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Interview with Jean Vengua

Jean Vengua

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Jean Vengua
Interviewed by: HCOM 350

1 **Interviewer:** This is our first collective interview, this is a very exciting thing. We're
2 here on a Thursday, October 27, 2011. This is the HCOM 350 Service Learning Class Oral
3 History and Community Memory. We're gathered here to do an interview with Professor Jean
4 Vengua, who is a professor in HCOM and has been a long-time resident of this area. Santa Cruz,
5 I think? And we're here to ask you about your memories of the Filipino community and growing
6 up in this community. We wanted to ask you Jean if it's okay to record this interview.

7 **Vengua:** Yes.

8 **Supervisor:** Okay, thank you we need to have that on tape. My name is Rina Benmayor.
9 I'm not going to be doing the interview, I will be supervising it. Just staying in the background.
10 But maybe we can go around the room and say our first name, last name, and our concentration-
11 or your major.

12 **Weddle:** My name is Mark Weddle; my concentration is social and behavioral science I
13 have a minor in --- arts and photography.

14 **Wiggins:** My name is Jessie Wiggins, I have not decided on my concentration yet but my
15 major is HCOM.

16 **Eckard:** My name is Theresa Eckard, my major is HCOM with a focus on world history
17 and in media.

18 **Flores:** Hello, my name is Angela Flores (?), I'm a major in HCOM with a ---
19 concentration.

20 **Michelle:** My name is Enchaskay McHam (?) and I'm a psychology major with a
21 concentration in industrial programs.

22 **Warner:** My name is Jenna Warner and I'm an HCOM major. Currently, I cannot attest
23 to a concentration.

24 **Contreras:** My name is Melissa Contreras. My concentration is history, oral history, and
25 media.

26 Flay: My name is Mary Flay, my major is Communications with a concentration in
27 history or a history in media.

28 **Garcia:** My name is Martha Garcia and I'm a communication major and Chicano studies
29 major.

30 **Flores:** My name is George Flores, I'm a --- major with social history.

31 **Supervisor:** Alright and now to Eren and Michelle ---.

32 **Interviewer:** Alright, to start off, would you give us a sense of your family history?
33 Things such as when your family came, anything you'd like to share

34 **Vengua:** Okay, well I never actually met my grandparents. They were from the
35 Philippines but my father is from, was from mindiow, in the southern Philippines in this little
36 town called Dakolo. In the northern Philippines, another little town. They met towards the end of
37 WW2. My father was then in the merchant marines. So as a worker on a merchant marine ship,
38 you sail to a lot of different places. He went to the Philippines at one point hoping that he could
39 find a wife. This was just after the liberation of Manilla, when the Americans came to Manilla
40 and the whole city was in ruins. He met my mother thereafter being introduced to her by her
41 brother. So, they get to know each other and my mother came to the united states by herself on a
42 ship because my dad was working the merchant marines. He was sailing around so he came on a
43 ship I can't remember the name of the ship. She ended up in San Francisco right after the war.
44 She was greeted there by two friends of my dad's. And the port she went to a little apartment in
45 San Francisco's Chinatown. It was a little walk-up flat. I still have memories of that place. It was
46 on Vallejo street and I remember very steep dark stairs going up several floors going into pretty
47 dark apartment buildings with shared kitchens on one side of the hall. So that's the first home
48 that I remember. Can I backtrack a little bit?

49 **Interviewer:** Please, go ahead.

50 **Vengua:** Because there was something interesting including my family that I wanted to
51 get to which is that back in the Philippines my grandmother as I understand it. My grandmother
52 and my grandfather weren't getting along too well and actually, he was really started to ramble
53 here and there. But he was a member of the Philippines constabulary. Which is a sort of

