Filipino American Farmworker Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

With

Lorraine Agtang

May 26, 2014
Natomas, California

By Allan Jason Sarmiento
Welga! Filipino American Labor Archives
UC Davis Asian American Studies Department

[Session 1, May 26, 2014]

[Begin Audio File]

SARMIENTO: So let us begin. It is May 26, 2014. This is Allan Jason Sarmiento interviewing Lorraine Agtang, and this is the Filipino-American Farmworker Oral History Project. Today we are at Natomas at Lorraine's Home. So, let us begin by talking a little bit about your background. When and where were you born?

AGTANG: I was born in a labor camp outside of Delano in 1952.

SARMIENTO: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother and father?

AGTANG: My mother is Mexican and my father is Ilocano. My father came over in the 20's, part of the first wave of Ilocano's that were farmworkers. Like the bracero programs to bring Filipinos here to the United States to work. My mother too is a farmworker. They met in Arizona and got together, later married and have seven children.

SARMIENTO: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's background before he met your mother in Arizona?

AGTANG: My father was a farmworker. He came to Hawaii and worked in the sugar canes. Then he went to Alaska and worked with the salmon [canneries]. He also had a brother who came, my uncle Larry. They made this circuit of agriculture work. They started in Thermal, Coachella, and then in the springtime would come down through Arvin, Bakersfield and then through Delano. As the work went on they would go down further to Stockton and work in the asparagus.

SARMIENTO: When your father was up north in the canneries, did he participate in any

labor organizing or any activities of the sort?

AGTANG: That's something I don't know. I don't remember, recall, or asking.

SARMIENTO: How about your mother? How did she arrive in the states, and what was her occupation?

AGTANG: My mother would come working with her mother, father and family. She was a farmworker. So, it was in the fields that they met. My father didn't speak Spanish and so he learned how to speak to Spanish so he could talk to her. They eventually got to know each other, and they were getting married. But she came from a poor family in Mexico.

SARMIENTO: So when did your family relocate to Delano?

AGTANG: Now you're asking–

SARMIENTO: Or what time period. 30s? 40s?

AGTANG: It had to be around the 40s. My brother was born in '47–46'.

SARMIENTO: How did the Filipino and Mexican communities respond to your parents' marriage?

AGTANG: Growing up, I never noticed any kind of response to them. All the people we grew up with were Filipino families. The Agbayani's, the Mostaho's. They were our godparents, and they had children who were our ages. Those are the people we grew up with – Filipinos. I didn't have a whole lot of exposure to Mexicans other than my mother and my cousins in Los Angeles growing up. We lived on the east side of town in a labor camp, which was near Filipino [labor camps], where my uncle lived. We went to school on the eastside of town. Delano has a freeway that separates the east and west sides of town. The white people go to the east side of town, even go on the

east side of town. It's all the stories about the tracks that separates them. The Hispanics and the Filipinos went to the school and church on the west side of town. I didn't have a whole lot of exposure to Mexicans growing up. Even in school, there were like–I remember my Filipino friend Dana, and my friend Elina who was half Mexican and half Filipino like me. There were several blacks but everyone else was white. So for our family, and for me growing up, I didn't really have a lot of exposure to Hispanic people and they were mostly Filipinos. They were wonderful people. We used to get together every weekend, there was something going on–a party or birthday party.

[5:00]

SARMIENTO: So there wasn't any animosity from your family friends about your parents' marriage?

AGTANG: I don't ever really recall. The women were always very polite. I never seen them be rude growing up as a child. We used to spend the nights at their houses. If there was out in the community, it wasn't with us. You know sometimes you have a friend who–they don't discriminate people who they think are good friends. I don't know. But I didn't experience any of that.

SARMIENTO: How about in your classroom? Did you experience any prejudice due to your mixed ethnic background?

AGTANG: I think the discrimination that I experienced as a young child was because I wasn't white. Like I said, I went to the white side of town. Like my two girlfriends, we were kind of the only people who hung around together. I don't recall ever being–even to the time I finished school–I don't recall any

friends that were white. I knew them, but none that I was very close friends with and hung around them. Mostly it was Mexican or Filipino.

