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Interview with Anne Bagasao

Anne Bagasao

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Interviewee: Anne Bagasao

Interviewers: Kayla Dizon, Jacelynn Esteban

Date: April 28, 2021

Location: Zoom

Collection: Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS 322: Asian American Women's History, Spring 2021

Length: 00:54:39

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio: Anne Bagasao is a wedding planner in Southern California who got involved with the Auntie Sewing Squad during COVID-19. She is a daughter of a Filipino father who migrated from the Philippines as one of the first “Manongs” in Los Angeles and an Appalachian mother from the rural midwest. Her role in the Auntie Sewing Squad is a Super Auntie, a founding Auntie who expedites and distributes, for her section in South Pasadena.

Thematic Outline: 00:00:38 Anne Bagasao discusses her family’s history in Los Angeles, her role as a Super Auntie in the Auntie Sewing Squad and reminisces about the first days of trying to scramble for mask-making material. 00:11:31 Bagasao discusses how COVID 19 has positively affected her focus on mutual aid but has negatively affected her daughter’s growth. 00:16:40 Her favorite part about being in the Auntie Sewing Squad is the fact that she educated so many other women on racial justice. 00:28:20 Bagasao discusses the importance of community building. 00:31:47 Bagasao discusses her view on the recent spike of Asian hate crimes and what it was like growing up as a mixed-race person.

Auntie Anne Bagasao Oral History Transcript

00:00:00-00:00:26

Kayla (K): Hi, my name is Kayla Dizon and I am here with Jacelynn Esteban and Auntie Anne from the Auntie Sewing Squad here to conduct a 30-minute interview for SBS 322, which is Asian Americans Women's History on April 28. So Jacelynn, you were the first to start off.

00:00:27-00:00:37

Jacelynn (J): I know in the survey you gave us a brief intro, but can you tell us a little bit about yourself like family history background.

00:00:38-00:07:15

Anne (A): Sure my father was one of the manongs who came to Los Angeles in the 30s from the northern Philippines. He and his brother, four brothers, came here and settled in what is now called historic Filipino town. So I go all the way back to that, which is hard to find someone my age who is a product of the first Filipino immigrants to Los Angeles. He did serve in World War Two. And when he came back, he met my mother, who was a waitress in Westwood, California, and she was an Appalachian woman from the Ohio, Kentucky border who came from rural Ohio. They had literally the visual that you have of them living in a one-room shack where my mother grew up. And so she came to California. I'm sorry, I get emotional when I talk about it. She came to California and met my dad and they started their life together. And at the time they got married in 1947, it was illegal for mixed-race couples to marry in California because of miscegenation laws. So they actually drove back with two of his brothers and a cousin to Ohio and they were married there and then came back to California and started their life here. And the business, they were in the restaurant business. My dad, at that time, the only work really that Filipinos could get aside from being farmworkers, was to work in restaurants. So that's what my dad knew how to do. So they opened small restaurants throughout West Los Angeles throughout their entire lives. They raised three children, all UC grads. I have an older brother and sister who are quite a bit older. Both have PhDs and are extremely accomplished. And then I was the baby. I was the baby who decided to go to UCSD to study fine art. Which is fine because my father is also a painter. So I'm from a family that has always put other people and helping other people as a priority, is one of our family values given from the struggles that both of my parents had coming up. They always felt that it was their obligation to give back. You know, one of the things my mom used to always tell us until she died in 2016 was if you have to and your neighbor has none, give them one, and then you'll be equal. So that's kind of the philosophy that we were brought up on and the way I bring up my daughter and how I like to model for her. I, after many years of working in government and in nonprofit fundraising and also in the corporate sector, in business development and hospitality, I had an opportunity to start my own business and I wanted to become a wedding planner, which I was very fortunate to be able to do for many years on my own. And just when COVID hit, I was thinking that at my age it might be time for

