A TEI Project

Interview of Jaime Geaga

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1.1. Session One (JULY 27, 2011)

SINGSON

Today is July 27, 2011, and we are doing our first interview with Jaime Geaga. This is Precious Singson doing the interview. How are you, Jaime?

GEAGA

Fine. Good.

SINGSON

Very good.

GEAGA

Nice summer day.

SINGSON

Yes. Beautiful summer day, actually. We are here in Los Angeles. Or should we consider this Silver Lake area?

GEAGA

Yes. Silver Lake, yes.

SINGSON

Now, as in all good interviews in the very first interview, we will start with your family background, or at least what you remember and what you've been told of your family's experiences and also your early childhood experience. First of all, let's start with where you were born.

GEAGA

Okay. I was born in Baguio [City, Philippines], this is in 1953, the third child of four in my family. I have an older brother [Jorge Geaga] and an older sister [Joselyn Geaga]. My sister's the eldest, and then there's three sons: my older brother, myself, and then a younger brother [Joaquin Geaga].

SINGSON

In Baguio your family had settled there for a very long time, or where did your family, your mom and your father, where did they came from?

GEAGA

I remember Baguio as being kind of the—when I started school, first grade, that's where we settled. I also have memories of when I was even—before kindergarten, living in Baguio, but it seemed like we would move back and forth between Baguio and the lowlands, Manila, Quezon City. My parents met after the war [World War II]. My dad [Jose Vargas Geaga] was in the war fighting the Japanese alongside my mother's [Remedios Vergara Geaga] older brother [Abelardo Vergara], my uncle. My uncle was then a doctor. My dad was an engineer. They were on the [Bataan] Death March.

SINGSON

Okay. Wow.

GEAGA

My dad, who was—how do you call it? He surveys the topography of the area, and so he knows the geography of the area.

SINGSON

So that is his job within—

GEAGA

The military.

SINGSON

—military. Okay. I see.

GEAGA

There's a term for that.

SINGSON

It's sort of a like an urban planner type.

GEAGA

Yes. Or he—

SINGSON

Scout.

GEAGA

Yes, he scouts. There's a technical name for it. Maybe I'll remember. But anyway, they were on the Death March, and my dad said to my uncle, my mom's older brother, said, "We should escape. This is not going to go anywhere. I know the terrain because I've landscaped it, and I know how to get out of here. And you're a doctor, so you have the medicine for malaria. So between the two of us we should be able to do okay."

SINGSON

Wow.

GEAGA

So my uncle was at first hesitant, but they did eventually escape. So that's a story my dad loves to tell.

SINGSON

But as far as you know, or at least from all these stories, were there a lot of escapees? Because we sort of hear about—I mean there's—

GEAGA

People escaping?

SINGSON

Right. From Bataan, yes.

GEAGA

Yes. The Death March ended up in Bataan.

SINGSON

Right.

GEAGA

That I don't know. All I know is their specific story, my dad and my uncle.

SINGSON

That's incredible.

GEAGA

But anyway, so they escaped. My mom's family already was—because they heard that the Japanese was heading north, so they evacuated. They evacuated from Bontoc to Baguio, and then when they got to Baguio, they heard that the Japanese was on the way there. They was heading north, so they also then evacuated. They were in the mountains somewhere. But anyway, then the war ended, and my uncle introduced my dad to my mom. It's kind of like that's the connection. So they met after the war.

SINGSON

The same uncle who escaped with your father?

GEAGA

Yes. Finally they met up. They were able to reunite. The Vergara family, that's my mom's side, they were able to reunite. I guess because the escape and being together in the war, my uncle and my dad were close, were friends and close, so my mom met my dad through my uncle after the war.

SINGSON

Now, your family affiliation or your mom's side's affiliation in Bontoc, are they originally from Bontoc?

GEAGA

La Union, San Fernando La Union, [unclear]. My dad was Visayan from Negros Iloilo. That's what I know.

SINGSON

That's fine. So from La Union, I'm sorry, what is the affiliation with Bontoc again? How [unclear]?

GEAGA

My mom's dad was provincial governor and was stationed in Bontoc for the mountain province, so that's how they were, and when the war broke out, I guess they were stationed in Bontoc, and as the war progressed, they evacuated to Baguio, and then from there—anyway, so Baguio was always where my mom lived, and when she met my dad through my uncle, kind of established their home in Baguio.

SINGSON

So just to clarify, your uncle established his home in Baguio. And was your father sort of just traveling to Baguio when they met, or is he stationed in Manila or in Visayas?

GEAGA

No, they met during the war, my dad and my uncle, and so I don't know exactly where he was stationed, but they just happened to be in the same unit.

SINGSON

Okay, I see. This is really interesting because we don't have a lot of accounts of Filipinos sort of traveling back and forth. The transience of Filipinos during the war is sort of also not covered.

GEAGA

Also, I think the thing here is that it's also rare that—I think in the Philippines the regionalism is so profound, and so the cross-regionalism is—I think it's only because of the war that people from different regions or men from different regions are able to meet, and then maybe families. So I think, for me, usually your parents are either both from the same region or the same town, whereas in my case I have parents who are from two different regions very separate, not even close.

SINGSON

And then as far as you know your father being—I'm sorry, your mother's—your grandfather [Nicolas Vergara] being a provincial official.

GEAGA

Official, yes.

SINGSON

What was your mother's background? Were they in, I guess, a higher class of—in terms of class and social status?

GEAGA

Well, I know that the kids were sent to school in Manila, so my mom would go to Manila, or she went to—was it Santo Tomas?

SINGSON

University.

GEAGA

University of Santo Tomas, a B.S. in education. My grandfather, the dad, really stressed education, so in terms of the social class, maybe it's from the educated class, because that was strongly looked upon as something to be able to do well in life, and it's the same value that's also stressed on my dad's side. I could talk a little bit about my dad's side, but—

SINGSON

Yes. And your father's side, what was your memories or what was told about your family?

GEAGA

You know, I grew up in Baguio, which is primarily where my mom's family, that side of the family, is based, La Union, Baguio, Bontoc. My dad's side I never really—it would only be our trips to Manila where I would meet my aunts and uncles on my dad's side, and never went to the Visayas, never went to visit their home town. But looks like my dad was the eldest of about six or seven siblings, and three of his siblings, youngest sisters, were all in the convent, were nuns. So there's a very strong religious influence on my dad's side, although my dad himself is not religious, but the family was very strong. So they also stressed a lot of education. It's only now that I'm beginning to know more about my cousins on my dad's side that were here in the U.S., so we've had reunions. In the Philippines, my vague memory is that we would just visit different aunts and uncles and my cousins then we were young. I would see them, like, once every two or three years.

SINGSON

Right, when you visited Manila, you mean?

GEAGA

Yes, when our family would go to Manila, because my mom's older sister—my mom has an older sister [Sofia Vergara Holigores] and older brother. After the war, my mom's older brother [Ambassador Alejandro Holigores], the doctor, migrated to the U.S. during the

fifties. My mom's older sister was even older than my uncle, the doctor, was married to an ambassador.

SINGSON

Ambassador to the U.S.?

GEAGA

Who was stationed in different part—at that time I think he was in Singapore. But they had a house in Quezon City, so when we went to visit them, we would stay with them in Quezon, and while we were there we would visit on my dad's side the other aunts and uncles.

SINGSON

And as far as you remember, your dad's side of the family also lived in Quezon City?

GEAGA

Some of them. Most of them would be in Iloilo, but there would be one. His younger brother early on established residence in Quezon City, so I remember that particular family, my aunt and my cousins, who we visited more. We got to know them more than my dad's three other sisters who had families. One of the family was always in Iloilo and never really got to meet them till we were here in the U.S. because their migration is a different story from ours.

SINGSON

So let's talk about all these memories. It seems like it's very rich, even if you were very young. So let's start talking about Baguio first. This is already after the war. What was Baguio like and what are the earliest memories of your home? Were there extended family around?

GEAGA

Baguio was idyllic to me. It was really lush, lots of pine trees, green, cooler weather, so it was nice. It was very nice. Once I started kindergarten, I think my mom decided that we were going to live in

Baguio and go to school in Baguio, so she, along with my dad, set up a business to kind of help us. With my dad's experience in the war as being an electrical engineer and mechanical engineer, was able to salvage some of the equipment, and they established a laundry, and they were the main contractors for the Philippine Military Academy, PMA, so they did all of the PMA's uniforms.

SINGSON

Wow.

GEAGA

So I remember that growing up. That was their main business. We had this big truck that the employees would drive and pick up all the dirty—you know, the soiled uniforms and bring it over. My dad had this big huge washing machine just to wash it. But then there was this huge area where they would dry it under the sun, and then a big huge clubhouse where there were workers who would iron it.

SINGSON

Now, the PMA is also very close to the American bases.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Where there any interactions?

GEAGA

John Hay, PMA, and all that. See, I forget. Isn't it—

SINGSON

Camp John Hay.

GEAGA

Camp John Hay. I think they were kind of in the same area.

SINGSON

Right. And do you remember having to deal with Americans in Baguio?

GEAGA

Not so much with Americans, but it was like a treat to go to Camp John Hay and have burgers, hamburgers. It's like the whole idealized notion of the United States. It's like a mini reflection of what it was here in Baguio was the United States as exemplified by Camp John Hay.

SINGSON

Now, was it open to the public so anybody could go in?

GEAGA

I mean, I remember us being able to go to the restaurant and have—burgers were like a real treat because you couldn't get it anywhere else, or the steaks, you know, that stuff. I think so. I don't know.

SINGSON

So you remember this as being an American thing.

GEAGA

Yes, yes, definitely an American thing. And then the PMA. I guess they didn't distinguish the two. All I knew was just all this military, but Camp John Hay clearly was a U.S. base.

SINGSON

And how did you distinguish it as the surroundings, the [unclear]?

GEAGA

The landscape was so neat and nice and manicured, huge grounds.

SINGSON

And as opposed to outside of the campgrounds?

GEAGA

Well, you didn't see anything else comparable in seeing when you visited, like, Mines View Park or some of the sites in Baguio. It stood out as being kind of this very well-manicured, big huge piece of property.

SINGSON

Now, you went to school.

GEAGA

Yes. I started school at Saint Teresa's College.

SINGSON

And do you have any early memories of what the school was like? It's a Catholic school, I'm assuming.

GEAGA

Yes. We had the arts and crafts. I remember there was a lot of extracurricular activities, sports. My sister was also in high school at that time at Saint Teresa's College, and my younger brother started the year after I did, so we would all be picked up by Jeepney at seven o'clock in the morning, stay in school all day, and then come back. But there was a lot of activities. It's kind of like mainly my sister was very active also in school activities. My older brother went to Saint Louis High School or University at that time.

SINGSON

Do you remember if Tagalog or English or Ilocano was spoken?

GEAGA

It was English, and it was run by sisters.

SINGSON

Filipino or—

GEAGA

Filipino sisters. We would have days of just silence, some of the practices and rituals which I cherish today— [bells ringing]

SINGSON

Let me pause for a moment. [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

So we are back to recording, and we were just talking about your early memories of Saint Teresa's as young and going to elementary. Or is it preschool that you went through Saint Teresa's?

GEAGA

It's from grade one to grade four.

SINGSON

Oh, okay. I see.

GEAGA

Elementary, yes.

SINGSON

And then what is the language being spoken at home?

GEAGA

It's also English. I don't remember speaking in Tagalog at all. My aunts, our maids, they would speak in Ilocano. My mom, my aunt and my mom, it would be Ilocano, yes.

SINGSON

Would you consider her first language as—

GEAGA

Ilocano, yes.

SINGSON

And your father would speak Visayan?

GEAGA

My dad, during my growing-up years, was in Korea, so soon after my mom and dad met and started a family, had the kids—this is

probably by the mid 1950s—my mom—they built this business, but then she encouraged my dad to—I guess he was able to have a connection with a U.S. company in Manila that was looking for employees to work for them, but in Korea during the Korean War. So my mom encouraged him to really take this on and see this as an opportunity that might lead to something else.

SINGSON

So he was in Korea not as a military.

GEAGA

Civil, civil support, whatever.

SINGSON

Right, but working for the U.S. company, or is it your own business?

GEAGA

Working for a U.S. company. Once the laundry business was all set up, then really my dad helped with establishing the machines. All they needed next was just somebody who would fix it if it broke down. Kind of my dad had done his work where his expertise was. My mom was kind of the go-getter in our family, directing the whole—I think in Filipino culture the—what do you call it—

SINGSON

Matriarchal.

GEAGA

Matriarch plays a strong role, and that's exemplified in my mom.

SINGSON

And she was the one taking care of the kids and the business at the same time.

GEAGA

The business, yes.

SINGSON

Did she have any help at all with anyone else?

GEAGA

No, not really. I mean, when she established the business, it was just a matter of running and managing it. The contract with PMA was an ongoing thing. We knew that there would be soldiers who would have soiled uniforms. [laughs]

SINGSON

But I meant, like, so having to deal with other people in the business, the PMA itself. So we think of—again, this is very unusual, especially in the 1950s—a woman having to run the business.

GEAGA

Run the business, yes. Now it seems like she kind of took care of all of it, at least from my—and then occasionally she would fly to Manila for other things. I don't know.

SINGSON

Oh, so she would fly. There's also—

GEAGA

Not fly. I guess the bus.

SINGSON

Okay. Right. I see.

GEAGA

Dongwa and BAL [Baliwag Transit]. I don't know if they still exist, but those are the two bus lines that I remember.

SINGSON

So let's go back to language again. Why is it that English is spoken?

GEAGA

I think maybe school. Ilocano a little bit, but because once we start school, I think it is in English. I don't remember it being taught in Tagalog at all during those years. And I think even in Baguio people spoke English even on the street.

SINGSON

Oh, really.

GEAGA

Yes, even on the street. It was like that was the language.

SINGSON

So in the market—

GEAGA

Yes, even in the market, because there was a lot of different dialects, Pangasinan, Ilocano. Not much—maybe Tagalog was a dialect. But what language that people all could speak was English.

SINGSON

So do you consider Baguio as being sort of a very cosmopolitan city?

GEAGA

Yes, at that time. And lots of people come up. Especially during summers it was like a tourist spot just to cool off from the heat from the lowlands. So I remember the place being really packed. There's Burnham Park, which is like a nice area for boating and roller skating and biking.

SINGSON

Do you remember seeing the foreigners or seeing tourists from the lowlands in the Philippines and what you thought of them and what you thought of how the city attracted all these different people? I mean, what were your early thoughts of the tourists?

GEAGA

The tourists were, for me from my perspective, was a lot of relatives from the lowlands coming up. So our cousins on my mom's side, because she had—there were probably nine siblings. A lot of them lived in Manila or Quezon City. They would come up and just—

SINGSON

You'd take them around?

GEAGA

Yes. They'd stay with us. We had a younger cousin who would spend, like, her whole summer with us.

SINGSON

That's great.

GEAGA

Because her mom was working, and they were in Manila or in Cubao or Quezon City. So, yes, those cousins. My mom also had friends from college who also now had families, but they were from Pampanga. They would come up and spend weeks at a time.

SINGSON

So you were exposed to very different people doing a lot of tourist—

GEAGA

Yes. And then we would go to Manila and stay at their places. I have fond memories of going to—I guess they're technically my aunt, but this is a best friend of my mom from college, and we would stay in San Fernando, Pampanga for weeks at a time as well.

SINGSON

Oh, really?

GEAGA

Yes, and stay in their big house and go to the river and eat all kinds of food.

SINGSON

Well, let's move on to the circumstances of your moving, migrating to the U.S. You're already in fourth grade, did you say?

GEAGA

I'm in fourth grade, yes. I first hear something about I was in fourth grade, and I think it was 1964, probably the early part of that year, and I hear the word "Los Angeles." And, "Oh, Los Angeles. That's in the U.S." So there's all this excitement about the U.S. But I just remember my mom saying we're moving to the U.S., that it'll be in a year, or at least there's this possibility and we need to get ourselves ready. So anyway, so there's the immediate excitement about Los Angeles, the term "Los Angeles." And I think I connected, too, with—one memory that stands out with me was when JFK [John F. Kennedy] was assassinated. Wasn't that '63?

SINGSON

Sixty-five, I think.

GEAGA

JFK?

SINGSON

Yes.

GEAGA

Was that sixty—no.

SINGSON

Was it earlier?

GEAGA

I think it was earlier. I think '62 or '63. But anyway, it was big news. It was big news worldwide, internationally, and also in the U.S. that there's this U.S. president was assassinated. I remember just listening to the news about the U.S. So my notion of the U.S. is

either Camp John Hay and then the news of JFK being shot because it's always in the news, so there's those glimpses, and all of a sudden this term, the city of Los Angeles.

SINGSON

And then do you remember why there was an opportunity for your family to move?

GEAGA

Not at that time. So now let me give you the backdrop to that, how that became possible. My dad comes back from Korea. He does his stint with this U.S. corporation, and so I guess the laundry business is doing fine. But I guess my mom, by '61, this is where now settled in Baguio, and my dad is just about to come back from Korea, '61, '62, she hears news that her sister and brother-in-law are reassigned to Los Angeles to be the Filipino ambassador for the Philippine Consulate here in Los Angeles, I think from Singapore. They were in Singapore for, like, during the fifties, and he's being reassigned to Los Angeles, so, of course, my mom immediately, when my dad's coming back, said, "You need to go join the part of the consular core."

SINGSON

So you mean work for the consulate.

GEAGA

Yes, or I guess the consulate general, the ambassador, can indicate who is part of his consular corps as an employer, whatever. So my mom asks my sister. I'm sure she asks my sister, whatever, suggests or whatever can Jose, my dad, be part of the consular corps. I guess he is, so he comes over to the U.S. in '63.

SINGSON

Now, why is it desired to go to the U.S., as far as you can remember? Because your family seems very settled in the Philippines, having a business and—

GEAGA

Yes, yes, and we actually have two houses. But I don't know. I guess it's my—

SINGSON

A house in Baguio and house in Manila?

GEAGA

No, in Baguio. We had the laundry business, which was on one side of Burnham Park, and then we had our own home, which was on the backside of the [Baguio] Cathedral, Session Road, up at the Cathedral, and then we were kind of on the backside down there.

SINGSON

I see. So there's two properties.

GEAGA

Two properties, yes. So there was the laundry business, which was the main—I guess we could have lived there, but we decided—I don't know. My parents decided that they were going to purchase this other house and just use that as the other property, which had this big clubhouse. Yes, so we had that. I guess then my mom had maybe as soon as she probably found out—I've never asked her. I wish I could. But from my observation, she really was the driving force to kind of—maybe she felt that the laundry business was kind of—that was it for our family, and that maybe there were more opportunities beyond just the laundry business if we were to go, or maybe overseas. I don't know. This is my speculation. But I know she's the driving force.

SINGSON

So you see her as a very ambitious person?

GEAGA

Yes, I think so, at least to further our—to be able to take advantage of opportunities that might be there. She's very far-sighted about

what might be available, and she was willing to take those risks. She was truly a go-getter.

SINGSON

Yes, and it's a big risk. So what did you have to do in order to prepare? So here you are in fourth grade. Do you remember any type of preparation to leave?

GEAGA

No. I think as soon as she finds out—so my dad comes, becomes part of the consular corps. I guess he then decides to go to school here, once he's here, to kind of further his schooling. He goes to [Los Angeles] City College, LACC, and he changes his status from member of the consular corps to student.

SINGSON

And what is the field that he's trying to get into or further his—

GEAGA

Mechanical engineering. So while in school, he also applies for a job, and he gets a job with Parsons [Corporation], I think, in Pasadena.

SINGSON

And what does Parsons do?

GEAGA

It's an architectural firm, I think.

SINGSON

So at this point your father's here and you are in the Philippines, your family's in the Philippines.

GEAGA

We're in the Philippines, yes.

SINGSON

So who took care of the business? Did you sell the business?

GEAGA

No, we still have it. My mom's still running it, running and managing it. My dad gets employed with this company. They decide to sponsor him for permanent residence, so from a student visa to becoming a permanent residence. And then once he gets that—I think this all goes on within a year or two years, '63 to '65 or, like, mid '64, and once he gets his permanent residence through this company, he's able to then, through the family reunification—

SINGSON

Sponsor.

GEAGA

—sponsor the rest of the family to come over. So I think my mom gets word of this, like, by '64. She said that, "Well, this is all being worked out, so we have to move to Manila and be ready to just take off." So I finish grade four in April because the school year is from June to April, I think.

SINGSON

That's right. And do you remember when you went to Manila?

GEAGA

Yes, when we went to Manila specifically to kind of just hang out and wait. [laughs] But I enrolled at JASMS [Jose Abad Santos Memorial School].

SINGSON

Which is?

GEAGA

It's a school in Cubao. I forget what it even stands for.

SINGSON

Okay. We can look it up later.

GEAGA

J-A-S, JASMS, J-A-S-M-S, for, like, six months until we get word that, "Okay, you've got the visa," and take a boat from the Philippines. It's probably the last trip of the U.S. President Lines.

SINGSON

Yes, I was just going to ask—

GEAGA

President Wilson.

SINGSON

This is very unusual. Right.

GEAGA

They didn't have flights yet.

SINGSON

Wow.

GEAGA

Or maybe they did, but—

SINGSON

They did.

GEAGA

They had Pan Am [Pan American World Airways] flights, but it's very rare and probably very expensive.

SINGSON

So do you remember what was the experience like being in a boat with all your family and perhaps a lot of luggage?

GEAGA

Yes. The other driving force about coming to the U.S. besides my mom, her sister and her brother-in-law being the ambassador, I think I told you earlier that her older brother, the doctor, had

migrated to the U.S., so he's also kind of a pull factor for her to come over. I think she does get—she's close to my uncle.

SINGSON

The doctor.

GEAGA

The doctor who comes and tells stories about the U.S., because I remember when very young, he would come and visit. And in fact, he gets married and has a son kind of younger than I, and I was still going to school in Saint Teresa's. He tried to open up a drugstore on Session Road, but then had that for a couple years, but then decided to go back to the U.S. So I think he says, "Well, this is—." He comes back, tries to do a business, kind of runs the drugstore, but then says it's still better to go back to the U.S. So I think this impacts my mom about, okay, I think it's good—

SINGSON

It must be better, right?

GEAGA

It must be better there. So while he comes back and forth, we see him and his family take off on these ships.

SINGSON

Oh, wow. Okay.

GEAGA

We go to Manila. We give him the big sendoff on one of the U.S. President Lines.

SINGSON

So you remember sending someone.

GEAGA

Somebody, yes, my uncle and his wife and my cousin [Gary Vergara], who was, like—so I remember that one specific thing, sending him off probably in 1962, ’63 probably.

SINGSON

And now you’re in on the line itself.

GEAGA

Yes. So then this excitement about L.A., and we’re going to take this ship has all this thing about it because we were able to go in and look at their cabin, and this is really huge. The shipping pulled off with those streamers. You’ve seen pictures of that probably in the fifties from people on the outside, on the planning side coming to the U.S., but this is the Philippines side.

SINGSON

Right. Yes.

GEAGA

So there’s a lot of that excitement, and I said, “Oh, we’re going to be doing that.”

SINGSON

Right. Now, who is on the boat? Were there a lot of Filipinos or mostly American travelers?

GEAGA

No. So we get in the boat, we push off, and we leave Manila. Next we’re in seas for a couple of days, and I think our first stop is Hong Kong. And this is where the Philippine identity immediately hits because there aren’t a lot of Filipinos.

SINGSON

Traveling to Hong Kong?

GEAGA

Or to the U.S. in the boat. And of course, we're, like—our passage, we have our own cabin. It's my mom, my sister, me, and my younger brother because one cabin only fits four. My older brother has to share a cabin with some other people.

SINGSON

Oh, really.

GEAGA

And we're not even—we're not first class. We're not steerage either, but we're kind of, like—

SINGSON

In the middle.

GEAGA

—probably the most economy, whatever. And then we're the only Filipino family. When we go to the meals, I notice there's not any Filipinos. We're like the only Filipino.

SINGSON

Would you expect more Filipinos in the steerage?

GEAGA

I was expecting to see a lot of other Filipinos, but there weren't. But even the whole ship. You know what I'm saying?

SINGSON

Right. I see.

GEAGA

There wasn't even a whole lot. Maybe there were a few, but we were probably all scattered. But it wasn't a whole lot. There was not a whole lot of Filipinos that I remember seeing. So we would speak in English, and we'd hear other—I would hear other people speak the different languages.

SINGSON

Not English?

GEAGA

Not English, yes. And then food was another big thing where they served food in the—it was not Filipino food. [laughter]

SINGSON

So, mainly Western?

GEAGA

No, I remember they served Mexican food one time, and it was just so weird for me or even for—I remember for our whole family, like, they served some sort of what was a Mexican dish, and it was just so weird. We said not only does it taste weird, it also smells like kilikili, [unclear]. [laughter] And this was the salsa that they make with cheese enchiladas, whatever. I think it's the red chili spice, now which, of course, I love. But at that time growing up, I was just—

SINGSON

Right. Yes. Something that you were not familiar with.

GEAGA

Not familiar with.

SINGSON

In terms of you mentioned that this is when the whole Filipino identity is already hitting you. Is it just on the food and also comparing yourself to other people?

GEAGA

Comparing food and language. I remember us, me specifically, starting to speak Tagalog because I wasn't fluent in Ilocano. I guess maybe there was enough Tagalog spoken in school, but even though classes were not taught in Tagalog, it was taught in English.

SINGSON

So where did you learn Tagalog, just to backtrack a little bit?

GEAGA

I don't know. Maybe—

SINGSON

From cousins, visitors?

GEAGA

Probably, yes, a lot of cousins coming in from Manila, because they spoke Tagalog. But they also spoke English. I know cousins from Pampanga spoke Kapampangan, but we'd speak to each other in English, but their English was broken, Kapampangan-style English, the "f" for the "p" or the "p" for the "f." [laughter] But the Tagalog—so I think we spoke Tagalog, yes, with cousins, mainly cousins.

SINGSON

So you arrive in Los Angeles and having to experience the Philippines sort of in already an age where you're very aware and having to compare it to your first sights and smell and sound of Los Angeles.

GEAGA

Actually, we landed in Hawaii. So from Hong Kong we went to Kobe, Japan, and then Japan to Hawaii was, like, three weeks. I remember seeing huge, huge waves.

SINGSON

In Hawaii?

GEAGA

In the Pacific Ocean. As we were traveling, there were days where we were just sick for days. We couldn't even come out and eat because we were just so, so sick. So by this time we're eating all

these different kind of foods. I remember pizza, my first experience of eating pizza, and I liked it. It was pretty good.

