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Hi. Today is June. June 18th, 2024 Tuesday I May Lee and Karen Wong. I am affiliated with the Asian American and Asian Studies Department. Karen Wong is a student research intern with the department, and we're working on this oral history as part of an NIH grant called Asian American Storytelling in Santa Clara Valley. Today, we are interviewing Robert Rezac at Danza College in Cupertino as part of the grant, uh, NIH grant on Asian American storytelling in Santa Clara Valley. So thank you for being here. Um, the first question actually is about the retrospective. The retrospective. Yeah. And the question is that, uh, in, well, I guess, about documentation and how you, how and when you started documenting your life story, your family's story, and also the history of Filipinos in San Jose Japantown. So we know that, um, you wrote that retrospective in 2008. We also know that in 2006, around that time, Kurt Fukuda and Ralph Pierce approached you for the books that they were writing and asking you about the Filipino, the Filipino ethnic enclave in San Jose, Japantown. So the first question is, can you tell us how you got into, uh, documenting these stories, your story, your family's story, and then the bigger Filipino American community story of San Jose Japantown? Uh, okay. Well, the, um, it was a bit, um, uh, I forgot the you maybe it was the date of the retrospective 2008. 2008. Yeah, the first first version. Okay. For the first version. So that in about three years before I was at a funeral for a friend of mine, um, and, uh, I met Al Robles, uh, who was an active, uh, an activist in, uh, San Francisco and a poet and well-known and got involved in a hotel and, and the big riots there. And when we, we got talking about, uh, our generation, which is what we call the, uh, bridge generation, and that's the, uh, children of the first wave of Filipino and Filipinos that migrated here into the United States in 1920s and 1930s. And so he was he was talking about, you know, there's a lot of us that have not documented our stories. So why don't you, Robert? Why don't you write something about that? What what what? And now you thought of that. He says, yeah. You know, just write something about how you what it was like when you were growing up and say, hey, that's a good idea. So about 2 or 3 years it took me to write that, uh, off and on because I was working full time. So I finally got it written and, uh, I called Alice and say, ah, but let's meet sometime because I got it done. What do you want to do? But and he said, uh, okay, let's meet. I said, all right, let me I'll give you a call when I get free time. And this is a great lesson. I called him and he had passed away. So that's just a little bit from, uh, fast forward, Kurt name. When we do our history detective things, he says, don't wait. So if you're going to interview somebody or you're going to talk about something, or are you going to write something or you're going to give a presentation, don't worry, because we both experienced the same thing. We're going to do something. This is great, great resource. But he passed away so that so I didn't know what to do with it. So I thought well I'll just give that to my friends. All right. So in about that time, um, let's see. And I have to go back 1970s or so, I got involved with the Filipino Youth, um, Association of Fire or something like that. Um, and, uh, that day, uh, they asked me, uh, I forgot who was it? Asked me. I'll think of it later. But to ask me, could you help us talk to these older Filipino generations? And I said, well, what can I do it? You know, I'm not involved. I don't do that kind of thing. And they said, well, just help us with, uh, the incoming new immigrants. I said, well, yeah, I could do that. But then as I get involved with this group, that's a, you know, one of the things that I that always bothered me is that amongst all of these Filipino generation, uh, organizations, there's no coordination among them. So I always thought

somebody was going to have a big celebration on one day on that very same day. And then. The organization is going to have another a gigantic annual picnic. It would be nice if they called me and I thought, well, here's my little bit about when they talk to you about me attending those classes at Stanford and Anthro social working with organizations. I thought, well, I would use some of that. So I called together all of the leaders of those organizations, and I said, and I've had this meeting and I said, here's with the plan is you just coordinate all we want is just a coordinating council. And I thought, it's simple. We don't have to. Nobody really captures any of their power. Just coordinate. We're going to have this big celebration and resolve. They don't have a birthday party or a queen contest on that date, and I thought that was pretty simple. However, I never even thought that I missed the cultural aspect of it, and that is a lot of it in those days and the 1970s. It is probably true in even in my day, in the 1940s, that a lot of the culture is who is going to lead, who is going to be the president, the chairman of the the leader. And I said, well, nobody we just we'll have a chairman, of course, when we have the core in council. But I got the sense that they were not ready to relinquish any of their decision making to another body. And so a few months after that, after we've gone through all of this activity, tried to get to get this thing to work, discord, any council that I'm out, uh, it's not going to work. And besides, it's I felt it's just even though I know a little bit about organizations, I didn't know enough about how a culture of the Filipinos, the first wave would fit in an American type organization. So that didn't work out well. All right. So, um, now we're at 2008, but earlier than that, uh, this is curtain of curtain in Rome. So when I was working with the Philippine Youth Association, when we were doing this coordinating council, one of the, the uh, Filipinos I worked with was Carlito and Plato. It turns out that Ralph Pierce, his wife is Emily and a Plato. Uh, so when Ralph and Kurt, we're doing the Japan town book, it was, uh, I think both Ralph and Kurt felt, uh, thought that there was a Filipino community during the Japantown era or the what we now call the Chinatown era. And he's, uh, it just so happens that Ralph. But. Well, he told Emily that now, and he says, well, yeah, that that, uh, my dad worked with a guy named Robert Reich sack. So they, uh, Ralph called me and got my number, and they said he and Kurt are writing this book about Japan. Um, but they felt they don't. They want to have it more than just the East. A Nisei, the first and second generation in, in Japan. Um, and they would like to expand it because there was another ethnic organization like the Chinese and the Filipinos. I said, sure, I'll help you. What we'll do is that, uh, I'll get together with all of my cohorts, my generation. And for those first wave Filipinos who are still alive, we'll arrange to get the video recorded. And so we did that. We we, uh, Kurt and, uh, Ralph, we sat down with, uh, of our my generation. We said, bring your books, bring your albums. Don't make a decision as to whether or not the photos are appropriate. Just will they say that for you and to the extent that you can, you bring your friends or your your siblings. Because if you just interview one person, you have their memories. Just like it's going to happen here too, right? Uh, because my sister, I always say my sisters have better memories than I do about what happened around us. So what we did was we set a place either at their house or at some place that's convenient or at, uh, at Kurt's because he had recording material, uh, equipment. So we thought, well, okay, so we had we got together at, uh, somebody's house. They had the albums, they had their sibling 2 or 3. And so we go through the photographs and we say, what's this? Who? What? When? Where? We had a scant. And then, uh, next to it, uh, on a laptop. We recorded what was on that photograph. To the extent that the remember now here's a lot of problems with photographs. So that's really

