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Interview with Gertrude Imperial

Gertrude Imperial

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Lauren Driscoll
Interviewer: Gertrude Imperial
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Duration of Interview: 00:52:55

Lauren Driscoll 00:00

I'll try not to ask you as many questions, as I'm gonna prompt you to say—

Gertrude Imperial 00:04

Let me ramble on?

Lauren Driscoll 00:05

Let you ramble [Gertrude laughs] on, exactly! [laughs] But, I was—are you ready? Are you recording?
This is Mayra. Did you—Mayra introduced herself to you?

Gertrude Imperial 00:05

Hi.

Lauren Driscoll 00:21

[laughs] And we were first gonna talk about your early life, like, when you were a child, where did you live?

Gertrude Imperial 00:35

We lived in Salinas. I was born there. And we lived on Blanco Road on a farm owned by a Portuguese couple who owned ten acres. And my father worked for them. And he did everything there. He, you know, did the soil and planted and everything. But that's where we stayed, and they had a house built for us. We didn't pay rent. But the bathroom was outside, which was very inconvenient at times. And we had, like, an arinola at night. You know what arinola is?

Lauren Driscoll 01:18

No.

Gertrude Imperial 01:18

It's those little plastic thing where you go when you have to go, because my parents wouldn't let us go outside to the bathroom. So, that's what we did. That's how we lived. And we had a wooden stove. And to me, it was—we lived fine. We didn't starve during the Depression, because we had vegetables. And the owners, Mr. And Mrs. DePorto, would give us chicken, because they were raising chicken, cows, horses. And anytime they killed anything, we would get it. We didn't have to buy anything. So that was my childhood. The vegetables were just growing wild around us. We'd just go in there and pick it, cook it, eat it, fresh.

Lauren Driscoll 02:09

Did anyone else live on your property besides—

Gertrude Imperial 02:12

No, just my mother, father, and at that time, my three brothers and myself. And later on, my mother had—must have been a change of life, [laughs] they call it. She had another boy. That's the brother living with me now. And my sister who's married has three children and lives in Virginia—state of Virginia that you heard so much on the—during the election.

Lauren Driscoll 02:44

Oh, yeah. Yeah. [laughs]

Gertrude Imperial 02:45

They waited three hours to vote, the whole family. And she said when they got in the building, started raining. So she lives there now, and Alfred lives in Salinas. Richard, my other brother, lives in Livermore. My other brother, the one that was next to me, died. And my brother, my youngest brother, lives here with me, which I'm very thankful for. I don't want to live alone. I'm always used to—you know, in those—my early days, we were just surrounded with friends and people, you know, family.

Lauren Driscoll 03:25

Did you have any relatives or aunts and uncles that also lived in Salinas?

Gertrude Imperial 03:29

Oh, yes. And they did the same thing. You know, they lived on ranches and worked on the ranch. And it wasn't easy. They were only paid like thirty-five cents, forty cents an hour. And, but in our case, we were lucky because we were given food by the owner, you know, like meat and, you know, chicken and all that, but we were surrounded with fresh vegetables too. And food was no problem during the Depression like it was for some people. And I think Alfred must have said the same thing here. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 04:18

It's great. We have to give, you know, both sides because we didn't know what Alfred said. Were your parents born here, or did they—

Gertrude Imperial 04:29

No, they were born in the Philippines. My mother was born in Bayas, and my father was born in Pulangyuta, which is red earth, and Siquijor, the Visayans—they're both Visayans. And then they had a chance to go to Hawaii, and they did, and they lived there for quite a while. Then they came here to the United States, and in the late 20s, they lived in a tent for—in Salinas for about, I don't know how many years, before they lived in the ranch where they are—where we were. And we were born there, you know, except for the last two, Eileen and Steven. They were born in a hospital, because they had to. But before the doctors just came to the house, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 05:24

So, they were living in a tent in Salinas and working?

Gertrude Imperial 05:28

At first, yes. But we weren't born yet, and then when we moved to the house, that's when we were born. I guess they felt, you know, more secure—as secure as you can get in those days.

Lauren Driscoll 05:46

And so, did you go to a school in Salinas too?

Gertrude Imperial 05:48

Oh, yes. We all went to Spring School from first grade to eighth grade, which I don't think they have now. And we had three teachers. One, Mrs. Lewis, she was a principal, taught the first and second. Mrs. Griffin taught three, four, and five, and Mrs. Richmond taught six, seven, and eighth grade. And we all graduated from there. And we all went to Salinas High School. We all graduated from there. And then I went to Hartnell. I graduated from there, so did my one other brother, and then he went to San Jose State after that, but the other brothers didn't go—continue after high school. They just went directly to work.