SINGSON

Oh, wow. You weren't exposed to pizza in—

GEAGA

The Philippines, no.

SINGSON

—Camp John Hay? Okay.

GEAGA

Just hamburgers, ketchup, but not pizza. Maybe they had pizza then, but I remember my uncles being—they would always stress the burgers and the steaks.

SINGSON

Now, actually the other thing that I wanted to ask was, you know, we hear about Filipinos as sort of not only being always relegated to the steerage in the seas, but also as sort of servants. You know, they're the ones doing a lot of the menial labor. With a ship coming from the Philippines, were there any? Did you notice any?

GEAGA

Filipino workers?

SINGSON

Workers.

GEAGA

I didn't notice any, at least not in our ship. I think it would be interesting to—because I remember our ship was the last trip of the S.S. President Lines. They had, like, four ships or so. Wilson was the ship we took, and that was active going back and forth during the fifties through the mid sixties, through the mid sixties. But I don't remember seeing Filipino workers who were on that specific ship.

SINGSON

And having to stop in Hong Kong and Japan, were there sort of any incidents that strike you as something that would contrast the Asian-ness or you being Filipino and also the other foreign—

GEAGA

No, nothing. We were there so short. It was just maybe a day stop for us to go out, buy some stuff, and then come back, but not enough to do anything, not even touring or tourists.

SINGSON

How did the other passengers treat you and the family?

GEAGA

You know, I don't even remember knowing all the other—I mean we knew some of the passengers, but there's nothing in my memory that comes to mind. I think it's just the whole trip was so—the seas were always rough, I just remember, so maybe we were always in the cabin, either being in the cabin or the dining room. Those are the memories that I remember. So we finally landed in Hawaii, and so we're dying for Filipino food. It's been, like, three weeks and we haven't had anything. [bells ringing]

SINGSON

Can I pause for a moment? [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

So we're back from pause, and we are just talking about your Hawaii landing and your yearning for Filipino food.

GEAGA

Yes. So we landed in Hawaii, Hawaii in '65, January 1, 1965. This is the first day where the new immigration laws [Hart-Cellar Act] take effect because the whole new U.S. immigration laws had changed to certain new ones, and the old ones were still from the early thirties. So we land. So I don't know. I consider our family one of the first

families of the third wave. [laughter] This just in hindsight, but at that time I—

SINGSON

Absolutely.

GEAGA

So, maybe not, because I don't think we were part of the second wave. We were not related to the military at all. We're with the third wave. So we land. Hawaii reminded me so much like San Fernando, La Union or the lowlands at that time.

SINGSON

Why is that?

GEAGA

The roads were, like—there's just two-lane highways, and on the side of the roads were these huge mango trees, and they'd just be falling, so, of course, this looks very much like the Philippines, so it's kind of like, oh, we're back to the Philippines. It's tropical—

SINGSON

The heat, humidity.

GEAGA

—climate, the heat, and the mango trees are all over, and we meet Filipinos.

SINGSON

Did you just go to Hawaii for a stopover, or do you have family there, or was this sort of a temporary settlement?

GEAGA

No, no, this is a stopover from the ship.

SINGSON

I see.

GEAGA

It was, like, a two-day stop, the ship, because it's been out in sea for twenty days. They need to reload or restock, whatever. We don't have family in Hawaii, no relatives. We don't know any friends, so it's just the Filipinos that we meet at the port. We said, "Can you take us to a Filipino restaurant?" [laughs]

SINGSON

So there were already Filipinos at the port already? And what do they usually do?

GEAGA

I think we took a cab. Maybe the driver happened to be Filipino.

SINGSON

And did you meet other Filipinos, or did you happen to go to a Filipino restaurant?

GEAGA

Yes, we went to a Filipino restaurant, so I just remember just—we had the best time, did a lot of sightseeing, and then I think we were back on the ship. So we could have been there for two days, but I remember at that time it just reminded me so much of the Philippines.

SINGSON

So now moving to Los Angeles.

GEAGA

So we go back. We're again on the ship for another five days and land in San Francisco on January 5th. So I think it's a five-day trip to the West Coast. We get off, we disembark, and my dad meets us, and my mom, me, and my younger brother all go in his car. My sister and my older brother is met by my aunt [Aurora Vergara Waller], and they take the Greyhound bus to L.A. I think the ship

comes in about in the afternoon, and my dad—we get into the car. We don't have any other relatives who meet us. It's just my dad.

SINGSON

In San Francisco.

GEAGA

In San Francisco. It's just my dad. And then I remember driving all night.

SINGSON

To L.A.

GEAGA

To L.A.

SINGSON

So you don't have any relatives at all from your mom's side or dad's side in San Francisco.

GEAGA

In San Francisco. My dad had some cousins, but he drives up from L.A. He's based in L.A. He meets us at the port and—

SINGSON

Went straight.

GEAGA

—took off straight for L.A.

SINGSON

So what is it like having to see L.A. the next morning, having to compare the Philippines, coming from Hawaii to re-meeting Filipinos, and then here in L.A.?

GEAGA

On the way down we took [U.S. Route] 101. I remember he took 101, the coast, and of course we were hungry, and so I think we stopped off at a fast-food hamburger place. [laughter] Totally reminded me of Camp John Hay. So that was, again, a neat thing about just hamburgers and fries and shakes, because we don't have that in the Philippines. This is something, like, in the middle of the night you can drive into and you can get that.

SINGSON

And also the fast food is something new.

GEAGA

Yes, it's totally new. So I think we stop, and then we get in earlier in the morning. I think my dad drives to the Greyhound station to pick up my older brother and sister, my aunt. See, we couldn't fit all of us into one car, so that's why they had to take the bus. And we sleep for, like, I don't know, hours, a day and a half, two days. Waking up in L.A. I remember my aunt and my cousins, my sisters, my mom's older sister married to the ambassador, the consul general.

SINGSON

Now, how is your dad? How has he settled in L.A. at this time? Do you have a house?

GEAGA

Yes. So by the time he meets us in San Francisco, he now rents a house on Commonwealth Avenue, Commonwealth Street, which is two blocks away from where the ambassador lives, which he lives on Sixth [Street] and Virgil [Avenue]. And the Philippine Consulate, I think, is on Wilshire [Avenue] and Vermont [Avenue].

SINGSON

How was he able to afford this? He's going to school. Oh, I'm sorry. He's already working.

GEAGA

Working, yes. By this time I think he did one year in school, and then becomes full-time, so he's already working.

SINGSON

And your mom, what is her plan? Was she going to look for work, or is it business? What is sort of the economic, financial plans?

GEAGA

Oh, yes, this is funny. So we move into this house. It's a big huge house. It's a California bungalow, lots of rooms upstairs, big room downstairs with the kitchen. I remember the first six months my mom saying, "God, it's hard here in the U.S. In the Philippines I don't have to cook, I don't have to clean, and then here I have to do all of those."

SINGSON

Right. And just to clarify, because you had servants in the Philippines.

GEAGA

Yes, we had servants in the Philippines. So anyway, I remember her just stating it that this is really a hard life. I remember the washing machine we had. It's where you had to put the clothes through, to squeeze the water out. It was still—we don't have all the modern—

SINGSON

Did the kids have to help out the mom?

GEAGA

Yes. I mean, we did as much as we can, but it seems like we had—schooling was so much, you know. I just remember standing and seeing how she would be so frustrated and complaining. [laughs] But you know what? What we did, what my mom did was—and I think it was with the advice of her older brother, the doctor, kind of in helping her with this migration—

SINGSON

And adjustment.

GEAGA

And adjustment. He said, "You'll need servants here." That's what he said. So I think however way they worked it out, as part of my uncle's consular corps that came, like, a year before with my dad, my aunt, the youngest sister of my mom, and our maid came, like, a year before as part of the consular corps.

SINGSON

So you mean a maid in the Philippines.

GEAGA

In the Philippines, who was our maid then growing up. So from when we were growing up, she was our maid.

SINGSON

Taking care of the kids or doing other chores?

GEAGA

Taking care of the kids, taking care of us. She came from, I forget, some province in the north. I guess she didn't have any more parents, and she was a friend of one of the people who were renting the laundry, the managers.

SINGSON

But not related to your family.

GEAGA

No, not related, but she was already working—she was our maid growing up then. She came as part of the consular corps, and then she went to help my uncle in Chicago. My uncle, the doctor, was always based in Chicago, so she stayed with them until we came over.

SINGSON

And then she moved to L.A. when she heard—

GEAGA

Moved back. Yes, when we were here. So the first six months for my mom, that's when she had to do everything herself. It was really hard. So I think she finally talked to my uncle, her older brother. Manang Simping is our maid, who pretty much we all grew up with her.

SINGSON

Is it Manang Simping?

GEAGA

Yes, Manang Simping.

SINGSON

Just out of curiosity, was she ever—we think about a lot of the maids being brought her from the Philippines. They have a very difficult time with papers because they're not being documented because they're not highly skilled in immigration laws. Was she finally ever—

GEAGA

Able to get her documents?

SINGSON

Able to get her documents.

GEAGA

Yes. She originally came as part of the consular corps, as my uncle's consular corps service. Of course, my uncle was only—he was reassigned then to New York, and that was probably another, maybe, five years afterwards. So Manang Simping, I guess she married somebody. That's how she was able to get her citizenship.

SINGSON

Now, in L.A. growing up, you're in fourth grade. Do you remember having to adjust to your elementary school? Well, first of all, let's name the elementary school that you went to.

GEAGA

When we came in January, I was registered at Precious Blood Elementary School.

SINGSON

And this is a Catholic school?

GEAGA

It's a Catholic school. My cousin [Tony Holigores], the son of my mom's older sister, the son of the ambassador, was going to the same elementary school.

SINGSON

And they were able to take you in the middle of the school year in January?

GEAGA

Yes. Yes, they took me in, and I had to repeat fourth grade again because I had finished fourth grade in the Philippines.

SINGSON

That's right.

GEAGA

But anyway, it's kind of like a natural thing that I would go to that elementary school. We were close. We were only a few blocks away, so I could walk. My brother and I could walk there.

SINGSON

Do you remember if there were a lot of Filipinos besides your cousin and your siblings?

GEAGA

There were other Filipino Americans, but while they were Filipino, they were Filipino Americans, so they were kind of different from Filipino, me, fresh off the boat Filipino.

SINGSON

And you made the distinction right away?

GEAGA

Yes, maybe the accent.

SINGSON

Can I just pause for a moment? [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

So we're back to recording, just to adjust the wires. I was just about to ask how you made a distinction right away, and you mentioned that it was accent. What about culture, so cultural differences? Do you see it right away, Filipino versus Filipino American?

GEAGA

Not immediately. I think I just noticed it because they were kind of standoffish. [bells ringing] [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

So you were talking about not having to distinguish Filipino American versus Filipino culture right away. And how do you say that? Why wasn't there so much difference in terms of culture?

GEAGA

There wasn't or there was?

SINGSON

I thought you said there wasn't.

GEAGA

Oh, yes. I didn't notice a cultural difference. It was more the standoffish and accent, maybe some mannerisms. But, yes, gradually I got to be friends with the other Filipino Americans, and the fact that they knew I was cousins with Tony, who was son of the consul general, then it's kind of like my card of—

SINGSON

So that happens with kids too.

GEAGA

Yes. [laughter] "Ah-oh, you're cousins with Tony," you know, that kind of thing.

SINGSON

Is it because he was the son, or is it also—did Tony do very well in school?

GEAGA

Yes, he excelled in sports. He was the son. He was kind of known, and everybody wants to be his friend.

SINGSON

You seem to suggest that there's a lot of Filipinos in Precious Blood.

GEAGA

Maybe three families, three families.

SINGSON

I'm sorry, three families of Filipino Americans besides you?

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

And what was your interaction like, I mean not just with Filipinos but with other kids that are non-Filipinos, especially your first time being exposed to non-Filipinos?

GEAGA

That was a shock to me because the girls in my class—it was coed—I said, wow, they used makeup here. At that young an age they're even using lipstick. [laughter] To me it was kind of—or they seem so much what we would consider to be so grownup. So culturally that was a shocker to me. They're very outspoken, not the shy Mahinhin. So that was like a cultural shock to me as far as the non-Filipino classmates.

SINGSON

Now, your exposure to non-Filipinos, is it just sort of at this point through school? I'm thinking outside of the community, outside of the school, and looking at how your family's interaction is with the community at large in Los Angeles. So can you describe your feelings, your sense of how L.A. is, how Los Angeles was in terms of diversity and racial composition and racial interaction?

GEAGA

Yes. It doesn't come into focus, so really it's my exposure in school. I do have Filipinos who are Filipino Americans, then, of course, my family, my cousin who's prominent in the community, but no sense other than then there's the non-Filipinos, the white folks. Even notion of Latinos or African Americans is not even—

SINGSON

Is it because you're living in a mostly Filipino area?

GEAGA

Which is now today Echo Park, Beverly Boulevard, Commonwealth [Street], Third [Street] and Virgil. It's predominantly—it's still predominantly white, not too many Latinos or African Americans, no African Americans, maybe some other Asian families and Filipinos. It's a lot of Filipino families.

SINGSON

Did you ever interact with your neighbor, your white neighbors or some of the other Asian neighbors?

GEAGA

We did. We had a Korean neighbor. She became really good friends with my mom. I think she was also an immigrant. They shared the same kind of reality, the fact that, oh, at home we had maids and then here we have to do laundry and cook dinner. They eventually become co-workers once Manang Simping comes and joins us. Then my mom goes to work.

SINGSON

Where did she work?

GEAGA

She worked for an insurance company down on Commonwealth and Sixth [Avenue].

SINGSON

This would be sort of her first—

GEAGA

Her first, yes—

SINGSON

—job?

GEAGA

Job, yes.

SINGSON

What about your sense of—do you have to go to the market? I'm just sort of getting a sense of Los Angeles, the diversity of L.A., at least the part of L.A. where you're going to.

GEAGA

Yes, probably we would go to the market once a week, my mom would. We'd go to Grand Central Market downtown Broadway [Avenue]. I don't know if you've ever been there.

SINGSON

The today's?

GEAGA

Today's, yes. You could still see the Angel's Flight, because that's where my mom's older sister, Auntie Sofing, would also go for market, so that would be the market she would go to. So to me, it seemed like a regular bustling market that I would see in the Philippines in Baguio with lots of people, lots of stuff going on.

SINGSON

And who are mostly the vendors? Who do you see? Do you see Filipino vendors?

GEAGA

I think there you could see a more diverse group of vendors. They're not all white. In fact, maybe that's my first sense of Latino, but I still see them as vendors, the market where it's bustling, lots of different kinds of people engaged in their business, selling their stuff. The racial composition really doesn't come into focus. My Auntie Sofing, the wife of the ambassador, she was a great cook, and because the ambassador was the consul general, he was the consul general, they would host all of these receptions pretty much probably every—it seemed like it was every day. Maybe not that often. And my mom, we would go there, be part of that.

SINGSON

And you're always part of these receptions? Your family's always part of the receptions?

GEAGA

Yes, we were always invited to come, but my aunt, Auntie Sofing, would have to go to the market all the time because she prepared

the food. She also had her maids, and they would prepare all this food, just constantly working in the kitchen. They had a nice big house, mansion on Sixth and Virgil. They've torn it down now, but they had a big yard, and so they would always have these receptions.

SINGSON

So you were exposed to a lot of Filipino parties even at this point.

GEAGA

At this point, yes. So the Filipino kind of maybe it was assuring that there was—because of our connection with my aunt's family, with the consul general, we got to know a lot of Filipinos through them.

SINGSON

And having this sense of the Filipinos going through these parties and the Filipino families that you're exposed to, and even the Filipino young people that you're exposed to, how would you compare them, so the Filipinos here versus your sense of Filipinos in the Philippines while you were still there, in terms of having these get-togethers that are so often versus what your remembrance is of the Philippines?

GEAGA

Yes, in the Philippines a lot of this stuff was very seldom and it wasn't primarily with cousins. So, yes, this is really different. This thing of the interaction with Filipinos here in the U.S. was clearly—I mean, I knew it was clearly connected to my uncle being the consul general, so it was this very active social life that I wasn't accustomed to. It would only be, again, those times when my cousins would come and visit and we had this almost, like, celebration. And I saw this constant celebrating, celebration constantly.

SINGSON

And were you exposed to a lot of kids, too, during these parties?

GEAGA

No, it's primarily the adults. It's later the kids—again, for me it was observing my mom really being more connected socially with other Filipinos and her becoming active or her being kind of recruited or courted to join these other different organizations.

SINGSON

I think because this seems to be such a large story, so your family's involvement started to become involved with the Philippine Women's League. I think I'll reserve that for the next session, but for now let's just maybe talk about other things, such as religious affiliation, perhaps. That wasn't something that we talked about. You were obviously Catholic because of—were you involved at all in any other organizations or exposure to Catholic organizations?

GEAGA

Yes. Once I got kind of settled into Precious Blood School and became friends with other Filipino Americans, through them I became an altar boy, joined the choir, and, thirdly, joined the Boy Scouts.

SINGSON

In Precious Blood?

GEAGA

In Precious Blood School. They had a troop, something, and my cousin Tony was also a member of the Boy Scouts. So this was a nice way just to kind of round out the school experience by being a member of the choir, an altar boy, and going camping, like, once a month, which is really a lot of excitement.

SINGSON

So you go camping outside of L.A.?

GEAGA

Of L.A., yes, the whole troop. Precious Blood School went up to sixth grade, one to six, and I came in at fourth. The other Filipino Americans were all in fifth grade, and my cousin was already in sixth grade. So I was kind of, like, the—

SINGSON

The youngest.

GEAGA

The youngest, yes.

SINGSON

Of all the Filipinos.

GEAGA

The Filipinos, yes, because nobody else—although technically I should have been in the fifth grade with everybody, but I was in the fourth grade. So I participated in these other activities, the choir and the altar boy, with some of the other Filipino Americans. But there were a lot of non-Filipinos who I then became friends with through the choir, through being altar boy, and also through the Scouts.

SINGSON

Now, what was your interaction with them? Was there any sense of "I'm Filipino and they're not" at this age?

GEAGA

No. There was a lot of just this it was great being friends. Not only was I friends now with Fil-Ams because they knew I was Tony's cousin, I was a cousin of Tony's, but then I became friends with a lot of—because they were a grade above me, so then I had developed friendships with other classmates in my class.

SINGSON

And they don't look at you differently because of an accent, for example?

GEAGA

No, they never made me feel like I was different. Yes, we just became—it was being classmates. We'd talk about—or we'd be playing on the playground. We'd be roughing it a little bit. I remember one of the big nuns, Sister Angela. I was playing with this friend of mine. I guess we were kind of playing roughly, and I kind of stuck him with my pencil. She picks me up and shakes me and throws me against the fence. [laughter] "You never do that again."

SINGSON

Now, that's also one of the things that I forgot to mention. So now you have exposure to non-Filipino teachers. What was that like for you?

GEAGA

Well, it was new. I'm beginning to recognize that this is not the Philippines anymore. This is really a new environment. It's lots of different types of people. See, I quickly get over that or quickly accept that. So I don't linger with the fact that I'm not in the Philippines anymore. It's just this new, this visual experience, that there's a lot of new things that's different, and I kind of just accept it and embrace it and go along with it.

SINGSON

And just to kind of wrap this session up, did you ever feel nostalgic to your Philippine life growing up and perhaps even now? You mentioned in the very beginning of the interview when I asked you about what was your Philippine experience, you said it's very idyllic. So what is your perception of the Philippines? [bells ringing] [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

We're back to recording. So just the question of what your perception is in the Philippines or maybe even both when you were younger and also even today.

GEAGA

Yes, I think once we come here, get settled in school, I really—kind of the Philippines kind of recedes to the background, and I'm just really excited about all that's new here. I kind of delve into it wholeheartedly in the L.A. community with the new friends I've made in Precious Blood School, the fact that I'm in choir and altar boy, in the Scouts, all these activities. Yes, it felt like it was great living in L.A. The thing that was looming—because this is the spring of '65, the thing that was looming was my uncle in Chicago wanted me and my younger brother to move to Chicago, for us to go live there and go to school, to be kind of the older brothers of my younger cousin, the only son, because they weren't going to have any more kids. But he was going to kind of adopt us and send us to school and give us whatever we wanted. And I was dreading it. I was dreading it because I said—

SINGSON

But it was a possibility, a strong possibility?

GEAGA

Well, my mom was pretty much resigned that we were going to go, and I kind of said, "Well, okay, I'll go for the summer." I kind of gave in, but I knew inside of me I was only staying for the summer. I was going to come back to L.A. because there was so many things going on in L.A. and that's where I wanted to go to school.

SINGSON

And you won?

GEAGA

Well, I did go to Chicago for the summer. My uncle came out and my cousin Gary came out. They stayed for a few days. Then we went to Union Station to take the three-night train ride. But we packed like we were going to go and stay with them, even though I knew in my heart I was going to come back. And toward the end of

the summer I said, “Uncle, I really need to go back to L.A.” I came up with all kinds of excuses.

SINGSON

Did your brother also decide to go back to L.A.?

GEAGA

Well, he was very quiet and kind of, like, didn’t speak anything, and somehow I vouched for him. I said, “He needs to come back too,” because I couldn’t see him stay. I hope my cousin doesn’t listen to this. [laughter] We’ve never really talked about it. But he was so upset, my uncle. He really was so upset. He called me being ungrateful and don’t appreciate what opportunity. I said, “Well, I really appreciate this, but I know I’m not going to be happy here. You know what I’m saying? That’s really all it came down to, and great that you’re offering me this opportunity.” But I couldn’t even—I was basically just quiet and had my uncle—

SINGSON

Vent.

GEAGA

Vent. Exactly.

SINGSON

Did he ever forgive you, or were things ever resolved?

GEAGA

You know, we never did. We never did. He passed away over twenty years ago now. They eventually moved back. They moved to L.A.

SINGSON

You mean your cousin?

GEAGA

My uncle and my cousin and the family. They moved from Chicago. They lived here. We were in friendly terms, but we never really

reconciled, never really looked back to talk about that. I don't know. It's just one of those things that happened. I was very strong-willed about what I wanted, what I wanted to do.

SINGSON

For a young child, too.

GEAGA

For being young, being at that age. I knew I wasn't going to be happy for whatever reason. But anyway, we came back at the end of the summer. It's kind of like everybody was just relieved. I thought of my aunt, one aunt—because everybody was—I guess everybody knew about this, but somehow I came back at the end of the summer.

SINGSON

And they wanted you all back in L.A.? They wanted you both to be back in L.A.?

GEAGA

Yes, I mean, I think my family, my mom. We never, again, talked about this. I guess it's the Filipino way.

SINGSON

Yes, the silence in family.

GEAGA

Yes, silence. But she was happy we were back, and started school again in the fall like nothing had happened. I decided when we went there, my uncle bought us lots of clothes and bikes, and I decided to just leave it and not take it with me.

SINGSON

Okay. Let's end there, and we'll continue the story of you going back to school in L.A. and your family's involvement in the organization community, Filipino community, on the next session. Thank you very much, Jaime.

GEAGA

Thank you. [End of July 27, 2011 interview]

1.2. Session Two (AUGUST 3, 2011)

SINGSON

Today is August 3, 2011, and we are doing our second session interview with Jaime Geaga. This is Precious Singson doing the interview. How are you, Jaime?

GEAGA

Good. Great.

SINGSON

Very good. So we ended our last interview session with your experiences in elementary school, and this is pretty much your adjustment period coming from the Philippines. You moved here on your fourth grade. So let's try to move on. So when were you at Precious Blood [Elementary School]? Is it from fourth grade until what grade?

GEAGA

Fourth grade, and then the following year I think I did fifth grade. And then we moved from Echo Park on Commonwealth Avenue to Larchmont Village, and that's where I grew up. My mom was able to purchase a house. We bought our house, I think it was '67, 1967, and moved over there, and pretty much that's where I transferred elementary school. I moved to Christ the King Elementary School. It's right on the corner of Melrose [Avenue] and Vine [Street], and we lived on Lucerne [Street] and Melrose. The boundary is Rossmore, which starts Hancock Park.

SINGSON

And this is also a Catholic school?

GEAGA

It's a Catholic school, yes.

SINGSON

Were you also involved—last time we talked about Precious Blood, you were involved in becoming an altar boy. Did that religious involvement continue in Christ the King?

GEAGA

You know, in Christ the King there was no choir and there was no altar boy, no opportunity, so I kind of missed leaving Precious Blood. But Precious Blood only went up to sixth grade, so, yes, I think I finished fourth, fifth, and sixth at Precious Blood, and then started senior, I guess. No, no. Now I'm getting confused.

SINGSON

It's okay.

GEAGA

I think I finished sixth, seventh, and eighth at Christ the King, and then high school was nine through twelve. That's right. In '68 I go to high school at a Catholic school also.

SINGSON

And your high school?

GEAGA

Daniel Murphy High School, which is on Third [Street] and La Brea. It's run by the Dominican Brothers, Dominican denomination.

SINGSON

And since we're on the topic of religion, because hopefully we can come back to this later, we'll touch it again, but for now let's deal with this, your religious experience. Has this affected you in any way while you were growing up? Was your family perhaps affiliated with religious organizations, or was it just sort of a school experience?

GEAGA

Firstly, it was a school experience, but I think being a Filipino family and Filipino background, Catholicism is very strong, has very strong influence. So I think the tradition is to really go to Catholic school, and I guess it was just something that we, for me, I accepted or that was part of growing up not only here in the U.S., but that was the tradition in the Philippines, and the fact that three of my aunts on my dad's side are nuns or sisters. Both my parents, they themselves were not religious, so to speak, quote, unquote. They went to Mass. We did the rosaries on Wednesdays, the Novena. I remember doing that all my growing-up childhood and probably—

SINGSON

You mean at home or at the church?

GEAGA

At home. At home on Wednesday night. It was like a ritual, and I remember growing up that we had—and my mom [Remedios Vergara Geaga] was the one that did it. So maybe her doing that—I guess looking back now, she was religious, but she really didn't go and do volunteer work in the church. She went to Mass every Sunday and did the Novena.

SINGSON

And has that impacted, do you think, your view of life, your values, and even attending private school? Is this what you would call a typical Filipino experience at that time?

GEAGA

I think so. I think I'd call it a typical Filipino experience. The only time that I start to question it is when my brother and sister stop going to Mass and my mom confronts them why they don't go to church anymore.

SINGSON

This is later in life, or while you're—

GEAGA

This is, like, around ’68, which is the same time that I start high school, start high school.