me to not work for myself and in order to go back and get a real job with retirement. And then of course COVID hit and I had nothing to do. I couldn't do my business, clearly, which I still can't do. And of course, my need to help kicked in. And just through this weird collision of the planets, my women's group here in South Pasadena, who's also very what can we do, what can we do? Because it is a service organization, [we] said can we start sewing masks for the grocery store workers or for Huntington Hospital, which is right up the street. Well, they all started sewing, a local woman here who has a silk screening business, donated a ton of fabric, and we were just working. I don't sew I'm an expediter in charge of expediting and distribution. So we were literally working at that time with nine by nine sample squares of fabric. But Huntington Hospital wouldn't take the masks because they were homemade. So I said, wait, I know this woman on Facebook, Kristina Wong, she's a comedian but she started sewing masks and I just ordered one from her and maybe we can work with her. So I connected with Kristina and I kept my Aunties here in South Pasadena sewing and then I would take the orders from Kristina and say, okay my Aunties now have several hundred masks and I would pay a local high school student to take them to the post office for me because I was too paranoid to stand in line. So he needed the money and he needed community service hours. There were so many people who wanted to help. So I tried to find roles that everyone could do kind of like with Auntie Sewing Squad there. A lot of us that don't sew, [but they have] skills like Auntie Laura Karlin who I'll never forget the day she logged on to the Facebook group and she said, I just had a baby and I can't sew, but I want to help and I can make homemade hand salve. And so we're like we're going to do with this woman who became our contact for a lot of our farmworker communities and getting tens of thousands of masks sent to them. So we were able to just collect this great group of women with, you know, the most important thing that we had was our willingness to help to work because we saw that like everything else in American society, there was this huge gap with with the administration and everything that had to do. And we needed to to try to close that with good, so there we found a role for everyone. And we did a super great job. And that's kind of how I got to become an Auntie. And then, you know, so much happened last summer too that I also became extremely involved locally with Black Lives Matter and then that kind of folded into helping our homeless, because when we were out on the corner for one hundred and sixty five days here in South Pasadena. One of the things that we would do is always bring food to the homeless. You got off the bus, [we] were passing [out] what we could feed. And now my cohort from Black Lives Matter, the woman who started here in South Pasadena, now we've taken on a whole program of feeding the homeless three days a week. And eventually we'll have to go back to work.

00:07:14-00:07:21

J: Well, that's good that you have your hands in a lot of things to help people out.

00:07:22-00:07:26

K: So our next question is, what was your first initial impression of Auntie Sewing Squad?

00:07:27-00:10:58

A: Well, my first initial impression, it was just really Kristina and a couple of other and I didn't really know her. I knew of her because she was doing a YouTube program that was like Radical Crash Course for children where she taught kids, this part of her comedic act. Also, it was teaching kids, mostly young Asian kids, how to be politically involved. And so another friend who is also an actress is a Latina, knew Kristina, and said, oh, you know, this might be something your daughter's interested in. So that's how I knew Kristina and started following her on Facebook. But we really had no personal interaction before that day. I think it was probably March 24th, 2020, when I sent her five dollars and ordered a couple masks, though, and suddenly it grew and we were big, borrowing, stealing anything we could to make masks. And I thought to myself, you know, this is what we do. We are the children of immigrants. I get so emotional about this, but we're the children of immigrants and this is what our parents did and this is what we do, we don't get discouraged. We don't get afraid. We put our heads down and we figure out how to make it. And we did. And it's so funny because even now, I still have a little pile of supplies under the piano. But every once in a while and I'm moving stuff over there, I'll find a pipe cleaner. We were using the wackiest materials to make these masks because nothing was open and we couldn't get anything. Everything was sold out. So I had put a call out on Facebook for my community here in South Pas, which is very, very affluent and it's a small community, probably 30 percent Asian, you know, very small Latino and African American community with a very close knit community. And I remember driving around one day going and picking up bags of pipe cleaners and mailing envelopes and, you know, whatever fabric anybody had was willing to give us because we were actually using pipe cleaners as a little wire insert in the nose and getting elastic, and we were just such an industrious group of trying to figure out. I remember somebody said, go to the dollar store because they're open, because they're essential and buy the hair bands to use as the elastic on, it was true. It really was like, you know, when you hear stories that you watch movies about people in the Depression or during war times and what they had to do to put things together and make things. That's what we were doing. And I'll never forget one Auntie posting one time she goes, can I use the elastic in my son's underwear? We teased her about that for so long. But that's how desperate we were to get it done and to get masks on the faces, especially of our nurses at that time and our hospital workers. So that was our first impression of like, oh course, this is what we're doing as predominantly API women who initiated this group. There were no questions asked. We just said, what do we do? Where do we send them?

00:10:59-00:11:30

J: Well that's awesome I love how things like everyday things from your everyday lives you figured out how to use to make these masks. My next question you actually touched on already and how you got involved with the Auntie Sewing Squad and your role. So how has this pandemic affected your life both positively and negatively?