Lauren Driscoll 06:43

You remember your teachers' names so well.

Gertrude Imperial 06:46

Well, they were good teachers. They were excellent teachers. You know what they did? They used to pick us up at home to go to school in their car, and then bring us to school, and then take us home. You can't find that now. Oh, I remember them very well. They were kind. And then I think they gave my parents a little money for—to take the children to the movies, they would say. And that's what we did. We went to the El Rey Theater and watched cowboy movies. Or my father would go gambling on Sundays in the afternoon. He loved Pai Gow. So that's where we were, you know, playing along at Soledad Street in Salinas, which is bad now I understand, or it's getting better. I don't know. But that was safe in those days. No problem. And like I told you, the prostitutes used to come out to the bar and, you know, play with us, you know, run around in the street. And then when they were called for business, they'd go, [laughs] you know. And then there was a PI market, a Filipino—Philippine Island market—there too, in Soledad Street. And that was fun to go to.

Lauren Driscoll 08:13

Do you remember any childhood games that you used to play with your siblings, or, you know—

Gertrude Imperial 08:21

Well, we used to play—where you drew the three squares—hopscotch, I guess you'd call it, and then do that. We played that. And we played balls, but mostly we'd be fighting over the prunes. [Lauren laughs] Our own—the owner of the ranch had a prune tree, and we would, you know—anything that fell on the ground, we would pick up and eat, and if someone had more than the other, that's when we fought. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 08:53

[laughs] So you remember the fighting?

Gertrude Imperial 08:55

Yes, I do, because they were three against me. I was the oldest. But my parents always sided with me, because I was the oldest.

Lauren Driscoll 09:06

[laughs] Did your mom used to cook for the family a lot?

Gertrude Imperial 09:09

All the time. That's all she did—cook, clean, reprimand, scold, spank. She did all that. They used to spank us in those days with the belt, but only in the rear end. They never spanked us anywhere else. I don't know why. You know, I've seen parents just hit their children anywhere, but not my mother and father. It was always in the rear end, or when my mother couldn't control herself, she would pinch us in the inner thigh. And that would be black and blue for a while.

Lauren Driscoll 09:49

Do you remember any celebrations that you'd have, like birthday parties?

Gertrude Imperial 09:53

Oh yeah, the baptism, where they would kill a pig and roast, and invite, you know—roasted right there on the ground. They would get up early in the morning, and I think they used to use the ditch in back of the house to—they'd put the pig through the stick, and then just go round and round till it was cooked.

Lauren Driscoll 10:20

What was the celebration for, just—

Gertrude Imperial 10:21

Baptism.

Lauren Driscoll 10:22

Oh, Baptism.

Gertrude Imperial 10:23

Mostly. That's what we did.

Lauren Driscoll 10:27

And did you guys all have birthday parties and things as kids, or—

Gertrude Imperial 10:32

No, I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all. That only happened as we got older, when we were in high school. That was it.

Lauren Driscoll 10:45

And what exactly did your dad do? He—

Gertrude Imperial 10:47

He worked on the farm. He drove the tractor, and he planted, and—but in the beginning, there was no tractor. They had horses on—you connected them with those things that you—I don't know what you call it. And that's what he used to do too for many years. No tractor.

Lauren Driscoll 11:11

Wow.

Gertrude Imperial 11:11

They used to dig the soil with these, I don't know what you call it, and they'd go through the—and then dig it up and, you know, then they'd plant, like, sugar beets. And I remember sugar beets mostly, because of the Spreckels Sugar Company that was so close. They would come and load that up and do that.

Lauren Driscoll 11:41

Did your mom work outside the home at all or no?

Gertrude Imperial 11:44

No. No time.

Lauren Driscoll 11:46

Yeah.

Gertrude Imperial 11:47

No time. Although some other women worked in the field with the men, because they didn't have children. But my mother never did that. She was strictly a mother.

Lauren Driscoll 12:02

Did you have any chores or responsibilities to help out with your mom, or did your siblings?

Gertrude Imperial 12:07

No, she would just yell. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 12:08

[laughs] When she wanted help?

Gertrude Imperial 12:10

When she wanted something done, she would yell at us, "Do this. Do that." She—we never had anything, you know, scheduled for us. She could never find us. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 12:23

[laughs] What do you remember learning in school when you were in—went to the Springfield School?