54 American policing that he joined after the Philippines became a colony of the United States. He
55 didn't do much policing though because he was a musician. He joined a band, the Philippines
56 constabulary band. It was led by a black bandleader named lieutenant loving. I believe this was
57 the 9th cavalry band and I've read references to that band as above below soldier regiment. So,
58 this particular band was very large and there were a lot of Filipino musicians in it. It became
59 famous and that band traveled, expositions, international expositions. So, St. Louis, Panama, and
60 San Francisco expeditions. A couple of others. They would exhibit it there. Part of these
61 exhibitions took place in the reservation area outside of the exposition. I actually heard about the
62 band was I was younger but I didn't get very interested, I was a little older and started doing
63 some searching and stumbled across a photo of the band. That's when it made it real for me. My
64 grandfather after my grandmother and grandfather stood up, he ended up moving to junction city
65 Kansas. This was in the 1920s. I wanted to bring that up partly to mention that he was really the
66 first person that in my family come to the United States. In the 1920s. And he started another
67 family here. There are all these interesting stories that I have. We all got to find out about that
68 other family. So, I don't know if I should say more about my family background as far as that.
69 Well, let me see. A few more things about my parents, during WW2 my mother worked in a
70 bank in manila. But when she came to the US the only work she could get was working at
71 canneries. After we moved from San Francisco to Santa Cruz she worked in canneries. And my
72 father continued to work for the merchant marines.

73 **Michelle:** So were you born in the Philippines or were you born...

74 **Vengua:** I was born in San Francisco.

75 **Michelle:** Oh, okay. . .

76 **Interviewer:** So, that brings us a little closer to your story, you were born in San
77 Francisco and moved to Santa Cruz. So, what was it like for you? How was it like growing up in
78 Santa Cruz compared to where you are today?

79 **Vengua:** Oh wow, that's a big question. We moved to Santa Cruz when I was really
80 little. Like I was 3 or something. 2-3. So, I didn't really remember that transition. I remember
81 visits to San Francisco and now I remember early scenes in my mind. Santa Cruz when I was
82 young. Actually, one of the first memories I had was my father taking me to the boxing matches

83 in San Francisco in the Olympic Club. I must have been three. Or four at that time. I remember
84 really bugging my parents about getting me a coat and somebody in the front row telling me to
85 shut up. So, they could watch the fight. That was an early memory. my dad was gone a lot so I
86 was pretty much raised by my mom and she worked in the cannery. I was a latch key kid. Santa
87 Cruz, when I was a kid, was mostly white that's what I remember. My babysitters except for one
88 were all white. I remember when the babysitter was very strongly Christian and hoped to convert
89 me to her --- of Christianity. My mother was catholic. That didn't happen. I grew up in a mostly
90 white community it seemed, and I wasn't really too much aware of that until I got into junior
91 high. In high school because my mother then became really involved in the Filipino community
92 organizations. Not just in Santa Cruz, there were some very active organizations in Santa Cruz
93 but also in Salinas, Watsonville, San Francisco, and even Stockton. With my dad gone most of
94 the time, she would spend weekends with her girlfriends to the Filipina dances. These were in a
95 lot of them were in Salinas. The Filipino community center in Salinas. Some were in
96 Watsonville. At the Portuguese Hall in Salinas, there were a lot of dances there too. I would say
97 she would stat be taking me there when I was about 9 or so. I began developing what I thought
98 was a double life. I'd be hanging out with the kids that worked in the labor camps when I went to
99 the Filipina dances. Most of the older people who went to the Filipina dances also worked in the
100 labor camps. The older ones, the manongs the ruler male farmworkers had been here since the
101 1920s or 30s. so I would go to these dances and go to high school and didn't know quite how to
102 explain my other life. Id tells my friends and stuff and they'd say oh that's cool. But I'd get self-
103 conscious about inviting them to the dances because for one thing, it's really a whole working-
104 class group of people. It wasn't just Filipinos either it was white working-class, Mexican, a few
105 African Americans that would go to these dances. It wasn't like the dances the kids in high
106 school went to. There would be a band, parents would mostly stay home, it'd mostly be teenage
107 kids going to the dances. The Filipina dances had little kids, teenagers, people of different
108 ethnicities all hanging out together. That even extended out to the bands they had. They would
109 first half of the dances they would have a bunch of Filipino guys playing old Filipino songs and
110 favorites from the 20s and 30s. halfway through the dance they'd switch to a rock band. Back
111 then it was the 1960s, the band would be playing mow town or something like that. All the bands
112 had car names like the thunderbird you know? Something like that. But the thing that I still
113 appreciate actually was that the kids would all get out there and dance. The old folks would also