00:11:31-00:16:02

A: Well, I have to think, and I'll start with the positive first. The positive is I have to say, for that year until things started opening up and it became apparent that I was, you know, financially not as secure as I thought I was, because it was probably the most content I've been in a really long time. I think, because I was focused on my daughter, I was focused on important work and I wasn't doing this work for fame. I wasn't doing it to get a promotion. I wasn't doing it you know, because I had to. I was actually doing it because I wanted to do it and I enjoyed it, and I was able to meet so many people who I would never have met before that are just such wonderful giving, interesting, creative, loving people. That I've learned a lot from them. And, you know, it also, oddly enough, gave me a lot of hope, maybe naively, that I thought that there would be. That people would wake up and see, you know, this is what happens when we don't have a good healthcare system. This is what happens when we have so much consumption that it's requiring, you know, this travel, and you know we're packing people into concerts, not thinking about their health and safety, but just to make bank and we are all going home with it or how we travel, how we go to work, how we work. You know, I think a lot of people discovered there's no reason for people to go into the office. You know, that's gonna save a lot of stress on people and traveling, they can spend more time at home, although now they probably don't want to. Lots of hope and thinking this was a revolution. This is the change. And then, you know, everything that was happening socially, I think we did see a lot of revolution in this last year. And, you know, I'm hoping that some people are changing their lifestyles and they're thinking and are more conscious about how we treat each other. As far as negatively, you know, it did keep me from being able to work and do what I love. And not being able to see my friends, I'm now realizing how much I miss that. You know, now when I'm driving and seeing people in restaurants, although I'm still a little bit afraid, I have to smile because it's like, OK, looks a little bit normal. I remember what my life was before. And as a matter of fact, I have my first wedding on this Saturday and I had to go in my closet to find something too. I was like, "oh my gosh, I have to put a dress on in heels." All this stuff I haven't done in a really long time. And the dress had to go to dry cleaners because of these things that have just been sitting there collecting dust. And it's like time stopped or you know, we all fell asleep and then woke up. And it's like, well, it doesn't matter that the dress is out of style because nobody's seen anybody in the last year. No one's gonna know. And then negatively, I think the hardest thing for me is what as a single mom was seeing what it did to my daughter. I mean, she just shrunk. She was, you know, she's kind of a late bloomer anyways. And she just turned 16 and just the disappointment and she became...she just she shrunk. I mean, and so did a lot, I saw it happening to a lot, of her friends, and there was no amount of encouragement or motivation or positive talking that I could do to her to make her feel better. You know, so eventually she had to go into therapy. And that part it's just hard. And then, you know, sitting there one night at dinner and her saying, "Mom, I don't think I can go straight to a four year because I feel like I've lost a life. I'm not gonna be ready. I'm not going to be mature enough or academically ready because I've been home in my room for a year. I've done my junior year in high school." So that has been I think that's been hardest on me is just the toll that it's taken on my daughter and not being able to fix it. As a mom, I'm doing all this other stuff for other people, not being able to do for her what she needs the most. So, I mean, I am

paying for therapy, so I guess there's that. But, you know, you'll know someday when your mom. You just want to be able to fix it.

00:16:03-00:16:04

J: Oh, I'm I'm already a mom.

00:16:05-00:16:06

A: Okay so you know what I mean.

00:16:07-00:16:09

J:I have little ones that are younger, so I know I can relate.

00:16:10-00:16:39

A: I mean, yeah. But still I mean it's just I can't fix it. And that's the most that's so that was the most negative part is that she was on such a good trajectory socially and with her self-esteem. And the road just got kind of pulled out from under her. And as much as I tell her, "you know, you're not the only one that's happened to," she doesn't want to hear that. So I don't know what to say. Whoops. I'm sorry. Did I... Okay. I tried to get rid of a message on there and then the screen. Okay.

00:16:40-00:16:47

K: Okay. So going back to the Auntie Sewing Squad, What is your favorite part about being in the Auntie Sewing Squad?

00:16:48-00:16:48

A: I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

00:16:49-00:16:39

K: What is your favorite part about being in the Auntie Sewing Squad?