Gertrude Imperial 12:32

Spring School? Oh, that's why I love those teachers. They taught you till you knew, you know, like, counting first, and then addition, and then—Mrs. Lewis was very strict. She—we knew when we left that class that she knew—that we knew what she taught us. And it was the same with the other teachers. They were very devoted to their work. And they would talk loud. That scared me too. You know, when they wanted you to do—to learn something—you learned it. That was it. I liked all those teachers.

Lauren Driscoll 13:17

Was it—who went to the school?

Gertrude Imperial 13:21

Families that lived along Hitchcock Road and all around there, because Spreckels had their own school, but it was families who lived just around that area. And the classes were full. Japanese and all that, you know, Filipino, and all nationalities. But we're still friends with some of them if they hadn't died. You know, they're all [laughs] old like me. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 14:03

But everything was taught in English?

Gertrude Imperial 14:05

Yes. Oh, yes.

Lauren Driscoll 14:08

But at home did you speak Tagalog too, or it was all English?

Gertrude Imperial 14:12

All English. My parents only spoke to us in Filipino when they were angry. And that's how we knew all the angry words. [Lauren laughs] But that was interesting too. [Lauren laughs] We never learned. We just knew words, or we understood what they said. But we never learned the language, to speak it fluently. But—

Lauren Driscoll 14:40

Why didn't they teach it to you?

Gertrude Imperial 14:42

I don't know. They—I think they wanted us to be English, to be part of the—although the Japanese were different. The children knew how to speak Japanese, and—but not us. We were different. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 14:59

So other Filipino children—

Gertrude Imperial 15:01

Were the same.

Lauren Driscoll 15:01

They were—they spoke all English too?

Gertrude Imperial 15:03

Mm-hmm.

Lauren Driscoll 15:05

That's interesting. Did you guys go on many family vacations or trips or anything as a child?

Gertrude Imperial 15:15

Not vacation. We went, like, on weekends, we used to go to Stockton, Walnut Grove. You know where Walnut Grove is? It's near Stockton, I think. Because we had relatives there, and we could stay with them and not be in a hotel. That was the only thing we went to. That was—it was fun. But when I think now of the car we drove, you know, it was an old car. I don't know how we ever made it to Stockton or Walnut Grove. I don't know. But it was very interesting.

Lauren Driscoll 15:58

Did you have cousins that you stayed with?

Gertrude Imperial 16:00

I beg your pardon?

Lauren Driscoll 16:01

Did you have cousins there too?

Gertrude Imperial 16:03

Yes, we did. But, you know, we lost track after we got married and all that stuff. And the only time you'd really see old friends was at funerals, or at weddings. That was the only time. We never—

Lauren Driscoll 16:21

So, when did you go to Chinatown as a child?

Gertrude Imperial 16:26

Oh, I must have been about ten—eight, nine, or ten. And that was fun for me because I had friends there—little girls, Martha chin, the Chin family. And I went through high school with Martha and her brothers. They were nice. And Ahtyes—Wallace Ahtye, Stanley Ahtye. He was good looking. And we would eat at a—whenever my father would win a little money, you know, in that Pai Gow game, we would eat at this Republic restaurant, where the waitresses were mothers of these children running around in the street, and they dressed so beautifully in this Chinese costume. But the Republic was a very good restaurant. I don't know if it's still there. I doubt it. But there were two waitresses that were, you know, middle aged, and they were—they were good waitresses, and the food was good. It was their husbands who cooked. It's a family thing. But we used to go there with families whose parents want to or something. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 17:46

So, it wasn't just special occasions. It was—

Gertrude Imperial 17:50

Just when they won some money [laughs] in that gambling.

Lauren Driscoll 17:54

[laughs] How often did your dad go down there?

Gertrude Imperial 17:56

Oh, not very often, because he didn't have that much money. Maybe twice a month. And that was a outing for us too. And we would see people there that, you know, friends—they would go there too. Their parents would go there too. The mothers used to go too, you know. They'd have to babysit us. [laughs] But that was fun in those days. I don't know what it's like in there. I haven't been there for so many years, because it's bad to go there, I understand. I don't know now. Maybe they've straightened it out. I don't know.

Lauren Driscoll 18:44

It's hard to say, because we've never seen what it looked like before, [laughs] you know, when—

Gertrude Imperial 18:51

Well, it was nice before. There must have been some people there who weren't very nice, but they were nice to us, the little kids.

Lauren Driscoll 19:04

What kinds of businesses did they have?