great. But we don't know who they say. Well, I'm not sure who that is. There's nothing in the back. And that's only from their memory. So I think that's anti somebody I think. So to the extent we can we just say the family name but sometimes we get a little more detail. And we did that with uh 1 or 2 Filipinos. Uh uh first we Filipinos. Uh, but by that time most of them had passed away. So what what came out of this was a lot of material, a lot of video recordings, photograph stories, uh, that appear in the, uh, Japan Town book, uh, current and well done book. So and I don't know when it occurred, but maybe I was still working and I was talking to a lot of my friends who was, uh, we were just sitting around talking about old days. The old talked. Hey, do you remember the buses? And do you remember the Buddhist temple? And how about, uh, the when we played basketball against the zebras, the, uh, the Nisei basketball team, and I said, yeah, right. Hey, maybe all weekend you'll walk around and we'll just go, just a move. My, uh, my little group, maybe just 3 or 4 of us. Of five of us. And we started walking around. Since I do, do you remember toe shoes with the the, uh, fountain there? Oh, yeah. Tom and Mary's. And I remember when we we played the zebras, zebra beers and that kind of stories when we were going around. And then we would go to the on sixth Street and say, oh, yeah, I remember it's going home. Yeah. Right. How about the time when all these Filipinos were out there on the street, you know, just talking stories, right? Oh, sorry. Great. And then I thought, I wonder if maybe somebody else would be interested in this. So I think 2018, uh, I had this idea. Maybe we ought to have a formal tour, you know, just let somebody know. Now, I don't know who that somebody is that I or or maybe one of my friends contacted somebody says, hey, you know, we're doing this thing. And I thought, well, yeah, okay, well, what we'll do is just invite everybody who wants to come. It's very informal. No sign up, just show up. Uh, it was, uh, March 2019, the first time we held a formal, uh, uh, tour organized. And prior to that, I thought, well, I'll just write down on a on a pamphlet, uh, using a PowerPoint style, you know, here's the location and a little description, uh, in facing page text. And it was about 20 pages or something like that. And I said, well, that would be cool because I, I always found out, uh, in my professional life, when we give briefings to, uh, to the, our customer, we have always, always have a report. And then when I give up my, my, my little thing, I, I have a little something that I specific to my part of the project, so I, so I said, well I'll do that for this group. So I made up uh, I don't think I made enough copies because a lot of people showed up. No, I, I have a photograph of the group and it's something like 25 or something. People, first I, uh, go ahead. And the first group, I mean, the first, um, official tour. The pension transfer. Yeah. Well, it's it's not what I call official. It just says, hey, we're going to have this tour. Got it. Uh, call your buddies and meet at the Japantown bench at 15 and Jackson, and we'll see who shows up. So I made copies of the book, but I don't know if I just did. I guess, you know, I make 10 or 15 or whatever it was. And I told Kurt and Ralph just, hey, that's a great idea. Is there? Okay. If we recorded, recorded. So hey. Yeah. That's cool. Yes. So I so I discovered again last night when I was thinking about senior questions, I said, I think, I think could recorded it. Yes. He recorded the entire tour along with the questions and comments, uh, that that people had and, and we had my, my sister who. Good had better memory. And my, my brother in law, uh, my sister's husband, uh, my sister Elaine and her and her husband read equivalent. And, um, we had one other one of the my peers, uh, Eugene Winter. Also, his nickname was pinky, who lived in there in, uh, in the, uh, demersal, uh, uh, boardinghouse. His dad and him lived there in sixth Street. So I went to the recording and said, this is great. Refresh my memory as to what this is all about. So that's what I

would like to think. Started the tours that would we call it the official tour because, you know, it was announced by word of mouth, but, uh, in that the videos, I'm sure is Tony Santana. Um, and uh, and, um, an original, um, now an original is a, uh, Filipino American National Historical Society, um, principal in the Santa Clara Valley chapter. And it was I it was her and her friends. I said, why don't we do this officially? Formally. So I said, well, yeah. What do you mean by that? That. Well, we could if you want, we could take over managing the the tour. We'll put up the website, we'll do the, uh, the formal sign up, we'll do the, um, legal document to this. And so I said, well, yeah, but how are we going to do it? Because 2019, what happened was Covid. So just oh, well, we could break down the social distancing, wear masks and we'll still do the tours. So in some of the later tours, that's what we did. And it was the Philippine-American National Historical Society. Um, Santa Clara chapter was Mark Serrano, uh, and Victoria and uh, and Virginia. Virginia. They're the ones who were the principals of that chapter. And they took over that that those that tour. So what happens now is that people can go to the website, and if they get enough people to sign up, then we'll have a tour or organizations, um, uh, sometimes, uh, a classroom or a college or, uh, school or we have a younger group say, you know, the high school groups and, uh, the Asian studies or Filipino studies. And so we give tours and they sign up through the website and the funds funds chapter of the South Dakota Valley chapter, take care of all that. And so, uh, I shouldn't say too, but when they did decide to do that, I said, well, you know, there's a lot of stories that you don't know about, so let's have a training session. So I wrote up a script with all the material and the, uh, of course, just not the younger kids. So I had up, you know, the hard copy, the take notes. They put it on their cell phone, and it's when they give it to them that. That's pretty cool. I did not know I envisioned old school year, but look at the hard copy. Um, well, one of the the docents or the guides had three by five guards, and then soon the others just on the cell phone and as well as on the cell phone, just other additional material, like when you talk about discrimination. Well, we talk about the discrimination that we experience, but they talk about it in general. They come up and say, you know, and, and I just generation laws, those kind of thing. Right. So they add something to it. So my role in these tours, so I give what I call the color commentary. You know there's the principal speaker. And just like in the sports describing a sport event and the color commentary comes in and gives back other information. So I, I take them down, they give their little talk and they say, oh yeah, this side here, there was, uh, a Chinese couple or I deliver newspapers to this black couple here. You know something that's not in the script. It's, uh, personal stories. So there is the story that they give about the buildings and some of the people and then anecdotes that I add in, uh, in addition to that. So that's how the town tours came about, and that's how, uh, and. And it was because of. I would like to believe that because of. I guess the germ started with Al Robles. Mhm. Mhm. When I expanded my horizons a little bit. And then of course with Ralph and Curt it became even larger than I could, could ever have imagined. Can I follow up on that just to ask you, as, as you were writing, uh, you know, prompted by al to write your retrospective and then, uh, Ralph and Curt approached you about their book and then this tour, did you think your writing of your life story and the documentary, did you think it was historically important, uh, at the time, or how did that how did how did you think about the importance of what you were doing? Oh, it was pretty. Just pretty. I would say it was pretty narrow. Uh huh. That just writing this thing. Um, and, uh. Well, when I wrote the retrospective, that's the first time I did a hard documentation. Uh, and, uh, actually writing about things that happened around me. So I had