00:16:40-00:20:03

A: Well now, you know, things have slowed down a lot. The women who are sewing for me here in South Pasadena, the oldest was ninety-one and youngest was seventy-five. They sewed nonstop from March until about December of last year. And then they retired because they were just exhausted. So I think now things are winding down. I think my favorite part of being part of Auntie Sewing Squad is the relationships that we have, particularly among the Super Aunties. We were kind of like the founding Aunties who took on very specific roles and kind of guided the group. You know, I'm a part of a lot of groups and organizations and I have to say for a group that's gone on this long and that is virtually, completely virtual, very few of us have met each other in person. That it's that we operate by consensus. Even though Kristina was a founder, I mean, we joked we call her "the Overlord." Really, we do everything by consensus. We'll have these group threads at, you know, Super Auntie threads. "What do you think about this? So if this person wants to do this project, what should we do?" I remember the Rachael Ray Show wanted to do an interview. And I think it took us the entire day all the Super Aunties kind of chiming in and discussing and figuring out if Kristina should do the interview. And if it was the best thing for us to finally come to the decision on whether or not Kristina should accept, if the interview, it was the best thing for us as a group at that time. So that's what I appreciated the most because I think there's this misconception about women that we have a hard time working together. And, you know, and this was completely the opposite. And it's just such a joy to be able to work. I don't think I've ever worked in any group that has been entirely by consensus where there's not one leader or one person trying to, you know, be the person on the top telling everyone else what to do. So that's been the most beautiful part about this, because that's it's the way it should be. You know, it's like I always tell this to people, especially when it comes to children. You know, mothers, all children are our children. If you're a mother, you can't just say, well, these kids I don't care about. And it's kind of the same thing. You know, even though not all of us in the group are mothers, it was like it's, we're women, as usual, doing the work, unpaid work, undervalued work. And in this situation, doing the work that our government wouldn't do. And we can work together as a group and do it well and still come out of it. I mean, I don't think there's been any personality differences or power struggles or arguments. It just was like a dream situation. And everyone should strive to operate like Auntie Sewing Squad.

00:20:04-00:20:06

J: It's awesome. I mean, what would we do without technology?

00:20:07-00:20:11

A: Exactly. And that might be part of it because we weren't all in the same room.

00:20:12-00:20:20

J: Now, you talked about being a Super Auntie. Can you kind of talk a little bit more about what a Super Auntie does for them to sort things out?

00:20:21-00:22:29

A: So each Super Auntie, again, it was like a core group of founding Aunties from their early months, probably maybe from like March through maybe May of last year. And these were Aunties that kind of took charge or came forward right away and saying, “you know what I can do this”. And we needed to start delegating people to someone to be in charge of social media, someone to be in charge of, you know, vetting and accepting and sort of training new members into the group, somebody who fields requests or looks for opportunities to help in different communities, i.e., the farmworkers community or Indigenous communities, the medical communities, and also in different parts of the state, because initially we're pretty much northern California and southern California. And so we had our hubs and so Super Aunties you know, we kind of are each all in charge of everything. I was a Super Auntie in charge of South Pasadena, but again, my people started to stop sewing. But I'm still included in part of the group and I'm still able to chime in decision making and things like that. And also, when there was a problem with an Auntie on the group page or she was asking too many questions or she needed too much hand holding, you know, there was a group of us too, that could go and say, you know, “I'll go talk to her” or, you know, “I'll handle this.” So it's not always coming from the same person. So it was kind of like management almost but not really. So and we were there to support each other and we were there to, you know, support Kristina. So there was a level of trust. I think that over [time] because we'd started out altogether that we were able to build between ourselves.

00:22:30-00:22:44

K: Okay. So what is the one impact you hope that the Auntie Sewing Squad will make on California, since most of them are in either northern or southern California?

00:22:44-00:28:18

A: Well I think the largest impact that we've made here in California and even outside has to be with our First Nation communities, because they were so isolated and they already struggled so much with trying to access resources. And we had voted as a group to kind of shift at some point away from frontliners and really go after those most vulnerable and left out communities, which were our First Nation communities and farmworkers. And we're still sending a ton of masks to farmworkers. And I think that's the biggest impact that we did because they're already such invisible communities anyways and us getting these masks out there and having to...I have to say the difference between the work that we did and maybe some other people who are sending out masks is that we put the dignity of those who we were providing masks to above all else. We had very specific parameters when it came to color and design, particularly in our Native American