Gertrude Imperial 19:06

Oh my gosh, they had that—I told you that Chinese restaurant, the Republic. And then they had a Japanese restaurant a few doors down. And then they would have little grocery stores like, you know, and there was Carmen and Gloria's donut shop, and all the Filipinos would go there because the girls were really good looking. And they sold donuts, and they were very popular. That place was very popular. Then there was Phillip and Stella Ben, who had a grocery store on Bridge Street, where they had [laughs] prostitute [unclear] [laughs]. They'd call it the red district. But, you know, we never thought of it as bad, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 20:02

It was just normal.

Gertrude Imperial 20:04

For then, I think it was, but we never—we never went there. We weren't allowed to go near there, but we were allowed to go to the groceries. And then there was the—another family that had a barber shop there across from the Bens, and a lot of little shops. That was popular in those days.

Lauren Driscoll 20:30

Where did Filipino people shop, or was there a specific place where they got—

Gertrude Imperial 20:34

Well, they went to the PI market, and then there was that shop over there on East Market. It was a little grocery store run by a Filipino couple, and they had Filipino type food there. And that's where they'd go. That's where we went. I'm surprised I remembered all these things. It just comes back, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 21:04

What was your favorite food as a child that you would always want your mom to make?

Gertrude Imperial 21:09

Oh, she was—she was a good cook. She would cook chicken, boiled chicken, with this long rice and a lot of vegetables in it. That was good. We always enjoyed that with rice. And it was a treat when we got a dessert, which we never got at all sometimes. You know, once in a great while my dad would bring home ice cream. And then there was that Leidig. I don't know if you remember—well, no, you wouldn't—Leidig's on Romie Lane and Monterey Street. There used to be a grocery store, and they used to give my dad, like, stuff that they sell nowadays, you know, like the legs of the chicken, and the liver and all the innards. They would give that to my dad, and then they didn't know that my mother could cook that. [laughs] She would adobo it, and oh, it was good.

Lauren Driscoll 22:14

What's adobo?

Gertrude Imperial 22:15

Well, they put vinegar and spices and everything, and it was good. You know, I'm not a very good cook. I don't know how to cook really, [laughs] because my husband was a chef for—he was at the Pine Inn in Carmel for twenty-five years.

Lauren Driscoll 22:36

Oh, wow.

Gertrude Imperial 22:36

Do you know Pine Inn in Carmel? He was chef there for twenty-five years. We lived there in Carmel. Then when he retired, we came here. Sold our home there and bought this one. So that was it. [laughs] And I worked at June Simpson when I found out that—because I was a hostess at Pine Inn for a while. Then I saw all these waiters making all that tip. So, I said, I think I want to do that. [laughs] So that's what I did. I worked at June Simpson's for a while.

Lauren Driscoll 23:12

Was that your first job?

Gertrude Imperial 23:14

As a waitress, yeah. I just learned from watching those waiters at the Pine Inn, because they were first class waiters. I was just hostess showing people to the tables. And I guess I learned that from the waiters there, and I enjoyed working there. And—sort of reminds me of my olden days [laughs] when I, you know, would go to Chinatown, and those Chinese waitresses. They were just so wonderful. No matter how nasty some guys got or how the children were playing around and running around in the—they were so sweet.

Lauren Driscoll 24:08

Why do you think that was? Just—

Gertrude Imperial 24:11

Well, I think they understood. You know, because they had children of their own. And I guess they've met a lot of people and they were like that, you know, some of them. But they were so sweet. I said, I think I've got to be sweet to make good tips. [laughs] And I did. I made good tips. You know Herb Alpert?

Lauren Driscoll 24:36

Unh-uh.

Gertrude Imperial 24:38

Oh, I guess that was before your time. He was a musician. He had a band, and he was a singer. And he left me a hundred dollar tip.

Lauren Driscoll 24:49

Wow!

Gertrude Imperial 24:51

That was for lunch.

Lauren Driscoll 24:53

[laughs] Wow! When was this?

Gertrude Imperial 24:57

Gosh, it must have been in the 70s. But then Simpson people usually gave good tips, so—but that was the most I've ever gotten. And I just [laughs], and Mrs. Simpson said, "Well, that—" She was from Seattle, and she said, "Well, that's because you're a good waitress." Then she made me hostess sometimes, too. When the hostess got ill, she said, "You're gonna be hostess tonight. No money." [laughs] "Just your salary." [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 25:38

What was your first job?