never done that before. You know, you know, you always think about your memories and you talk with your family. But, you know, the first time I documented it and it was just for that purpose, al asked me to write this, and I said, okay, I'll write it and I'll give it to you. You're going to do whatever you he because I think he asked other people to do the same things. So I said, well, okay, I'll just write. And it was just pretty narrow. And and it became much larger when I got involved with Ralph and Curt. Now they're historian and a writers and documentarians, so I've never done any of that before. You know, so Curt, Curt has done tremendous background. He has a tremendous background in documenting and historic history. And then, of course, the Japan Town Book. Same thing with Ralph. He's an author. I'm just contributing material. I said, you know, okay, I'll get the people together. You got the material, you got the video recording, you got the photographs you get. Uh oh. You need something. You read about that, don't you? Yeah. I'll cook up something here. You said so it. I didn't think that was historically important until I. The book, Ralph's book came out and Curt's book, and I don't know if you've seen the book. Right. Is that that weighs about £5. And I went through it and thought, people who have this book could see not only what happened in Chinatown, Japan. Tom Benoit and I were part of it, and it's the first time other than in technical documents. It's first time that you look at the index. There's my name. My sister's name. My buddies, my friends, the old Pinoys. You look at their names there, and then they acknowledgements, uh, Kurt or Ralph did a great job in thanking me and and the family and all of us for contributing. And then it dawned on me that, yeah, this is pretty important. This is, uh, really, really meaningful stuff. And it contributes to the somebody wants to know about Japantown. We'll find out a little bit more about the Filipinos. So that that widened my horizons quite a bit. Um, I guess, like, um, just to talk more about that in your AAPI perspectives interview, James, you said that, um, you use this phrase, you said you began to call us your experiences of, um, racism from when you were, um, young all the way up until maybe when you were older, um, when you started getting involved. And in that book project and in particular, you mentioned that you had all these conversations with kirtan, Ralph, that sort of how do you call us that? And I was just wondering if maybe you could tell us a bit more about the conversations you had. Is there any that you remember or found, like, particularly memorable? Well, uh, the, um, uh, you're right that a lot of the conversations bring up the memories, and some of that memory is written that shows up in the in the retrospective. Right? Because in the beginning, in the first page, you know, uh, thank all these people. Those are the people I had the conversations with. And a lot of their thoughts are in that, uh, retrospective. So it would I would at the time that we were doing this, just just talks with conversations. I didn't think it was important. That was great. But when I thought, start thinking about this. Be written down in the retrospective. So we had further conversations. Now I'm a little more concerned. So I start writing notes or I ask questions. And I said, do you remember the when we had the formal band? All the, all the, all the guys were wearing off for formal business. Did you do you remember what you were there or. So that's it. Oh that's right. We had a formal dance. So in the retrospective there's the picture of the at the San Jose Agenda club of Filipino Youth, with the with all these pinoys in their formal dress. Well, I never thought about that until somebody said that. I said, well, where's the picture? We have I know we have a picture. So those kinds of things is how those conversations became a document, not only in the retrospective, but they show up also in the tours, because a lot of the material that, uh, that I wrote in the, uh, tour book were also based on conversations or memories or, or talks that we