communities. And then with colors and quality and just that even the engineering for our farmworkers, it was better for them to have the masks that tied opposed to the loops. And we wanted those in neutral colors. And there was also something that we didn't consider because most of us, that's where the founding Aunties are, for lack of a better word, we're more socially progressive, there was also an education element that we've been able to provide to some Auntie who maybe didn't understand, you know, why shouldn't we send American flag print to Standing Rock? Or, you know, we're only going to send butterfly prints to farmworkers and there wasn't, that was the other thing too, you have a lot of women sewing, officially older women and their stock of quilting fabric was butterflies and flowers, you know, it's like, well, no, men have to wear these masks to suit, trying to just get people to say, OK, we have to do gender neutral. And then there is even a woman that we worked with who did a beautiful project here where she was called Meals and Masks, and she delivered once a month meals and masks to the homeless Trans community in Hollywood. So when I would sort through all my hundreds of masks that would come in and figure out these are going to this communities, I would always save those really beautiful, fun, exciting ones that I couldn't send to farmworkers because they were mostly men and I'd save them for Ms. Shay and she was so happy. And so I think that wasn't just the fact that we were able to take care of those communities who are normally discarded and not part of the conversations before COVID, but it was also that through that work that we were able to educate so many other women on some issues that they had never, I mean, no fault of their own, they had never really thought about because, you know, we're in California. We understand what it means to be a farmworker and what that community is like. And we know that, you know, there's women there and they don't have access to, a lot of times, to hot water. That's a very, very [similar] thing in our First Nations. You know, we were sending... I went to Home Depot and bought huge five gallon buckets to send there for them to use for washing stations. So, you know, in addition to us struggling with the fact that, oh, my God, how did this happen? You know, we have this problem in this thing in America. We can't get masks. We can't get toilet paper. That was where the average person, no one considered how difficult it was for some of the poorest communities in our country. And I think that as being that sort of age, [our] organization that was able to bridge so many of those gaps or people who were disconnected from that reality just because it's not part of their consciousness. I think going into the future, we've really know we've helped some people kind of be more aware now even with when we were sending things to Black Lives Matter or we're sending things to, you know, to northern California for, you know, adult daycare centers for the Asian elderly. We were able to break down a lot of perceptions. I think that some people outside of our communities had about life, and particularly, I think in California, where I think they just think that we're all this happy-go-lucky, wealthy people and I don't think that they realize at home the reason why, you know, our state is able to provide the most federal taxes in the United States is because we have a huge, huge population of working class poor. And so that's for me. And I should thank you for asking me that question, because that just occurred to me, as I had to think about it, was the education that we provided to so many other women in so many other people in the work that we do.

00:28:20-00:28:28

J: Okay. What is something you learned about yourself during this pandemic and all that's been going on?

00:28:29-00:31:27

A: I think what I've learned about myself is even and I consider myself a woke person, but I got more awake. I think what I learned about myself is what I can do without. I think I really leaned into what my ancestors probably experienced or my father's generation and what it meant to be an immigrant during, you know, the worst possible time to come to United States, which was during the Depression and how important community is, no matter what that is, whether it's working with my very affluent, you know, stay-at-home mom friends here in South Pasadena who saved every single Postmates container they got over the last year and have now given them to me, so when I make my meals for the homeless, I don't have to spend, you know, tons of dollars buying containers or if it's going down and into the encampments and delivering food and medicine, is that, you know, my community isn't just one thing. My community isn't just, you know, my radical Super Auntie group. It's not my Black Lives Matter group. It's not just my friends. It's not just, you know, other parents in South Pasadena who are very, very different than I am. And that if I'm willing to put my prejudices aside and just know that people want to help in whatever way they can, and I can tap into that, that it's going to benefit everyone. And so that's something I've learned about myself and that people really are just doing the best they can, whatever that means to them. You know, when you asked what I had hoped about what happened with COVID it is that would be the great equalizer. And in some cases it was. But in that same instance, the social inequalities of society set up just became so more glaringly apparent. And that's something that I became more conscious of than just watching this whole thing unfold over the last year. And so, you know, just being aware of that. And for me, what I got out of that is how to be more aware of that, even if it's in the language that I use or how I live my life and how I treat people, communities that I go into. So that's been the positive effect. It's made me a better person, I think.

00:31:28-00:31:47

K: So within these last couple months, we have seen a rising spike of Asian hate crimes and Asian hate, so as an Asian woman yourself, what are some of your fears in light of these recent events?

00:31:47-00:40:02

A: Well, I'm going to be perfectly honest, I have the privilege of not looking Asian so, I'm not personally afraid. I mean, just being a woman, you have enough to be afraid of. Being a woman of color, I have enough to be afraid of. But I got a pass on this Asian hate thing. A man in my town here, a 41-year-old, was one of the victims of the shooting rampage yesterday in California.