Gertrude Imperial 25:41

I worked for the superintendent of schools. Gladys Stone was her name. And that was part of the course, you know, that I took at Hartnell, and I worked in her office for a year. She was nice. I think she passed away, though. Superintendent of Schools of Salinas. And then I worked at—gosh, it didn't impress me, so I don't remember it, I guess. But I remember working there at the Superintendent of School's office. I liked that. You know, people were nice. There's my brother. Steven, do you remember anything about Chinatown?

Steven Imperial 26:30

Yeah. All I know is it used to be a red light district a long time ago. [all laugh]

Gertrude Imperial 26:34

Aren't men like that? [Lauren laughs] They remember red light. Gee, and that's all?

Steven Imperial 26:41

Oh, I remember.

Lauren Driscoll 26:42

Do you remember what men used to come for the red light?

Steven Imperial 26:45

Pardon?

Lauren Driscoll 26:46

Who used to come for the red light district?

Steven Imperial 26:49

Oh, immi—field workers, people from out of town used to come down there. That's what I've been told. [Gertrude and Lauren laugh] [unclear].

Lauren Driscoll 27:06

Who were the customers?

Gertrude Imperial 27:08

Yeah, I guess they were like field workers, you know, and people who had no families, you know. That's what they did. I asked my husband if he did that. He said, "No, I don't remember that." [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 27:27

So, but it was, you know—the people, the women who worked there, were they Chinese or white or—

Gertrude Imperial 27:33

Yeah, white, Mexican. They were either white or Mexican, or black. But gee, those women were—I couldn't understand. They were so nice. They would go along, you know, Soledad Street [unclear].

And, you know, they were just nice. You know, they weren't mean or say anything. No sarcasm. I don't know.

Lauren Driscoll 28:02

So, everybody was nice to them as well.

Gertrude Imperial 28:04

Yeah, the men were. I guess that's how they could get good money, I suppose, if they were nice. But then they were nice to small kids like us, you know, and to the mothers that were in the car. They were very, very nice. And then the Chinese young girls that I knew that lived there in Chinatown knew them by their first name. And I said, Oh. When I think about it later, I said, Gee, how did they do that?

Lauren Driscoll 28:36

[laughs] Why were you guys waiting in your car?

Gertrude Imperial 28:39

My dad was gambling.

Lauren Driscoll 28:41

Oh, yeah.

Gertrude Imperial 28:43

And that was sort of an outing for us too, instead of staying home. So that was kind of fun. And my dad was having fun gambling too, so—they call it Pai Gow. They play that now in Reno and the, you know, these gambling places. They have that now. And I said, Gee whiz, it's gone a long—that's all I could remember. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 29:14

Do you—did you—when you were getting older, do you remember starting to go to dances through school or anything like that, or—

Gertrude Imperial 29:21

Well, my brother—my father belonged to the Legionarios Del Trabajo, and they would hold benefit dances. And then that's when all of us young girls would go there. And then they would have social boxes where each one of us, they would pay us—you know, those men there, the members—would pay us to dance with them, each one of us, and then we would get half of it, and then the organization would get the other half. That's how they made money.

Lauren Driscoll 29:54

Wow, was that fun?

Gertrude Imperial 29:56

Yeah, because we met a lot of guys there. You know, young guys too, but they didn't have money to dance with us.

Lauren Driscoll 30:02

Oh, [Gertrude laughs] who had the money to dance?

Gertrude Imperial 30:04

The older men. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 30:08

Was that a good way to make money for young girls, or—

Gertrude Imperial 30:11

Yeah, sort of. But when I think about it now, I say, Gee, why did I do that? But my father made me do it, because he said that the club needs the money, you know. And that was one way of doing it, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 30:29

What did you and your friends used to do when you were teenagers?

Gertrude Imperial 30:33

Oh, let's see. I don't quite remember. We never could go out that much, because our parents wouldn't—they were strict. We had to be careful, even in high school. And when I went to Hartnell, my father said, "It's no use for you to get educated more, because you're not going to use it." You know, he was the old-fashioned type, where women were in the back, and it was the men and the young boys who got all the education and all that. And he didn't like it when I went to Hartnell. And then when I got married two years after I graduated, I said, "What did I tell you? You're not using your education." But I did. You know, I did use it. He doesn't know. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 31:37

How did you meet your husband?

Gertrude Imperial 31:40

Let's see, we met at a party in Carmel, where my whole family went, and all the families went, because I never could go out, you know, and then that's when—that's where we met. And then he kept coming to the house, and my parents liked him, because he was—you know, he came from a good family in the Philippines, too. And he was nice and very respectful. So about after a year, we got married. And he had to come to the house and asked for my hand in marriage while all my relatives were there. And they had to ask him questions. That's a style in those days. You know, they'd ask him terrible questions. But I guess he was alright, because he said yes.