114 dance to songs they wouldn't quite understand but that's okay. It was a whole generational thing
115 that was really different and hard to explain to the white kids I hung out with within the high
116 school. Plus, there was the issue of social box. The social box was this sort of venue to help raise
117 money for the lodges and the community organizations. It involved the teenage girls getting up
118 and they would all stand and get up in a row. There would be chairs at one end of the dance hall,
119 the girls would sit on the chairs and the band would start playing. They'd get up one at a time,
120 someone says "alright what're you going to contribute to the lodge, what're you going to give up
121 for this young lady standing right here?" and then various people, both male and female and
122 would get up and dance with the girls. They would contribute whatever money they could to go
123 to the social box. They would at the end of the night each girl would get half to take. I was
124 involved with that and I liked it because I brought home more money than I would ever make in
125 any other job as a teenager. But, talk about hard to explain to people on the other side of my life!
126 That was really difficult. There was some, especially towards the end of the 1960s, there began
127 to be conflicted about the social box; within the lodges and community organization. A lot of
128 people would say this looks like taxi dancing, cheapening our girls. So, there were a lot of
129 conflicts about it and gradually it slowed down to eventually end. I should also add to that I was
130 so deeply involved in the whole thing partly because I ran for the queen of the lodge. I was part
131 of a queen contest when I was 13. Part of running for the queen in lodges like that is you do this
132 intensive fundraising, intensively doing social boxes, not just in your own town also in
133 Watsonville, Stockton, LA. Besides that, you're going to the labor camps and hanging out with
134 workers in the labor camps. You're chaperoned by family and parents but you're going there to
135 raise funds and sell tickets. A lot of m time during that period was going to labor camps and
136 going to all these dances to the point where I could hardly even imagine another life. My grades
137 were really going down too, in high school. That high school was just something I did during the
138 week. My real life was going to the flip dances.

139 **Interviewer:** So, what was it like going to these labor camps at 13? How were you
140 treated?

141 **Vengua:** Well initially, because I wasn't raised in a labor camp I didn't have a labor
142 camp life. Initially, it was kind of shocking. Back then in the 60s, the labor camps conditions, the
143 workers lived in were really sad. Bathroom facilities were kinda scary, you could look into the

144 areas where they lived and you see they didn't have much privacy. Privacy was made by putting
145 up sheets between bunk beds, the buildings were dark. That was kind of shocking in the
146 beginning but after a while, I got used to it.

147 **Interviewer:** Were they actually treated with respect? *muffled*

148 **Vengua:** I was actually treated with a lot of respect by the older Filipino men. I didn't
149 meet many young Filipino guys in the labor camps. Maybe they were all out working or
150 whatever. But we'd go there and they'd very often cook for us. We shared a lot of food on the
151 camps with them. I have good memories of meals in the labor camps. I got to know a lot of the
152 older fieldworkers and when I went to the dances they would dance with me. At thirteen by this
153 time a lot of field workers are kinda at my shoulder, really short! I didn't feel very intimidated by
154 them vertically.

155 **Interviewer:** You mentioned a double life, could you clarify why is it hard to explain?
156 Why was it hard to explain your two lives?

157 **Vengua:** Yeah, I guess at the time I was both a little bit embarrassed and self-conscious
158 maybe more than a little bit I don't know. At the same time defensive so I was starting to realize
159 how the working-class group was and how different it was from the people I knew in high
160 school. At the same time, I kind of wanted to protect the sense of community I felt because I sure
161 didn't feel it outside of that. But I did feel a sense of community within the circle of Filipino
162 organizations: the dances, the structure of things even the social box. It's not like I really always
163 loved to be doing the social box like the queen contest I did feel some pressure to be
164 representative to the Filipino community. As a Pinoy as a Filipino that I had to act a certain way.
165 I didn't always want to do that. For example, I actually won the queen contest when I was 13 and
166 we had a convention in Hollywood. I got into a huge argument with my mom at the hotel over
167 lipstick. She wanted me to wear this really dark red lipstick. At that time, it was a big fashion tip
168 to wear pale lipstick. I felt the need to kind of argue for that as an individual. So, I had some
169 conflicts about that.

170 **Interviewer:** You mention words like defensive and protective? Are you talking about
171 your culture or memory when you tried to defend or protect?

172 **Vengua:** I don't know if I could say this is defensive or protective, more like self-
173 conscious. During the time I ran for the queen, there was a murder at the dance I was giving. It
174 was in the newspaper; I witnessed the murder. It was a gang-related incident. I was in the social
175 box at the time and just stood up for a dance and somebody walked into the dance hall and shot a
176 guy at the other side of the hall. I heard the shots and my mother before I even knew what it was
177 and dragged me into the back. When you're a teenager things like that aren't totally shameful,
178 there's a sort of coolness being associated with something like that. I obviously had conflicting
179 feelings about that and it's hard for me to say.