SINGSON

But you’re still in the Catholic school?

GEAGA

Oh, yes. I’m finishing eighth grade at Christ the King, and I think I’m just getting ready to start high school at Daniel Murphy High School.

SINGSON

Your brother and your sister seem to have a very big influence in you. You mentioned that they influenced you in terms of viewing religion. How have they impacted you in your views while going through Catholic high school?

GEAGA

I think I maintain my own views about religion. It was interesting for me to just listen what their reason for not going to Mass. I forget exactly what it is anymore, but it was a discourse, a topic of discourse in the morning, not only that, but including them being active in the Antiwar Movement. The act of even discussing it is what kind of makes me think maybe I guess there’s other ways, there’s other cultural—it just made me start to think, not that I questioned. It’s not later in life. But it just made me think, yes, I guess there are other ways of how you grow up or influence. But by and large, through elementary school and through high school I considered it was normal to be Catholic as being a normal Filipino family and going to Catholic school.

SINGSON

Was there a lot of Filipinos in Christ the King and also in Dominican?

GEAGA

None at Christ the King that I can remember. So a lot of the Filipino Americans that I got to be friends with at Precious Blood stayed in

Precious Blood, or they moved out of Echo Park and moved to Monterey Park. They moved further east into the suburbs, and I found myself being just the only Filipino at Christ the King, myself and my younger brother [Joaquin Geaga]. But by that time it seemed like it wasn't too big of an adjustment because I had kind of started to socialize into the culture and started to accept that there were a lot of non-Filipinos, that being the only wasn't so weird anymore.

SINGSON

I'm trying to get a sense of the number of Filipino families staying here sort of in the Los Angeles area, because you do mention that families move away, so to Monterey, east to Monterey and towards more suburban area. Did you get a sense that there's a lot of Filipino families here where you were living? Or where in L.A. area do they live?

GEAGA

You know, I think again, my sense of Filipinos and Filipino families is when we first arrive, you see a lot of Filipinos at social gatherings that were organized by my uncle [Alejandro Holigores], the consul general. And then through there, my mom becomes more active with the Sampaguita Women's Circle, again, during their monthly meeting, their annual Queen Contest. That's where I see lots of Filipinos.

SINGSON

Did they come from outside of L.A.?

GEAGA

Yes. My notion is that there were families coming from Long Beach, from the South Bay. They were coming in from South Central, also locally here in Echo Park, and then just some of the Filipino families and their kids that I start to become really good friends with, they originally were living in Echo Park, but moved to a nicer, bigger house in Monterey Park, Alhambra.

SINGSON

So Filipinos are pretty much dispersed.

GEAGA

Dispersed, yes.

SINGSON

Geographically.

GEAGA

Geographically. The only place that I knew that there were kind of a visible concentration of Filipinos is when we were living on Commonwealth area, Beverly [Boulevard] and Commonwealth, which is Echo Park, because that's where a lot of the other Filipino American friends that I had were also going to Precious Blood School.

SINGSON

And did they actually continue on to a local—

GEAGA

Yes, they continued to live there, and even when I moved, when our family moved to Larchmont Village, I still kept in touch with these friends of mine who lived—because towards the beginning of high school I was still in touch. We formed a band, so we would get together maybe on weekends to practice.

SINGSON

And just for the record, what's the name of the band?

GEAGA

The very first band, I can't remember our name. But then eventually that evolved to the formation of a Barkada, [unclear] band.

SINGSON

And this is linked through SIPA [Search to Involve Pilipino Americans], right?

GEAGA

It coincides. It predates SIPA, actually.

SINGSON

Well, we'll talk about that because since this is later on. But since you already mentioned your mother's involvement with Philippine Women's, so let's try to kind of talk about that first initial community involvement of your family and your observations of the Filipino families. So how did she get involved in Philippine Women's, or is it Sampaguita first?

GEAGA

Sampaguita Women's Circle. I don't think she never really officially joined the Philippine Women's Circle or the Philippine Women's—what's the "C" stand for? It's something.

SINGSON

The PWC?

GEAGA

Yes. Philippine Women's something. Early on, I think in 1966, she was recruited by the founder of the Sampaguita Women's Circle, Carmen Salumbides. She was the president at the time, and I remember she was being groomed by Mrs. Salumbides kind of to become an officer of the club and eventually become the president of the Sampaguita Women's Circle. Because she was an officer during those early years—of course, I was still young—we would always be tagging along. She would—

SINGSON

Drag you along.

GEAGA

Drag us, yes, the kids, all over the L.A. area because the monthly meetings would be held at members' homes. So I remember going to the South Bay, maybe in the [San Fernando] Valley or in Monterey Park.

SINGSON

The Sampaguita Circle was a big—

GEAGA

It was a big women's circle. I remember the organization. At the meetings would be lots of kids running around, lots of food. A lot of the women members would be sitting, and the living room would usually be packed. The husbands would be outside drinking beer.

SINGSON

And as far as you can remember, has Sampaguita Circle been around for a long time, and who were the founders, the members of it? Were they families from an earlier migratory wave of Filipinos?

GEAGA

Yes. I believe, yes. I think a lot of the families were already here during the fifties, and Mrs. Salumbides, I believe, was the founder. Another prominent name that I remember was part of the officers was Mrs. Anthony, Dolly Anthony, Mrs. [Nellie] Mationg.

SINGSON

And what was this for? What was this organization for?

GEAGA

It's a civic organization maybe to promote pride in Filipino culture.

SINGSON

And the activities that they were involved in, what were they, and was it really only mainly for women or did they involved the kids too? You mentioned their annual—is it Queen Contest?

GEAGA

Yes. It was primarily a civic organization. They would raise funds, and their main fundraising activity was the annual Miss Little Sampaguita Pageant, which was held in December during the holidays. It would be held at the Ambassador Hotel, which is now a school. The Coconut Grove, I remember us little kids running around the Coconut Grove. That went on for several years, I think, through the late sixties, ’66 through ’69.

SINGSON

And as far as you can remember, what did the families get from this, from the Queen Contests? What was the benefit of it for your family, for your mom?

GEAGA

I think for my mom, just the social interaction, because probably this was her only interaction with other Filipinos besides just once a month coming together, Filipinos. The rest of the month was probably—first we lived in Commonwealth, and then when we moved to Larchmont Village, there were no Filipinos there. Most of our neighbors, in fact all our neighbors were white, so that’s where my first sense of a white neighbor, because when we were living in Commonwealth, our next-door neighbor was Korean. Never really had—and I think other families on either side of the house were, like, Latinos.

SINGSON

You mean in Commonwealth?

GEAGA

Commonwealth, yes. But when we moved into Lucerne, our next-door neighbor were these elderly white couple who were—so, for me, was the stereotypical, this is a white—

SINGSON

Is it like a suburban area at this point, the row houses of—what was it like?

GEAGA

No, no, no. It's houses from the thirties, so there's still the California-style homes, pre-war, single-family dwelling homes with nice big yards, front and back.

SINGSON

How did they react to non-whites moving into the area?

GEAGA

Well, our neighbor, Mrs. Spear, she and her husband, she was sweet and welcoming, but she would always—she was curious about what Filipino families were. I remember her asking me small questions, and I would try to answer. I felt this curiosity of hers to find out more about our family, where we came from and that kind of thing. So she was welcoming, and I remember her inviting me and my siblings, my sisters, to have lemonade during the summer in her house, and her house was so neat and nice and really nice old furniture.

SINGSON

And as opposed to how you would think of a Filipino family's homes, what is it typically like versus your white neighbors' home?

GEAGA

It was just her and her husband, and so as opposed to a Filipino family, not only were there parents but lots of kids and aunts and uncles. There were more people in the home, and here it's just like there's only these two people living here with all this space. It's just so weird for me. But, god, they have all these rooms and there's only two of them.

SINGSON

So heading back to the Sampaguita Women's Circle, did you ever get yourself involved with any of the Queen Contests? You as a child, what did you get out of this? What was your view of why this happens?

GEAGA

Well, since my mom dragged myself and my younger brother, we were sons, so we never were able to compete, because this is a Miss Little Sampaguita Women's Circle. So it was more from the sidelines watching, like, the meeting before that, who was going to be the Little Miss Sampaguita Queen or whatever.

SINGSON

So there was a sense of excitement even for the young kids?

GEAGA

Yes, because I guess there would be—whoever bought the most tickets for that Little Miss Sampaguita would be the queen, which would be the following month, this big celebration.

SINGSON

So it's not based on beauty.

GEAGA

No. It's based on the [unclear], so for me that was interesting. It was just based on how many tickets you could sell, so there was this active solicitation of more tickets to buy and sell and stuff, but it was all in the spirit of raising funds for the organization.

SINGSON

So to bring it back also, because you were related to the consul general, what was the relationship of the Sampaguita Women's Circle to the consulate?

GEAGA

By this time I think my uncle, the consul general, I think was being reassigned probably by '68, so had been reassigned out to New York. But it was more early on that that's where my mom is able to be introduced to the existing organizations in L.A., and as she becomes more involved with the Sampaguita Women's Circle, it's kind of an independent activity. And then as officer, she would

attend the parties that the consul general hosted. But it was shortly after we moved to Larchmont Village my mom becomes active in the Sampaguita Women's Circle. My uncle, I think he gets reassigned and he moves to New York, I think by '68.

SINGSON

And your sense of the social position of most of the Filipino families, are they kind of on the middle-class? Were the parents skilled laborers, workers? I'm trying to get a sense of—you say that most of the families are from the early fifties. What was their social position, social class?

GEAGA

They tend to be normal, maybe middle-class. I think my sense is that a lot of the Filipino families were women married to old-timers, so I didn't get any sense of families that were more related to the navy or the military here in Los Angeles. There could have been one or two that came from South Bay, the Long Beach naval base, but a lot of Filipino families that I remember were more Filipino younger wives with families already, children, but their husbands were much older, manongs from the early thirties.

SINGSON

It's very interesting because it's almost typical throughout the West Coast. You have this group of people who married older manong, but do you also see the manongs, single manongs, in L.A., and how did they interact with groups such as yours?

GEAGA

The single manongs, I don't specifically notice it, not until my mother becomes involved with FACLA [Filipino American Community of Los Angeles]. But through the Women's Circle, it's a lot of families, parents with kids. That's the late sixties.

SINGSON

And how did your mom get involved with FACLA?

GEAGA

The Sampaguita Women's Circle, I think, would sometimes use FACLA, the venue, to hold their meetings. This is what I understand. I'm not definitely—I'm guessing now.

SINGSON

Right. No, that's okay.

GEAGA

I'm guessing. But I think occasionally they would have their meetings there. My sister [Joselyn Geaga], from what I understand, she was doing her social work. She was doing her master's in social work at USC [University of Southern California], and I think a part of doing that program was to work—I think she was able to bring in the lunch program at FACLA at one time. So this is all simultaneously going on, and I think my mom is actively the president of the Philippine Women's Circle. The FACLA, I think, had events at that time that would invite all the Filipino organizations and have some sort of kind of an annual—because it being the Filipino community. And I think during my mom's tenure as president of the Sampaguita Women's Circle, that's how she becomes involved with the FACLA and kind of sees that, yes, this should be the umbrella organization for the whole Filipino community.

SINGSON

So you're saying it should be because it wasn't before?

GEAGA

Well, it was. It was functioning. She could see how the Sampaguita Women's Circle was just one, and there was this other broader Filipino—and she was already aware of that because the presidents of the FACLA would also be invited earlier on to the consulate functions that my uncle would host.

SINGSON

I see. And just to clarify, the Philippine Women's Circle is different from the Sampaguita, but you also mentioned Sampaguita Philippine Women's Circle. So are those two different—

GEAGA

No, no, no, no. There's only two women's group that I'm familiar with. There's the Philippine Women's Circle and the Sampaguita Women's Circle.

SINGSON

But your mom was only involved in the Sampaguita?

GEAGA

Sampaguita Women's Circle, yes.

SINGSON

So the demographic of FACLA is different from the Sampaguita?

GEAGA

Yes, it's very different. I think the FACLA was primarily where the manongs, single men, and maybe a handful of them would have wives, and a number of them, their wives were white, Caucasian.

SINGSON

So there's a lot of interracial families within FACLA?

GEAGA

Well, let's say the FACLA was predominantly manongs, maybe 80 percent, and then 20 percent were manongs who were married. Their wives were probably never really members of either of the Women's Circle or Sampaguita Women's Circle, as far as I understand or I remember that.

SINGSON

And so because of this demographic, what were the differences in their activities or their causes or whatever both are working for?

GEAGA

I think the FACLA early on really didn't have a lot of programs, but they had a building, which was good because a lot of times these other organizations would either have to go to members' house.

SINGSON

And just for the record, where's the building of FACLA?

GEAGA

The FACLA is located on Temple, 1740 West Temple Street. I don't know a whole lot of history about the building or the FACLA itself, when it was founded. I'm assuming it was founded in the fifties, and that's when the building was built. I don't want to speak for my mom, but I think she recognizes that it's another pillar organization, the organization that she belonged to, but that this was another pillar organization that was a major part of the community that I think she wanted to be involved with. They had a building, and that's an important thing. It's just that it seemed like there was no real program.

SINGSON

So they don't hold a lot of activities, the organization itself. It's just a building.

GEAGA

Building, yes, so it was kind of open to other organizations to use.

SINGSON

Were you also ever involved in folk dancing? That's a typical experience of a young Filipino American growing up? Were you ever involved in a group or as part of the Sampaguita Women's Circle?

GEAGA

Yes, during the summer. Another major community institution in L.A. is the Filipino Christian Church, which is located on Union Street just maybe two blocks from where FACLA is on Temple. That had a

large congregation of Filipinos, but never really got to know them until they would host this annual cultural school. Somehow, I attended one of those early on and became part of those activities.

SINGSON

Do you remember if this was encouraged by your mom? I guess, how were you introduced to that group?

GEAGA

I think for me it was more accidental. It wasn't through my mom or anything. I think it was just my beginning to be involved with other Filipino Americans. I think with Uncle Roy, I must have met him and he invited me to come to this cultural school. It was Filipino folk dancing. It struck my interest. I said, "Sure."

SINGSON

So what was it like? Why did you join, and what was the experience like dancing with other Filipinos?

GEAGA

I had very vague memories of when I was still growing up in Baguio in Saint Louis [University] seeing Filipinescas perform, and I said, "Wow." It was like a stage performance. So anyway, it was folk dance. So maybe I would get to learn some of those dances.

SINGSON

Later on.

GEAGA

Later on. I mean that's when they said there's this Filipino cultural school, so that sparked my interest.

SINGSON

And was this also a way for you to meet other Filipino Americans, or was that easy for you to network with other young Filipinos during this time? Who were joining that group?

GEAGA

Other Filipino Americans.

SINGSON

From L.A.?

GEAGA

From L.A. Well, I think it was primarily through the Filipino Christian Church. So I think that was the main contact. It was a cultural school that was organized by the Filipino Christian Church, and by fluke, I don't know, I probably run into Uncle Roy and he invites me to come, and I said, "Oh, great." So I meet other Filipinos who I've kind of also run into in the past.

SINGSON

Was this ever in any way—did this ever affect your sense of who you are as a Filipino? As I've said before, this is sort of a typical Filipino American experience. Looking back at it now, did it ever affect you, your folk dancing?

GEAGA

Yes. I think for me this is still part of that, that recognition when we first boarded the boat, the ship, to come to the U.S., of being Filipino, so this constant thing of what does it mean to be Filipino, and then coming to the U.S., and then my first experience of going to grade school at Precious Blood, that's constantly trying to reinforce what that Filipino is because I think when I was in the Philippines growing up, I just took it for granted. And then here, being in the U.S. in this new environment, while I accepted the new environment, I kind of just grabbed onto anything that was Filipino for me.

SINGSON

Is it because the demographic of the people in school are non-Filipino, and so are you sort of living two lives as sort of a typical

American kid in school, and then you have something to grab on, as Filipino dancing or Filipino meetings? So how did you manage?

GEAGA

Somehow for me, it's like I wanted to learn more about what this Filipino identity was for me. I kind of embraced it. I talked to other Filipinos or Filipino Americans who have a different perspective to it, where they just completely try to assimilate and have nothing to do with their Filipino background.

SINGSON

Assimilate, you mean in mainstream?

GEAGA

Mainstream, yes. So that was kind of odd for me, whereas in my case I wanted to know more about my Filipino—what it meant to be Filipino. I kind of distinguished myself from that. So anyway, I kind of took note. I was already aware of that early on.

SINGSON

You mean moving here to the U.S.?

GEAGA

Yes, that there were even different ways of how other Filipinos wanted to embrace their Filipino background during that period, and in that sense, I was maybe different.

SINGSON

Was there also differences with new Filipino arrivals versus Filipino Americans who were born here or you sort of being in the middle growing up? You arrived a few years back, but you were sort of in this in between.

GEAGA

No, I recognize that difference. I think among Filipino Americans there was more that openness to learn more about the Filipino, the dances, the folk dances, Tagalog, whereas newer Filipino

immigrants, they didn't seem to be that—I mean, I met other Filipinos my age who were more into trying to speak English as perfectly as possible, although there were also other Filipino immigrants who were trying to speak English as much as possible, but they were more familiar with the folk dances, so they kind of showed off their being able to do the dances. [laughs]

SINGSON

So since they're more expert because [unclear].

GEAGA

More expert, right. Yes. Like, "Oh, I know how to do it because we learned this in the Philippines, these folks dances." I guess for me, I never learned them, and so I was anxious to learn how to do them. So I came across a variety of different Filipinos during that period, the late sixties, in seventh and eighth grade, starting high school.

SINGSON

And then Uncle Roy Morales, how did he affect you? Was he just a teacher of folk dancing, or do you consider him a mentor of some sort?

GEAGA

He, himself, was not the coordinator of the cultural school or summer school, Filipino summer school. I just remember him being a prominent person who kind of recruited me to come to these different activities. It was another person who actually run the school. What's his name? I forget his name. I saw Uncle Roy as kind of a—he seemed to be a prominent community leader who kind of would whenever I saw him, he'd say, "Do you want to come to this?" Or, "There's this thing happening."

SINGSON

Now, as far as you can remember, do you know if this kind of organization, the gatherings of young Filipino, was just happening, or is this something that has happened even before in L.A.? I mean, was this group already established? I'm trying to get a sense of if

these kinds of identity-making was, in part, because it's in the 1960s and moved by the Civil Rights Movement and also the larger Filipino American awareness.

GEAGA

No, none of this has existed. There was no existing organization. I think the identity movement, this is more a—how do you call it—an extension or influence of other identity movements going on in the broader L.A. area, specifically the Japanese American identity movement, which, in turn, was also being impacted by the Civil Rights Movement, the African American identity movement, the Black Power Movement. So as Filipinos, we were also being influenced by that.

SINGSON

And for you personally, do you remember what was the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, although this is a little earlier in 1965, 1964? Did you ever have any recollection of it, and what was it like to you? Was it far away or was it close to L.A.?

GEAGA

No. So the Civil Rights Movement is active at this point, so I'm slowly becoming or recognizing it. I mean now it's not till much later do I have a better, fuller understanding of it about how it started in the South. But here in L.A. my first notion or my first coming across with it was the Watts Riots in '65. That's the same year that we come to the U.S. And then shortly after that there's this Black Power Movement. It's, "I am black and I am proud."

SINGSON

Where do you see it? Do you see it on television, through people talking about it?

GEAGA

Television, fashion, see the big hair, afro, the afro. So in fashion it's very prominent.

SINGSON

Do you see kids in your school or Filipinos?

GEAGA

Well, not Filipinos, but I see African—by the time I start high school, which is ’68, I think the afro is kind of already popular among—there’s a lot of African Americans in the high school that I go to, but it’s still predominantly white, very few—no Filipinos, as far as I remember. There was a Filipino priest who was the principal.

SINGSON

What about other Asians?

GEAGA

Not even Asians. It was either black or white, and I was the only Filipino.

SINGSON

And your brother, too.

GEAGA

And my cousin, who was there for about a year, Tony [Holigores], the son of the consul general. He’s there for a year and then he goes—no, he was already at Daniel Murphy High School. I was still in grade school here. By the time I started high school there, he already moves to—relocates to New York. So, yes, visually I see this being proud of your ethnic background.

SINGSON

Were there sort of groups, too? I guess my question is how did this visual observations translate into kind of a political awareness either for you, or even do they have any African Americans groups in high school?

GEAGA

No, nothing. I just notice the fact that, yes, it's proud to be black, and this is going on. So while subconsciously in me it's like I'm also trying to grab for what it is to be Filipino and be proud of it by participating, being open to whatever it is that's going on Filipino.

SINGSON

So you mentioned Japanese Americans. How did you observe the Asian American power? Was it later or just about the time that you were—

GEAGA

About the same time, because this is the same time that Uncle Roy invites me to a conference at Oak Grove, Camp Oak Grove, which is being organized by JACL, Japanese American—

SINGSON

Citizens League.

GEAGA

Citizens League. Actually, the JACL does this summer camp for Japanese Americans every year, I think, since the fifties, whatever, as long as whatever.

SINGSON

And so you were invited to join one of these Asian or Japanese American—

GEAGA

Conference, yes.

SINGSON

So what was it like? Do you remember the year and the title of the conference?

GEAGA

"Are You Curious Yellow?" [laughter] This is in probably '69. "Are You Curious Yellow?"

SINGSON

You were in high school already.

GEAGA

Yes. Uncle Roy says, "You know, we should attend this or we should go to this." This is actually the precursor of SIPA.

SINGSON

Yes.

GEAGA

So it's specifically—well, it's Asian, and "Are You Curious Yellow?" I guess we're Asians. That's why Uncle Roy says, "We can go to this."

SINGSON

When you say "we," you were with other young Filipino Americans?

GEAGA

Well, there's three specific people that he recruits. It's myself and Florante [Ibanez]. It's my first time to run into Florante. I'm a youth. Uncle Roy, I guess he's a community organizer or community leader, and I guess he's recruiting youth to attend this and maybe do something among Filipino Americans, among Fil-Ams. And Charlie Salumbides, I believe, yes, was the third Filipino. We go to this camp, Oak Grove. I totally enjoy it. It's where I first meet Warren Furatani—

SINGSON

And what are your observations?

GEAGA

—and Mia Iwataki. And then this is kind of maybe my first notion of Asian. So it's Filipinos and then it's whites and blacks, so nothing about Asians. This is my first exposure to Asians. I guess we're Asians because we're part of Asia. [laughter]

SINGSON

So, Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans?

GEAGA

Primarily Japanese Americans. We call them the Buddha-heads at that time. They even called themselves Buddha-heads at that time.

SINGSON

And what was it like? So, of course, there was a visual experience.

GEAGA

Yes, and the whole thrust is to explore your Asian-ness and be proud of it. I think that was kind of, for me, reaffirming, even though it was not specifically Filipino. I said, "I'm part of this more general category. We are Asians, and these are Asians."

SINGSON

Are there people who come over to talk about being Asian?

GEAGA

There's workshops, yes. I remember workshops and games and a lot of fun, swimming in the pool, hiking. And then there would be these groups that would be led by—at that time it was Warren. I don't know if you're familiar with Warren.

SINGSON

Yes. Warren is our leader and not part of the youth.

GEAGA

Yes, he's an organizer. He's on the same level as Uncle Roy.

SINGSON

Now, I want to get also a sense of what is fun besides meeting the people. So obviously there's new friends. What is the workshop doing for you, and how did the identity affirmation working through these workshops and the networks of people that you're working, that you're meeting?

GEAGA

I think for me what kind of, again, sticks in my mind is just a lot of these affirming questions about we need to be proud of where we come from, who we are, some history. They probably talked about some history, maybe the [Japanese] internment. But a lot of it was so all new information, and just for me it was really exciting. It's kind of like breaking out of my own Filipino shell, because before even this was the experience with the social activities with my mom through her activities in the Sampaguita Women's Circle and then in that school. But again, it was a more organized setting to kind of affirm what I saw visually out in school, on the street was that there was this diversity of people, and then that coming to this conference was kind of just affirming our own specific identity as being valid and we should be proud of it, and it kind of matched what I'm seeing in the real world of other blacks being proud about being black. It didn't seem like the whites had to affirm that, that they were confident, whatever they did. They didn't have to reaffirm their pride. I mean, it kind of just came naturally, and I could see that. For blacks, they had to do that, and somehow in this setting for me for the first time—I mean, I probably never consciously felt that I should—in Filipino settings like Sampaguita Women's meetings or the pageants we were all happy, having a great time, but there wasn't that ritual to affirm our being Filipinos, but I think we were kind of proud to be within that setting. It's in this conference, in this Asian conference, that there is this more conscious sense to affirm that, and I thought that was great.

SINGSON

Yes.

GEAGA

Very self-fulfilling.

SINGSON

And you mentioned that this is happening every year?

GEAGA

No, this is the first time I attended, and so as soon as that conference is over, the four of us who attend that say, "You know, we should do this for Filipinos. Next year we should do Camp Oak Grove, our own specific Filipino Camp Oak Grove," and that's the founding of SIPA.

SINGSON

Actually, before we get to SIPA, I want to ask, while going through this conference, the Asian conference, was there a difference between being proud of Filipino versus being proud as an Asian while you conjure up this identity, the pride that you get from affirmation of identity?

GEAGA

I think the thing about being proud as Filipinos, I don't see it in the conference itself. It's all Asians. It's all being, "We are Asians. We have history. There's things that we should be proud of." I mean even the theme, "Are you Curious Yellow?" [laughs] First of all, I said, "Why yellow?" Because I thought, "I'm brown." But then I immediately—yellow, Asian, China, Japan. So I mean even at that I age I was—but I could make a distinction. I guess I could still—I fall within the general category of Asian, but clearly we're brown, not yellow. But it's really not until the conference on our drive home, because this is up in the Big Bear, Arrowhead area. I think that's where Camp Oak Grove is. We're in the car, and I think Uncle Roy was just saying, "How'd you guys like it?" I said, "Oh, it's great. We should do this for Filipinos because, you know, 'Are You Curious Brown?'" [laughter] But, yes, so there was a lot of that excitement. For me I said, "Yeah, we should do it. We should really do it."

SINGSON

So is it the following year?

GEAGA

The following year, yes.

SINGSON

And were you part of the organization of SIPA? How did you contribute to the planning?

GEAGA

No, I guess the following year I just remember the next camp over was Filipino.