Lauren Driscoll 32:31

What kind of questions? Just—

Gertrude Imperial 32:34

Oh, personal questions, you know. Did you fool around and, you know, and all this and that. Or did—what did you do? But good thing he was a hard-working man when he came from the Philippines, and he was only eighteen, and he had an uncle here in Berkeley, and then he put him to work right away.

And that's where he learned all that stuff. He knew through, you know, not through education, but by doing it. That's how he got that good job in Carmel. He had a restaurant of his own too. But he gave it up in Carmel because it was too much money.

Lauren Driscoll 33:22

So, he—when you met him, he was a chef at the Pine—

Gertrude Imperial 33:25

Mm-hmm, at the Pine Inn.

Lauren Driscoll 33:26

Pine Inn?

Gertrude Imperial 33:26

Mm-hmm. Yep. I liked him from the very beginning because he was not pushy or, you know, anything, and my parents liked him too, so that made a difference. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 33:45

And he cooked for you?

Gertrude Imperial 33:47

No, he liked my lousy cooking believe it or not. You know, I didn't know how to cook.

Lauren Driscoll 33:54

He probably liked it with somebody else cooked for him because he cooked all day.

Gertrude Imperial 33:58

Well, probably. But, you know, my cooking—I know it was not good.

Lauren Driscoll 34:05

What did you like to cook?

Gertrude Imperial 34:07

Hamburger and [laughs] something easy, you know. Nothing hard. And I didn't even learn from my mother. You know, I didn't watch her cook, but I liked her cooking.

Lauren Driscoll 34:24

And you guys had children?

Gertrude Imperial 34:26

We had one. Jeffrey. He's fifty-two now. He's been married for twenty-seven years. He has two children, boy and a girl, Ryan and Alex, and then he has one great—he has a grandson, Ryan Alexander.

Lauren Driscoll 34:53

Wow. So, you're a great—

Gertrude Imperial 34:56

A great grandmother. And Ryan Alexander's celebrating his first birthday this Saturday. They're going to have it at that pizza place, and I do not like pizza. But I told the mother and dad, I said, I'll go there for the cake. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 35:17

Yeah. And you guys grew up in—he grew up in Carmel, your son.

Gertrude Imperial 35:27

He went to Junipero Serra. He went to Monterey High School. And he went to MPC. And that was it. He didn't want to go any further. And that was his choice. And now he's forcing his kids to go to college, and they don't want to. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 35:52

What did—what does he do for a living?

Gertrude Imperial 35:55

He does, you know, where they draw plans for a building? I guess he started in construction, and then he went into that where they drew plans. He went to school for that, too. And he's doing very well. I hope he doesn't get laid off with this bad economy, but I don't think so.

Lauren Driscoll 36:25

Did you ever take him to Salinas and show him where you—

Gertrude Imperial 36:29

Yeah, once in a while, but it got too rough to go there after a while, you know. You couldn't walk around there safely. And he knows all about it. So does my husband, and we used to talk about it. And he said, "Gee, you had a rough life, Mom." [laughs] I said, No, I didn't. Growing up in those days, no. I had good schooling. I had good teachers. And it was in one place, Spring School. And it was the same teachers, you know. We all had the same teachers, all of us. And we went—all graduated from Salinas High and all that. That was great, I thought. Not too many kids could do that. Now, the schools are different now.

Lauren Driscoll 37:28

So, now they're kind of talking about trying to improve Chinatown in Salinas and make it—

Gertrude Imperial 37:37

That's what I understand.

Lauren Driscoll 37:38

What do you think of that? Do you think that it's—

Gertrude Imperial 37:40

I think it's a good idea. I think it's a very good idea, because a lot of people hang out there, and the bad ones will get out, you know, if they improve that place, and they can't get away with anything. They won't be there. Salinas is having a hard time now. I'm glad I don't live there, but my brother and his family lived there. But everybody's out of there. My niece moved out of Salinas. She got married. She has two children, but they bought a home in Greenfield. But she commutes to Monterey, because she works for attorneys here in Monterey. She's a paralegal, but she doesn't think it's hard. I don't know, I think it's hard commuting from Greenfield to Salinas, where she drops the children, and then Monterey. Do you know of anybody like that? [both laugh] She loves it.

Lauren Driscoll 38:54

So, you don't really go to Chinatown much anymore then?

