposed to, it's so completely different.

Mary Flynn 41:54
Who are your close friends that you remember, that you did a lot of activities with down in Chinatown?

Frankie Littlewood 42:03
All the [unclear] girls. I don't—Grace was basically more social, at the dances or whatever. But most of it was the [unclear]. And that was about—oh, the [unclear]. These were all field laborers, even the daughters.

Mary Flynn 42:23
Really?

Frankie Littlewood 42:23
Yeah.

Mary Flynn 42:24
So, you had friends that were working in the labor—in the fields?

Frankie Littlewood 42:31
Right. And—

Mary Flynn 42:32
Was that, like, different, like—I mean, you weren't technically working in the field

Frankie Littlewood 42:37
Not—no—

Mary Flynn 42:38
Not anymore at this point. Because you did it once and you were, like, no way, right?

Frankie Littlewood 42:41
That's right. Yeah, that was it.

Mary Flynn 42:43
But you have your friends that were participating. Did they—was that difficult to—

Frankie Littlewood 42:50
No, because they were just, like, family. It didn't matter, you know. It didn't matter that they worked in the fields or whatever. It was just, we got together and it was just like that, you know. We just—but our parents were close too, you know, so but the [unclear] and the [unclear], they were working people out in the field. You know, the children did. And their generation, now their kids are grown and out of the field, you know. But they did—they worked the fields all the time, and so did the [unclear].

Mary Flynn 43:28
So, there must have been, like, in the community of Filipinos, different working class.

Frankie Littlewood 43:34
Yes. You had your field laborers. You had your labor contractors, then you had your store owners. You know, I mean, I guess it's a different level of class, because as I think about it, we weren't upper or lower. We were just right there in the middle. You know, Reyeses, [unclear], those people we would consider upper class. [unclear], the [unclear], you know, not lower class, they were just, you know, field workers. But when you get them together, they're all one. I mean, it doesn't really—

Mary Flynn 44:14
And you went to high school at all—the same school as all these—

Frankie Littlewood 44:18
No, I went to Catholic school. I went to Palma High.

Mary Flynn 44:23
Okay, when it was co-ed?

Frankie Littlewood 44:25
Yes, when it was co-ed, and I graduated from Salinas High. But my outside activities were basically with, you know, the Filipinos, or the mestizas, you want to call them. They're mixed blood, you know.

Mary Flynn 44:41
Mixed blood. And did the mixed blood—was that—did you—there was no segregation between that?

Frankie Littlewood 44:47
No, there was segregation between the American born and the Philippine born.

Mary Flynn 44:56
Can you go further into that, why and—

Frankie Littlewood 44:59
That was in my teenage years and, you know, I really don't know why. But it was just there. They just did—we just didn't like each other. I think we had the feeling that they thought they were better than us. And they had the same feeling. You know, so all through high school, there was this—you just had that feeling—you stuck with—the American born just stick with each other and the Filipino born would stick with each other. And they had—I remember the Filipino community, they had fights over that.

Mary Flynn 45:27
Really?

Frankie Littlewood 45:28
Yeah. But as they grew older and out of high school and stuff and, you know, they—

Mary Flynn 45:33
Is there any particular memory that you—stands out between—that shows the division?

Frankie Littlewood 45:40
Yeah, well, this is one that was—as a matter of fact, we were talking about it today. A friend of mine, Jeanie Baguio, and her boyfriend at the time was Tony [unclear]. They went to the Filipino community for a dance, and they were jumped by the Philippine born. And then she said that there was nobody there to help her. But anyway, the segregation portion of it was they just didn't like the way I guess he looked or whatever. But at that point in time—

Mary Flynn 46:19
Because he looked American?

Frankie Littlewood 46:20
You could tell the—

Mary Flynn 46:22
Really?

Frankie Littlewood 46:22
Yeah, you can just look at them. You know if they're born in the States or they're born in the Philippines. I don't know what it is, but we were able to, you know, tell. But the reason for them being separate, I don't know. You know, I really can't put my finger on it, because we never really talked about it. It was just there. They just stayed in their little clique. We stayed in our little clique. And that was it. And prejudices. I don't know, I've never really felt it except, you know, just the segregation between the Filipinos.

Mary Flynn 46:58
So, you said that your dad came from the Philippines to Hawaii, and he worked in the—

Frankie Littlewood 47:05
Pineapple fields.

Mary Flynn 47:06
Pineapple fields.

Frankie Littlewood 47:07
Mm-hmm.

Mary Flynn 47:07
Was he a part of any labor movements?

Frankie Littlewood 47:10
Not to my knowledge.

Mary Flynn 47:13
And then he was in the military?

Frankie Littlewood 47:15
No.