SINGSON

Before we get to that, I want to ask how you felt. So here you come to a conference and you're able to affirm your identity as an Asian. Did this affect you going back to school to sort of your mainstream life with other mostly white and also African Americans who were empowering themselves? Did you feel more proud of yourself going back to the real world?

GEAGA

Yes. I think I never did—I was proud. I felt good about myself. I don't think I really had any problems with self-esteem even prior to this conference. I think it just strengthened it. But when I went back to school, I felt I was just as—in my studies I concentrated on my homework, my studies, and my classmates. There were a number of people that were my friends both in grade school and high school. One was white, one was Costa Rican. I don't think I ever had an African American friend.

SINGSON

So there's a diversity.

GEAGA

A diversity of the friends that I hanged out with, and I didn't have to be like them to be accepted. I was just who I was. I didn't have to go out of my way to pretend to be something different. They seemed to just accept me how I was.

SINGSON

So there wasn't a racial difference in high school.

GEAGA

No. I never really experienced that, not also in grade school, mainly because a lot of my friends in grade school were Fil-Ams, so I just had to remember there was the difference between being Filipino fresh off the boat. But somehow maybe there's the pressure for me to act Fil-Am, but as soon as they found out I was the cousin of Tony, the barrier broke down, so it really didn't matter whether I was—

SINGSON

Fil-Am or—

GEAGA

Fil-Am or whatever. That was the barrier that I was able to overcome.

SINGSON

So let's get to SIPA. What was it like? I guess, first of all, since we talked about the Asian conference, what is the difference in what were the issues tackled, specifically for Filipino versus the Asian conference?

GEAGA

I wasn't part of any of the planning for the first SIPA Camp Oak Grove. All I remember is Uncle Roy or somebody calling, and they say, "Oh, we're having Camp Oak Grove again this year if you want to come." I said, "Sure, I want to come to that." It's going to be only for Filipino Americans, and I guess they organized carpool, where to be picked up. And kind of the main meeting point was in Gardena or Carson or Torrance. There was going to be buses that was going to take us all up there, and I remember that. I remember that the year before when we went, I rode in Uncle Roy's car.

SINGSON

Because there were only three of you.

GEAGA

Yes, there was only three of us, but this time there's going to be a lot more other. And so as soon as I get to the point where we were supposed to depart, where we were supposed to gather and get to the buses, kind of my first—how do you call it—experience with a lot of Filipino, Fil-Ams, because the only other Fil-Ams that I know is from grade school, from Precious Blood. After that, there's no really Fil-Ams.

SINGSON

Well, what about the Filipinos in Sampaguita Women's Circle?

GEAGA

We were kids. We were young. But I think we were all kind of—we're still very young and just running around and fooling around. But this is the first time I see actually Fil-Ams that are adolescent and clearly are really proud about being Fil-Am, and they're trying to speak Tagalog, patis, bagoong. [laughs] It's kind of that display of that they're Filipino, but they're really Fil-Am. Well, they are Filipino, but Filipino Fil-Am. Anyway, it's kind of to outdo each other, to say as many Tagalog words. And then here I am, I feel like I'm more Filipino than any. Anyway, it was very interesting for me to see that. And Pinoy. There were Pinoy kids coming up all the time. "I'm Pinoy."

SINGSON

Is that the first time you've heard it?

GEAGA

A lot, yes, although I heard it in the past. It's been used, but not quite as frequent as in this where we're getting into the bus and, "Pinoy." [laughter]

SINGSON

Where are they from? I mean why were they—

GEAGA

These are from the South Bay. I never met them, and I find out that they're born here, so that's again—it's very rare that I actually meet Fil-Ams who were born here.

SINGSON

And were there people such as you, who were born in the Philippines or even more recent arrivals?

GEAGA

It seemed to me like everybody was born here. That's my sense, that they had never been to the Philippines. Lots of Fil-Ams. So, yes, I was shocked. I said, "Wow, there's all these Fil-Ams." It was great.

SINGSON

So what's the workshop like? Was it sort of similar to that play of words, affirmation that you're a Filipino, you're Pinoy?

GEAGA

You know, I don't have any recollection of the workshops. I think all of it was play and messing around, I mean, just being with Filipinos. [laughs] I don't remember any serious workshops, but I think there were. But again, it was a great weekend. Everybody had a lot of fun. There was a lot of singing. I remember singing, joking around.

SINGSON

This whole fooling around, the friendships, what came out of it? So something has had to come out of—

GEAGA

I think that's where everybody decided we should do this more often and it's great, and I think that's where we should form a group. I think after we came back from that camp, there was a suggestion that we'll do this again, somebody will take care of it, and maybe we should come up with a name, because there was always this play with Filipino words. So SIPA, again another—I think

somebody said the word Sipa, and then we used the word to put together what that acronym rather than coming up with the—

SINGSON

Acronym first.

GEAGA

We came up with the word and then before coming up with the actual title. Then you'd fit the acronym to what it would fit, so Search to Involve Pilipino Americans. So I think that's how even—Sipa was the term. We should call ourselves something. It had to be a Tagalog word, and Sipa was a Tagalog word. So through everybody's kind of just playing around and joking around, "Oh, that's a great name for our group."

SINGSON

So this became sort of a yearly thing, but did you ever actually form friendships with—how did you connect, I guess, is a better question. How did you connect to the people who were all in the South Bay throughout the year before the conference happens again on the next year?

GEAGA

Well, I think there was probably another Camp Oak Grove. Maybe there was a total of two and that was it. It wasn't annually. It wasn't quite as organized as the JACL. It's a more established institution, the Japanese American community, that kind of just does this every year for the kids. I think ours, SIPA, was more short-lived. It tried to organize gatherings in between, and I remember as I attended—I don't know if I attended all of them. There would be other new Fil-Ams that I didn't meet. But then this is already—Camp Oak Grove, I think the first one was in '70, and then it kind of opens the door for other Fil-Am activities. This is like the following years, then the Far West Convention. It's sort of like channels that not only is local for Fil-Ams, but West Coast-wide. You know what I'm saying?

SINGSON

Yes. Okay. So your thinking is that the SIPA was sort of a way of for you and other Filipino Americans to network, so not just with SIPA, but through other means of networking?

GEAGA

Yes, with the network, because then it's through SIPA that I meet Florante, who then over the years become really good friends.

SINGSON

Barkada Band. You mentioned this.

GEAGA

In Barkada Band, yes.

SINGSON

You said this is even earlier than SIPA.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

How did it form?

GEAGA

So we had this band, and when we all gathered to board the bus to go to the first Oak Grove, there were people I was in the band there who also knew all these other Fil-Ams.

SINGSON

You mean so this person was in your band, and then he knew all the other—

GEAGA

All of these other Fil-Ams who were cousins or something, you know, and Florante was third or second, third cousin of this person. So when I attended my first Oak Grove conference, I already knew

Florante, I already knew Uncle Roy. There were a couple people there that I was already playing in the band with that when we went to Oak Grove, just happens that they also knew all these other Fil-Ams who I'm meeting for the first time, and they were, like, kind of related. So, yes, so there seems to be all these other links with these other Fil-Ams that were networking, that I'm networking for the first time, but they have also been kind of networking.

SINGSON

So just to make sure, that band that you had before, they were Filipino friends or were they more—

GEAGA

They're Fil-Ams from Precious Blood School.

SINGSON

I see. So did those same people turn into—

GEAGA

Some of them didn't really become involved with SIPA, but they were familiar, and they'd come to some of the SIPA events because SIPA, after the Camp Oak Grove, would organize a picnic gathering. It would be more like a social, so it would be a picnic or maybe a dance, maybe after three or four months maybe a holiday kind of, again, social. A lot of it was just social.

SINGSON

And who was arranging them?

GEAGA

By this time, besides, from what I understand, Uncle Roy, then there's Jeannie Abella, Jeannie and Joe Abella. What's his name? You interviewed him. Uncle Mendoza.

SINGSON

Okay, Al.

GEAGA

Al Mendoza. This is where I first meet Al is at the first Oak Grove, so these were kind of more the elders who ran, Estella Habal, a lot of folks from the South Bay who you could tell were much older than I am. They were Fil-Ams born and raised here.

SINGSON

And so now these gatherings are more social gatherings. Okay. And then how did the band—so I'm just trying to clarify. So the band was formed in the first SIPA Oak Grove Camp, and then did they continue on to play through these social events?

GEAGA

The band, actually, we were already playing as a group, as a band. Oak Grove gets organized and some of us actually attend that, and kind of that's where these other Fil-Ams know that there's this band called Barkada. And we become part of the Asian circuit, because at that time there was Hiroshima was already a band, Winfield Summit, Barkada, and we would play at all these dances that would not be just Filipino, but Asian dances that everybody would go to. We all had our own groupies. [laughter] So there's SIPA people, I mean Fil-Ams, which is really SIPA, but then there are other—pretty much all the other Filipino, Fil-Ams who come to the weekend kind of gig that's these four bands are playing at would also go to the SIPA socials when it would be organized.

SINGSON

So specifically for Filipinos.

GEAGA

Yes. But the dances themselves are kind of more Asian or even broader than Asians, kind of like it's the dance to go to.

SINGSON

This is really not documented at all, these kinds of Asian dances. Are they in any way sort of forerunners of today's rave?

GEAGA

Yes, but specifically for the Filipino. [unclear] to be Asian.

SINGSON

Right. So how were they organized? Is this sort of a new thing just specifically for—

GEAGA

For Asians.

SINGSON

That happened in the sixties, or was there something existing even before?

GEAGA

This is a new thing. You know, Hiroshima, which is still exists today, if you go to New Wave or go to iTunes, New Wave, Hiroshima, they'll come up. But that's one of the main bands, and Winfield Summit was really a big band. Again, a lot in the Japanese American community was this big events during the weekend.

SINGSON

And a lot of people just sort of—it's word of mouth.

GEAGA

Word of mouth. It's kind of like their groupies would know. They'd say, "Where you guys playing this weekend?" "We're playing with Winfield Summit in a couple weeks," or whatever. "We're going to be at this venue." And somebody else organizes it. I don't know who.

SINGSON

And as far as you can remember, was there anything sort of political about any of these dances or are they sort of just a way for Asians to get together? What do you think came out of these Asian gatherings?

GEAGA

It's all purely social among Asians to kind of get together and kind of party, show off your—this is also where I develop an afro. [laughter] I was playing saxophone. I was part of the brass section. At that time the fashion was these, like, three-inch heels—not heels, but platform, bell bottoms. So the fashion at that time was, like, Motown and afro, bell bottoms. [laughs]

SINGSON

So was there specifically an Asian kind of flare to this, or is it sort of just more from the African American or maybe even the larger—

GEAGA

It's, yes, from the larger society. Probably the only Asian flare is the fact that all the bands are Asians. All the players or members of the bands are all Asians. Each band would occasionally have one white person or a black person, but majority were—Winfield Summit was all Japanese Americans, so was Hiroshima, and Barkada was all Filipino.

SINGSON

And the music, is it also—

GEAGA

It's all Motown, Top 40s of the day. Chicago. The group Chicago was a lot of brass section. Each of these bands had big huge brass sections.

SINGSON

I'm also curious about the way that these youth, Asian youth, are traveling to go to these weekend gatherings. What were parents, what did they think about these, even your parents, you being involved, really involved like this?

GEAGA

"What's going on with the kids?" I know during this time, too, there was a lot of drugs going on, marijuana. I mean, this is where the term Buddha-head—being Buddha-head was to get as stoned as possible. [laughter] So this is kind of an outlet where you could kind of be free and be able to do all these things. So as far as parents, my mom—I can only speak in my specific case. She would always say, "Where are you going?" She knew I was involved in the band, and she pretty much was fine with that, because sometimes we would practice at the house. In the back we had a small room back there, and we would practice. So for her it was like, "That's good. Don't do drugs. No drugs, but it's good playing instrument." So she was, by and large, supportive of it. So for me to be able to go to these events was because I'm in the bands, I need to go to these, and that was fine. It was all part of my excuse to go.

SINGSON

So we'll end the session here, but just to kind of wrap it up, I'm curious about—this is all very social. SIPA, the Filipino one, a conference, seems to be a way of socializing with other Filipinos. What do you think this impacts you in a way on your identity-making, this separate from very political affirmation of your identity? How did this social networking help you?

GEAGA

Yes. Well, I think I got to meet other Filipino Americans through SIPA, through these interactions, who not only wanted to kind of come together and socialize but kind of were more—they seemed to want to know more about what was going on overall or seemed to have more knowledge about the civil rights. I guess they were more progressive or more activist in that sense. So they were, like, individual people. So that was the impact of this gathering. To me, they kind of matched for me not only did I like the social, it was great being on stage playing, but I seemed to share with them this kind of beyond just the social of SIPA or the Asian, but seemed to also kind of go beyond that. So, yes, it was, for me, networking in that sense. That's the impact it had on me.

SINGSON

And then these people sort of became lifelong friends?

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Or down the road?

GEAGA

Yes, lifelong friends, people I get to know and be in touch and actually become politically active with that distinguishes from other friends of mine who are still really good friends personally and socially, but when we start talking about the [Vietnam] War or, "Let's go to a demonstration against the war," they're more reserved about that, as opposed to some other Fil-Ams who say, "Yeah, we should do that." So you distinguish different types of people, right, besides just it's great to hang out with Filipinos and be in the band, "Let's go dance, go smoke some dope, go hang out on the beach." And then others who said, "Yeah, we'll do all that, too, plus we should demonstrate against the war," and kind of interact with other people, including African or blacks.

SINGSON

Okay. Let's end there. So, thank you very much, Jaime.

GEAGA

Okay. [End of August 3, 2011 interview]

1.3. Session Three (AUGUST 17, 2011)

SINGSON

Today is August 17, 2011, and we are here in Silver Lake and we are doing our third session interview with Jaime Geaga. How are you, Jaime?

GEAGA

Good.

SINGSON

Very good. We ended last week with the formation of SIPA [Search to Involve Pilipino Americans], your participation in the first SIPA conference. But before we continue talking about what happened after SIPA, I think I want to talk about the Vietnam War and how it's affected you as an individual, sort of all this larger events happening internationally and you becoming aware of yourself, who you are, and what's happening around you during those years when you were in SIPA. So how did the war affect you?

GEAGA

Well, very directly. I have an older brother and he's about five years older than me. So the war, I guess, started in the mid sixties, and by the time the late sixties came around, my brother Jorge [Geaga] was in college, and the idea of the draft was always a big issue, the draft, and my older brother being drafted to go to the war. And if you look back at the accounts during the late sixties, there was a big draft resistance movement. People of that age were being drafted, leave the country and go to Canada or could refuse to enlist based on conscience of not supporting the war, and these were all tried in the courts, their cases. So in our specific family, my brother was of age to be enlisted, and so it concerned all of us. Of course we didn't him to be drafted and be sent to Vietnam on the frontlines. It was a very major concern for my parents. He was in college, and I think he was able to get a deferment based on being in school. There was a provision of those that if you were in school, in college, or a specific scientific pursuit, you can get the draft enlistment postponed. He was doing his master's and his Ph.D. in physics at UC [University of California] Berkeley. So that kind of helped in his specific case. 0:03:00.2 But we would hear—he would come home back for the summer or during breaks and talked about the riots, the student riots, the student protests at Berkeley against the war. Of course, we would know about it because we'd see it on the news. This is all in the late sixties. And so by the seventies,

early seventies, I think when I reached eighteen, then I was draftable, so that was how it impacted me. So seeing my brother—

SINGSON

Go through the—

GEAGA

—go through the whole process of dealing with being drafted, and in a year or two for me that I was going to qualify to be drafted. But they instituted the lottery system, I think, by the time I turned eighteen, and at that point the lottery system was that if you got a high number, there's chances that you would not be drafted that year.

SINGSON

So did you remember what—

GEAGA

I think I got a really high number, lucked out. But before the lottery itself, I think there was this dread about what kind of number, because if I got a low number, I could be immediately called up to go and enlist, go to boot camp, and then be sent.

SINGSON

There's so much to that, what you just said, but let's go back to your brother being in Berkeley. This is not just sort of the Antiwar Movement happening there, but also the student movement, including Asian American Student Movement, the Black Power Movement. Was he ever affected and, in turn, bring home the stories to you, and did you ever feel that Asian American Movement happening up there in the Bay Area?

GEAGA

No, it wasn't through my brother. It seemed like he was more directly involved with the Antiwar Movement, the student protests against the war. This was late sixties. It's not till later that I hear about the student riots for Asian American Studies at SF [San

Francisco] State [University]. I think that's where it starts. But I never really got that from my brother. It's more my being introduced to SIPA or being part of the SIPA Movement locally and learning more about Asian American and Black Power Movement and the Asian American identity movement, the student struggle for Asian American Studies at SF State.

SINGSON

And a few more questions about your brother's experience and your experience during the war. Did you actually participate in any of the protests here in L.A. or—

GEAGA

Antiwar movement?

SINGSON

In the Antiwar Movement.

GEAGA

No, I never did. I would just hear about it from my older sister [Joselyn Geaga] and brother, that they participated. Actually, I found out because my mom [Remedios Vergara Geaga] would ask them, "How come you guys are protesting against this government, this government who we're immigrants here to? You should be more grateful rather than ungrateful by protesting against the government."

SINGSON

So there was some kind of tension also among your parents and the political beliefs of your siblings?

GEAGA

Yes, I think there was that tension, but I think because my sister and brother's response to my parents' questioning, they were articulate also in being able to express it, they, I think, were able to more convince my mom specifically about their arguments. She questioned them, but then I think their response made sense. They

were confident in how they responded to it. And I think my mom could see also on TV, so she wasn't shielded to the fact. But I think being an immigrant, that was a logical question or concern she raised.

SINGSON

So I'm just kind of curious, and I know you can't speak for your mom, but from what you remember about these conversations, on one hand, she believes, as an immigrant, that we need to support the government, but at the same time, she's afraid for your own drafting or your brother's draft. How does she reconcile both support for the government and at the same time fearing for your draft?

GEAGA

Yes, I think her notion of support for government evolves over time. I think that support for government early is more a naïve understanding of it, but then I think as we stay here in the United States longer, become integrated, socializing into the culture and politics of the nation, she begins to see that we're a minority group, part of a larger minority groups of African Americans, Latinos, Asians. And so I think she also develops that understanding through our discourse in the morning, my older brother and sister bringing in these broader perspectives to place our family in context.

SINGSON

I'm really curious about this whole—do you actually sit down together and talk about politics? When did this happen? Is it a regular thing, or is it more, perhaps, sparked by a certain event? How do these things happen?

GEAGA

They're spontaneous. This is, like, in the morning before we all go off to school, we're having breakfast. Because when we come home at night, we have dinner, but I think it's more at breakfast we're awake and alert and rushing here and there. But I think it's more spontaneous, and it's brought up by the fact that my mom, in

particular, notices that, "Oh, you attended this demonstration during the weekend," or, "How come you're not going to church anymore?" Those issues. So it's not a regular thing. Besides those things, we talk about other stuff in the family and what's going on, the coordination of the car, because we only had one car at that time.

SINGSON

So your mom always knew where you were going?

GEAGA

Yes, yes. So we're this newly settled family here in the U.S. We're all going to school in the morning, trying to get our schedule, and we had to organize who's going to drive, who's going to take who. We developed that regimen over time until—I think it's not a while till my brothers, who we rely on for driving, and then eventually my sister gets her car, and then my mother learns how to drive. But in the early, the late sixties, the late sixties, because we come here in '65, by late sixties there's the breakfast time is where we're all rushing, trying to get to somewhere.

SINGSON

And talking about where you're going.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Was there any fear at all about your brother and sister joining these protests, fear for their safety?

GEAGA

Not that I can recall. I think it just was such a mass movement.

SINGSON

You mean it's everywhere?

GEAGA

Everywhere, yes, during that time. It was happening. It was in the news. It's not only L.A. It wasn't unique to here in L.A., but the student protests, the killing, the Kent State [University] massacre, you hear about it, the student riots or student protests in Berkeley.

SINGSON

Yes, that's what I mean. There's—

GEAGA

There's constantly going on. At the same time, they would have excerpts of what was going on in Vietnam, the newscasts about how many—you just see pictures of the Viet Cong Trail or whatever, soldiers. So it was like an everyday part of life, and so the war was going on and student protests was just an everyday thing.

SINGSON

So there wasn't any fear that the police would perhaps intervene in the protests?

GEAGA

No. During that period there's so much turmoil going on in the country nationwide, even between the presidential campaign of '68. There was the antiwar president my sister was campaigning for. What's his name? He was the Democratic Party. He was a peace candidate.

SINGSON

So she was involved already in campaigns. I'm sorry, how much older was your sister than you?

GEAGA

She's six years older than me.

SINGSON

So at this time she was already in college.

GEAGA

Yes, they were in college. They were against the war. She was actively supporting the candidate that said, "We should stop the war in Vietnam and leave the war." So it was part of the discourse going on nationwide.

SINGSON

So how are you affected by this, seeing your sister being politically active, your brother, as well, being involved in these antiwar protests, student protests?

GEAGA

Yes. I think it just becomes—on one, it's exciting to get engaged in the discussion. It wasn't a taboo the way maybe initially my mom would pose it. But my older siblings kind of asserted that this is important, we need to be involved, so it was fine to discuss this rather than it being a taboo. It's exciting, and at the same time I was being, myself, influenced by my being involved in the identity movement here in L.A. through SIPA. So I think it all had positive reinforcements about just being engaged. Then again, you watch TV and the popular culture, Black Power Movement, the afro, soul music. It's you should be proud to be a minority, be proud about your national ethnic identity, that type of thing.

SINGSON

So for you, how do you think do these antiwar protests and what's happening internationally affected this Asian movement? So if you think about it, there are two separate things going on, antiwar is sort of an international—and then along with these students protesting against something from far away. But then here is an ethnic movement as you learn it through SIPA. How did they interact in your mind? How did they influence you?

GEAGA

Again, when I look back to the late sixties, seventies, there was just all of these things going on internationally. You compare that to

today, it's just so many—how do you call it—movements going on. Early on, they looked all like all separate things going on. They were not mutually exclusive. But I think as I got involved with the study group, this is where it maybe begins to illuminate that maybe there are connections amongst all of these things, but that's later, like '72, '73, '71, '72, '73. But again, these are just—what do you call it—it's a phenomenon that you just observe that this is all going on. Here I'm trying to get through high school, prepare for college. At the same time, I'm in a band. It's just so many activities going on. I think today if you're in high school, you're really focused on going to college, and I was too. I was trying to make sure that I get good grades in high school while, again, outside of me you just can't avoid the fact that all of these things are going on. So you couldn't tuck yourself away and get into a bubble and not be influenced. It was just impossible because you'd see it on the news. You'd go out, you'd meet other people who are influenced by it or being impacted by it, so it's discussed. We'd talk about it in breakfast. So it's just going on all over. And then at this point what's going on in the Philippines is still very far in the background.

SINGSON

Let's deal with what happened to SIPA. So we talked a lot about it last time. So did you attend the second SIPA conference? What happened to the group itself, SIPA? It first started as a conference, but later on as a group.

GEAGA

I think there was another second conference, which I attended, but nothing specific stands out in my mind. It was primarily a social group. People tried to organize other activities during the year, maybe it'd be during the holidays, maybe, at best, two or three other activities. But the thing that comes out of there is this is where I meet Esther Soriano. There is the Neighborhood Youth Corps Program that happens nationwide. I think there are programs for the youth, for the summer, in response to the Watts Riots, the riots that happened in all the major metropolitan areas.

SINGSON

So this is sort of federally funded?

GEAGA

Yes, it's a federal program, War on Poverty [Program]. I know that's a fact now, but at that time it was just, "Oh, we have some funds to do these programs." And Esther taps me to see if I'm interested in working with her to develop this programs, and I said, "Sure, I'll be a part of your staff."

SINGSON

So this is the local Neighborhood Youth Corps Program in L.A.

GEAGA

In L.A.

SINGSON

And what do they intend to do, and how were you going to be part of this group? So what's the intention? What's the goals of the group?

GEAGA

It's a program that starts—I think it's from ten to three in the morning every day from Monday to Friday, and it's to enroll Filipino youth specifically into the program and provide activities during the day. A a lot of it was centered around Philippine culture and Philippine folk dancing and arts. It was based at the Filipino Christian Church. I think that was one of the main sites, I think, that we had it in, and maybe some of the activities would be held at FACLA [Filipino American Community of Los Angeles] some of the days. But I remember just being the main staff of Esther. Either she would pick me up or I would meet her at Filipino Christian Church.

SINGSON

And what did you do as a staff person?

GEAGA

Once we got there, we would maybe do some folk dancing. At that time I was also kind of an extension of the Filipino Cultural School that I attended maybe a year or two earlier that was held at the Filipino Christian Church. Because I was already introduced to the folk dancing, so I would be a surrogate teacher.

SINGSON

And this is through Roy Morales, the earlier one.

GEAGA

Yes, the earlier one. We would do arts and crafts. We would make parols.

SINGSON

And can you tell me why these activities, the parol-making, the folk dancing, in your conception or Esther Soriano's lining up of these activities, what was it supposed to do for the youth besides giving them recreation, something to do during the summer? Was there any overall sort of political or larger social higher objective for it?

GEAGA

I don't know. I'm not aware. I think as I look back on it today, it was to keep us busy, and it was a lot of fun. We would do other things. We would do trips to the beach, to the park. So I'm not aware of it being of any higher goals other than her—I think the first year I just remember just being so busy and always riding in her car, getting supplies, either getting food so we would have food to eat. So it's just all the logistics, and this is, like, everyday.

SINGSON

And none of the kids will pay for this. It's all for free?

GEAGA

It's all for free, from what I understand, yes. It was just all for free, and I don't remember getting paid, myself. I was, like, her staff, but I don't remember getting paid. It's just the food that we had today, somehow it was paid for.

SINGSON

So why did you do it if it was only for you, it was a voluntary thing?

GEAGA

I think I just got the excitement of meeting a lot of other Filipino Americans and Filipino immigrants other than those who I already knew from grade school when I was going to school.

SINGSON

And are these attendees also the same people from SIPA, or are they different?

GEAGA

Yes. Some were from SIPA and others were new people who then became involved with SIPA. So it was like a major—I would say it's probably a SIPA-sponsored program for the summer that Esther took on. A lot of the attendees were recruited from SIPA, and then other Filipino Americans come along and Filipino immigrants.

SINGSON

So there was already also an interaction between the Filipino Americans and the Filipino immigrants. And what did the Filipino immigrants get out from this? They'd know what a parol is or the Filipino folk dancing is sort of more familiar, I guess.