Gertrude Imperial 38:59

No, I hardly go anywhere now. I don't drive far places. I just go to the doctors, the groceries, you know, places that are close by. I used to drive to the city by myself, but no more. You know, I don't trust myself too much. My reaction to things are not as fast as they used to be. So I just go where I have to go. I do volunteer work at church, but that's only two blocks, so that's not far. And Meals on Wheels, I do that. And it takes, you know, keeps me occupied.

Lauren Driscoll 39:50

Did your family go to church when you were a child too?

Gertrude Imperial 39:54

Well, my father was always working seven days a week. But my mother was very religious. She never went to church, but we'd go when we, you know, when we had the chance to. As we got older though we did go, as we got older, but not as children. But my mother kept us, you know, informed on things like that

Lauren Driscoll 40:20

Was there, like, a Filipino community in Salinas that you were a part of and everything?

Gertrude Imperial 40:26

Yes, there was, but I remember Reverend [unclear] used to have a church on California Street. And he used to pick us up sometimes and take us to the church there. And—but my mother was a Catholic. Reverend [unclear]—but she'd let us go to the Sunday school there. And it was nice. I remember Reverend [unclear]. He had that church between—there's a Chinese church there, and the Japanese church across the street was all there. And in those days, you know, those churches were busy. But I remember Reverend [unclear] wanted us to go to church every Sunday, but he'd only take us, you know, to Sunday school. That was—

Lauren Driscoll 41:24

When you were growing up, too, did you ever notice any discrimination between the different races, like, Japanese and Filipino and Chinese and white people in Salinas?

Gertrude Imperial 41:35

The only discrimination that I experienced when I applied for a job at—this was when I was older, though. I applied for a job, because the school sent me, because I said I wanted to work. And this was high school. And I went to this place where they collect garbage. They needed somebody in the office. And I went there, and then when he saw who I was, he said, "There's no job here." He didn't even know what I was there for. That's the only one that I've experienced really, you know, to your face, but—

Lauren Driscoll 42:15

How did you respond?

Gertrude Imperial 42:19

What could I do? I just went back to school and told them that there was no job there. So, they didn't say anything. So, I don't know. I think I'm lucky. I just—we were lucky. We didn't experience it. Maybe my parents did, but they never talked about it. But I really never experienced anything bad. And that wasn't bad at all that—what I had, you know, experienced. But that was the only one I remembered. You know, maybe I did have some others, but I just didn't remember it. Because when I worked at the Superintendent of School's office, they were very nice, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 43:17

So, when you were a kid, and you went to school, did people—everybody kind of played with everybody?

Gertrude Imperial 43:23

Mm-hmm. Because it was a mixture—Japanese, Filipino, white. And everybody knew everybody, you know. There was no discrimination there. I don't think the teachers would allow it, Mrs. Lewis or Mrs. Griffin or Mrs. Richmond. I don't think they would allow that. They were the three best teachers. I remember them to this day. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 43:53

Do you think they're part of the reason that you went on to do more schools, because you had such good teachers?

Gertrude Imperial 43:59

That's all of it, I think. How you, you know, respond to others. That's how I did anyway. It's over. [laughs] You want it back now?

Lauren Driscoll 44:19

[speaking to Mayra] You want to ask any questions or—

Mayra 44:24

[unclear]

Lauren Driscoll 44:29

You can ask.

Gertrude Imperial 44:30

What is it?

Mayra 44:31

Like, when the Japanese were going to the internment camps, how do you remember the area?

Gertrude Imperial 44:37

It was in school. We gave them a party. All the Japanese children before they left, you know, before they left for the internment camp, we gave them a party and everybody cried. And then when they came back, we saw them again too, but they were more on the reserved side. I think they must have been treated badly where they were. But they were friendly to us, but they were reserved. Not like when we were kids in, you know, grammar school. We were just so open, laughing, all that. And I see some of them. I think some of them have passed away already. I saw that Tanimura—one of the Tanimuras had passed away, and I went to school with him. And it was just kind of sad. Maybe they were not—and you know what else they had to do? They had to change their Japanese name to American names. Like Miyako, she was my best friend. She changed her name to Arlene. I said, I like Miyako better. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 46:00

Why did they change their name?

Gertrude Imperial 46:01

I don't know. They were told to. I don't know who told them. But they all changed their name to Americanized name. Isn't that sad?

Lauren Driscoll 46:16

How old were you when they went they went away?