had informally. And so, as I wrote, as I read describing one of the illustrations, I think, oh, yeah, that's right. Somebody said something about that. So I called my sister who was at that, or we called one of my buddies. So I and then I firmed up the wording so that it's as accurate as memory skin can be. So that's how a lot of it. If we didn't have those kinds of conversations at first, when you have these family talks you just talk. Well we call talk story. We just sit around and talk. So we started laughing on that. But that's I got more involved than I thought. We ought to start thinking about documenting this. And I thought, well, that was that's great. I'll use that and follow up on a topic and then use that in the, in the, in the, uh, retrospective, the tour book. And I think I did the same thing for, uh, the Japan Town Book. Now, in fact, that's a complete point of view. Made that when I tell I told Curtis, you know, I had this conversation with my sister and my buddies who were sitting around and we're talking about this. And Kurt, the documentarian, says, we got a record, you know. So what do you mean? This is when you have a family dinner. Can I come over with my equipment and record it? I said, yeah, yeah, right. Because the stuff we talk about, we laugh, and then we we go home and, you know, in fact, it almost happened last night when my sister and I were talking that night that we had dinner with my two sisters and my brother in law and my niece, and we just started talking, and it was exactly the same thing where we're talking. This is Kurt should have been there. So one of these days, it's another thing that we're going to do. Kurt says, one of these days, again, you know, hopefully soon when we get together, we're having dinner, says Kurt. I'll tell you, you better be ready, he says. You tell me and I'll drop everything. You'll come over and do the recording, you know, just like we're doing here, to to record those lost memories. Because when you do a, a conversation, it's interactive. So yeah, I remember that. And then then you started expanding on it. Did in those conversations you had with Kurt and Ralph? Did you have conversations about race and racism and discrimination, or how did that, um, how did you think about your sense of identity or did that your sense of identity change? Or did you think about how your own thoughts or awareness of race or racism changed as you were getting involved in these projects? You know that that did not occur. Oh, no. Okay. But the major one, of course, is Executive Order 1966. Right. We talked about that only to the extent that, like Kurt talks about the effect on the essay and essay. And then I, uh, I said, um, I think I do this in our tours, one of our tours, because we, we, we stop at the Buddhist temple. Right. And there's a story that that came up and I told Kurt, and I wrote this, uh, I don't think it shows up in the book. Uh, or it's it's not. Oh, yes. It's now in the tour book. Um, and that is that how the, uh, the evacuation of the etc. Nisei affected our family because we lived next to a Japanese family. So in April of 42, before, uh, my sister told me this, and I have a memory of it because I was only 11 years old and 42. The next door neighbors were the Iwasaki family, and they were with my sisters. Remember Aki? Her friend was the daughter of the. It was Aki's. There, coming out of the house. And then as soon as she said that, it hit my memory. They're carrying their bags and their luggage and anything they could carry around to 65th Street. And then there's a lot of people gathering on fifth Street on the East end, you see. So that's not discrimination of a race, per se. It's the impact of the executive order, which is the major discrimination. Right? But we didn't talk about that personally in the book, like we experience or, or or current experience or any of the family experience. So that never came up in during the writing of the book. It comes up on occasion, just as I said, how it affected us or my family. Uh, when the evacuation order came out. Mhm. Now there's stories about this racial discrimination, uh, that I don't we will dwell

on when we do the tours because the tour is about the Filipinos, their life to social justice or social interactions with the Chinese and the Japanese and that kind of thing. Mhm. Because, uh, from my account and the memories of my generation amongst the three ethnic minorities, the Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos in Chinatown, to the extent that we can recall there was no real riots or mass fights between or amongst the three races. There may have been altercations. Uh, but, um, among the three races, there was no fighting or riding or anything among them. No. Within like the Filipinos, there was a lot of fighting and battles and and going on. But, but but there was no interracial, uh, among the three minorities. Uh, any kind of altercation or conflicts that I, that I know of. So the so like the question is, was, was race and discrimination part of our narrative? It wasn't that not within that context. Okay. Related to that, I was thinking in your retrospective, you really focus on your sense of being Ilocano, um, and not Filipino. And in fact, someone said, you're not really not Filipino to your dad in the airport, was it? Right? So have you seen your sense of identity? Did it evolve as you were participating in these projects in terms of either Ilocano identity or Filipino or Filipino American identity? Well, this goes back quite a bit. Well, actually, within context now in Pinoy Town they were all Ilocano. Mhm. Right. Uh, because um, when the mainland uh, farmers and uh, and in Hawai'i to the Hawai'i Sugar Planters Association very experienced, I think it started with the Hawaii Sugar Pledge Association. They hired something like 15 or 16 cicadas, which is the, uh, contract workers. That was the 1900s, 1906, I think it was right after the, uh, Filipino-American War. They found out that Ilocano were hardworking, don't complain and very reliable and and worked for really low wages. And so when fast forward to 1920s, the, uh, the, uh, Filipinos start migrating here from Hawaii, or they came directly to Seattle or to San Francisco. But mostly you get a lot of cicadas from, um, in Hawaii migrated to the mainland. My dad was one of them, and he was a cicada several act. And he he and his friends were all Ilocano. All of them were. And they all settled there in the sixth Street area, or they were in the labor camps around the valley, but they would go to Pinoy Town for the gambling, restaurants, laundry and all that kind of for socializing and, and the and the Filipino organizations. So they would all meet there in sixth Street. Yeah. So as I was growing up. All the Filipinos are in the hotel, right? Until, uh, I think it was. My mom was very friendly with a, uh, Tagalog family. Still revelers. So that was my inkling that, yeah, we're Filipinos are not just all avocados that took us to silver, but that was just to go. And that was just a passing thing. My best friend was Ray of lo. Um, we went through elementary school, junior high, high school together, and that was my first. This has to be in the 1930s. I'd find out they have that, uh, Tagalog family. That's different. And then as I grew older, that I found out that the Philippines has something like that. A multitude of languages. Right. But the more I grew, I as I grew up, it was all of us. We just, you know, my friends were old colonels. But so what happened then is that it became one of the things that if you're Ilocano, you're a good man and you're a good guy because we could relate, right? It's almost like, uh, being a member of the same organization. You find out. Oh, you remember? Oh, yeah. No, your brothers are just closer, right? Oh, that's. So that kind of pervaded me. And then it became one of those kinds of, um, uh, jokes, I guess, or or commentary. So several times when I've given a talk to a college group or a high school group or some group, I say, hi, I'm Robert Reich, say.