GEAGA

Yes. You could tell that the Filipino immigrants were more familiar with the folk dancing, so they would take a lead in showing the other Fil-Ams [Filipino Americans] how to do the dance.

SINGSON

So what did they get from this, the exposure to Filipino activities, the Filipino immigrants?

GEAGA

I think maybe they got the exposure to Fil-Ams.

SINGSON

Oh, okay. So the interaction.

GEAGA

Interaction.

SINGSON

Right.

GEAGA

So you could see that interaction. I think for me, by this time I've been here for five years already, so I'm kind of in between. I guess I don't know if I consider myself an immigrant or a Fil-Am. I'm a combination of both. I could straddle the two groups because I could maybe say a little bit more Tagalog words than the Fil-Ams, but not the fluency as the Filipino immigrants.

SINGSON

And you went to school here, too, at the same time.

GEAGA

Yes, so I'm already socialized here in grade school. So, yes, maybe that's why she picked me as staff, because I could relate to both.

SINGSON

So what about the influence of the Neighborhood Youth Corps to you in terms of identity? As you've mentioned, you're already almost a Fil-Am, but also a Filipino immigrant yet, right? So you carry both experiences. Did it have any influence on you politically? This is sort of in retrospect, after knowing that later on you'll be active as a Filipino American activist within the movement to create a Filipino identity.

GEAGA

It didn't really have a direct impact on me, on my activism. It was fun. It was a lot of busywork during the summer, driving here and

there, organizing the lunch meals, getting all the props for folk dancing. We would have Britain [phonetic]. We would have Tagalog classes. So it's just a lot of busywork. I think this is where there was this insistence on Esther that we should form a study group. She invited me. I said, "Well, why?" Or not so much why, but I said, "Oh, okay. Sounds interesting," at that time and said, "Yeah, I'm interested." It's like I was always interested in whatever new that came up.

SINGSON

Study group meaning—what is a study group? Is this something that's being done often?

GEAGA

No, it wasn't being done. I think for her, I think she was more conscious about why do we have to do all these things. I think she was a person that needed—she had just finished her master's, I think, when she went to school. I forget exactly in what. I think she did it in political science, and so I think she was just aware of what was going on internationally. And also she's Filipino American and, from what I understand, she was involved with the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties, so she had made those connections herself.

SINGSON

And she's rooted here in L.A., is she?

GEAGA

Yes. I think her parents grew up in the Valley, were farm workers in Santa Paula, I think, but went to school, I forget, in the East Coast, I think in college was involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the South, made those connections. So I think she had a broader perspective of what was going on both internationally and domestically here in the U.S. And then for her, seeing the Filipino community as a community becoming—seeing the formation of SIPA, a lot of Fil-Ams coming out, being influenced by what was going on, the Antiwar Movement, I think for her—she was really the

one that said we should do a study group. And there were a couple of other people from the NYC [Neighborhood Youth Corps] Program.

SINGSON

Can you name them?

GEAGA

Lillian Tamoria, the Tamorias, the sisters that were a part of the NYC Program too. In fact, Lillian and Lee [Tamoria] and myself are like staff. Now that you mention it, we were all staff that came together every day, did all those logistics.

SINGSON

So the four of you created—

GEAGA

The study group.

SINGSON

—the first study group.

GEAGA

That and then maybe three more. Alan Constantino was also there, the NYC Program, SIPA, Glen Constantino.

SINGSON

And just to sort of make sense of this chronologically, what year was the study group or what point?

GEAGA

Seventy-one.

SINGSON

And this already right after—

GEAGA

Right after the first NYC Program, I think, or maybe the second NYC Program. The first program was in ’70, and then the following year, ’71, the program again, and then I think right after that, because I guess right after the summer, the program, we’d be all so exhausted. [laughs] We had a lot of fun being together, but it seems all these logistics eventually could be so mundane. Esther and with Lee and Lillian, maybe the three of them said, “Yeah, we should do this study. We should learn more because there’s just a lot of stuff going on.”

SINGSON

So how did you do the study group? Did you bring books in, or what were the choices of books? What came out of this?

GEAGA

So we decided we’d meet Saturday afternoons every week. There would be books. We put together a reading list, a book list that then we would all read and then come back together and discuss the following week, or we could do chapter by chapter.

SINGSON

And what in particular do you think really came out of this, at least the first few sessions? How long did the study group last for?

GEAGA

Probably a year and a half.

SINGSON

Wow. That’s great.

GEAGA

So, yes, by ’71 we started in the fall, went through ’72, and that study group itself continued on and I was with the study group through the end of ’72 December. I had to leave because I joined KDP [Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino, Union of Democratic Filipinos].

SINGSON

And so what came out of this for you? What are the biggest things that you think you took on from these study groups?

GEAGA

Being in the study group was great, and by this time, I, myself, was seeing a lot of what was going on in China. So in the study we said we should study Karl Marx, Das Kapital. I said, "Okay." It's my first introduction. I hear about these works. But kind of what struck me was more because of the Asian identity movement, and then hearing stories about what's going on in China, and that the people were—

SINGSON

In revolution.

GEAGA

—in revolution and they're taking power. So I said, "Oh, I want to learn that." So, yes, that was part of our reading list, and we started reading Mao Tse-tung. We read, I think, Mao's Red Book. By this time, you'd see lots of posters that was produced in China, and it would be here in the U.S. You could see it to, like, community events of the people taking power.

SINGSON

Now, at this time a lot of not just Filipino—I guess the question is more Asians and Chinese Americans are aware of this.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

How did your group become aware? Is it through outside or through other Asians in L.A.?

GEAGA

Through other Asians in L.A. Yes, I think it's through other Asians in L.A. because as a study group, our reading, it sparks interest in other movements going on, and there are movements going on here in L.A., Asian movements, who are talking about what's going on in China, the cultural revolutions that we read more about that. So, yes, and then for me, eventually we know that it's not only happening in L.A., but in the Bay Area as well.

SINGSON

And how did you make that connection that it's not just happening here in L.A., but also in other parts of the West Coast?

GEAGA

By this time I start college at [University of California] Irvine, so I'm in the study group for a year already. I start college at UC Irvine, and I meet Asian students who kind of share the same language that I've been learning in the last year and a half through the study group, the international movements, Mao Tse-tung in China, there's the Cross Cultural Center, and even the instructors there are talking about Marx and Mao Tse-tung thought. So, yes, so it's not just a discussion that we've been doing in the study group, but actually at other progressive Asians. I see there's other progressive Asians who are like-minded and like-thinking.

SINGSON

Was there ever any conclusion that came out of the study group or your dealings with other Asians, for example, in Irvine when you already went to college about what kind of socialist or—because is there different strands of communism and socialism that's happening? [telephone ringing]

SINGSON

Do you want to pause for a moment? [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

Okay, we are back from a quick pause, and we ended with the question of what kind of thought is coming out of these discussions

among Asian groups from these readings of Mao Tse-tung and Marxism.

GEAGA

Yes. So from the study group, of course, the terms "imperialism" becomes very prominent, "anti-imperialism." These concepts is what then explains what's going on internationally for me and for the people in the study group at that time, and, of course, capitalism, that being the root and imperialism being the height of capitalist development, and that there are alternatives to that type of society, which you could see emerging in the East in the Soviet Union, socialism, and in China, communism also being developed in the Soviet Union. That's something that's being espoused in China as well, socialism as a transition to communism. So we discussed this in our study group. When I go to college, it's the same type of thinking among students and professors, the Cross Cultural Center, who I gravitate to, and that's where I get recruited to Irvine through affirmative action. So my first year, my first fall semester at UC Irvine, there's an orientation and there's all the minority students who get into UC Irvine through the Affirmative Action Program at that time. There's African Americans, Latinos, and other Asians, and a handful of Filipino Americans. So somehow we talked the same language, and our professors who are, at that time, a couple of Japanese American professors at the Cross Cultural Center—it's comparable to what would be the Asian American Studies Center at SF State at that time. At Irvine we called it the Cross Cultural Center. They also suggest we have a study group outside the classroom, and I'm kind of used to the idea. I said, "Sure, let's have a study group," and we had that on Saturday.

SINGSON

And this is not just Filipino, I'm assuming.

GEAGA

Right. This is just not Filipino; this is, again, minority students, mostly minority students who are other Asians, African Americans, and Latinos.

SINGSON

Is there a formal group that came out of that, or it was just called a study group?

GEAGA

At UC Irvine?

SINGSON

At UC Irvine is there an organization?

GEAGA

Each semester there would be, depending on which class you took, besides my science classes, I have one or two elective classes. Of course, I took the Asian American Studies or Asian American History 101, and there would be the class. I guess it would be intertwined, this separate study group as part of the class, and our readings would be the same, Karl Marx, Mao Tse-tung thought.

SINGSON

And so it's student-initiated, but at the same time you were getting units for it? Is that how it works?

GEAGA

Actually, not only was it student-initiated, the instructors would initiate it. So during that time when Asian Studies was still evolving or at its very early beginnings, it was professors who were initiating these discussion groups.

SINGSON

At least for the Filipino group, did you make any connections yet about what's going on in the Philippines and these Mao Tse-tung against capitalism, against imperialism thought at this point, so 1971, 1972?

GEAGA

Not yet. I do in 1972 in the fall, and it was specifically with the declaration of martial law. One more thing. When I was at Irvine, there were opportunities for students. Through the Cross Cultural Center they had student programs to take trips to the Bay Area, so I was part of that. They gave us a car, and there was three or four of us that drove up to the Bay Area. We went to [San Francisco] Chinatown, and that's when I was first introduced to the International Hotel struggle.

SINGSON

Now I'm really curious about the Cross Cultural Center. So they just sort of tell students you could do these kinds of programs, and this program you chose. Is that how it worked?

GEAGA

Yes. So the instructors, they were really—I guess they were trying to get involved. They were trying to involve minority students in stuff that was going on statewide with the sanction or funding of the Cross Cultural Center, part of the class, you know, other activities.

SINGSON

So this is field trip.

GEAGA

It's a field trip. Exactly. It's a field trip. So he said, "Oh, yeah, let's go to Yosemite on our way back. We're planning our trip, but we'll go the Bay Area because this is really what we're supposed to do. Go visit International Hotel." So I did, and when I get there, I actually meet Filipino Americans who are in the International Hotel, learn a little bit more about the International Hotel struggle, the manongs. Then this group called [Ang] Kalayaan, a newspaper of Fil-Ams and Filipino immigrants who are activists, and that really sparks. I said, "Wow, it's not only the study group." I said, well, I think about what's comparable to L.A, and I said, well, these people

are like our study group in L.A., trying to learn more beyond what we're doing in SIPA and NYC.

SINGSON

And just for the record, who are the people who are part of Kalayaan International?

GEAGA

Well, the main person that I meet there—I remember we just walked through the door.

SINGSON

You mean their office?

GEAGA

Yes, the office. And I meet Trinity Ordona. I don't know if you know her.

SINGSON

Yes.

GEAGA

She got her Ph.D. at Santa Cruz now, and she does Women's Studies at UC San Francisco. But, yes, I remember meeting her. She kind of just approached me and introduced herself and said, "This is the I-Hotel struggle, the manongs, the third wave and the first wave." And these are all new terms because a lot of what we talked about in the study group was more Karl Marx, capitalism, imperialism. I think my trip to the Bay Area as part of this Asian Studies elective that I was taking at Irvine kind of was my first introduction to Filipino American activism in the Bay Area.

SINGSON

But you were not aware of this kind of Filipino American activism in Irvine, even through the classes that you were taking?

GEAGA

No, I wasn't.

SINGSON

Now, the Kalayaan International also introduced you to the I-Hotel, meaning did they introduce you to the manongs themselves or to the activists or just sort of to the broader issue? Did you actually meet the people?

GEAGA

It was an unannounced visit, so it was kind of more general, my first introduction to the Kalayaan newspaper, to the people there, Filipino Americans, Fil-Am activists, and Filipino immigrant activists, and kind of a struggle that was going on at I-Hotel. And then I don't have interaction with Kalayaan till the Far West Convention in Stockton in '72. That's another where I see the newspaper.

SINGSON

So this trip was in '72.

GEAGA

In '72, yes, beginning of the year. I think it was January. I started—I'm getting confused now.

SINGSON

That's okay. [laughter]

GEAGA

The timing.

SINGSON

So Stockton is in 1972 around September.

GEAGA

Seventy-two, yes. So did I hear about—I guess I started college in fall of '72. Is that correct? Yes. So my trip to the Bay Area—or did I start college?

SINGSON

That's okay. Memory has always a play in our minds. But let's think about your thoughts about the Stockton Far West Convention. How are you introduced to this? Is it through the study group?

GEAGA

The study group.

SINGSON

So what were your impressions of it? So, first of all, maybe what did you expect from the Far West Convention and what did you observe about what's going on?

GEAGA

It seemed like a larger SIPA conference because this was more kind of statewide, West Coast-wide gathering of Fil-Ams. Yes, so I attended that. I think that's where I first get introduced to the Kalayaan newspaper. I think there was a newspaper that was floated. So I had not made my trip to the Bay Area yet to the I-Hotel, because it's later that year.

SINGSON

That you learned about the I-Hotel.

GEAGA

Yes. So I think it's the Stockton where there's this newspaper that comes out of the Bay Area. It has things about the International Hotel and stuff that's going on in the Philippines. Maybe the term "New People's Army" is the first time I hear or read about it.

SINGSON

Now, the Stockton Convention is always thought about—just based on other interviews that I did, that it had a lot of partying and a lot of—

GEAGA

Yes. For me, that's really mostly what I remember the Stockton, was a lot of social stuff and partying.

SINGSON

Meeting other—

GEAGA

Meeting other Fil-Ams, other Fil-Ams from the West Coast.

SINGSON

But how did the politics of Kalayaan play with this social gathering?

GEAGA

I think the newspaper was just there on, like, a table, literature table. So there was no specific workshop that was on the Philippines. I think it's just the newspaper—I said, "Oh, there's a Filipino newspaper," so I pick it up. So I think for me, that's my introduction that there's a newspaper, Kalayaan, that exists kind of based in the Bay Area. I don't remember meeting anybody specifically who said, "Yeah, I'm with Kalayaan. This is our newspaper." So it's at the Stockton when I hear, and then subsequently after that, I see another copy of it and another edition at maybe two or three months down the road.

SINGSON

You mean in L.A.?

GEAGA

Yes, in some of the activities that we—

SINGSON

Now, martial law happened in 1972. How did you hear about it? Or did you hear about it right away?

GEAGA

The way I heard about it is our study group, I think—okay, so I get wind of this newspaper, Kalayaan. This is in the '72 Stockton. So we

have this study group, and somebody comes down from the Bay Area. They don't themselves say, "We're part of Kalayaan." They're just Filipino activists. They said, "We want to do this retreat in Santa Cruz in the fall." So they invite our study group from L.A., and myself and Esther go up and attend this retreat in Santa Cruz.

SINGSON

And who are the instigators of these—

GEAGA

[unclear]?

SINGSON

Right.

GEAGA

I guess looking back, at that time I didn't know. It was people of the Kalayaan Collective who were the ones who were organizing this.

SINGSON

Can you name some of them? Trinity Ordona was there.

GEAGA

I may have seen her there, but I really—she may have been, and she may have been at that retreat, but the people that I remember being at that retreat was Rodel, Rodel Rodis, Bruce Occena, John Silva, and—what's her name? She passed away already. Maglaya.

SINGSON

Cynthia?

GEAGA

Cynthia Maglaya. I was kind of awestruck at this retreat because I said, "Wow, these are Filipino activists who are very articulate and they know so much." [laughter] And they were talking about the

Philippines, the National Democratic Movement. I think in our study group we also studied Jose Maria Sison, Jo Ma—

SINGSON

Jo Ma Sison.

GEAGA

Jo Ma Sison and the Philippine Revolution. The Red—

SINGSON

The Red Book.

GEAGA

The Red Book.

SINGSON

Of the Philippines.

GEAGA

Of the Philippines. Yes, so we studied that in our study group in L.A. So, yes, I attended, and I said, "Wow, this is—."

SINGSON

What did they talk about? What impressed you so much?

GEAGA

Well, I remember attending one of the sessions, and it had to do with the—a lot of it was the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines. This is the first time I really—even though I remember reading Jose Maria Sison's book, I guess it became more alive with somebody presenting it. And I remember it was John Silva and Cynthia Maglaya leading the discussion group, and I said, "Wow, these folks are really articulate." [laughter] It's kind of like they were, like, they were models to me, role models. And they're talking about the Philippines. This is the first time that—this is the Philippines.

SINGSON

Was there a lot of people not just from L.A. and Santa Cruz or the Bay Area?

GEAGA

It was actually, for me, Esther and I were the only ones from L.A. representing the study group, and I remember there were people there from New York. Rene Cruz was there and—what's her name?

SINGSON

Walden Bello?

GEAGA

No, I don't remember Walden being there. There was Emil de Guzman. I think it was Emil who picked me up at the airport. Or no, no. We drove up. We drove up. And then they were the ones who kind of showed us. I don't remember meeting Trinity. She may have been there, but there were, like, people who were leading the workshops kind of that stood out. This is the weekend, the same weekend that martial law is declared. So the retreat in Santa Cruz was September 22nd, and it was Sunday. So Saturday was the 21st, I guess. We go to this retreat, go to the workshops, and then Sunday I guess we all hear that martial law has been declared. You know, I hear stories about the First Quarter Storm, kind of just [unclear]. But then Sunday it's like martial law is declared. What do we do? And I think that's where the proposal to establish the NCRCLP, National Committee for the Restoration of [Civil Liberties in the Philippines] Democracy in the Philippines. We all agree in that retreat that, yes—and I remember people from Chicago there, too, I think Mayee Aside [Mayee Crispin], Boy [Asidao], Boy and Mayee, Rene, and Aimee Cruz from New York, maybe somebody from Philadelphia, but they don't stand out. I really just remember Rodel Rodis and Bruce and Cynthia were kind of like the retreat chairs. So anyway, we come out and we form the NCRCLP.

SINGSON

So are you a founder, official founder of—

GEAGA

Of NC—I guess. [laughter] That's when it was founded, that weekend, the same weekend that martial law is declared. We all go back to our cities, and we agreed at that retreat that we would organize protests movements at the consulate in all different cities as NCRCLP.

SINGSON

So you went back. Did you organize?

GEAGA

We did. It could be the following week or two weeks from there, but I remember there were, like, a lot of activities nationwide in response.

SINGSON

Now, was there a lot of Filipinos here in L.A. who helped? Not just Filipinos, but who were you able to recruit to help in this protest against martial law?

GEAGA

So as a study group we said, "Yes, will work as part of the National Committee for the Restoration of Civil—." We would do this. And I think we got people who were—there was the six of us Filipinos.

SINGSON

In the study group.

GEAGA

In the study group, and other kind of outliers who were SIPA members. And then I think the broader—there were, like, other Asian activists that we put the word out to and said, "We're going to demonstrate at the Philippine Consulate."

SINGSON

And what was the response?

GEAGA

It was a lot of work, a lot of logistics, preparing the snacks, because we did a forum before it, to do kind of an education forum.

SINGSON

And this is outside of the consulate or before the protest?

GEAGA

Before the consulate, before the protest, or maybe the following day or the day before. It was a combination of protest and forum. So forums were whatever day, but I think remember there was, like, a designated day that we would all do this protest so it would kind of have impact.

SINGSON

And what was the community response? I'm sure the Philippine Consulate did not like it.

GEAGA

No. [laughter] Since I was so involved in the organizing, I think initially maybe there was—I think there was shock in the community, just the declaration of martial law, where that was new for everybody. What did this mean? The Philippine News would be reporting about it, I remember.

SINGSON

Now, the Philippine News is from San Francisco, right? Was there any other Filipino newspaper that responded or covered what you were doing in L.A.?

GEAGA

I think that was it at that time. There weren't all the other new Filipino newspapers that there is today. I think it was mainly the Philippine News.

SINGSON

I think what I want to do is carry this conversation to the establishment, and then maybe next week we'll do the Far West Convention. So this is happening in '72, and you're still NCRCLP.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

How did this carry over to the KDP, which is really mainly an anti-[Ferdinand] Marcos group? Isn't that right?

GEAGA

Yes. I think once we got back to—so we attended this retreat. It coincides with the declaration of martial law, resulting in the formation of the NCRCLP. After that, I think Rodel comes back down and says, "There's going to be a founding congress of the formation of a new organization nationwide, Union of Democratic Filipinos, KDP. We want your study group to be part of this founding."

SINGSON

And how are you connecting with Rodel at this time? Is Rodel coming down as a speaker for the study group, or is it more of a friendship type of visit?

GEAGA

Friendship.

SINGSON

Okay. So I'm just wondering if it's an official visit from—

GEAGA

And I don't know exactly—now, looking back now that I know more about it, I guess he was coming down because he was part of the Kalayaan Collective.

SINGSON

That's right.

GEAGA

He was coming down as a member of the Kalayaan Collective to invite—I guess the Kalayaan Collective, in the fall of '72, even before the retreat in Santa Cruz, was already getting the different separate collectives nationwide of Filipino activists who were, themselves, activists in the Philippines to form a national organization.

SINGSON

And this is a national organization against Marcos?

GEAGA

Yes, I guess against Marcos, but martial law was not declared yet. But it was kind of in support of the National Democratic Movement, maybe the primary goal of it. And then that, of course, was anti-Marcos, and then it even becomes more crystal-clear with the declaration of martial law in September. So already there was this. So I think Rodel came down, or maybe we got a phone call, "You should come to this retreat. We're also doing this national organization." And I think, yes, we said, "We'll come to the retreat, but being part of this national organization, we have questions." Although I said, "Well, that sounds interesting. Maybe we should." And that's how Esther and I were the representatives of the study group to go to the retreat in Santa Cruz to find out more about this.

SINGSON

So Rodel comes back again.

GEAGA

Yes. Rodel, Emil, Estella, they all come down. I think by the time—

SINGSON

This is Estella Habal?

GEAGA

Estella Habal, yes. Estella used to be from L.A., so I know Estella from SIPA.

SINGSON

Oh, you did?

GEAGA

She was one of the early founders of SIPA. Then she moved up to the Bay Area, and I think she eventually became part of the Kalayaan Collective.

SINGSON

So all three come?

GEAGA

They come different times, inviting or convincing the study group to be part of this founding, a founder of this national organization, nationwide organization. Everybody in the study group were against it except for me. I said, "Yeah, we should join this." And then I guess I was being criticized. Well, they asked me why. I said, "Well, it's a nationwide Filipino activist organization. We should join it."

SINGSON

Can we pause for a moment? [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

Okay, so we're back from pause. So you were being criticized by the other people in the study group because you wanted to join this national movement.

GEAGA

Yes. They asked me why. I said, "Well, it's a Filipino nationwide organization, and we should be part of it." And so they said my reasoning was too narrow, nationalist. I said, "Well, but that's how I feel." For me, this is still an extension of my being Filipino and my Filipino-ness and my Filipino identity, and here it is to be organizationally connected to other Filipino activists, not only Fil-

Ams but Filipino immigrants. So that was the exciting thing for me, but I was being—said, "Well, you're just being too narrow, nationalistic. What we really need to do is form a more internationalist organization." That was the justification. We finally put it to a vote, and I said yes. Everybody else said no, so the study group was not part of the founding of KDP, one of the collectives to found KDP.

SINGSON

So how did you eventually join the KDP?

GEAGA

The founding congress was not till the summer of '73.

SINGSON

That's right.

GEAGA

So this invitation's all going through the fall of '72 and the winter of '73. I get outvoted, the KDP congress happens, the founding congress in summer of '73 happens. I don't attend because I have to abide by the study group decision. I wasn't invited as an individual. I didn't know anything about it.

SINGSON

From what you know, were there L.A. people at the founding congress?

GEAGA

Yes, later, later. In the fall of '73 I find out that there was somebody from L.A. who attended; Russell Valparaiso attended. I think he was the only one from L.A., and I guess folks there said, "When you go back to L.A., you should contact Jaime because he wanted to be part of this." So, yes, I remember him calling me in the fall of '73 and saying, "Jaime, I hear you wanted to join KDP. It's formed now, and, yes, you should—." I said, "Yes, yes," but at that time I was still at Irvine. I was starting my second year at

Irvine. I was still playing in the band. I was going to the study groups. We were doing NCRCLP activities.

SINGSON

Oh, so you're still part of NCRCLP.

GEAGA

Yes, yes, the study group. I'm still part of this—

SINGSON

Oh, I'm sorry. So the study group has turned into NCRCLP?

GEAGA

Well, pretty much becomes the same thing. The local NCRCLP chapter, which was initiated by the study group—

SINGSON

With Esther.

GEAGA

With Esther, yes, I think they recruit one or two other people into the NCRCLP that were not members of the study group. But eventually they become one and the same.

SINGSON

I see. Now, KDP's presence didn't really come to L.A. until much later, it seems like.

GEAGA

Yes, not till '73. Well, Russell Valparaiso comes back from the founding congress, the founding KDP congress in July, comes back, calls me, and said, "Jaime, the KDP has formed. We have a local KDP chapter, and I hear you're interested in joining. Why don't you come to the meetings." And I say, "Yes, I am," but I really don't attend their first meeting until November.

SINGSON

Of ’73.

GEAGA

Of ’73.

SINGSON

And who founded KDP here in L.A.?

GEAGA

Russell.

SINGSON

So he was the founder.

GEAGA

It was Russell Valparaiso, Sherry Hirota [Valparaiso], his wife, and Amado David, the three of them, and John Estrella and my younger brother, “Wicks” [Joaquin Geaga].

SINGSON

That brings a different dynamic because your brother in the KDP, but you were not.

GEAGA

Right, right. See, Russell, he’s kind of the—we use the term “Lumpen.” [laughs]

SINGSON

I’m sorry. You have to say that one more time.

GEAGA

Lumpen, the Lumpenproletariat. [laughs] That was the term we used at that time. But anyway, these are the youth, kind of the gang youth, brothers who are hanging out on the streets. And so my brother was with that crowd, and those were the first members that Russell recruited to form the L.A. KDP chapter.

SINGSON

So how was your brother interacting with you as a KDP—how did you talk and dialogue about what's going on in the KDP?

GEAGA

First of all, I didn't know he was part of it. This is all very fluid. I was in college, and I'm kind of commuting back and forth. And I don't think for him—you'd have to talk to him about his own political development. He's probably influenced by it, but not as in it as the way I was because he's kind of more drawn in as part of these brothers, Filipino "bros" who kind of hang out, with long hair, by Russell as the initial core of the KDP chapter.