Gertrude Imperial 46:19

I was still in grammar school, so I must have been twelve, in that area, because I remembered it so well. Sad. Even the teachers cried and all that. And they were all white. [laughs] You know, they were sad, because they had taught all those children, you know, from the first grade to eighth grade. That's what the school went, first to eight. But I had some nice experiences there too in school. But I really loved those teachers. Any other questions?

Mayra 47:07

How long do you remember that your friends, the Japanese—how long were they gone? Or, what did they come home to? Did they lose their homes?

Gertrude Imperial 47:17

Yeah. Miyako's family had I don't know how many acres there on Hitchcock Road, and I think they got it back. I don't know what happened exactly, but they went back to that house. And—but, you know, they were not the same like they were. And my brother said, "Gee, they changed. They're not as open and

as friendly as they used to be." They were open. They would just say anything, you know—not bad, but, you know, they would just—

Lauren Driscoll 47:54

Yeah.

Gertrude Imperial 47:55

But something must have happened. Maybe they were mistreated. They were all born here too. And that was kind of sad. But then, you know, that's the way it is.

Lauren Driscoll 48:13

What year were you born in?

Gertrude Imperial 48:14

1928. [laughs] Eighty years old. [laughs]

Lauren Driscoll 48:19

Oh, that's right. So, in the beginning of the interview, you were talking about the Depression.

Gertrude Imperial 48:26

Yeah, I lived through there.

Lauren Driscoll 48:28

Yeah, so I was thinking—

Gertrude Imperial 48:31

But we never starved like some people talk about starving. Maybe people out in the street or families who didn't live in the farm. But we were lucky because vegetables were growing all around us, and my mother would just pick what she wanted. And then the owner, if they killed a chicken or something like that, we would get some part of it. You know, not the good parts, but [laughs] we got something.

Lauren Driscoll 48:59

Resourceful.

Gertrude Imperial 48:59

Yeah.

Mayra 49:02

How about World War II? What do you remember about—

Gertrude Imperial 49:05

Oh, I remember the soldiers. [laughs] I was a teenager then, and we used to go to dances at the USO and dance with those guys, you know, and I said, Oh, geez, I feel kinda sad dancing. Some of them died, you know.

Lauren Driscoll 49:05

Yeah.

Gertrude Imperial 49:05

That was fun in those days. All the girls usually get invited to the USO and dance. You know that USO in Salinas? That's where we used to go to the dances, and it was fun. But, you know, we always had people watching us, [laughs] like my—

Lauren Driscoll 49:55

Chaperone?

Gertrude Imperial 49:58

I don't know. I would call them guards, like my parents.

Lauren Driscoll 50:05

[laughs] So, they didn't let you date much?

Gertrude Imperial 50:08

No, if I had a date, they would all go. [Lauren laughs] Yeah, it's true. And it was all right. You felt safe, you know. But then they wouldn't let anybody take us out unless they knew them too. [laughs] But they would pay their own way. [Gertrude and Lauren laugh] They weren't, you know, that cheap.

Lauren Driscoll 50:34

Did any of your siblings or brothers have to go to fight in the war, or—

Gertrude Imperial 50:39

Richard, my second brother, went to, I think, Korea, and Steven, I think, went somewhere, but there was no war. He was drafted or something. I don't know. My son never went, which I'm glad for. And my brother Albert was in the Marines, but he didn't go to any place that was dangerous. And but he passed away, because after he came back from the service, he was smoking, drinking, you know. I don't know.

Lauren Driscoll 51:18

Picked up some habits?

Gertrude Imperial 51:19

Probably, because he never did that before he left. So, I guess then he—but he died when he was seventy, so that wasn't bad. Any other question?

Lauren Driscoll 51:40

Thank you so much for letting us interview you.

Gertrude Imperial 51:43

Well, I'm glad, but I think I talked too much.

Lauren Driscoll 51:47

You talk too much?

Gertrude Imperial 51:48

Did I?

Lauren Driscoll 51:49

No!

Gertrude Imperial 51:50

Was it informative?

Lauren Driscoll 51:52

Very informative. You have such a great memory.

Gertrude Imperial 51:58

I talk about it, I remember, but when I turn around now I [Lauren laughs] forgot what I said. When I start thinking about those things, it comes back. I had a good life. You know, it wasn't bad. My parents did the right things.

Lauren Driscoll 52:28

It's interesting too that your son says that you had, you know, a rough life, but you're saying no.

Gertrude Imperial 52:36

He thinks it was, because I didn't have what he had when he was growing up. That's what he thinks. This is yours too. Well, I hope that helps.