Mary Flynn 47:15
No?

Frankie Littlewood 47:15
He was never in the military. He worked there and saved money and then came to the States. And then he went to the labor camps, and that's, you know, where he worked. Then my mother didn't come in until, I think it was 1937.

Mary Flynn 47:30
How old were they when they got married?

Frankie Littlewood 47:34
They were old already. I think—let's see, I was—she was born 1902. [unclear]—she was in her 40s or late 30s when they got married.

Mary Flynn 47:49
When they finally—

Frankie Littlewood 47:50
When they finally got married.

Mary Flynn 47:51
Okay, and how did they reconnect? They reconnected in Salinas Valley, right?

Frankie Littlewood 47:55
Right.

Mary Flynn 47:56
And they were in their 20s, or—

Frankie Littlewood 47:58
No, they were—they had to be in their 30s or—

Mary Flynn 48:01
Oh, they were—

Frankie Littlewood 48:01
They were—yeah, she already had—she already had six children.

Mary Flynn 48:06
Okay, so they were married beforehand or—

Frankie Littlewood 48:08
No, they got married here.

Mary Flynn 48:10
Okay.

Frankie Littlewood 48:10
He was—from what I understand, he was considered by my grandparents as not equal to her.

Mary Flynn 48:17
Why?

Frankie Littlewood 48:18
Well, he's from a fishing village, and she was supposedly—her parents were Spanish, Filipino, and teachers and whatever. And so, they had their little class fights, too. So, he was not, I guess, marrying material for her. So, and then they remarried over here. And she had six children prior—eight children prior to that, that she left with my grandmother. And she came just before the war was over—started. You know, so and then they met up here, and she had four more with him. So, but that's—[unclear] [laughs]

Mary Flynn 49:04
No, anything you want to share.

Frankie Littlewood 49:06
Yeah, that's, you know, basically—I just feel kind of sad that my kids, my children and grandchildren, don't know all this, and they don't—they haven't experienced it, because it really—it helped define me. I

think it helped define all of us, because it made us want to better ourselves. You know, we didn't want to work out in the fields and, you know, just labor the rest of our life.

Mary Flynn 49:32
The second generation didn't want that?

Frankie Littlewood 49:34
No, the second generation didn't want that. A lot of them did, but eventually got their educations and got out of the field, you know.

Mary Flynn 49:41
Because you saw just how difficult it was for your parents and working, and then working in the field?

Frankie Littlewood 49:46
Yes, and then it's long hours. You have no benefits. You know, and there was nothing there. And it seems like you work in the fields, and you look at these people and, you know, their lifestyle is not what you want. You want something better in case you have children. You want something better for them, you know, so you try the best way you can to improve their lifestyle. And hopefully the generation after will try that, you know. But it's just sad that they're going to lose this. You know, so this is why I would like it documented and kept. You know, even if my blood's not there anymore, at least they can look at it, you know, and know what it's like.

Mary Flynn 50:32
So, ending on this note, if there was a few things you could say to the Filipino community of the next generation in Salinas, what would you want them to know about?

Frankie Littlewood 50:44
I would like them to—about Salinas or the Filipinos?

Mary Flynn 50:48
Filipinos.

Frankie Littlewood 50:50
I would like them to know—let them know—to learn more about their culture, to embrace their culture, because it really defines—the Philippines is what you would call a third world country. The people there are—they're very giving. They're very family oriented, and I just wish that they would try to learn and know about their background, because it really will define them. They're hardworking people, and they do try to improve themselves. For some reason, the Philippines hasn't been able to get out of that funk, but the generation outside of there can, and if they embrace that, you know. I mean, it's part of their heritage, you know. And so is all the other bloods that they have in them, you know. And they should be proud of all of it. So, I just wish that they would learn more about it and embrace it, and embrace who they are, regardless, you know, Filipino or not, but this way, my children will know, and their children, you know. So, because it will go generation to generation, and hopefully, you know, they'll be able to

use that in their life. And maybe we can get back to basics, you know, and get back to the safe environment we had in the 50s, and the family lifestyle that we had. But, anyhow.

Mary Flynn 52:22
Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Frankie Littlewood 52:24
Oh, you're welcome. I enjoyed speaking with you and bringing back all these memories of the manongs and what have you. They're all gone now, but I really enjoyed it. So, hopefully I'll get a CD. [laughs]

Mary Flynn 52:37
Yes. Yes, yes. Definitely.

Frankie Littlewood 52:40
Yeah, because my kids were saying, "Are you gonna get a CD?" I said, "I don't know, but I'll ask her."

Mary Flynn 52:44
Yeah, totally.

Frankie Littlewood 52:46
But yeah, that was—you haven't experienced any of this?