180 **Interviewer:** Do you remember having any family members being involved in the labor
181 struggles?

182 **Vengua:** My father worked in the labor camps before he joined the merchant marines.
183 My father came here in 1929 and he worked all up and down through the west coast all the up to
184 Alaska. Just like a lot of Filipinos in the 20s and 30s he was a migrant worker. He didn't want to
185 expose me to some of the more difficult aspects of that life. He was in the merchant marines but
186 my mother was taking me to all these labor camps. As far as what he knew about that but he
187 didn't want to talk to me about it. He was worried about telling me about it. He did tell me that
188 he was involved in some union organizing. That some of that took place in San Francisco and
189 just from what I know about it, it may have something to do with the bloody Tuesday strikes in
190 San Francisco that happened around 1934. I know that there were union organizing meetings in
191 SF and broken up by police and very violent but I don't know the extent of his participation.

192 **Interviewer:** You had said earlier and that I'm sure everyone can relate to that high
193 school is just a thing that you do during the week and your grades dropped and you didn't enjoy
194 high school. I was wondering how education became such an important aspect of your life
195 enough so that you would become a professor?

196 **Vengua:** That's a really interesting question.

197 **Supervisor:** We're all thinking the same thing

198 **Vengua:** Right. Gosh, in Filipino families education is often a big issue, at least it was
199 when I was a kid, especially my mom. My mom didn't know how to work the system so she
200 couldn't give me much help as far as applying to college and stuff like that. I ended up marrying

201 really young and having a family, I didn't go back to college until my son was grown up really. I
202 was probably afraid to go to college for a long time because I didn't feel like I had good
203 experiences in high school. I think that some emphasis behind my going back to college had
204 something to do with proving to myself that I could do it. I went to community college. Found
205 out that I could write, got a lot of support from teachers, and when to Rio college. Lots of
206 support from my teachers. One day I took Asian American history class and that kind of changed
207 things for me because I kind of pushed my childhood back after having a family. Suddenly I
208 realized there was some significance behind the experience I had as a child that I hadn't realized
209 before. I started looking more into that and getting interested in writing. I noticed I didn't see any
210 Filipino writers around me in Santa Cruz. I kept on writing and at one point I ended up managing
211 a poetry reading series in Santa Cruz. One of the poets was a guy named Jack Phoely from SF. I
212 was at a party and sat down and talked to him. He asked if I ever met the Filipino members of a
213 bear paw. The bear paw is Filipino American writer. They're Filipino writers that live in
214 Watsonville. So, I wrote to them and talked to them and they introduced me to Big Paw. I went to
215 a meeting for Filipino American writers in SF and that's where I met Al Robles, Virginia
216 Cereniole, Katarina S, just a lot of interesting writers there. That kind of set me off on another
217 part of my journey.

218 **Interviewer:** So where did you go from there?

219 **Vengua:** Well I just continued to write. I probably digressed because you were talking
220 about education, right? Well, actually this was about education.

221 **Interviewer:** How you found your passion for writing and communication

222 **Vengua:** Yeah, okay. Meeting all these people really kind of set my mind going about
223 different things I want to do. I ended up going to UCSC, I got my degree there in world literature
224 and culture studies. I met some really interesting and inspiring teachers there. Susy Gilman was
225 one mentor, another was Roberto Crispi, he was a really interesting and inspiring teacher and
226 unfortunately, he passed away at the end of one semester. He was very encouraging to me to
227 continue my studies so I did and decided to get into a graduate program. I got into UC Berkeley
228 with some help from those mentors and some grants. So, I did that. I started doing more research
229 into Filipino American history and then I got interested in Filipino newspapers. Again, that was

230 part of my education. The newspapers turned out to be an incredible archive of the history and
231 not just history but literature. Early writing from the 1920s and 30s from Filipinos. It was just
232 mind-blowing to me especially when I found out they were very prolific. There were over 40
233 newspapers published on the west coast alone before WW2. Think about all the history and all
234 the literature contained in those newspapers. Just a lot there to work with. I'm happy. I have a lot
235 of things to look at.

236 **Interviewer:** You mentioned going back and frequenting a lot of Filipino communities
237 like in Watsonville, then in Salinas, and also thinking about the intent to preserve Filipino history
238 in Salinas. Do you have any good memories of Chinatown in Salinas or maybe your mom told
239 stories about Chinatown in Salinas?