My last name is rug. \*\*\*\* the rug. Suck in the the code was in the crowd. Do you know what that means? It means happy. Well, sometimes when I say that, I say no, don't \*\*\*\*. I get the Filipino

because it means happy sets. Oh, yeah. See? So if you want. But I use that as a as a warm up, uh, to, to break the when I'm talking to a, uh, Asian group, you know, uh, and it's sort of helps the conversation, uh, the talk move along and, uh, and then of course, I say, well, yeah, but just more than just that, you know, there's we had that we I'm grown up as I grown up now, I know people who speak because I know BCA and of course Tagalog and that and then of course the Ilocano. So that expanded my horizons culturally about the Filipinos. And it's uh, uh, and I should say that it's it's one of those things where I'm surprised when I say to a group of people that, you know, I'm Ilocano and, uh, and I always say, you know, comes in the crowd, a lot of them come up and said, proud to be Lakota. So it's, you know, and I'm surprised that's something I learned just recently, you know, maybe in 5 or 6 years when I start talking to, uh, groups of Filipinos and a lot of women say they're really proud to be in a room. And I know that my neighbors are really carnal, and their feeling is that Ilocano should be the national language that's look. Right. So I'm getting this hmhm from the youth and from my neighbors who are who are recent immigrants. They came in the 60s and 70s and they're younger. Younger, meaning they're 60 years old.

How do you think that relates to like being Asian American? Like, there's also this sort of like pan ethnic Asian American identity that, you know, we speak about where we might say, oh, is that a fire to identify us? Like, would you I thought if I was Asian American, why or why not? Oh, let me give you a great story.

I was I was part of a panel and we're talking about Filipino American history. And so we're talking about our experiences and our perspective. And afterwards I think we took a break. So we're in the break room and we're talking about Filipino American, uh, and, and you know, like you said, the identity as a we Asian, uh, are we, uh, Pacific Islander? I said, here's my thought. Good. They're saying, well, we're Asian. I said, well, you know, we're Pacific Islander. So wait a minute. I said, the Philippines is an island in the Pacific, right? So. And it's not associated with the Asian continent. Right. So were Pacific Islanders, right? And there's a, uh. Uh, well, I would say, well, it's part of the Asian as well. But geopolitically, the Philippines is an island in the Pacific, so we're Pacific Islanders. But that was just deleted because the real my real feeling is, if you look back at the history of the Philippines, way back before the Spanish era, there was tremendous amount of trade going on between mainland China, Southeast Asia and Japan before the Spanish showed up. And there's tremendous number of trading posts or trading ports in the Philippines.

Now you have this big influx of the Asian mainlanders, and of course, they intermarry. Then later on comes the Spanish and they intermarry. Right. So, yes, if you look at the anthropology of the Philippine Islands, where Asians.

You could look at the geography and they'll use that just as a lead in for the real story. That and then we talked among ourselves and we said, yeah, that sort of makes sense that. Yeah.

The Philippines is an island away from the Asian mainland, but culturally, socially, anthropologically for Asians. And so Asian-Americans.

Try that one does that, does that. Um, when you think of yourself as a or I don't know if you think of yourself as a community historian, I think of you as a community historian. Um, how how do you approach your work or think about your work as a community historian, maybe in relation to, like when you wrote the retrospect as maybe you're just thinking, I'm a first generation Ilocano, you know, Filipino American, and then as you're writing more and working with, you know, Ralph and Kurt, maybe you're thinking, I don't know. Oh, this is about the Filipino American ethnic enclave. And then as you're participating in talks, going to schools and all, maybe you're thinking this is also Asian American. How do you think of your role as a community historian, maybe in relation to these evolving identities or what are you trying to what do you try to do when you are a historian, a community historian? Yeah, that's that's a great question because I don't consider myself a historian because my perspective, a historian is an academic. Um, and then when you do history and you want to do a story on the Philippine arrangements, but you just do this tremendous amount of research, right? You go to the Library of Congress, you go to the genealogical store of a website and all that. I don't do that. Mhm. And I guess the label historian came about only because the kinds of things I'm doing is documenting historical activities and events and people, but within the small area. So I didn't consider myself a historian as such. But now Curtin had Kurt and I had this discussion one time about being a historian, because I call him a historian. I said, uh, I look upon Kurt and I told him, as you about you, you're the historian and you're my mentor, you know? And he said, no, we're not historians, we're history detectives. There's something occurred but went along with all that from the Filipino side. Right.

So we look into it and we see what are the relevant documents that affect this event or this person or this group. And then we use that as part of the narrative for the tours or in his case, he did for the book, or he just write a document about that. But it's not it doesn't belong there. There's no intent, at least on my part, that anyway, where it gets published, um, I'm not writing. At least I didn't intend to write to publish. Now, of course, Ralph is a historian, and and I still consider Kurt his story. They said we have enough material to write a book. I said, uh, yeah, I guess so. One of the things we ought to do that. But that thought was about. Ten years ago. So we're still thinking about it. And it's what I call the whip. Work in progress. So I guess people outside of work and see what I'm doing would say that's that's that's being an historian. Okay. I didn't intend to be one. But if that's what it is, then. But then. Sure. Yeah. Um, but I'd like to. I prefer to use Curtis term as a history detective. So we call ourselves FD, and I call him the senior PhD. And, um, this the junior HD, the the history detective. And I like that term better because I don't want to be called a historian because I don't have that, um, that academic training or the formal training. So even informally, training of being a historian and I and I agree with you that the kinds of things I do at a lower level is what a historian would do. Yeah. No. Associated with that, I think, is one of your questions, being an activist, right? I'm not an activist. I don't consider myself. I don't go to the any of the rallies, and I go to the parades or protests, or I don't join an organization that says, uh, we're going to work about this on this political thing concerning Filipinos. I don't do that. But maybe some of it, because we have a deployment where it makes our story known, which I think is an active kind of thing because I want the story to be told. And so from that point of view, yeah, maybe, maybe I am a type of activist in the

sense, but not what you would call, uh, I guess popularly known as a, as a Filipino activist. But but I am, but not determined. I am mission oriented. Mission oriented means that I want the Filipino American story here in San Miguel to be told. So any and all things that get involved in supporting that I'll support, I'll do that. And of course. Be careful what you wish for, because I'm involved in so many projects toward that end. And it's okay. It's a labor of love. I'll do it. So I'll volunteer.

Did I get the questions? Yeah, I know we're floating around on, uh, on your on your. This is great. No, this is very this is great. It's helpful. It's very.