SINGSON

So you joined the KDP, and—

GEAGA

And then I had to leave the study group. When I told them I was joining the KDP, they said, "Well, you can't be in both." So I had to leave the study group. I join the KDP, I see the members, I say, "God, these are all gang members." [laughs] That was just my first impression. So we need to expand or recruit new people. Not that I said, "Oh, I'm not going to join KDP because these are all Lumpen youth, gang folks." It was none of that. I said, "Yeah, well, this is going to be a challenge for myself," because clearly they were already looking to me as leadership to getting the chapter off the ground. So I attend the first meeting. It's nothing like our study group meeting. It's more disciplined. We all come prepared to discuss. I go to my first KDP meeting. Sherry's two-year-old is running all over the place, we can't even get a meeting, there's all these disruptions, and so it's just kind of like night and day difference.

SINGSON

But can I ask, though, why—at least what was told to you about why you cannot be in both NCRCLP, the study group, and the—

GEAGA

I don’t remember any real reason. That was just the culmination. There was just this very hard stand not to be part of the founding. So this just became an extension, so when I said, “Well, I’m joining the KDP. They’ve invited me, and I want to join it,” “Well, you can’t be in both.” It’s kind of like I guess I just accepted it. I said, “Why? Why can’t I? I’m going to protest.” [laughs] I guess I never really took it that far. I just accepted it. I guess it was unspoken attitude towards not being part of KDP. So that was already clear for about a year after all this discussions, this invitations from different folks coming down from the Bay Area.

SINGSON

So what did you need to do for KDP to establish them as a more disciplined group?

GEAGA

I think as soon as I joined, then we had kind of a discussion group, a more kind of opening to recruit other people, I think in the month, in that first month that I joined. I was still at Irvine. I knew I was going to move back to L.A., so I was in the process of transferring to UCLA [University of California Los Angeles] because this commuting back and forth was just—I left the band because I couldn’t do school and being in the band and going to Irvine. So I said, “I’ll move to UCLA, I’ll be closer, I’m going to quit the band, and, okay, I’ll focus on this,” the KDP local chapter.

SINGSON

So I guess one other question was, did you ever meet KDP chapters? I know in San Diego they have a KDP chapter there. So did you ever meet them more south of L.A.?

GEAGA

Later on.

SINGSON

But not during while you were in Irvine?

GEAGA

Yes. I mean, I had so much excitement about KDP formation, and I kind of was disappointed that our group wasn't going to join, kind of just forgot about it. I didn't even know that the founding congress happened, it did take place, not till I get a phone call from Russell saying, "Yes, we have a local chapter here now. I'd like you to be a part of it and a member. I said, "Yeah, I'm interested. I'm kind of in the middle of different things." This is the fall, so this is when I do all these transitions.

SINGSON

So what I want to do is for the next session we can start talking about the Far West Convention at UCLA, but I wanted to ask first, what happened in between for KDP from your joining, from that point when you joined, until after you got busy with the Far West Convention? Did the KDP change its structure or change its—you started to recruit members. What was the changes that happened while you were there, after you joined?

GEAGA

So I think after my first meeting, must have been in end of October, November, the fall quarter ended. I was here at UCLA. I quit the band. We had a number of meetings where we recruited new members. We were still doing NCRCLP activities, so we joined the local NCRCLP activities as KDP now. So we would do the—

SINGSON

Protests.

GEAGA

The protests and the teach-ins, the educational forums, the forums and the teach-ins. I think we recruited three or four new people by December. Then the NCRCLP had its first nationwide national conference in Chicago in December of 1973. So it had been already in existence for a year, a little bit over a year, and this was the time

for the NCRCLP to come together and kind of do a summation or a meeting.

SINGSON

And this is different from the KDP's founding.

GEAGA

Yes, it is.

SINGSON

It's just also national.

GEAGA

This was a national NCRCLP conference that was going to be hosted by Chicago.

SINGSON

I'm a little confused, because when you went to Santa Cruz, you came back and established the group as NCRCLP as a response to what happened in Santa Cruz. But also the KDP is separate from the group?

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Because I know Bruce Occena was also KDP.

GEAGA

Yes, it was separate. So the KDP had not formed yet in September of '72. What officially formed was the NCRCLP, and a lot of the folks in that retreat went back and formed local NCRCLPs, recruited people there, while simultaneously preparing for the founding of KDP that summer, which is separate from NCRCLP. So NCRCLP activities would still be happening. The main organizing for NCRCLP locally was the study group, which part of it I also remember by the

time I left and joined the local KDP, we as a local chapter worked with the study group to do NCR activities in L.A.

SINGSON

Okay. Let's end there, and then next week we'll talk about your role and the KDP's role also in the Far West Convention.

GEAGA

Yes. I think that's a good segue there because as a KDP member, that's, like, my first community to organize the Far West Convention.

SINGSON

Okay. Thank you so much. [End of August 17, 2011 interview]

1.4. Session Four (August 24, 2011)

SINGSON

Today is August 24, 2011, and I we are doing our fourth interview session with Jaime Geaga, and we are here in Silver Lake. How are you, Jaime?

GEAGA

Good, good.

SINGSON

Very good. So we ended our last interview session with a narration of your involvement with KDP [Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino], so starting from your study group, and then leaving that study group and joining the KDP really in its early, early initial stages of formation. But I'd like to move on to sort of, I guess, this is the first project that you undertook as a KDP member, which is the UCLA [University of California Los Angeles] Far West Convention. But just to kind of backtrack, clarify a little bit, when did you join KDP and how did it lead to your involvement with the Far West?

GEAGA

I finally joined KDP probably at the end of October, early November 1973. That's right, yes. Yes. And I guess I was in the process of transferring from UC [University of California] Irvine. That was my last quarter. I was going to move to UCLA and start my winter quarter at UCLA in '74. So that being the case, UCLA was going to be the host of the Far West Convention in the summer of 1974.

SINGSON

It was already approved?

GEAGA

Had been decided. Well, it had been decided the prior year that L.A. was going to host it. Exactly which campus it was going to be held at wasn't determined, but by early 1974, I guess, a group of people, Planning Committee had started to coalesce to start planning for the Far West Convention Los Angeles 1974, and I guess at that point a number of the initial members of the Planning Committee were students from UCLA, and since I was at UCLA now, I joined the Planning Committee.

SINGSON

Just to kind of be a little bit more specific, who was in the Planning Committee? Was it mainly students from UCLA? How did they become part of the Planning Committee? Was there a group that initiated it, or were there other people outside of UCLA as well? So just to sort of be more specific about the groups and people involved.

GEAGA

I guess I can't really say exactly how it started, but my initial impression is that a majority of the planning members were students from UCLA, and I just happened to be one of them as a student from UCLA since I was going to UCLA then.

SINGSON

Was it Samahang [Pilipino], which is the main organization at that point?

GEAGA

It could have been, but I'm not definite. The person who would probably know would be Cas[imiro] Tolentino and Florante [Ibanez] maybe. But there were other community members, and just speculating, I think probably the people who probably called the first planning meeting in Los Angeles were representatives who attended the previous year Far West Convention and probably made a commitment and say, "Okay, L.A. will host it. I or we will take responsibility for calling the first planning meeting. We'll put out the word and see who comes and decides to be part of this." Bob Iluminne, I think, was probably one of those people who initiated that call and probably attended the previous year and probably made the commitment, but that's all speculation on my part.

SINGSON

That's okay.

GEAGA

But he would be a community member. He wasn't a student at UCLA.

SINGSON

What organization did Bob Iluminne come from? So we have these figures, which is Al Mendoza, Bob Iluminne. Were they sort of acting just on their own?

GEAGA

I think so. They were not representing—they could have been doing it on behalf of SIPA [Search to Involve Pilipino Americans] also, but that I don't know. Eventually the Planning Committee just take life of its own. It was not specifically representing a specific local organization, so it was just the Planning Committee for the Los Angeles 1974 Far West Convention comprised of students from UCLA. The committee was not a SIPA or a Samahang or whatever; it was an independent Planning Committee for the Far West Convention 1974. That's how I understand it.

SINGSON

Now, why did you decide to get involved, and what were your initial responsibilities?

GEAGA

Well, I was a student, newly student. I had transferred from UC Irvine to UCLA. It's my first quarter at UCLA. I am now a member of the local chapter of the KDP for a couple of months, and as the KDP going on its—I guess it was formed in 1973 summer, so this is after six months of its formation, it's planning to do its first community intervention. And so the Far West Convention, it had participated in the Far West Convention in previous years not officially as an organization because it had just formed the previous year, but as the pre—what do you call it—the prototype collectives. I guess the prototype pre-KDP formation members of the collectives, especially the Kalayaan Collective in the Bay Area, members of that collective had attended previous Far West Conventions and really attended the Far West Conventions in '71, '72, and even '73 for networking, to network with other Filipino Americans, Filipino nationals who were active in the community.

SINGSON

So 1974 when you said that it's going to be a community intervention, what does that mean?

GEAGA

I guess it's the KDP has two programs when it forms. One is it's to support the National Democratic Movement, the National Democratic Revolution in the Philippines. That includes opposing [Ferdinand] Marcos, opposing the martial law dictatorship. Its second main program is to organize the Filipinos in the U.S. to fight against discrimination, to educate Filipino community about its rich history and legacy as part of the U.S. society starting from the turn of the century when first wave of Filipinos came to work as farm workers in Hawaii and up and down the coast, West Coast of the United States. So it was to educate and fight for Filipino rights the

same way other minorities were being discriminated, and to also link the struggles of Filipinos as part of the broader struggle for rights and civil liberties here in the U.S. for Filipinos as a minority and part of other larger minority population.

SINGSON

So this is sort of the goal, the objective simply saying to educate, but how do you do it, I guess kind of talking about specific strategies, within the Far West Convention?

GEAGA

Yes. Well, this would be now the third, ’71, ’72—this will be the fourth Far West Convention, and the previous three Far West Conventions was a combination of social, which is to be expected, but also workshops on current topics affecting the community: education, employment, labor. There would be a spattering of different—

SINGSON

Panels.

GEAGA

—panels and workshops and plenary sessions, which is good. This is a good thing, and Far West Convention would bring lots of Filipinos together to address current events of what’s affecting communities. And, of course, that also includes what’s going on in the Philippines.

SINGSON

So the workshop form, meaning what’s in the workshop or panel?

GEAGA

It would be in the workshop form where there would be workshop leaders. Of course, there would be the topics to be discussed, determining the panel members of who would present, maybe an outline or overview of the topics to be discussed. The Far West Convention from its inception had this potential format. Clearly, in the first one it was—or maybe first or second ones, even maybe the

third, people would say that it was primarily partying, but a good part of it was also to address serious issues affecting the community. So it would be a mix. By 1974, KDP being a national organization, its strategy was to participate actively in the Far West Convention and use it to actively educate or at least bring the current relevant issues to the community to be discussed. So that was its strategy.

SINGSON

And so for you, did you participate as a panelist or a workshop leader, or what was your particular role?

GEAGA

So as part of the Planning Committee, joining that both as a student at UCLA and also as a member of the KDP, the L.A. chapter, my role was to make sure that the format of the upcoming Far West Convention would include these topics, so organizing the three-day convening of Filipinos up and down the West Coast and also from other parts of the country, that it wouldn't just be a big social, big party, but that there was some seriousness in terms of workshops and plenaries, and that there would be at least these topics that affected the Filipino community would be addressed. So that was really more my role in joining the Planning Committee on behalf of the KDP, just to ensure that there would be contents, there would be substantive content to the Far West Convention, and not it just being a lot of parties and social gatherings.

SINGSON

So a little bit more sort of politically involved.

GEAGA

Yes, yes.

SINGSON

So I guess you, as sort of in the Planning Committee, you attempted to put all the workshops, organize these different aspects of the convention. On the convention itself, was it realized? How did

you think your role as a KDP in organizing—was it successful in the end?

GEAGA

Well, I think in the planning of the Far West Convention there really wasn't a whole lot of controversy because, by and large, the Planning Committee agreed that there should be a good balance of workshops and plenaries and that the topics were important. So there was agreement in the Planning Committee as to the structure and nature of the Far West Convention, that it not be just purely political. It's not a political convening of individuals, but it had broad goals of bringing together members of the Filipino communities West Coast-wide and others from other parts of the country, and it would have a good balance of both social interaction and political discussion of current-day events. Now, I think once the convention convenes, I think maybe there is that tension of whether it—I guess there is on the superficial sense, there seems to be this tension that it's too political, and it really should be more kind of a celebration of Fil-Ams [Filipino Americans] coming together and kind of more emphasis on the celebratory and social part of it. I think on the surface that's what I think is the tension that's going on, and the primary opposing force that the Far West Convention is becoming too, quote, unquote, "political" is Fred Cordova from Seattle or FYA [Filipino Youth Activities].

SINGSON

Who started the Far West Convention in the very beginning, in its inception.

GEAGA

Right, right. They were the founders of the Far West Convention.

SINGSON

Is it a response to maybe the changes that are happening from the first three Far Wests? I guess based on what you heard or at least what you remember about the conversations and, I guess, the events wherein these kinds of tension occurred, how did it come up?

Did people actually say, “This is too political,” or, “Let’s relax”? What did you hear? What did you remember?

GEAGA

I think, yes, probably you’re right. You’d have side conversations. This is once the Far West Convention convenes officially.

SINGSON

So there wasn’t anything before, is what you’re saying. There wasn’t any tension before the conference itself.

GEAGA

Yes, yes. From the point of view of the Planning Committee, there was general agreement about what the character of this Far West Convention would be, knowing that previous Far West Convention was kind of a mixed bag of lots of different things, and that we wanted to make this Far West Convention ’74 clearly both celebrating our coming together, but at the same time addressing the issues.

SINGSON

There’s also another line that other activists remember during this Far West Convention, which is a tension between or conflicts between Philippine-focused work versus Filipino American-focused work. Was that something that you recall occurring during that time, especially with the Marcos—KDP sort of—one of their objectives is to bring attention to what’s happening in the Philippines in a Marcos dictatorship, and there’s always that pro-Marcos versus anti-Marcos within the larger community. So was this ever a source of conflict within the conference, or is it more of a, as you’ve said, political versus celebratory?

GEAGA

I think you’re correct there. I think there was also the tension about whether what’s going on in the Philippines should be something that should be addressed by the community here. So I think in the earlier days right after martial law was declared, the community,

the Filipino activists, Filipino progressives had immediate response to oppose the dictatorship, the declaration of martial law. It was very vocal. I think the support for Marcos was there but was initially not very vocal, but over time, that became more clear, and it was primarily orchestrated through the Philippine consulates. And in cities where the Philippine consulates had more influence or were more established would also channel that support for Marcos or support for declaration through the community organizations. And then there would be a third factor of a sentiment in the community that would say that, "Well, this is really in the Philippines. It really doesn't affect us as Filipinos here." So this would be here, but by that time, the Far West Convention comes to L.A. in 1974. There is also those sentiments which kind of complicates this tension. So clearly it's there, but it was not officially verbalized, vocalized by any one group, but you could clearly see that, well, we shouldn't discuss this, it only divides the community, and we shouldn't be talking about—it just divides the community. I mean, those were the things I would hear.

SINGSON

Did you say we shouldn't talk about—

GEAGA

Well, some people would say that we shouldn't address the issues in the Philippines because it divides the community and we shouldn't talk about it; it just divides the community. But I think the perspective and the position or the line of the KDP was always, well, no, these are all very important issues and they should all be discussed within the community, and since the Far West Convention is a coming together of the community, these should all be relevant issues that should be discussed.

SINGSON

And you talk about this is the line of the KDP. Was there a lot of KDP members who attended the Far West Convention? Because you

sort of mention that KDP was just established in L.A. So was there more members of L.A. KDP, or were there from different places?

GEAGA

Yes, I think another reaction from non-KDP attendees to the 1974 Far West Convention was the presence of a lot of KDP members from different cities across the West Coast, but there were also as many non-KDP attendees who were not—that wasn't an issue to them. Again, I think the reaction comes primarily from—this is from my observations—from Fred, I guess his sense that this is a lot of KDP from Seattle, KDP members from the Bay Area, from Los Angeles, from San Diego attending this specific Far West Convention as KDP members. I think that's another tension there. In terms of percentages, I don't know. I'd have to go back to a roster and see exactly who attended, but there were as many non-KDP attendees who came, but I guess they didn't identify themselves as progressives or youth and didn't really disagree with the fact that we should discuss all these important issues.

SINGSON

So just to kind of clarify, while the convention took on more a political role or more political involvement, let's say, do you credit the KDP's involvement for having that change of tone, I guess, for the Far West Convention?

GEAGA

Oh, definitely. Yes, the Far West Convention taking on a more political character I think could be directly attributed to KDP's involvement, because I think we talked briefly about the '73 Far West Convention. I think I attended that, and I don't even remember the workshops that I attended. All I knew was, like, a big party.

SINGSON

This is the one in San Jose?

GEAGA

In Stockton.

SINGSON

Oh, okay, the 1972 convention.

GEAGA

Seventy-two, I think, yes. I think I attended that ’72. So people have different recollections of the earlier Far West Conventions, and maybe one workshop was very good, and to those who attended that specific workshop, could have been education or youth organizing or labor or anti-discrimination, whatever, it was good for them, but the overall character of the Far West Convention didn’t have that or people don’t remember or don’t have that recollection. So I think we wanted to not only give the structure for the ’74 Far West Convention clearly a more serious character to it besides the celebratory, the social, which is good, too, and I think it could be directly attributed to KDP and saying this is, in general, a good thing for the Filipino community to do.

SINGSON

And a lot of the memories, too, and documents would show that there was this sort of big division that happened in the final plenary session. Do you have any memories of what happened in that final workshop maybe you can relate to us as an example of this tension that’s occurring?

GEAGA

I think while the KDP—this is probably the first KDP’s intervention in the community as part of its program to educate the community about current-day events, issues that impact the community. The KDP definitely had a lot of mistakes, committed a lot of mistakes in implementing its program or this intervention. It’s a young national organization.

SINGSON

You mean this particular convention?

GEAGA

Yes. And the Far West Convention probably is probably a good example of that, and it's epitomized in the final plenary session, I guess the closing plenary session. I think the KDP was successful in at least getting the community to agree that we should discuss what's going on in the Philippines, but the mistake that the KDP did in this particular convention was to not only convince the community that it was important to discuss this, but also for the community to agree as to what the resolution or the solutions to martial law was. And that was there's all these problems both in the Philippines and here in the U.S., and that the only solution to all of these is in the Philippines it had to be the National Democratic Revolution, and in the U.S. the only solution to all these problems that we face as minority communities and as part of a society at large is socialism. So unless those phrases were included in the resolution, nothing was good enough, I think. So that was what this big problem and tension of the Far West Convention, and it kind of just crystallizes at the end in the plenary in how the resolutions were voted on.

SINGSON

Do you remember particular ways in which this particular plenary was held? There was a voting of some sort, you mentioned.

GEAGA

Yes. I think the plenary is the coming together. This is the final plenary, so at the plenary all the different workshops that were held the two previous days would come and present a summary of what was discussed in the workshop.

SINGSON

For all delegates to see.

GEAGA

Exactly, because not all delegates were able to attend all workshops. So there could have been maybe twelve, thirteen. We

could go back to the program and see what were all those workshops. But each workshop at the final plenary had a chance to present a summary of the workshop and whatever resolution that came out of that workshop, and so then the resolution was presented to the assembly, the whole body, with a chance to discuss the resolution and then take a vote on it.

SINGSON

And were there shouting matches that were involved, or how did the tension manifest?

GEAGA

There wasn't really shouting matches. I think there was definitely active discourse about the resolution from each of the workshops that were presented, active discourse, debate. And clearly, I think, for the KDP or KDP members who were part of the different workshops, once the resolution was presented, insisted that there be these phrases as part of—

SINGSON

For each of the workshops.

GEAGA

For each of the workshops. And, clearly, that was a real mistake. Anyway, a solution to these problems, proposed by the KDP's only solution, there could be lots of different solutions. There could be a gradation of those different solutions. And I think that was the problem in insisting that this be the one and only solution.

SINGSON

So what happened after the 1974 Far West Convention within the convention community? Let's just start with that. And then later on I wanted to ask what happened to sort of the Los Angeles community as a response to what happened to the Far West. So first let's talk about the Far West Convention itself. What happened after that?

GEAGA

After that, well, because there were a lot of KDP attendees, and in a lot of the different resolutions had, when it was put out to vote, had a majority in kind of passing or amending the resolution to reflect the way KDP wanted it to be reflected, and then passing it. At the same time, you could see there was a lot of disillusionment among the other non-KDP members who didn't necessarily agree with the way the resolution was worded. You could see a sense of that disillusion. But by and large, a lot of people also agreed with the KDP. So that was after the convention in the Planning Committee, I guess me, being the most open representative of the KDP, got the brunt of that criticism in the Planning Committee. But I think at that point we acknowledged the kind of over-handed, heavy-handed role that the KDP played. This is kind of at the summation of the—

SINGSON

Evaluation.

GEAGA

Evaluation, yes. So, clearly, it was heavy-handed, the fact that there were a lot of members of KDP who attended the convention and had that vote, that it had to be much more open to other solutions.

SINGSON

Did the 1975 convention reflect a response to what happens in 1974?

GEAGA

I forget what the next—I think '75—

SINGSON

In Berkeley.

GEAGA

—was held in Berkeley, yes. I think the character of the convention—well, again, the main opposition to the whole character and what seemed to be this character change of the Far West Convention, specifically in Los Angeles, was really from FYA in Seattle. So that was really the main—there wasn't really any—and maybe a few independents or so to speak maybe were close to FYA. I don't know. But the specific response of the subsequent, the following Far West Convention was it took into account the mistakes, or KDP assessed how its role was in the '74, and subsequently in '75, when you see the resolutions, you could clearly see that the KDP didn't really fight tooth and nail to make sure that the word "socialism" had to be in the resolution. The resolutions were actually much broader. So concretely that's how it changed, and it wasn't insistent on what were the strategic solutions to these issues and problems raised by the community.

SINGSON

Within L.A.'s communities, so you had students involved in the planning, you had the larger community. I'm not sure if FACLA [Filipino American Community of Los Angeles] was involved also in the planning, because it is held in L.A. and you have volunteers and people coming from L.A. This kind of disunity, did it ever affect the L.A. Filipino community or Filipino activists, maybe?

GEAGA

I think maybe not a direct impact. I think the rest of the Filipino community, L.A.'s participation in the Far West Convention was primarily students and a few individuals, namely Bob Iluminne, who was not really that active in the local Filipino community like FACLA or whatever. So other Filipino organizations, civic organizations, regional organizations in L.A. were more peripheral to the Far West Convention. So this is, again, a new activity in terms of Filipino community annual event, and so it didn't really impact. I think maybe it's more the signal of in the local Filipino community between the anti-martial-law forces or the anti-martial-law

individuals or the sentiment that it's anti-Marcos and anti-martial law versus the sentiment that is pro-martial law and pro-Marcos.

SINGSON

So just to clarify, what you're saying is that the 1974 UCLA Far West Convention seemed to be kind of the beginning of this—

GEAGA

More dynamic anti-martial law and pro-martial law.

SINGSON

Okay, let's get to that, then. So kind of shifting gears to KDP and their work as an anti-Marcos, you mentioned that they have two objectives: the anti-discrimination within the U.S. and also the anti-Marcos kind of focusing on the Philippines. So let's focus on that first. Just to trace back, your narration about the formation of the NCRCLP [National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines] in Santa Cruz and then your move to KDP, can you maybe delineate the differences between the different groups of anti-Marcos movement? So how is KDP different from all these different NCRCLP, any other groups?

GEAGA

To start with, I guess the differences between KDP and NCRCLP—in fact, the NCRCLP predates the KDP. So the National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines was specifically established to oppose the declaration of martial law in the Philippines, and that's it. Let's say once martial law is abolished, then maybe the basis for NCRCLP doesn't exist, whereas the KDP not only opposes the declaration of martial law in the Philippines, it actually also supports the actual—the change, the fundamental change in Philippine society, supporting the National Democratic Revolution.

SINGSON

And just to clarify, is there a connection between the groups in the Philippines, the National Democratic Front, so really broad coalition

of different students, different activists in the Philippines, some who have moved to the mountains and militarized? Was there a direct link between the KDP, or is it the KDP and the National Democratic Front, or is it more of a supporting role?

GEAGA

It's more of a supporting role, yes. There are members from National Democratic Front who emigrate to the U.S. because they are being sought by the government, and the only way they could seek safety is to leave the country. They come from prominent families. They have the resources to leave the country, to go to Europe, to go to the U.S., and once they come here, they feel a responsibility to continue to be involved in the National Democratic Front in the Philippines, but being outside the country, so they build support for the National Democratic Front. So they actively participate in the formation of organizations. Some of them join KDP, some of them join other organizations that are in support of the National Democratic Front, but there isn't a direct link. I think it's through these individuals.

SINGSON

And you mentioned other groups, so who are the other groups?

GEAGA

I guess there's in Canada—these are, again, groups that are collectives, and so then this is prior to the formation of KDP '71, '72. And then with the formation of KDP, they all agree as collectives to come together to form the U.S. national organization called Union of Democratic Filipinos, or KDP. I think the collectives in Canada also join the KDP, or I don't know if they form one in Canada. There are collectives in Europe, Italy. I think they eventually migrate to the U.S. So I think in those formative years they're more fluid, but I know there were collectives like in Italy.

SINGSON

There are also political asylums, such as sort of bigger, larger, more prominent political figures, such as Raul Manglapus.

GEAGA

Raul Daza.

SINGSON

Right, Raul Daza. And they seem to be different from the KDP.

GEAGA

Yes. I remember meeting Raul Daza because he lived here in Los Angeles, and he's in exile. After the declaration of martial law there are Philippine congress people who opposed the declaration of martial law, and so Marcos goes after them. So to seek safety, they migrate to the U.S.

SINGSON

And how do they support the KDP, or how are the interacting?

GEAGA

I think my specific interaction with Raul, who lived in the U.S. and knew my mom [Remedios Vergara Geaga], I don't know how, and also Dr. [Ramon] Sison —

SINGSON

JoMa [Jose Maria] Sison.

GEAGA

JoMa's brother, older brother.

SINGSON

And just for full record, what is his name?

GEAGA

Dr. Sison. JoMa's older brother. I can't remember the first name.

SINGSON

But he was in Los Angeles.

GEAGA

He was also in Los Angeles. Right after the declaration of martial law there are Filipinos who are opposed to martial law, to Marcos, but are not members of KDP.