240 **Vengua:** Well my mom was friends with a lot of people in Salinas. The Reyes,
241 Mendosa's, also in Watsonville the Tabasa Family. My mom used to hang out with Rosita
242 Tabasa, they were frequently dance buddies, they'd travel to the dance together. My memories of
243 Salinas Chinatown are sitting in the back of the car listening to rosiat and my mom crack joke
244 some of them off-color as we drive to Salinas. Looking out the car window to see the fields and
245 trains passing by, realizing that the train crosses over the tracks and we would meet the train
246 again near the Filipino dance hall. We would be driving through Chinatown often towards the
247 dancehall. I didn't hang out in the Chinatown area, well I did in the sense that I went to the
248 dances in the Chinatown community center.

249 **Interviewer:** So, the present Filipino hall was at the same place?

250 **Vengua:** You know, I'm not sure. It sure feels like it but you know how memory is. I
251 know it was close to Chinatown. I don't know if that was the one. So, I can't guarantee that. I
252 remember seeing Chinatown, I remember the buildings. As time went by the buildings got more
253 worn-down looking.

254 **Interviewer:** What years was that?

255 **Vengua:** The 60s through the early 70s.

256 **Interviewer:** So, you were a teenager in the early 60s?

257 **Vengua:** Actually, well yea I'd say through 1960 maybe 1959. The mid-60s were my
258 teenage days

259 **Interviewer:** If you were to describe your earliest impressions of Chinatown and what
260 the community was like what would you say about it?

261 **Vengua:** I think that at that time it was looking a little scary to me. A little bit skid row-
262 ish. yeah.

263 **Interviewer:** Is there a particular example that is creating that version?

264 **Vengua:** the people hanging out in front of bars, kind of something about the train tracks,
265 it's funny because it appears to me in visual layers as people kind of stumble around a bit. Bars,
266 people going into bars, shop fronts, and sort of above it. I'm kind of seeing vaguely pagoda-
267 shaped things which may have been the republic café I'm not sure at this point what it was. There
268 was definitely something that struck me as Asian and reminiscence of SF's Chinatown.

269 **Interviewer:** Did you ever eat at the republic café?

270 **Vengua:** Not that I remember. That doesn't mean I didn't. I have blurred memories as a
271 child and as a teenager, my mom and Rosita started taking me into these cafes. I know some of
272 these were in Stockton and there were a lot of manongs hanging out in the café. I wish you could
273 meet Rosita. She passed away but she was amazing. Even before I was a teenager introduced me
274 to Filipino culture with dances and dance classes. A lot of Filipinos my age took dance classes
275 from her. That was my introduction to Filipino culture before being a teenager.

276 **Interviewer:** What kind of dances?

277 **Vengua:** Oh, we did a lot. We did the bamboo dance. You know where you're jumping
278 around big bamboos and we did that a lot actually. We did the candle dance with the glass on the
279 tops of our heads and danced to that. A few other things but I can't remember them now. The
280 bamboo dance stood out to me to the most because I had to be really careful with that one.

281 **Interviewer:** Are you involved in any Filipino community organizations?

282 **Vengua:** Right now, I'm not. Except for my involvement with the Filipino exhibition
283 project. For the Steinbeck center putting on in support of the Chinatown renewal project. The

284 reason I got interested in that is because of the Chinatown renewal project. Because I felt that the
285 Filipino newspapers are so important and crucial in my own research I wanted to make sure
286 some of that material was made available to the public. That's how I got involved in that.

287 **Interviewer:** You mentioned that your mom was heavily involved in Filipino community
288 organizations, what kind of work did she do?

289 **Vengua:** They did masa Lang, the women's lodge, she belonged to the ----. The lodge
290 was named after Filipina actress denancia suzara. She was a member of the Filipino community
291 of Watsonville and Santa Cruz. She started a separate Filipino pioneers club later on in life.

292 **Interviewer:** Your mother?

293 **Vengua:** My mother did, yeah. I was a member of that for a while. But god I was so
294 interrogated by those members. That's when I learned to be a bit more assertive. I didn't know
295 how to speak out in that group, you'd be completely drowned out. There were some really
296 intense strong women so yeah. That's what she was involved in. it was largely social and
297 sponsored a lot of cultural events. They gave out some grants for students but those organizations
298 back then really existed to create and maintain a sense of community. Make people feel like they
299 were a part of something.