Um, I think this is kind of a bit of, uh, maybe like a different, um, turn, but, um, again, from the AAPI perspectives interview you mentioned, there's, uh, so you're telling the story, right? You're getting this, like, story of the Filipino Americans in the Santa Clara Valley. But you said you're also worried about young people like your grandkids, for example, um, going to college and you, you sort of like, um, hint at the sort of forgetting about their ethnic identity or history that seems to happen when they get older. I was just wondering if you could speak a bit more about, um, maybe like your thoughts on this? Like, why do you think this is? And also like if you've seen this happen with younger, younger generations or even like with your generation like this are a transitional period. Um, sure. Um, this might be long winded, but see, I'm a member of the board of directors of the Filipino American National Historical Society Museum in Stockton. And, um, the the Filipino American National Historical Society has a convention every two years. And they call papers. They call for papers. And, um, one of my, uh, the the president of the board at the time, uh, Richard together said he wants me to be on a panel. And I said, uh, yeah. What about it? Says mestizos. NUM num. Mestizos is a mixed marriage. Uh, children. Okay. I said, uh, yeah. Richard, you know, I'm a really beautiful Filipino. I'm not a mestizo. It is. And and this guy is really sharp. He says, yeah, but I have 3 or 4 others who are. But I would like a perspective from someone who is not. I said, okay, um, great idea. I'll do that. Um, provided um, last because you want the diversity story to be. 12 first, and then I'll give you my perspective about what I see about mestizos. Right. And you, do you know where that's going? The expression you. Right. Mhm. All right. So I said okay what I'll do is I'll come up with uh some kind of topic. So I started thinking about that and I thought, well, I'll use my family as an example because.

My sister married a Mexican Mexican-American.

My youngest. My youngest sister married a Filipino. Right?

I married a Pinay. My son married a white girl. Blond, blue eyed and beautiful. No, but look at it from this perspective as you go down the generations. Right? So in my talk and I had a chart of the family tree. Here's my sister, Helen. Maybe you're Mexican. You have a son, John Sanchez? No, his sister is Helen Sanchez, and her husband is Lee Lee Sanchez. So they have a son. He's happy. He's happy. We can't have. Have. No. He married a white girl. Now you see what's happening. The connection of the Filipino is slowly disappearing. Now, sitting with my son. He married a white girl. And I have three grandchildren who are hapa. You know, and so I use that as a model that says, if you have a family, say that the mother and father are Filipino.

No, I use Filipino, but it could be a German family. It could be an Irish family. But they intermarry with outside of their race. And so the succeeding generations now could lose their connection to being Filipino. Or they could, uh, maintain that that heritage and be proud of that lineage. Or they could ignore it or don't want to be known. Or they could be prefer the other half. Mhm. So in general, when, when I gave this talk I said what's happening is that the mestizo this the Filipino, this is disappearing is disappearing and the succeeding generations will will lose that unless you make a determined effort as a Filipino to say you want to remember the Filipino, say to the extent that you can, maybe some of these kids won't. They don't care. They may not be very proud of having being non-white or having non-white blood in them. So the I and I say this to the audience that if you are a parent.

You have to be aware of the fact that the Filipino this of your with your Ilocano, of the of wherever you are will dissipate and they will not in succeeding generations. You'll be a great grandmother. And will your great grandchildren know that they have a Filipino connection or do they really care or do you care? And that's true for when I give a talk to the to college kids or a group. Because I asked her, I said, when did your your parents come that who did you marry and how about yourself. And some of them say, oh yeah, my dad is Mexican or my my mom is Irish or something like that. And I said, well, do you know enough about your Filipino history? So they know this is the first time they've thought about in this talk. And I always say, well, if you really want your kids or you and I have another one of those old sayings from the old guy says, you're in the college kids now, right? As soon as you get your sheepskin or your degree and you get married and you go off, you get a good job. You have children, right? Unless you make a determined effort. Your children, if you're if you marry a non Filipino, will you have this mestizo mestizo ness dissipate? And I call that that phenomenon the receding wave. Now why is that? The first wave is the Filipino immigrants that came in the 1920s and 30s, or the Or for the Japanese, the first wave of the Issei. Right. They came in the 18 8088 and 1900s. Right. So they'll have that same. That same phenomenon. That's the first wave. I'm the second wave, my son to the third wave. But the waves are receding. It's no more. No longer appropriate as a wave. So it's a receding, what I call a receding wave. Is that why you. There's a metaphor that you gave that you said. You said Asian. American history is like a beach. Is that correct? That's correct. But I was just about to bring that up because you knew it's right here on the beach. The analogy I use is that, um, picture American. American history is the beach. And that beach is a whole lot of history of other races. Right? Absent in that beach, the.

Turn of the century is Filipino Philippine history, except for the Philippine branch of the war. And American history does not include them as as part of history at all, because there's such Filipinos and such a lower class that they were not. If you're not white, you're not part of the the American history. So this beach, this white beach.

For us. For historians. Yes. Now we take our little bit of history, Philippine history. Put it on that page. Right now, I would like to think that what I'm doing is one great bullet there. But I would like to believe people like yourselves or like, uh, the Filipino American does. History, as you said.

Have a teacup or a spoon and you put it to that page. So that's why. That's why I say that the beach is American history and it's lacking in Asian American history.