And immediately, Auntie Candice, who is in Alhambra, sent me the news story. And our initial reaction was it was an Asian hate crime, that you know, it was because of hate that he was killed. I didn't read the story; it was our initial reaction. And the fact that it happened to someone who, you know, is less than a mile from my house, um was very upsetting to me. And I put on our local Facebook page, I said, you know, the toll of Asian hate has come to our community because no one had known about it, and I put the story on there. And it was interesting to watch how the conversation unfolded, because there were mostly Asian women who were commenting. And there was one white man who said, we don't know the details, you don't know this was a hate crime so you should remove that until we have accuracy. And so, I thought, well OK, that's fair. Although my gut tells me, because it was you know, there were Latinos and Asians who were killed, that if it wasn't just specifically towards Asians, it was some sort of hatred towards immigrants. And so, I changed it and it was interesting because I watched two Asian women come back and go after this guy very intelligently. And one woman said, I know you want accuracy, but we just want to live. So, I was like OK, this is... and so, is there a fear? I fear for my friends. And you know, a lot of these attacks are on the Filipino community, particularly in San Diego, New York, San Francisco. And that's just sheer ignorance, that these people just, it's just to hate. It's, you know, it's like you look Asian, so I'm going to make you my target. They're not even intelligent enough to know that there are different countries in Asia and to even distinguish, you know, this. So, I mean, I have a little guilt in that I sit up here as an API woman saying, you know, I'm against Asian hate. I represent the Asian American/Filipino American community and I don't look like I'm Asian. So, that's something that I live with. And then as far as this fear, you know, I do feel for my elderly cousins. Every time I go outside, I fear for our elderly here in South Pasadena being so, you know, having such a high Asian population in Alhambra. I mean, it can happen to anyone anywhere. When we found about the shooting in Atlanta, my activist group here in South Pasadena asked the city if they could put patrol cars outside our nail salons and our massage spas, which they did for a couple of days. So, that's, that's a real fear. And I think one of the things regarding that, that I've been working with on, in conversations with because, you know, this is protesting and speaking up and going out in public and shouting, Stop Asian Hate is a huge deal for the Asian community. It's not something that we do, and I supported one of the protests down in Alhambra and my sign was, I think a little bit too radical for people there because, you know, it had to be said. And again, it was a teaching and learning situation. My friend who runs Black Lives Matter, spoke at one of the rallies that weekend and I think the conversations that were trying to have within the Asian American community I'm telling. It's hard having the conversations with my white friends and then having the conversation with my Asian friends or people in the Asian community, is what do we do in our own culture and our own mindsets to uphold white supremacy? Were we there for Black Lives Matter? And, you know, part of us stopping this situation is looking at ourselves and saying, what kind of language do I use? What do I tell my daughter when she wants to go out with a Black guy? You know, and it's not you know, it all comes from the same source. We learned these types of attitudes from white media, white religion, white education. You know, there's even colorism within our own races. And I'm like, we know we need to work on that too, so that we can have more solidarity with those other communities. I mean, just going and cringing at these marches with, you know, and they completely did it with good intentions with

their All Lives Matter signs. It's like oh no, no, no, no, no, no. Talking about why you cannot use this sign, you know, it's even.... and so, it's just so and sadly so complex. But now we can have these conversations. And I just hope that they continue because there is this whole flurry around Asian hate. And then this thing happened yesterday and we were triggered again. And then we're having, you know, I had not one but two white men in social media saying this has nothing to do with race. It's like, you know whenever this happens, you have the privilege of thinking it doesn't have to do with race. We don't because we are scared to death. And so, you know, I was trying so hard not to be an angry person today. So, I think that is the fear that my Asian American community will go back to the ways, you know, and I even looking at comments on Asian Journal when that woman was beat in New York. And that was a very unfortunate situation that I knew is just gonna bring up a lot of stuff because her attacker was African American. And I said, well, you know, we ought to just unpack this thing and understand why this is all happening and not start hating each other because again, it all comes from the same source. And I just hope that those conversations continue and that, you know, there is some real change and acknowledgement, and especially for our community, more solidarity with the African American community and the Latino community in what, in what they go through. And that we stop aligning ourselves so much with, you know, I'm sounding so radical here with the white status quo. But I mean, it's true.

00:40:04-00:40:06

J: Ok, go ahead with your next question Kayla.

00:40:07-00:40:24

K: Ok. So, as you mentioned, for a lot of your family on your father's side are immigrants from the Philippines. What is, what are some of the barriers and challenges you have faced, you know, having most of your family being immigrants?

00:40:26-00:45:44

A: I think well, for me, the experience is different as a daughter of an immigrant, because I'm a first [daughter of the] diaspora, first of all. And then secondly, because I'm mixed race. So, I have personal issues of being a mixed-race person where it was. And at the time I grew up, which was in the 60's, most Filipinos were married to white women. So that was my community. I did have a few uncles who had gone back to the Philippines after the war and married and brought back Filipino wives. But my community mostly was like all of my dad's brothers married white women. So, it was kind of... that's what my Filipino...I wasn't around like full-blood Filipinos very, very much. But we did go as my dad had a club as they would do back. And then people from the same town who lived in the same area would form a club, you know, of their townspeople. So, when we'd go to these things, you know, I was around Filipinos and I was essentially raised to identify wholly as Filipino because my mom's family was on the other side of the country and they, you know, I never saw them. And my mom just kind of got sucked