SINGSON

And did they interact with you as a KDP member? I guess the question is what is the role of KDP for these larger political figures?

GEAGA

Well, they knew that we were anti-martial law and we supported the National Democratic Revolution, the NDF [National Democratic Front], but we would get together to say, "We need to still organize a protest against Marcos. Let's do one in the consulate on the anniversary of the declaration of martial law." So in that sense, we had a point of unity opposing the government, the Marcos dictatorship. As to what would replace it, that's where we would have different—and that was okay. We would distinguish ourselves from each other in what we thought would be—what was the replacement to once martial law is abolished and civil liberties are restored, the different individuals and groups that they eventually come to form had their different programs as to what would be the solution for the Philippine nation after Marcos.

SINGSON

So just to clarify, were there local chapters, too, for example, for the Friends of the Filipino People, which is sort of a large organization throughout the U.S., and also the Movement to Free the Philippines?

GEAGA

Movement for Free Philippines. Movement for Free Philippines, MFP.

SINGSON

So were there local chapters in L.A., or did you sort of interact with them only at a national level?

GEAGA

No, it varied from city to city, but specifically for L.A. I think there was an MFP chapter, and I know Raul was a member of that. Raul Manglapus was not in L.A. I think he was in Washington, D.C. or—

SINGSON

Chicago.

GEAGA

Or Chicago. But there would be a local chapter, or if there wasn't a local chapter, there would be individuals who would be members of this other larger group. And where there would not be a member or a chapter, then I think the national group—and I'm trying to think of whether there was just a national group. But I think in the case of L.A. we had both. We had either a member or chapter of the other anti-Marcos groups by '75. That's MFP, which includes the Philippine News, Raul Manglapus, Raul Daza, other independents in L.A. I think Eric Lachica was a member of MFP.

SINGSON

Now, how did the other larger Filipinos—for example, let's talk about FACLA and the other regional groups—react to these existing anti-Marcos groups? Or maybe we don't have to speak for the other groups, but specifically for KDP?

GEAGA

I think KDP locally actively did education work around what was going on in the Philippines: political prisoners. We would have the torture of political prisoners. We were able to get speakers to come to the U.S. I forget the name of—there were several clergy people who were very active in freeing political prisoners were able to go on a tour, and we would host them. We would organize forums and give them a platform to talk about their plight as political prisoners. So we did these active educations with whoever other groups that wanted to sponsor it, including the NCRCLP, which they did, including, by and large, a local chapter of MFP. So there would be these events that, by and large, all the anti-Marcos groups, I think, would—

SINGSON

Support.

GEAGA

—support, anything that had to do with opposing the Marcos dictatorship. But at the same time, within the group there would articles in the Philippine News attacking the KDP and say, "Well, KDP's a communist organization, so we shouldn't work with them."

SINGSON

Did this criticism occur only at a national level?

GEAGA

Yes, on the national level, but you could hear it locally from individuals, primarily from the pro-Marcos, the individuals and consulate who were openly pro-Marcos.

SINGSON

So just to clarify, sort of locally you hear there's more clear tension between the pro-Marcos and anti-Marcos, but the anti-Marcos groups, the tension and conflict between them only happens at the national level?

GEAGA

At the national level, yes.

SINGSON

So there's always supportive work between the anti-Marcos groups.

GEAGA

I think so, by and large, yes.

SINGSON

So how did the Philippine Consulate oppose you? Do you have many memories of plenaries or forums, educational forums wherein the consulate will oppose or clearly oppose what you're saying?

GEAGA

Yes. I think at this period the Philippine Consulate, from my recollection, maybe ’75, organizes Compuso. I’m trying to remember what that stands for. You might have to do some research. But it’s kind of a coalition of Filipino local organizations, Compuso.

SINGSON

Sort of like FACLA?

GEAGA

And FACLA is supposedly part of this coalition or alliance that’s headed up very specifically by the consulate. And in FACLA, I think during those years, by ’77 the president is very pro-consulate and pro-Marcos.

SINGSON

And just for the record, is it okay to mention his name?

GEAGA

I don’t remember the president. See, my mother was the president of FACLA from ’72 to ’76, and she is anti-Marcos-leaning.

SINGSON

And why do you think—is it your own influence on her?

GEAGA

One of the influences, I think, but she’s very good friends with Raul Daza and Dr. Sison, who were very—and I think it’s Dr. Sison who introduces her to Raul Daza. This is, like, ’73, maybe ’74, ’75, who are in their own individual ways organizing against martial law.

SINGSON

So I know you can’t speak for your mother, but as sort of your own observation of how she led FACLA, was there ever any of these political leanings? Did it ever translate to her leadership? Especially

because the Filipino community is both anti- and pro-Marcos, involves both.

GEAGA

During her presidency I don't think she was officially anti-Marcos. It's not until she is not president anymore that she come out publicly against Marcos. I think through the late seventies, '78, '79, does she become publicly and actually participates in the demonstration in the consulate. But I think during her term as president for years, FACLA was primarily seen as doing a lot of activities for the seniors, the lunch program, the dancing, and just fundraisers to expand the community, a lot of different Filipino organization using the facilities. It was kind of open to everybody, everybody's use, both pro-martial law and anti-martial law. The anti-martial law, some of the anti-Marcos forums were held at FACLA during that, like '76, I guess through her last term. By '77 a different president took and was more pro-consulate, pro-Marcos, and so there was limited access to the—

SINGSON

Building.

GEAGA

To the Community Building. And that's when KDP as a local chapter took on the project of—what was the term you used?

SINGSON

Reforming.

GEAGA

Reforming FACLA. I think that reform platform, because I think it's during the '77 through '79 period that was clearly pro-Marcos through the president at that time.

SINGSON

So let's talk about that a little later, but I want to kind of talk about this Compuso, which is the reaction or the response of the Philippine

Consulate. When do you approximately think—when did this form, and what did they do?

GEAGA

I think it formed in ’77. I think that’s when it’s formed. Clearly the main group that formed it was the Philippine Consulate. It was very prominent, and they would have events. I think they celebrated Philippine Independence Day on July 4th. And to counter that, the KDP organized the Philippine National Day on June 12th. So those were two competing community events with different emphasis. Yes, so the June 12th Philippine National Day was celebrating Philippine heritage, the Philippine revolution during the turn of the century against Spain, whereas the consulate was more promoting Philippine Independence Day, July 4th, and pro-Marcos, what was going on in the Philippines. So there was clearly differences between the two. This is, like, in ’77, ’76, ’77, I think.

SINGSON

And what were the response of the people? Did they go more to the Philippine National Day or the Philippine Independence Day?

GEAGA

I think the community was split clearly, but there was also a big majority of people who were just silent, didn’t want to be identified one way or the other for whatever reason, and kind of were maybe the silent majority, the observers of the very active discourse in the community.

SINGSON

Well, I can imagine, or at least from based on my conversations with other activists, how they would really push and educate, but maybe you can help us or describe to us what the response is or what the other pro-Marcos—were there groups? Did they have educational forums as well, or did they attend the same educational forums that you did with debates? How did this active discourse occur?

GEAGA

No, I don't recall any pro-Marcos coming to any anti-martial-law forums and actively debate there. They pretty much kept away. Again, the main proponent for the pro-dictatorship was really the consulate.

SINGSON

Is it through newsletters?

GEAGA

Through newsletters, exactly, through kind of the July 4th Philippine Independence Day celebration. But a lot of it was print propaganda. That's my recollection. Otherwise, maybe the broad majority of the community was more silent. I think it's in FACLA because the president at that time—I forget the name of the president—was more pro-Compuso and would make statements about what was going on in the Philippines and the Marcos presidency and how things were really good there, a lot of positive stuff. And so the KDP as an independent community group challenged a lot of those claims.

SINGSON

So let's talk about that. How did they challenge? What is the strategy for reforming FACLA? Is it just to oust the president?

GEAGA

Yes, I think. Yes, I think the reform—I was there for part of it, but I think the reform of FACLA—well, yes, I think it starts in '77 because, clearly, '77 is when around that, maybe '76, is when the Compuso forms, or '77, led by the consulate. There's a president who then, I think, replaces my mom in FACLA, is very pro-Compuso, pro-consulate, pro-martial law. But we're also still members of FACLA as individuals, because when my mother was the president, lots of organizations and individuals, members of the FACLA, became kind of a center for community activities, so we participated in that. I think this challenge, when the election for

officers would be held every year came up, we would field candidates. Greg Santillan, was a KDP member, ran for president, I think in ’78. I forget exactly what the results were, but in the meeting, the incumbent president would use parliamentary procedures to prevent anybody that was identified as KDP from speaking or coming up to the mic, things like that.

SINGSON

So Greg Santillan, as a candidate for presidency, he wasn’t able to speak or—

GEAGA

Yes. Or if he was, he would be cut off right away. So all kinds of parliamentary—so it would be very contentious, and it was intense.

SINGSON

Did KDP—obviously, I guess, they weren’t successful.

GEAGA

I don’t think so, no, only because I think the ballots—we always alleged that the ballot boxes were stuffed. There was never really an accurate count of the votes.

SINGSON

You talk about this as if—you mentioned that you weren’t around. Did you leave L.A.?

GEAGA

I think I left L.A. I was in L.A. in ’77 when the reformed FACLA got started, and then I think I was around for about a year, and then I kind of moved to the background just to take care of my own personal issues, so I wasn’t quite on the forefront. Then shortly thereafter, I left. I moved to the Bay Area.

SINGSON

So just kind of still on this, focusing on the anti-Marcos, was there ever any difference that you observed among, for example, class

differences or sort of social class, economic class, or maybe a time of arrival in the U.S., different waves of arrival? Do you see any delineation of the pro-Marcos versus anti-Marcos, or is it really just political ideologies?

GEAGA

When we took up the reform campaign of FACLA, the majority of the manongs, the older people there, really supported what we were saying, and at the same time, though, they said—while we were all very friendly and had a lot of big support with the old-timers and their wives, their wives being primarily Caucasian women, they also said, "Well, you're so young. You're still wet behind the ears. You need to grow up some more," type of thing.

SINGSON

Because you're very idealistic?

GEAGA

Probably. "You're still youth, but what you guys are doing is really great." I think that's what I remember from—"You're good. You're challenging the establishment," so to speak, the establishment being the consulate and FACLA. But in terms of delineating, I guess the pro-Marcos, the really visible active voice was really the Philippine Consulate and then maybe a few presidents of organizations here and there. But by and large, the community was, again, very silent, and they would only convey whatever their feelings about it to you in private. I think the majority of people kind of, over time, were trying to see that martial law was not good and was not supporting it. Even my mom, over time, she didn't come out anti-martial law right away, but eventually she became very vocal. And then maybe with her coming out, she was also able to bring over some people. But I think the initial reaction of the majority of the community was kind of more stand back and see what's going to come out, what's going to happen.

SINGSON

As a KDP member—so let's kind of leave the anti-Marcos in the background—were there other things during the 1970s, early seventies towards before you left to the Bay Area, were there other activities that you were involved in? Because you mentioned that KDP has these two goals, so anti-Marcos and then this anti-racism, sort of promoting socialist revolution in the United States. Did you take part in that second goal?

GEAGA

Yes, I did. There was, I think, some of the examples of projects or campaigns that the KDP took, and specifically in L.A. were organizing nurses. There were a lot of nurses. In fact, by '77, '78 a lot of the supporters of the KDP chapter were nurses at UCLA at different hospitals.

SINGSON

New arrivals?

GEAGA

Yes, new arrivals. At that time we were doing the campaign, and the reason for that is because a lot of nurses were here on an H-1 visa, and they were being—actually, there was the [Filipina] Narciso-[Leonora] Perez. There were two nurses in Michigan—is it Michigan? I forget the details—who were being blamed for the death of a patient. So after doing research, I think some KDP members actually from the East Coast went to Michigan to talk to the two nurses to find out exactly what was going on before we took on the campaign. We knew that this was a discriminatory case, that this was a scapegoat for them or they were being scapegoated for this, so we took up a national campaign and organized nurses locally to support the two nurses in Michigan. So a lot of nurses, it resonated with them because they had the same situation as these nurses in Michigan. Their legal status was all hinged on this H-1 visa, and they could be easily discriminated or relegated to positions that really they had more skills for, things like that. So we checked that out.

SINGSON

How did you interact with them? Did you recruit them?

GEAGA

We held forums, and through those, nurses would attend, and they said they support it. And from them, one or two of them actually joined KDP. And through them being nurses working in the hospitals, extended that outreach to other nurses, immigrants. So that's one campaign. I'm trying to think. There were other—there was the [Regents of the University of California v.] Bakke case against affirmative action. There was the Alona case. This was a Filipino doctor in Ventura, or there was a military base there. He was also being accused for murder of a patient, and we took up that Alona case.

SINGSON

Now, since this is so close to L.A., it must have been sort of a main L.A. project.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Did it become national?

GEAGA

There was national support for it, but it was primarily focused—one of the KDP activists actually moved up to Ventura and stayed with the family to help organize forums about their case to let the community know, and then some demonstrations just so it would get press coverage.

SINGSON

And since there's just not a lot of documentation about KDP, I just wanted to get a sense of how big the group is, how you work together, I guess, sort of more in this organizational structure-wise.

Let’s start with your position. Did you hold an office of some sort, and how many people were under you? Structure is sort of something that needs to be talked about when you talk about an organization.

GEAGA

I joined KDP in the end of 1973. By 1975 I was elected to the National Council, which is, I think, a council of nine members from all over the country. I think, yes, it was nine. And from that National Council there is the National Executive Board that’s formed, that basically the National Council meets every six months to discuss policy. The National Executive Board is the group, the subcommittee of the National Council, that directs the work of the KDP day-to-day in between the National Council. So I get elected to the National Council in ’75, summer, and from the National Council I’m also elected to be part of the National Executive Board for two years.

SINGSON

And this is in ’75 and ’76?

GEAGA

Yes, ’75 to ’76, ’76 to ’77, for two years.

SINGSON

So if it’s a day-to-day, were you ever moved—

GEAGA

I had to move to the Bay Area for those two years.

SINGSON

Okay, in ’75 and ’76.

GEAGA

Yes, ’76 and ’77, for those two years. So I was in the Bay Area as part of the National Executive Board for two years. I was

responsible not the anti-martial law component of the organization's work, but more the anti-discrimination.

SINGSON

And just briefly, because we're sort of out of L.A., what were the projects that you handled while you were in the National Executive Board, specific projects for the KDP?

GEAGA

This was the beginning of the Narciso-Perez campaign, I think, was '76. I took that up. That was one national campaign that I was heading up, and my primary responsibility of the National Executive Board was really more regional organizational oversight. So I had a national campaign that I was leading. That was the Narciso-Perez campaign. And then I was primarily responsible for overseeing the East Coast, I think East Coast and Chicago. So I would go out there to make sure that the chapters in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. were okay, regional and chapter work, more organizational work.

SINGSON

So you do a lot of traveling.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

How was that for you?

GEAGA

Well, it wasn't quite a lot. A lot of it was by phone, and occasionally I would go out to the East Coast for a regional conference. That would be at least once a year.

SINGSON

So you mean one will be held in the East Coast and one will be held at the West Coast?

GEAGA

There would be a regional conference—well, there were several regions. There's the East Coast region, there's the Chicago chapter and region in and of itself. I think people from Canada would come to that region. There's the Southern California region. I think I headed up the Southern California region as well, which is basically L.A. and San Diego. So there would be a regional conference of the regions, so the chapters in that region would come together for a regional conference. There's the Bay Area region. There's Hawaii. There was a main chapter, and there would be individuals in different islands. And there was the Seattle, which was both a region and a chapter.

SINGSON

For the Northwest.

GEAGA

The Pacific Northwest, yes.

SINGSON

And I wanted to get a sense of how many members were really active.

GEAGA

Nationwide, maybe at its height, maybe 300-plus individuals.

SINGSON

At its height meaning?

GEAGA

Probably 1976, '77, through the latter part of the seventies.

SINGSON

So you're really in the leadership while KDP is doing lots of things.

GEAGA

All kinds of stuff.

SINGSON

How did you juggle? You said that you handled the Narciso-Perez. Are each leader focusing on an issue? Is that how it works?

GEAGA

Yes. It was a combination of a campaign, a national campaign, and heading up a region. From the executive board there was one person who was heading up just the newspaper, the Ang Katipunan. There was one who headed up all of the National Democratic support-related work, the anti-martial law, support for the work, whatever needed to be done as it related to the National Democratic support work in the Philippines. Let's see what else. There was the chair of the National Executive Board. So the tasks within the National Executive Board were assigned according to these different things, and they would change sometimes. There would be another campaign, or another region would be transferred to another individual.

SINGSON

Just to kind of wrap this session up, having explained these two levels or goals of the Philippine issue and sort of the more U.S. issues, how did they come together? Were they sort of treated separately? Or I guess in the KDP's attacking these two separate things, were there ever any tension between it? Or how did you see it?

GEAGA

From the very beginning, even the formation of KDP, that was an issue by some individuals who said you can only have one program, or if it did, there has to be a principal and a secondary. So this is always kind of—but I think coming out of the founding—I was part of the founding congress. I think it always just said this is the dual program, dual goal, and both had the same importance. I think as part of leadership and a member during my time in KDP, there was a definite—what do you call it? What's the word? I mean, the two

never really was in opposition because as you talk about support for the Philippines or if you talk about anti-discrimination, there was always that occasion to bring up what was going on in the Philippines because the Filipino you would be talking to had relatives in the Philippines. So it wasn't weird to talk about what was going on in the Philippines. Or maybe some people really, maybe Filipino Americans, that may sound new to them, but there was clear interest to kind of just what's going on. Whether they became actively involved was another question, and it was their choice whether they wanted to be or not, but it never was really in conflict, I think, as far as what's the organization's primary objective. It never was an issue again, although for some, theoretically, both within the organization and people outside, the National Democratic Front, actually their position was you can't have two goals.

SINGSON

Oh, you mean coming from the Philippines.

GEAGA

Coming from the Philippines. They thought the KDP can't have two principal goals. You have to identify what's your primary goal. So their position was the KDP should not have two simultaneous goals. But I think when we were implementing it, it never was—I think for everybody there was kind of a consensus that they were not contradictory. They were not mutually exclusive. You could actually do both.

SINGSON

Even in resources? You only have so much amount of time and so much amount of funding to support a forum in L.A., for example. Why is it that you chose to—well, I'm not sure. So let's talk about, for example, the FACLA reform. Was it mainly to reform Marcos, the pro-Marcos sentiment, or is it to reform the workings of community politics?

GEAGA

I think it had that broader objective of reforming the community. I think prior to the Compuso taking it over, the FACLA, under my mom's, Mrs. Geaga's, presidency really had the beginnings of it really being a Community Center that had the facilities to host lots of different activities. It could take up issues about education, affirmative action, have youth activities, programs for the seniors, a bunch of programs, multifaceted, the same way a lot of other Community Centers in minority communities function. So that was the broader goal, and address other issues that face members of the community. Like today it would be around healthcare, Medicare. It could be participate in election politics, which candidate should we support, or at least be a center where that discussion could take place. That was really the vision of what this Community Center, rather than it just being so—and it could have pageants, whatever, and festivals, but not solely that, the way it used to be. So it was kind of just to broaden it to have this more all-sided character to—that's what the KDP's vision of reforming the FACLA to be.

SINGSON

Besides the anti-Marcos.

GEAGA

Besides the anti-Marcos. Exactly.

SINGSON

The first question that I asked was competing resources. You only have so amount of funding to do—

GEAGA

Maybe that's where it takes its toll, these two programs takes its toll, because I think the membership was really—what do you call it? They were squeezed, every ounce of blood, in terms of time. Or other personal issues became—it was at the expense of other things, like raising a family. It demanded activism 24/7. I think that's the toll that it takes.

SINGSON

I think the best way to wrap this up is for your own personal opinion, your own personal experience. Did it do that for you, the KDP? How did KDP really sap this energy? Did it take a toll or was it more supportive? Did it encourage you or your character? What was its effect for you personally?

GEAGA

Well, I think me, personally, the response to when I felt I needed to address some of my own personal needs was uneven from individuals, but I think as an organization it was not mature enough to recognize that there were personal needs that each individual active in the movement had to face, and I think this is kind of a general sense of a lot of members, if not most members, who were activists 24/7. Some individuals were supportive and saying, "Yeah, you should do that." But formally as an organization it did not have that maturity to recognize it. But I went ahead or dropped out, went to the background, pursued my—when I got elected to National Council in 1975, that's when I decided to put my college career on hold, so I stopped going to UCLA. I think that spring was my last semester. I started '74 through '75 at UCLA.

SINGSON

Was it already in your third year? How far have you gone?

GEAGA

I guess two years, even though I had been three years total at both UC Irvine and UCLA. But it's something that I consciously decided I was going to do. When I said, "I'm going to put my college career on hold," I knew that I was doing that. Being an activist at that time seemed much more important to me. There was so many things going on not only in the U.S., but internationally. So I gave full-time of my life starting in the summer of '75 through '79, when I decided that I was going to pull back and go back to school and finish my career.

SINGSON

Are you in the Bay Area?

GEAGA

I'm in the Bay Area, yes. I'm in San Francisco. I go back to the Bay Area because I was looking to finish my college, and I got accepted to Stanford Medical Center for the Physician Assistant Program.

SINGSON

Okay. Let's continue the story next time that we start the session. So thank you very much. [End of August 24, 2011 interview]

1.5. Session Five (August 31, 2011)

SINGSON

So today is August 31, and we are here in Silver Lake again, and we are doing our fifth and last session with Jaime Geaga. How are you, Jaime?

GEAGA

Good.

SINGSON

Very good. So today I guess we're going to really move along your experiences. We ended last time with sort of the late seventies, your coming back to Los Angeles and helping reform FACLA [Filipino American Community of Los Angeles], and so this point is sort of a transition period for you. This is sort of the point, too, that you came out as gay for your family, in your community. So let's relate the circumstances that led up to your coming out. You can start wherever you can route it back to, so from where you began to decide that it's time to come out.

GEAGA

Well, I think the late seventies, probably '79, or maybe even starting with '77, it's starting to explore my sexuality. I knew for a long time I was different, I wasn't straight, that I had an attraction to men, even growing up, but never really seriously addressed it. So as I look back, certainly one way to not address it was to also be

active in a lot of different things throughout my growing up, especially during my adolescent years. By this time, I guess ’77, I would be—how old would I be? Thirty-plus years.

SINGSON

So what you’re saying is that sort of doing a lot of things, doing the activities that you were doing as a young person, was sort of a distraction?

GEAGA

Yes, maybe subconsciously a distraction to not addressing sexuality, especially when during adolescence you’re actively—what do you call it—exploring those issues. [telephone ringing]

SINGSON

Should we pause for a moment? [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

Okay, so we’re back, and we’re recording after a quick pause. So I just wanted to kind of trace back this earlier period of your sexuality, and then leading up to the coming-out process. So you knew earlier on, even during adolescence. Then when, do you think, did you start learning about other gay people?

GEAGA

I really didn’t—first of all, coming out after my being very active, I guess, like I said, it was probably in my late twenties, early thirties that, I guess, sexuality just can’t be suppressed anymore. So by that, I think the gay community was also starting to emerge, especially in metropolitan areas. It’s something you can’t avoid. So for me, living both in San Francisco during the mid seventies, especially San Francisco, and then L.A., the newspaper, the clubs were beginning to—they were beginning to come into existence.

SINGSON

Were you ever touched politically with Harvey Milk and sort of even just here on the West Coast or even what’s happening in New York

with the protests on gay rights, etc.? Did you ever hear about these, and how did you react to them?

GEAGA

I didn't hear about—I knew of Harvey Milk, and that was interesting. The thing that stands in my mind when I was coming out was the Gay Liberation Movement in the Bay Area, and it was something of interest to me, but I never really pursued. So that developed in mid seventies in San Francisco. So the notion of gay, homosexuals, and all that was becoming more public and kind of allowed the circumstance for me to kind of more actively look into it. It was more favorable. But it wasn't till later that I heard more about the Stonewall [riots] in the East Coast. I was familiar with Harvey Milk. So I was already—I've come out. In fact, I came out when I was in the Bay Area. I came out to KDP [Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino], to other members in the organization, that I was gay.

SINGSON

So before relating that to circumstances within KDP, I wanted to ask, did you ever come out to your family before then? I guess the first question should be what is the notion of gayness in the Filipino family setting or among your friends? Was there some sort of fear that, "Oh, I'll be rejected by my family," or just sort of on a more family, personal, friends level rather than political?

GEAGA

Yes. I didn't come out to my family till maybe the early eighties, so my coming out, my exploration of my sexuality, my gayness, was more within the context of being an activist, and it seemed comfortable to me.

SINGSON

It's uncomfortable?

GEAGA

It seemed comfortable. It was more comfortable for me. But as far as discussing the issue with family or within the community, I hadn't come out to my family or to the community.

SINGSON

Right away.

GEAGA

Right away. It was not till later.

SINGSON

Why is that? What do you think is a typical Filipino's view of it? So is there a cultural factor that you think played into why you delayed coming out?

GEAGA

I think it's still a taboo issue in the same way it is probably in a lot of other communities. Culturally, at least it's an acknowledged concept in our community, but I think it's more caricatured the same way in other cultures, probably in other communities. It's just that in my case there was more clear discretion about whether I wanted to come out or not in the community. But other than that, it wasn't any specific—

SINGSON

Well, I'm also thinking of the differences between bakla in the Philippines and also the gayness in the U.S. Did you have any notions of that?

GEAGA

Yes, I think I was aware of that, and maybe that could have also prevented me from being more aggressive or coming out more openly right away.

SINGSON

What was your perception of it or what was your family's perception of the bakla?

GEAGA

There was no open ridiculing of bakla in our family, or at least in my family, the way maybe if you go out in the community or when you're growing up as teenagers, there definitely is more ridiculing of that, and it's used for bullying when you're in grade school or high school, but not specifically. It's never really been discussed in our family.

SINGSON

I guess I'm also trying to get a sense of the difference between bakla and gay here in the U.S. So we think of bakla in terms of their beauty, they're the ones who wear makeup, in the makeup industry, they're fixing people's hair in the Filipino community. Was there that difference here, and did you relate to any of the gayness of America versus bakla even before you started coming out?