So now there is say, um, the Chinese role here in America, well, reasonably well documented only because they were laborers, right. They helped build the railroads or they were, uh, or like Carnegie was talking today, uh, yesterday. There are Chinatowns throughout the United States, but they were unknown. Rural Chinatown for unknown. They're not part of American history. That beach did that. That's the question. Why do you think that is? Like, why do you think it's a beach without Asian American, but because of sand? Well, look at all the exclusion laws right now for the Filipino Filipinos. It was telling McDuffie act now, uh, after the uh, Philippine American war ended, the Philippines was ceded to the United States via the Treaty of Paris. Right. So one of the edicts that came up, uh, was that the Filipino people, if they choose so, could get the status. Noncitizen. American. National. Noncitizen. American national. So that meant that they could come to the United States without going to a visa or things like that. My parents came, uh, in 1927 from Hawaii and landed in San Pedro. And the the only thing they had to worry about was get a ticket so they couldn't get on the boat, but they had to stay in San Pedro, I think, for a week. Uh, quarantine? No, they were American nationals, but non-citizens. Which means that you can't vote and you can't own property and. And none of that for some, uh, because the influx of Filipinos was mostly bachelors. Now, if you're a bachelor, you're 18, 19, 20. Here in the United States, there's no place you're going to look for a woman.

But you can't marry outside. But they're not nice here.

So. Well, that those kinds of things, the Add exclusion act, the tidy tidy up here which was restricted. No, no you're not American nationals. Now pay preserve a tiny bit of that and restricted the immigration to 50 Filipinos or something like that. So. So what's happened is that there was no presence of or anyone interested in that time of documenting the Filipinos and Filipino history, or for that matter, of Chinese and Japanese history as part of the American American history. And that's why I think that there's that void. And to know and it does my heart really good when I see people like Yvonne. Right. Or Tony, you know, and a lot of others. And then and the Filipino American National Historical Society and other Filipino organizations that are supporting what I call the the Philippine Fil-am history here in the United States.

What are what are some worries or what are some reactions that you've seen when you give talks or you lead the talk, or you lead the tour, or you read presentations or speaking to students or young people or college students. What are some of the, um, kind of reactions that they have to learning about this Filipino American history? What, especially if they've never heard of it or what are some memorable reactions? Well, the first thing is that they didn't realize that there was a Filipino American enclave here, um, or in other cities, because that could explain what happened here in San Jose. I said, but but remember, this is not the only place that the Filipino settled. Um, and I use the term street because here in San Jose it was called sixth Street. In Stockton, the Filipino community is called El Dorado Street in San Francisco, it's Kearny Street in LA, it's Temple Street. So when I tell talk to the students, first of all, they didn't know that was a the an enclave of Filipinos here in the 1920s. And I said, well, there were others around the

city in different cities. They never thought about that as. And so even some of the Filipino kids, well, when I talk to the Filipino kids, remember, their parents just came recently. So there. And not only that, their parents most likely were professionals, lawyers, doctors, nurses, or they own big businesses or they're high tech, uh, people. You have to contrast that with the first wave. Filipinos, again, who were mostly all laborers. So when I talk to the students, I give this the story that it's a revelation to them. First of all, that there is this there is a history of the Filipinos before them and then known and then and the reaction I get sometimes is that, gee, maybe we were part we were becoming part of it. And we say, yes, you are. You should be you should be becoming part of the American history. And so and this is a duty along those lines, every time I end a talk, I, uh, I tell students, I said, you know, I was a student once, too. And I said, and then I listen to this lecture in history. And I said, well, that's really great. Go out the door. 90% of it will vanish, right? They said it'll probably happen here, and I hope it doesn't, but I hope you remember most of it. But here are two things that I want you to remember. One, you write your dad and mom story. They're Filipinos now. If they're Irish or German, write their story two but get their story. Ask them why they left the Philippines. The second write of Family Tree. Two things that's easy for you to remember. Now why do I do that? Gets back to Asian American history. Unless you document that like I did, I just I'll just do this for I'll turn it off. Well, now I'm saying you write it, you write your story. Because someday somebody's story is going to say, this wasn't your family involved with that nurses. Right. And it was led by a Filipinos. And it was your family. It wasn't your mom and nurse. Unless you had that story, you could say, well, yeah, I know my mom was a nurse, but I don't know what she did any of that stuff. So someday. And then knowing that when you do a family tree.

Now we're talking about the intermarriage and the mestizo or hubba say, you got to get their stories too, because some, maybe some of those fourth generation who say, I want to know about my family history from the Filipino side. I want to know why my dad and mom left Cebu, but my great grandfather left Cebu. You know, they've retired or something like that. Unless you do that, you're not going to make a contribution. So it's maybe I didn't answer the question with the reaction of students, but I give that to them. Now, there is one reaction that I did get and that one Pinay raised her hand. She said, you know, I tried that with my mom and she refused to talk and somebody said, yeah, hey, I did that. My dad, you know, you said, well, you know and know talk about, oh, they would give you a little bit of bits of pieces. I said. Try this. First of all, there's a difference between conversation and interrogation. I said, like, if you want to talk to your mom and she's benign and she's a good cook, ask her where she got the recipe for peanut butter or adobo or something like that. And she'll probably might say, oh, I got that from my neighbor in the Philippines. Yeah. Who's your neighbor? Oh, that was Mrs. So-and-so. I said, well, she lived in the same province as you the same time. Oh, no. I met her at the market. What market was that?

In the meantime, be recorded, you know, put up their video recorders. And because some of them, if you say, why did you leave the Philippines? You know, that's a big question.

So that anyway, that, that, that that just one of the reactions I got. They will not talk. That's just rude. So I say try that. And surprisingly, when I did give some of the talks, there's a few that that