300 **Interviewer:** Of all the experiences you went through as a teenager and in childhood,
301 what significance does your heritage bring you today?

302 **Vengua:** Obviously a lot. It's kind of nurtured my research, my writing, it's provided a
303 font of wonderful history, a sense of community, sense of strength in my own capabilities as well
304 as the people I know, and from the Filipina dances, a sense that people can work together from
305 different ethnic groups and among different concerns and needs. So, it gives me a lot of sense not
306 of just hope but possibility and potential. Although I may have been kind of self-conscious about
307 my participation in some of those events when I was a teenager I think that eventually it really
308 gave me a sense of possibility. That people can work together. Not just across different groups
309 but also across generations and that really stands out to me.

310 **Interviewer:** What would you like *inaudible* the Filipino communities in the area like
311 Watsonville, Santa Cruz?

312 **Vengua:** Well from my research and from knowing these people there is such a rich
313 history. It's only just begun to be mine. I was just flabbergasted to see how much of that just
314 hasn't been touched yet. When the Philippines got into a war with the united states, back at the
315 end of the 19th century a lot of their files were brought to the US. A lot of those files are held in
316 the US and that's slowly changing. A lot of that stuff is still sitting in the library of congress,
317 hasn't been touched. With these Filipino newspapers, this is an archive. A precious archive of
318 material. Alex Fabros has done a great job in opening that up and giving us a lot of information
319 about Filipino history in the US. Think about the writers, budding writers who had their first
320 works published in those newspapers. What can you do with that? I'm just one person and there
321 is so much out there. I hope other people will kind of dive in.

322 **Interviewer:** Did you do your research in the library of Congress?

323 **Vengua:** Actually, did but very little though. Most of my research was done in Salinas,
324 especially the Philippines mail. The Philippines mail published out of Salinas is a really
325 important newspaper for the Filipino community. It's the longest-lasting newspaper published in
326 the US by Filipinos. It had a really important role in the Filipino labor movement in the 1930s.
327 the editors and publishers of the Philippines mail were crucial in organizing for those early labor
328 movements. And they didn't do it just by themselves they reached out and worked with editors,
329 publishers, and labor organizers in Stockton, Seattle, SF, LA. It was kind of a locus of really
330 important organizing. Courageous advocacy. People talk about the fermenta Barra incident, the
331 Filipina women shot in Watsonville by some vigilantes. I haven't heard of them talk about the
332 visual anti-attack on Filipinos in speckles. The telephone lines were cut and for hours vigilantes
333 shot at Filipino labor workers. They shot into the bunk beds and the workers were looking for a
334 safe place out in the ditches. If you go to their newspaper though, you will read first-hand
335 accounts of that. That as well as other events happening in the 1930s. that happened in 1934 I
336 think. It took a lot of guts for these editors to publish testimonies of this stuff because they were
337 at risk, their lives were at risk. That's another thing that really gets me fired up.

338 **Interviewer:** I was wondering if you grew up, did you have through your mother any
339 sense of a relationship with the strikes? The break strikes and a lot of strikes?

340 **Vengua:** Yeah, I did. My mother was not one for participating in any strikes of any sort.
341 This might be one reason why my dad didn't talk to me much about his participation. When I was
342 running as a candidate for the queen contest, the labor strikes were beginning, usually, some part
343 of the dance somebody would get up and make a pitch for people to get out and support the
344 strikers. These weren't all men either. Sometimes the queen candidates would get up, I
345 remember, in particular, one-woman name Gloria from Delano. This was during my queen
346 candidacy. She got a may have been before or after the social box. She got up to the microphone
347 and told everyone she would not be available for the next few dances because she will be
348 participating in the strikes. And so, I knew then that something was going on. That was mainly-
349 just seeing other people express their interest in that. It didn't really hit me until I got older about
350 what that was all about.

351 **Interviewer:** How do your children, have they been able to carry along some of the
352 cultural history to your own children?

353 **Vengua:** Well I have one grownup son living in San Francisco and he's interested in it he
354 often asks me questions about it. But he actually didn't start to get more vocally interested that I
355 could see until he was way grown-up. I'm not exactly sure what type of participation he has in
356 that right now. I know he asks me questions every now and then. He certainly isn't into it as
357 much as I am. He supports what I'm doing though.