GEAGA

I think no. Those distinctions are kind of more developed in my mind later, not so much before. Those were all very unconscious or subconscious notions. But somehow in my gradual coming out and initial exploration, clearly it started the notions of—my previous notions of gay or bakla were being kind of redefined by seeing new—again, that Gay Liberation Movement. I said, wow, it's a progressive movement, which is also not only fighting for or advocating for gay rights, but it's antiwar, anti-discrimination. These were gay activists in the Bay Area who I just would read about, but not really met anybody. Well, I knew a few, but not really well known. But again, it was developing a different image compared to what maybe I grew up with.

SINGSON

So let's talk about that. What was the process of coming out to KDP? You mentioned that they were sort of the first group or community that you decided that could accept your coming out. So what was it like? So how did you tell them, if you can relate to us, and what was their reaction?

GEAGA

Like I told you, I moved up to the Bay Area to be part of the National Executive Board of the KDP. That was 1975 to ’77, and that’s San Francisco Bay Area, where also that’s where I hear about the Gay Liberation—I think it’s Gay Liberation Front or something to that effect.

SINGSON

So there’s a main organization?

GEAGA

Yes, main organization in the Bay Area. And, of course, in San Francisco there’s the Castro [District] area, which is where a lot of the gay bars during that time were starting to develop. There was already a whole lot. There were other members of KDP who were also gay, so during our off time we’d go to the bars. So those would be during our off time, so it wasn’t very regular, but I had that opportunity to go the bars during the weekends when I didn’t have any specific duties that I needed to complete.

SINGSON

It’s socialization.

GEAGA

It was like a social—yes, exactly. So by the time I get back to Southern California and to the regional chapter, I felt because I was the top leadership here, I didn’t have that. I felt I just had so much responsibility that I couldn’t really maybe address my personal life or my exploration of my sexuality or being gay the same way I did when I was in the Bay Area.

SINGSON

Is it because you had so much responsibility?

GEAGA

Yes, I was kind of in the leadership, regional leadership. So I'd have to prepare for meetings. I'd head up meetings, I'd chair meetings, a lot of stuff, and kind of all-consuming. We talked a little bit about the KDP life. It was a 24/7 commitment during those years. There was one—I think we had a meeting to prepare for the protest demonstration. I think it was kind of the annual anti-martial-law demonstration that we were preparing for, so we had a meeting in—

SINGSON

In the consulate?

GEAGA

Yes, I think it was going to be in front of the consulate. It's, like, probably in September 22, declaration of martial law. I was heading to this meeting and I was so totally out of it, and so my colleagues in the same leadership level said, "Jaime, you seem so out of it, because you didn't even go through everything that we need to cover." I said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Well, I was just kind of thinking about where I was going to go out tonight." [laughs]

SINGSON

So you're distracted.

GEAGA

Distracted. Exactly. So that's how I came out. I was talking about which bars I was going to go to. Well, actually, I had already come out to the national leadership, like, when I was in the Bay Area, so people knew I was gay. I think the other thing is being a national organization and leadership, I would hear—the specific reason why I came out was that there were other activists, women activists who had an attraction for me in other regions of the country, so I just had to. I knew they would share, but then I would tell my colleagues, say, "Well, I like them, but I don't have the same—it's not mutual, and I'm gay."

SINGSON

Wow.

GEAGA

So, of course, the word got back. But anyway, so that's really how specifically how I come out.

SINGSON

Well, this is interesting because we always think of the KDP as sort of a very political organization, but of course there's also the sexuality and gender and love, romance playing out within the group. Going back to the national organization, is it sort of through rumors that your sexuality is actually being discussed, and it's not sort of an official thing?

GEAGA

Yes, yes, it's not an official—

SINGSON

So it didn't affect at all your work?

GEAGA

My work, no. No.

SINGSON

So how did the Southern California people react? You're being distracted.

GEAGA

Yes, I'm being distracted. I think similarly, because I'm in leadership here, there's other comrade women who have an attraction for me, so I had to sit with them one-on-one and say, "I like you very much, we're friends, but it's not mutual." So I think this is all kind of happening '78 when I come back, '77, '78. So as a result of that, I'm kind of relieved of my kind of primary responsibility, and other comrades kind of step in my position.

SINGSON

I'm sorry. Just to backtrack, did you say that you were relieved off your duty because—

GEAGA

Well, I think kind of like that I would go back to Northern California. I think once it was clear that I was just totally distracted, I mean, I couldn't focus, my leadership role really is not as effective as it should be, that I think we made arrangements and agreement that, yes, I probably—also, I already expressed my intention that I want to go back to school and kind of pursue that. So I've kind of put that out there. So on a regional level, a lot of the comrades, they probably didn't know exactly how to handle that. "So it would probably best that maybe you go back to National [Executive Board], and they'll deal with it there. We'll just take over the position." So that was agreed. I said, "Yeah, I'll still be active." So I think I was here for two years. The first year, then the second year was more—a couple of other comrades kind of just took over the leadership. I was part of the collective still, but not quite—

SINGSON

In a prominent role.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Then did the National actually allow you to go to school at the same time, be in the KDP? Were you back in the Bay Area as a leader once again? What happened after heading back to—

GEAGA

So once I got back to the Bay Area, I was kind of in transition, and I didn't have any specific responsibility other than I took on, like—how do you call—projects that were time-specific, like organize a conference. It was kind of a more ongoing responsibility. So that was a transition period. I helped to work with other non-KDP activists around the national question of end racism. It was a

national conference. I think it was in 1980, 1979. I moved back to the Bay Area in 1979.

SINGSON

Is this a Far West Convention?

GEAGA

No, this is a broader non-Filipino, but a broader progressive convention or meeting of activists all over the country to address the issue of racism and discrimination, the national question, as they called it.

SINGSON

So taking on sort of a slightly less prominent role within the KDP, they allowed you to go to school at the same time, or were you just sort of backing off of the leadership at this point?

GEAGA

I was backing off, and the issue of school was to be addressed, to be taken up. So I already had expressed that I wanted to go back to school, and so at the same time, I was exploring for my own what role I would play in KDP because then I could be more proactive and suggest. So after I took on some of these time-limited projects, completed it, I would participate in these time-limited projects, I was representing KDP working with other broad progressive activists, individuals.

SINGSON

Was this sort of the time when you decided that you were going to pull back out of KDP? Or if you can relate to us the circumstances around your leaving KDP.

GEAGA

Well, my intention was I wanted to stay in KDP, but in some section of the organization, because I was familiar with the organization, and I felt that maybe I could work in the newspaper [Ang

Katipunan]. That's something that I could do, and I can go to school and still be an activist. In fact, that's what I proposed.

SINGSON

So sort of a different department.

GEAGA

Yes, different department. Like I said, it's working with the Ang Katipunan staff. It could be that, it could be something else, maybe the National Organization Department, which was more internal work rather than being an organizer-activist in the community, which more external type of work. So I proposed a number of different—mainly maybe I could continue to work, as my KDP task assignment, so to speak, for two years while I'm going to school is I could work in the AK, Ang Katipunan.

SINGSON

What is the reason why of doing sort of more internal work, such as working in the office or working in the Ang Katipunan? Would that give you more time to go to school?

GEAGA

Well, I thought it would, yes. That was my own sense. I felt that I could probably do that. It'd still be a lot of work, but it's something that I could take on. But the comrades on the National who were the leadership at that time disagreed. It really didn't matter whether it was internal versus external, that it would still be 24/7, and that it's either being in KDP or not being in KDP. I mean, that's what it came down to.

SINGSON

And your decision?

GEAGA

I said, "Yes, I really want to go to school. If it can't be that," I may have suggested, I'm not sure, maybe a leave of absence or

something like that, but that was not even an option. So you either had to be with KDP or not.

SINGSON

Then at this point, too, and during the eighties, especially a little later on, there's a lot of—I guess we can call this a time when KDP's sort of dissolving, a lot of activists are leaving, and part of it is there's a lot of burnout. Is this something that you've noticed? This is just based on the interviews. What were activists doing and why were they leaving KDP? Just sort of to get a sense of what's happening within the group, besides your personal experience.

GEAGA

By the late seventies and early eighties—I actually leave KDP, I think it was in '81, because there was no option for me other than to leave because I wanted to pursue my schooling. So I left, I think, in '81. I'm not as familiar with the different cases of people leaving, although I think it's more in hindsight or in looking back or talking to people about why they left, but I think it had similar things of other people wanted to do other things or other personal things, like start a family, have a child. So it's a variety, a spectrum of things.

SINGSON

So there's no changes within the organization. We sort of think of the eighties as already the afterthought of this activism, heyday of activism in the sixties and seventies. Do you think perhaps there was also this kind of larger, broader connection between what was happening broadly within the activist community and what's happening within the group?

GEAGA

Probably. It probably has a connection. I think other people, other KDP activists, I think, leave not to pursue personal interest, but they actually leave the organization either on their own or with the organization's blessing to actually be more active in the broader progressive movement, the broader socialist, communist movement of the U.S., because I think in the eighties you have—starting in the

seventies there is the growing organizing for also social change in the United States. So there are numerous KDP activists who kind of also join that and become very actively part of that.

SINGSON

So are you referring to Line of March?

GEAGA

Line of March, yes, being kind of the national organization that takes on this program for social change, socialist, in the U.S.

SINGSON

Sort of moving on again to KDP, what happened to KDP, what happened after 1986? Well, actually, maybe let's just backtrack for a little bit. 1983 is when Ninoy Aquino got assassinated in the Philippines. Then towards 1986, when [Ferdinand] Marcos was ousted, what happened to the group, as far as you know? I know you're not already a member of KDP at this point, but did you keep in touch with them? What was happening to the group, and what happened to them after '86?

GEAGA

So while, I think, these years of maybe '81 to '86 it's very—because I'm not officially a member of KDP anymore. Of course, the Marcos dictatorship falls. I think in the Philippines there's also a debate about the KDP's dual role should be, and it's always been, I guess, an issue of controversy or debate or difference of opinion that the KDP really should not have this dual program.

SINGSON

"Dual program" meaning?

GEAGA

Both being kind of supporting the National Democratic Movement in the Philippines and doing anti-discrimination—

SINGSON

In the U.S.

GEAGA

—in the U.S. So by 1986, I think it's the leadership's decision in the KDP to fold up the organization because a lot of people have then moved on to kind of the broader movement or have pulled back. It's one of those two. So then the role of the KDP as supporting the National Democratic Revolution in the Philippines, I think that's where I'm not clear.

SINGSON

That's fine.

GEAGA

But I think as an organization they dissolved. I think it was officially dissolved. It dissolved, but then the newspaper, the AK, continued to be the only thing that was being put out by the organization for a couple years. I think its last issue could have been '87 or '88.

SINGSON

Did you keep in touch with activists even after you pulled back?

GEAGA

Yes, yes. Individuals I continued—I stayed friends with. But it's also during this period of time that I was fully coming out. I moved to San Francisco. That's where I met my partner [Gary Rhodes], I met other friends who were progressives, but they weren't activists, and I was also going to school. So I had a whole different—my circumstance was different, and because KDP—because even though I didn't have the option to stay with KDP, I had to leave, I felt I was still a progressive and an activist, so I continued to do other progressive work, and that's when I joined or I became active with the Committee for Health Rights in Central America.

SINGSON

How did you meet the group? How were you introduced to their cause?

GEAGA

I moved to San Francisco by 1982. I started school, the Physician Assistant Program at Stanford University Medical Center, and part of my PA program was to do—what do they call it?

SINGSON

Like field trips?

GEAGA

Not field trips, but actual work experience in clinics. There's a term for that. So I have my didactic course. I go in for lectures for about a week, and then the three weeks after that in a month I'd be—internship. I would do my internship in different clinical clinics, community clinics, in the Bay Area. It just so happens one of the community clinics I worked with, there was a lot of progressive activists who, themselves, like, were doctors, mid-level practitioners, like PAs and nurse practitioners and nurses.

SINGSON

They're doing free clinical medical stuff to the community?

GEAGA

No, it was like an HMO [Health Maintenance Organization]. But I think the eighties, there's lots of activists all over the Bay Area, so not only within KDP, but activists working against the—the specific was around Central America and all the struggles that were going on there. There national liberation struggles going on in El Salvador, in Nicaragua.

SINGSON

So how did the doctors and nurses and yourself, how did you make the connections to what you're doing to this struggle?

GEAGA

Well, I think they had already been—the Committee for Health Rights in Central America, I think, had already been going on for a

few years that I had heard about, being in KDP. When I worked on these broader issues against racism with other non-Filipino activists, that's how I come across some of them, and it so happens they're also in the health field. Of course, when I interviewed for my internships, I chose the clinics where I knew some of them. So that's how I get my internships is in these community clinics who I already know individuals, and then I meet other individuals. So over, like, the two-year period prior to me starting my PA program I've already had this—

SINGSON

Connections.

GEAGA

—connections, yes, and so I knew that there was an ongoing project of the larger Committee for Health Rights in Central America. There was a specific project of just connecting with a sister clinic in Nicaragua.

SINGSON

What did you guys do? So what are the specific work that this committee—

GEAGA

So this committee, we would do fundraisers, because this sister clinic in Nicaragua, in Esteli, Nicaragua, they needed medical supplies and they needed a truck. So I think for a couple of years we did fundraisers, and we actually raised enough money to buy a truck and medical supplies, and we actually brought it down there in 1984.

SINGSON

What are the fundraisings? Are there events, bake sales, or what kinds of—

GEAGA

Yes, bake sales, garage sales, Health Fairs that we would hold in Oakland and San Francisco and in North Oakland, in Berkeley area.

SINGSON

So let's sort of move onto to—this is that one issue that you advocated for after KDP, but there is also this looming gay-rights involvement. So how did you come across or how did you decide that you wanted to get involved with advocating for gay-rights issues? Or was it sort of the AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] rights first, or is it gay rights, or is it sort of altogether?

GEAGA

Probably the gay rights first, but soon after that, the HIV [Human Immunodeficiency Virus]/AIDS issue. Like I said, once I left KDP, I moved to San Francisco and kind of developed my own social family of new friends, other both Filipino and non-Filipino guys who were also coming out themselves, coming out the same way that the gay community was also burgeoning. So kind of we were all part of that whole everybody flocking to San Francisco to the Castro area and experiencing as a community our sexuality, our gayness.

SINGSON

I wanted to get a sense of this, too, because especially for Asian Pacific Islander, Filipino, we don't have documentation of the Asian Americans also participating in this. Do you have any sense of how big the API [Asian Pacific Islander] community, gay community was at that point, or was it hard to tell when this whole period was sort of forming?

GEAGA

Well, I think if you were to look at the census data, so there was the subset of gay Asian men who were also coming out, and we all found ourselves—and again, it's a subset of the larger growing gay community in San Francisco.

SINGSON

Let me just pause for a moment. [recorder turned off]

SINGSON

Okay, so we're back. You were just talking about the Asian Pacific community also participating in this sort of—is there a term, sort of a creation of this community in San Francisco?

GEAGA

Eventually it's come to be known as the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance, GAPA, in the Bay Area. The same thing happens in, like Los Angeles area. But how does this all evolve, the kind of cultural specific subsets within the gay community? So there's the gay community, and then there could be a subset of gay men who are into Asians. They're called "rice queens."

SINGSON

So it's also part of the sexual romances, personal.

GEAGA

Yes, their preference. Or there are gay men who are into bears. There are gay men who are into white guys; they're "snow queens." There are gay men who happen to be Asians who are into Asians, so they're called "sticky rice."

SINGSON

That's great. [laughter]

GEAGA

So anyway, there's lots of subsets of within the gay community, kind of your preference.

SINGSON

So the lingo being created, the rhetoric being created at the same time the community is also—

GEAGA

Is evolving, yes. Right, right. But at the same time there's the gay pride, which kind of includes all of them. There's certain bars that

mostly Asian gay men go to, so that's probably where other Asian men start to meet each other and know that there are other gay Asian men. But anyway, that, over time, then evolves into the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance.

SINGSON

Did you join right away?

GEAGA

Yes. I think I was part of the founder of Gay Asian Pacific Alliance. That is probably in '86, '87. So from my own close group of friends, my partner and one friend that I grew up with, we didn't know we were gay till we ran into each other in a bar years later.

SINGSON

In Los Angeles?

GEAGA

In Los Angeles, and he went to grade school here at Precious Blood [Elementary School].

SINGSON

He's Filipino too?

GEAGA

He's Filipino.

SINGSON

Just for the record.

GEAGA

He's Filipino American, yes. That's my friend Charles, Charlie Salumbitez. He had his set of friends, who we then became friends. I was visiting L.A., and that's when I ran into Charlie, and he says, "Where are you now?" I said, "Well, I'm in San Francisco." "San Francisco?" Of course, San Francisco was like a mecca. So he eventually moved up, and then the friends that he knew eventually

moved up, and we became kind of like our close friends with other activists who were still in KDP who were also gay. So not all KDP activists who were gay left the organization.

SINGSON

So this establishment of GAPA, what were the initial intentions, and was it sort of a really formal organization with action items?

GEAGA

It was a formal organization, and more to celebrate our identity as Asian Pacific Islander gay men, and then also to promote acceptance within the community, more positive images about gay Asian men, not only to the broader gay community, gay men's community, but also within our respective Asian communities, Asian Pacific Islander communities. I think some of the earlier activities of GAPA, there was a subgroup that promoted specifically folk dance, Philippine folk dance, and the dancers were all gay Asian men. And, of course, in our Philippine folks dances there's the male and female roles, and so all the members would perform both the male and the female roles—

SINGSON

That's great.

GEAGA

—singkil, tinikling.

SINGSON

What's your impression—or at least the group, they wanted to sort of celebrate this gayness within Asian community. What was your impression of what was happening in the Asian community in general and their views of gays within the community during this time in the 1980s?

GEAGA

I think this is where I get an idea how even within Asian Pacific Islander communities the concept or notion of homosexuality and

gay is different, and my own personal observation is that it seems like within the Filipino community or within the Philippine culture that we actually acknowledge homosexuality, whereas other cultures—and I may be wrong—Chinese American or Japanese American or the other Asian cultures don't acknowledge it. So I thought that was interesting for me to find out. So within Gay Asian Pacific Alliance we actually celebrated a lot of what—I would say that it all originated from the Philippines, but I think it's similar in all—once it's gay, whether you're Chinese, Japanese, we all share a lot in common, but a lot of the festivals or the pageants, you could trace a lot of it to the Philippines, celebrate these pageants. So even within the gay community we have Miss Gay USA, which is initially organized by Filipino Americans or Filipino nationals.

SINGSON

So, yes, I'm really curious about how the Filipinos were sort of in the leading—I guess they're the leaders of these cultural shows. Did the other Asian gays accept this? Because there's also the difference between transgender performances, and some gays wouldn't necessarily like to do this. So how did the gay Asian ethnicities accept this?

GEAGA

I think it was very widely accepted. I think the broader gay community as it's emerging really probably led the way in setting the tone of how even within the gay community we have these groups, including women, lesbians, gay men, transgendered, bisexual. I think the community as a whole, the gay community as a whole, had already kind of set a tone that even within our general broad LBGT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender], I think the notion of LBGT was already something that was kind of promoted, because it could have easily broken down along gender lines. Not only that, but also the transgender could have been a separate community. But I think early on, I think the gay community as a whole already kind of tried to champion the fact of the diversity within the community itself and all the different expressions that it

can take, and that's all the gay community. We should celebrate all of that, all those aspects. So then it translates also within the Asian Pacific Islander community.

SINGSON

What are the views of—so if you think that Filipinos are a little bit more accepting, did you have any challenges, GAPA, as a group? Did they have any challenges with the other ethnic groups within API? So perhaps when you do events or whatever in Chinese communities or Japanese American communities, was there ever any challenges?

GEAGA

No, I think they'd be supportive of all. It was a gay community or it was a gay event, and then if it specifically is a gay Asian event, kind of everybody would try to make it there.

SINGSON

I meant outside the community, the interaction—

GEAGA

Oh, the challenge. I can't talk about how the acceptance of gay is in the Chinese community or Japanese community, because I can only talk about it in the Filipino community. I think, by and large, during the eighties once the gay community comes into being broadly, and then that's also reflected within the Filipino community, even without GAPA, it's celebrated and never really is—so I can only speak about the Filipino community. The Filipino community, by and large, accepts it, because there's these gay pageants, and the audience are, like, majority Filipino with the grandmothers and the sisters and the mothers cheering their gay son as the contestant. It's just amazing.

SINGSON

So it's familiarity.

GEAGA

Yes, the familiarity, and it's great entertainment. It's also attended by other non-Filipino Asian gay, and they also participate in the pageants, but you could see the majority are all Filipinos representing all eighty countries of the world with great names.

SINGSON

Did you ever participate in—

GEAGA

In any of the pageants?

SINGSON

Yes.

GEAGA

No, I never did, although one of the pageants, we used it as a fundraiser for FTFA, Filipino Task Force on AIDS, for a couple years.

SINGSON

So you joined in organizing of it.

GEAGA

Yes.

SINGSON

Let's go backtrack on that and the Filipino Task Force for AIDS, or actually even further back to your involvement with the Natural History Epidemiologic Study in Berkeley. How did you get involved with this study?

GEAGA

So I finished my PA program at Stanford.

SINGSON

This is in—

GEAGA

In 1985. In 1984, that's when I do this trip with the Committee for Health Rights in Central America to Nicaragua. There's a convention there on health.

SINGSON

Did you actually meet the people that you were helping when you were on the committee?

GEAGA

Yes. This was in the fall of 1984. I'm supposed to be studying for my exams for the PA licensure. Our instructors were very progressive. "You know, you guys shouldn't really go down to Nicaragua. You should be studying," because we were supposed to go down for two weeks. But anyway, there was a few of us from my class, the PA program class, who went anyway, and we did. We met with—besides attending the National Conference on Health sponsored by the Nicaraguan government, we also did this small side trip to Esteli, which is a town in Nicaragua, met with the Community Health Clinic there, and presented them all the medical supplies that we brought down and the truck, the red truck, pickup truck. So, yes, that was great. But I graduated in 1985, so the first thing is finding a job, and it just so happened to be the first—or that's when the UC [University of California] Berkeley School of Public Health, as part of a five-city Natural History Study on HIV and AIDS, and they were starting up the project in San Francisco, a children's hospital that was going to be the site where the one-thousand randomly recruited men in certain zip codes of San Francisco with the highest incidence of AIDS by that time were recruited. So they would come to the clinic. They would have a lengthy history and then it would be followed by a physical exam. The physical exam part is what I did as a physician assistant, and then later on become the clinical coordinator of that clinic.

SINGSON

As a clinical coordinator, what did you actually do?

GEAGA

Basically, I think it was three nights out of the week, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I came on from six in the evening till ten, and people would be scheduled. This would be all out of UC Berkeley. There was a whole special staff that did the interview and the scheduling. We had a whole set of laboratory staff who collected blood, drew blood and specimen, and then the physical exam, which was done by physician assistants or mid-level practitioners.

SINGSON

So you do sort of all the coordinating of the whole study itself.

GEAGA

Of the whole study. Then myself, too, I would do some of the physical exams.

SINGSON

So you were really in touch with the AIDS epidemic within the gay community. What was the sense within the community? Was there a lot of fear during this time? What was going on within the community?

GEAGA

Oh, yes, definitely there was a lot of fear. It seemed like once you had—you were—and then again, the only way you would know that you had HIV or AIDS if you came down with serious illness, until they developed the HIV test. That was not until 1985. So once you had some, or the pneumonia, came down with pneumonia, all kind of the opportunistic infections as a result of a suppressed immune system, if you had any one of those, it was kind of like a death sentence. So, yes, there was a lot of fear. There was a lot of unknown. The information was still being developed. How do you get this? How is it transmitted?

SINGSON

How did people who have AIDS or who were found out to have AIDS, how did they cope with it? Were there already treatments?

And, I guess, how did the Natural History—were you part of also researching the treatment?

GEAGA

Yes. I mean, not as part of the Natural History Study, but as having the clinical trial setting, there were other doctors who were interested in researching treatments, so we would do clinical trials of treatments which would be separate from the Natural History Study.

SINGSON

But the participants are sort of the same participants?

GEAGA

It could be, because if they were interested, they could sign up, or participants could be referred by other doctors in San Francisco who were treating patients. There were no treatments, so once the new—the first drug came out, AZT [azidothymidine], our clinic would do clinical trials, would be a site for clinical trials for that treatment. So it was like a hub of activity. Through my job I was kind of connected to everything that was going on with HIV, all the clinical trials that were taking place. We would be a site where we could recruit participants who met the requirements, the clinical trial requirements to be part of the study or be part of a blind if it was double-blind or whatever. Also investigators, physicians who were interested in running clinical trials.

SINGSON

How did you feel personally about being involved in this? Was it exciting?

GEAGA

It was exciting. It was very exciting because it was kind of, like, in the cutting edge of what was going on.

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[This portion of the transcript has been sealed at the request of the interviewee.]

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SINGSON

I guess as a final question, this is sort of looking back on all the years you were an activist in KDP, anti-Marcos, your activism in the gay community. What was your assessment of how a person becomes active? After feeling better, did you stay as an activist, and why, do you think, were you involved? Was it partly just the issue itself, or is it sort of a personal thing?

GEAGA

Looking back, I know maybe in the earlier years I had all that energy to do that. I wouldn't change that. I feel that I'm still—I think activism is still in my being, but somehow I've noticed that I, myself, as you grow older, you can distinguish the idealism of activism. So I think it's good. Activism is good. It's what moves history forward. It's what it takes to get—otherwise society and history becomes stagnant. So I support activism, but I support and participate in it differently than how I did maybe when I had tons of energy. So either it could be monetary that I would support or writing a letter or writing about it, and even maybe attending a demonstration or lending my name to the cause of it. But how I got involved, I think it had a combination of lots of stuff that was going on during the seventies. It's, like, how could you not be involved would be more the question, because it seemed like the whole world was in turmoil, and it truly was. There were struggles going on not only in the Philippines, but in Central America, in Africa. I mean, it seemed like there was going to be a new dawn for society. It seemed like U.S. imperialism was really going to come apart. This is in the seventies and eighties. The ideals or the goals for equality seemed to be there won't be these hierarchy of class systems and poverty.

SINGSON

Did it feel reachable?

GEAGA

It seemed like it was reachable, and then with the downfall of Vietnam, it was just a matter of, like, domino, the domino effect. We even hear that term. It was palpable in the seventies and eighties. So I think that had a lot to do. It was just you were just going with the flow. So the question is, like, how could you not be involved? Either you were totally a monk in the desert that was not connected. So I think I got swept with that flow of the movements in the seventies and eighties.

SINGSON

Well, that's a good way to end this. Thank you very much, Jaime.

GEAGA

Thank you. [End of August 31, 2011 interview]

Date: 2014-05-13