I'm doing that I'm doing that. Good for you. Good for you. But did you do a family tree? Oh, I don't know. Do family tree. I got a lot of resources for that. Sorry. Just related to that. Um, cause, like, I kind of noticed that you've mentioned this family tree in various contexts, and I was wondering, like, maybe you could you just, like, ruminate on what you think will happen if every single, let's say, every single student who was your talked to document their family tree and now there's a bunch of family trees sitting around and stories. What do you envision would happen with that collection? What would you want to see happen with that? Family trees? Yeah. So let's say everyone did exactly what you said. And now I would use, you know, one of the things that's great about a family tree is that, um, you, as you do the research, you save on your name, on your surname. Right. You'll find a lot of other surnames and other people who have exactly that same name. So if you have a family tree and you could make a connection with that other person, you bring your family tree over. Now, the reason I say that is that that happened to me because my my dad in his second marriage, it took his, uh, my stepmom to Kauai. And in the phone book, his wife happened to look up at those projects there. So my dad talked to them and said, though they're not related, and my dad, because he's not a historian or they didn't pursue it any further when he came back, uh, home, he told me about them. I said, gee, that's weird. We're supposed to be all related. And he said, yeah, I know, but he said that there was no relationship that they could make. I said, yeah, well, that's too bad. So a couple years later, I took my girlfriend and I on vacation in Hawaii, and we went to Koi. So I looked at the number. It's it's bright side. So I called, I said, hi, I'm Robert Reich. Check it. This, I answered, and Boyd got this, got this, you know, accent. And she turned on her yelling, oh, wait a minute, daughter. Oh no. Honey, honey. And she's speaking Ilocano that there's somebody. And so he says, hello. I said, hi, I'm Robert Reich. Suck. Um, do you remember my dad talking to you? And you said who? No, I said, I think we're I think we're related. He said oh. Oh, baby. I said, uh, could we meet? So, uh. Sure. Uh, I'm going to my, uh, my cousin meet me at the Green Water tower. Uh, and said, the green water tower. I wear the green monitor. Oh, I come out from the plantation, honey, that was a plantation. Finally, I got the word. You know, it's just. Oh, yeah. There was that green water tower. He says okay. What time? The 20 minute maybe. I said, okay, I'll be parking. I have my hand out. So I'm sitting parked there by the street, the car comes by, they look over the Filipino. I said, hey, uh oh. Rug rugs. I said, yes, follow me. You. So we go to the to, um. It's actually his nephew, um, Primo Rex and his family, I mean, dinner, so invited me and my girlfriend. I said, oh, this is great. I could have made a bunch of people we don't know. So we're having them really cordial because aloha style, right? Filipino and aloha style. So we're sitting there, we're having a nice a nice dinner and we're talking. And I said, well, you know, my dad doesn't understand how we related. And he said, yeah, this is Primo or this is his nephew or uh, now Uncle Domingo, I call him Uncle Domingo. Uh, and I said, well, uh, I have a family tree that maybe that will help us. So I so, uh, so I got the family tree we sat down on, uh, on the carpet in the living room around the family tree, and I said, here's Francisco rucksack and Euphemia rig. And then there's the brothers. And then one of the, uh, brothers is, um, Francisco Junior. And I go through a bunch of names, and then, um, there's, uh, Alejandro works out. My dad said that Alejandro Rex is his uncle, and he left, uh, Santa Catalina when he was a little boy. My dad was a little boy. But do you remember Alejandro? Uncle. Uncle Alejandro, I look around, there's a big case, and their eyes are wide open. The window doors. Dad is Alejandro Rex and Uncle Doming is pure Filipino I sauce. I got chicken skin, which

means your skin is crawling because you know how a revelation. Your hair stands out. And that's their dad. So their nephew that, uh, that was hosting the dinner is my first cousins. Primo is my first cousin. That's it. The story is, unless you have a family tree and you go to another person, that family tree doesn't mean anything except for that family. But it has value when you're trying to make a link. And we always try to do that when this is happening in our Pinoy Town tours, when we have the, uh, the group we give, we ask each one, you know, what's your tie to the Philippines or to the Filipinos, right? So each of them says something about their family and where they're from and they go through. And in one occasion somebody stopped it says, where are you from? And what your dad from this is, do you know this? Do you know? So it says, uh, yeah, that's my auntie. Just that's my grandma. There's a relationship there. They discover it in the talk only by mentioning names. Now they had. And I was hoping if they have a family tree, they can solidify that and make other connections. And I think that's really important. That's why. And because of those experiences, I always end the talk saying, do I do this at this convention in front of this audience? I know one of the viewers, the rush to go eat another lunch, but remember two things.

It's like, okay, we can have maybe one more, unless you have another question, we'll just, um, yeah, we can see one. I think you can earn. Okay, okay. Maybe I'm just thinking, um, you know, this must be lots of, uh, unexpected learning and, uh, experiences you have in doing all this work you've been doing for, I guess, last 15 years, documenting, giving tours, presenting. I'm just curious, uh, you know, what's the most fun you've had or what? What learning do you feel like has been really valuable to you in this experience? Oh, you're the buzzword. Neat is that there is a lot that I've learned and not only about, uh, the, the people that I talk with and their, their, their history and their families. But I learned a little bit more about the perspective of the younger generation. You know, when I was younger or we had perspective like everybody else. Right. And so we have a common topic about Filipino American history, but their perspective is a little bit different than mine or, or, uh, or my sisters or anyone else. But I call that probably a generation gap, unless you make that connection or solidify it. Yeah. Their perspectives are look, uh, quite a bit different, but I always try to find a, uh, a commonality that. That will make our connection a little stronger, other than just Filipino American history. But sometimes there is no connection here that you can see when you're talking to the people that they're very they're being very courteous. Right. And so and when I see that, I just continue talking and then at the end I'm certain sooner because I know their, their mind is somewhere else, but that's their perspective. And so I've learned to see that when we have, when we have talk stories, unfortunately when I, when they do have to talk stories, people are there because they want to hear the story or they want to talk story. And so it's very rare when I see people that are just yawning or, or hoping that this thing will end and as fast as possible. And then I've learned that are social, the social interactions that I expect from people, you know, I have to adjust. I try to be as alert as I can to what they feel and what their perspective is. It and, uh, the I guess the going in position I have is that I do not talk down to them. You know, we're just people talking talking story. You know, that aloha style. Nobody's making it better than anybody else. We're just going to talk stories like we're doing here that did that. Let's get to it. Thank you. Yeah. Thank you so much. Yeah. You know what? You know, that means time out. Yeah. Time out. Yeah, I think that. Okay. Yeah, I think we're great because I think I'm. I think I'm running out of.