into Filipino culture. So, so for that, I think being an immigrant back then was, it was different than it is now. But I remember and I did this. My friends would say, like even my college friends would say, and by this time my dad had been in the country probably more than 30 years, you know, your dad is so sweet, but we can't understand him. He speaks perfect English. And because you know, I didn't realize he had an accent. Because I understood what he was saying, he did, he spoke perfect English. But, you know, that's why I think it's funny now that, you know, mainstream America thinks that Jo Koy is funny. Because when I first saw Jo Koy, I mean, I was watching it actually with some Mexican friends and our, you know, our communities growing up in West L.A., we're so connected, and they still are because we have so many similarities in our culture. You know, being, you know, Filipinos primarily being the only Asians that are Catholic, and the language is so much the same, and the last names are the same. If you grew up in the same neighborhood, everyone just assumed if you were Filipino, you were Mexican. And so, I remember watching Jo Koy with her and she got the jokes because she grew up, we all grew up together. Even though she grew up in South Bay in Chula Vista, it's also, there's also tons of Filipinos in Chula Vista so, she got the jokes. So, I think, you know, this being as difficult as being an immigrant, I see the second generation of my cousins who came here in the 70's, which is a second diaspora, they didn't assimilate as easily, as we did. And I think that's mostly because my, my dad's generation of immigrants really didn't have a choice. And they were so, they really felt that if they the more American they became, the more accepted they would be. Which wasn't the case. Um, and maybe just because they were here longer, their experience was so different because they were discriminated against more blatantly than I think Filipinos are now. And then, you know, there's the whole myth of the model minority, which doesn't serve us at all because, you know, I'm now starting to see, especially in my community, you know, first generation Taiwanese and Chinese kids that are in high school that live up, that are living up to that myth of being the model minority, which is hard for me to see. And it's a weird thing here in South Pasadena, we have a lot of pro Trump Asian youth in South Pasadena. And so, it's hard for me to see that because I know that it was so different for my dad, because there, you know, he was faced with that. I remember having a conversation online with some people there was that series, *How I Met Your Mother*, had done a yellowface episode, and it was interesting that you had American born Asian Americans who are fighting against it and then you had recent immigrant young people who were saying, I don't think this is offensive at all, they're just honoring our culture, it's flattering that they want to be like us. And I was like, oh, they don't remember how it was or they have no context for what it was to mean to be Asian prior to like 1990. And even now, we struggle with how we're presented in the media and in art and in culture, so I think the difficulty is as far as being for immigrants is me having to see the new generations and the things that they fall into and the struggles that they're having, that and how they're different from my generation, my dad's generation.

00:45:45-00:46:13

J: You know, a lot of the things that you brought up, you know, with the model minority and all that, it's funny because I mean, I'm just now learning about all this stuff, stuff that I didn't know and I think that some, I don't know how to say it. I think a lot of the reason why a lot of the hate

and stuff comes or is happening is because people are not, they need to learn more about it and educate themselves.

00:46:14-00:49:02

A: Right, and we do. Unfortunately, there's too much that they don't teach in schools. I mean, just the fact that we're having to fight within the UC, the state college system to keep Ethnic Studies in all places in California, you know, says a lot. But, you know, I have been talking... this is a funny story, speaking of farmworkers so, my daughter used to go to this hippie school in L.A. and she had the best third grade teacher and they did for their history project, they did a living museum and so, each kid got assigned a person in history and they had to research that person and then they had to go and stand there so the parents could walk through and other classmates and when you got up to their little display, they had to talk about who they were. And so, my daughter pulled Cesar Chavez's name and so, I had to educate her on Larry Itliong, and she's like 7 years old she's like, "that wasn't the assignment." I don't care, you need to learn your history and what it has to do with, you know, with the farm workers movement too. I made her change her speech to include Itliong's name because I'm like, how else are they going to know? We get such a small, tiny bit of information that has to do with our realities versus the pilgrims. I mean, the fact that they still do that stupid mission project in the fourth grade, I can't. And I went off on a friend of mine because she was like asking for help on the mission project and she's very Catholic and her son goes to a Catholic school and she's Latina, I said, oh my god, they're still doing that stupid project. It's so racist. Why are you letting your son do this? Even my daughter had to do it in the fourth grade with her teacher, who is white, was so against it that she did a different type of project, and she picked the mission up in San Francisco instead of and we have a mission right here, like in San Gabriel. And but she picked one in San Francisco because she said that mission now was more about the whole genocide aspect of it and less about religion and, you know, the missionaries. So um, yeah, I think that's, you're right there's more education, but it has to start. It has to start with their kids. Like, I'm always fascinated that in South Pasadena, I mean we are sitting on Tongva land here, their whole arroyo was Tongva land and then after that, it was owned by a Mexican American woman, before it became the United States, but our history starts from the day white people founded our city.