358 **Interviewer:** I had a quick follow-up question too. You had mentioned earlier when you
359 were talking about your mother and her participation in the lodges, and how other women
360 participated. You used a couple words, you used intense and strong to tell us you felt intimidated
361 when you were around them. Could you elaborate and share more about them?

362 **Vengua:** I sometimes think that the intensity of their responses to various things whether
363 it be putting together a dance, a meeting, raising funds for a scholarship, maybe came from a
364 sense of frustration. But I'm not sure- I know that it is said that the Philippines was once a
365 matriarchal society and I do know that in Filipino family's women handle the finances. At least
366 that was the case for my family and others I knew. At the same times, I don't think they were
367 encouraged to get out there and physically be outspoken. This may have just been my parents'
368 generation, I don't know. I sense a certain frustration behind their intensity.

369 **Interviewer:** Can you give us an example of how that manifested for you and what led
370 you to that conclusion?

371 **Vengua:** Just some of the arguments over things. Over organizing things would be very
372 loud. Real intense to the point where I don't even want to step in. get me out of here ha-ha. I was
373 afraid that blows were going to be exchanged. They had really strong opinions about stuff. My
374 mother was quite ambitious for me, like a stage mother. When she went to college in the
375 Philippines, the only good encouragement from her family was to take home economics. She
376 really wanted something bigger than that, I know that. So that's what she did, she worked in a
377 canner, a laundry, at the dances, she cooked, and she was a great cook and baker. She sewed
378 dresses for the queen contest; pretty amazing dresses maybe ill bring one to the Filipino exhibit if
379 I can donate one to that. I might be projecting some of this on my mom.

380 **Interviewer:** Is she still alive?

381 **Vengua:** No. my memories of my mother but the Philippines has had a female president
382 and there are some very strong Filipino women holding government positions. Actually, more
383 than one female president, right? The last one was very small but very intense. Maybe there is
384 some truth that the Philippines was a matriarchy. There are Filipina heroes in Filipino history.
385 There were Filipino guerillas that fought against the Americans. I just draw strength from that.

386 **Interviewer:** Maybe there's some sort of connection between Puerto Rico and the
387 Philippines because they've had a lot of women that are very active and vocal, intense, that were
388 in guerillas and all that. Maybe it's the combination of Spain and the United States.

389 **Interviewer:** I have another follow-up question, you mention your father was protecting
390 you or trying to protect you from that life. Could you-

391 **Vengua:** Yeah, I don't know if protection is the right word, he might have been
392 protecting himself. But ill give you an example. His reluctance to talk about union organizing or
393 his life as a laborer. A student from UCSC befriended me at one point and she came over to my
394 house. She was Filipina and she found out that my father was working in the fields in the 1920s
395 and 30s. She wanted to interview him. Initially, he agreed to do that, but over the week as I saw
396 he waited to take part in that interview I saw him get more and more comfortable with the idea. I
397 saw that he was really disturbed about it. I think it actually gave him some sleepless nights. My

398 mother said something about it and he said he didn't want to talk about it. Obviously, things
399 happened that he didn't want to talk about. I know that he was here in the Salinas and
400 Watsonville area during the riots, the Filipino riots. All the vigilante activity was going on. I
401 never heard the details. I did hear him talk about doing things like jumping on a train from
402 Seattle. From Seattle to Oakland or something. It was part of his migratory process. I think he
403 said something. Jumping on a train and realizing he couldn't get inside, getting frozen and
404 having to hang on until where ever the location was and becoming cold. He was a musician so he
405 played guitar in the camps also. Also, in the Filipino community dances. He also played in a
406 band in the 1920s in New Orleans. I think he went there to work, and his band was a bunch of
407 Filipinos that were jumping on the Hawaiian bandwagon at the time. They called themselves the
408 royal Hawaiians. They were playing music at that time which actually got me interested in
409 researching Filipino bands in the 1920s and traveled through the Midwest. There's this big gap in
410 my knowledge of my father's life. I love my father but there's something that I couldn't share.
411 This may be a way for me to kind of participate.

412 **Interviewer:** I think that's a wonderful way to end this interview!

Echoes of Thank You

413 **Vengua:** Thank you!

414 **Supervisor:** We've all learned a lot ey?

415 **Vengua:** I really appreciate having the chance to, thank you so much.

(END OF RECORDING)

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