00:49:03-00:49:12

J: And I think that a lot of the reason why I chose to take this class is it's an Asian American Women's History class. This is something that is rarely talked about.

00:49:13-00:51:13

A: Yeah, and that's amazing that that's Asian American women in particular. So, because our experience I mean, women's history is so different, but I think our history Asian women, because it's so vast, because you're talking about, you know, like Vietnamese and the Laotians came here so much later than the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. And for a long time in California, when

you said Asian American, it was Chinese and Japanese. And they pretty much, those communities pretty much controlled any political power that we had with regard to that. And then, you know, Filipinos started coming here more and we're starting now to get more recognition in that, you know, but then we have the Thai community and then you have the whole South East Asian community and that's why I thought it was so wonderful when Kamala came up, is suddenly everybody's owning her as an Asian because everybody wants to say, we have the first Asian woman American Vice President, you know, and then that is so funny. I do it all the time and I do it with my Black friends, I'm like, oh did you see another Asian American woman win best song for a Grammy or win best original song in the Oscars? And like, who's that? It wasn't... that was her. And I'm like, yeah, she's Filipino. So, you know, I'm going to own Filipino and I noticed that Filipinos, you know, it's like even with Bruno Mars, you know, he's Filipino. It's like, yes, you're right, he's Filipino, but he's also African American but yes, lets own that. People know who we are and what we're contributing. So, you know, Asian American women are probably as a couple things, were scientists or doctors or, you know, we do nails or we...

00:51:14-00:51:14

J: Nurse

00:51:15-00:51:31

A: Yes, nurse or teachers or we stay home and [don't] do what our husbands tell us to do. And we, so much more, I just saw that Biden's appointing as his undersecretary of some branch of the military a Filipina war veteran.

00:51:32-00:51:32

J: Oh wow!

00:51:33-00:53:55

A: Yeah. So, it's you know, thank goodness for people like Biden who are also appointing a lot of women and giving more of us and Asian women opportunities. So, I mean, I think my message to to you know, your generation of Asian women or just of women is to, you know, get as much leadership as you can, if you can get into government or get into a position of leadership in whatever industry that you are. And take our values and our realities forward, that's how things are gonna change. Because then it becomes normal, becomes part of the conversation of how we do things in America and it's not just, you know, it's weird for me being both white and Filipino because I have this super white side of myself where it's that, I love country music because that's what my mom listened to, and I have this whole other white Midwest palate of food that I crave. You know, even though I'm mostly Filipino so it's hard, it's hard for me to say things, you know, say oh, white people this because I'm half white because my mother was

white. So, I have to be conscious of that, but you know how it is, it's like I'm so super aware now whereas not as a child in the 60's, when I even flip through Netflix, if I see an all-white cast, it's weird to me now. Because now I can go through and say oh, I can watch a movie with an all-Black cast, or I can watch a movie or a television show series that like *Kim's Convenience*. I love that show or you can watch even a Filipino standup who's been successful and who's making Filipino American jokes that, that we can relate to. So, you know, but it starts, we have to become part of the conversation and we'll take that. And I think that that's coming in the next 10 years, we probably won't...this conversation will seem so archaic. And I think that's also why there's such a violent pushback against progress from a certain segment of our society, because they're afraid. So, we can't stop.

00:53:56-00:54:00

J: Anything else Kayla, you wanted to add before we wrap up?

00:54:01-00:54:18

A: I don't. I'm proud of you guys and thank you for doing this and I wish you all the luck. And hopefully, you know, my daughter will be at that school in a couple years and keep doing what you're doing and knowing what's important. And always take care of yourself because the world needs you guys.

00:54:19-00:54:20

J: Well, thank you for your time.

00:54:21-00:54:21

A: You're welcome!

00:54:22-00:54:28

J: It's very inspiring what you and the Auntie Sewing Squad is, thank you.

00:54:27-00:54:28

K: Thank you!

00:54:29-00:54:36

A: Thank you. I know, it's gonna be sad when we disband. Kristina keeps threatening to do it.

00:54:37-00:54:38

J: I'm gonna stop the recording now.

00:54:39-00:54:39

A: Okay