SARMIENTO: So how about when you got older in your teenage years. Was it still the same about being treated the same or did you eventually started feeling some prejudice?

AGTANG: There was one story that I recall as a child. A friend of mine took me home with her one day for lunch and she was a white friend. I remember her going to her backdoor and opening her back door, and her mother coming out and her mother telling her to never bring me home with her again. That was the first time I felt "wow, I better leave." As I got older then maybe the school year, the older grades integrated a little more. Because I'm half Mexican and half Filipino I never acknowledged, or never recognized, or didn't want to see if there were issued. Everybody seemed to get along. Like in schools, you have your groups that hang out together; Asian kids would hang out together, Mexican kids would hang out together and the Anglo kids would hang out together. Other than those kind of things that happened in high schools and grammar school–I don't recall any fights. I do recall fights from my brother though [Laughs]. My brother–my older brother–used to have a fights with Hispanics Chuco's back then.

SARMIENTO: What is a Chuco?

AGTANG: They were like – I don't want to say they were hoodlums– but the tough Mexican kids. I remember one night they got in a fight in front of our house. My mother had to go out with a broom and chase them all away.

That's the only time I recall a ethnic thing. They do what kids do, they were just being tough or something.

SARMIENTO: So it was more like being a bully or did it have to do with your brothers mixed ethnicity.

AGTANG: No, it had to do with being a bully. The Mexicans stayed with the Mexicans and the Filipinos stayed with the Filipinos, but I don't ever recall ever them talking about each other. Where I really experienced that discrimination was when I was a little kid and I went to work in the fields. Because they only had Mexican crews, and they only had Filipino crews, and Puerto Rican crews. At one point they even had Arab crews. There was always that competition, and the grower used that in his favor– divide and conquer.

[10:00]

AGTANG: Like "oh, the Filipinos made 100 boxes more than you guys" or "the Mexicans made finished this much work than you guys." There was always that competitive sense against the crews. I remember feeling that working in the grapes. The growers were just trying to make more money. The faster he could work everybody, the more money he made.

SARMIENTO: So when did you start working on the farms?

AGTANG: I have this one scar on my finger. I was about, gosh, 6 or 7 years old. We would go out and work, and we were tying vines and I cut myself with the knife tie the twine around. You grab the arm of the grape and wrap it around the wire and then you tie it. I cut my finger doing that, so I was

little. There was like no child care when we were young. My parents both worked in the fields, so often we would go and hang out in fields. That was our playground. Growing up we kind of worked in the fields. I think as I got older, maybe at 13, I remember working more, the older we got. The kids would just join in and work: picking grapes, we would do the laterals, cleaning all the leafs around the grapes so they could hang, take in the grapes and pulling them down so they would hang right, until the time we picked them and packed them.

SARMIENTO: So you worked in the Filipino working crew?

AGTANG: Yes.

SARMIENTO: Okay. When you were working in the fields, when was the first time you ever experienced some type of farmworker activism?

AGTANG: In 1965, September 8th, I remember we working for Chamorro Farms. The crews were pretty big, we had a huge crew. I remember it was mid-day and there were strikers. They came out, I was at least 10, I was just a little kid, I didn't know what the heck was going on. People were screaming and yelling "Huelga! Strike! Huelga! Come out, brothers!" So at that point, my family left, and I remember driving away and looking at all those people saying "who are all those people, Dad?" and he would say "well, they're strikers. They're people who want more money. So, it was the first time I ever seen any kind of civil disobedience kind of thing. I was really amazed

as a child to see that.

SARMIENTO: Was it the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee who was on strike?

AGTANG: Yes, it was AWOC. They were Filipinos, a lot of them I recognized. I may not of know them well, but I know them from the community. It was an exciting time. After that, I never went back to work, but I recall the commotion and [inaudible] down at the Filipino hall, where I would sneak over with friends and see what was going on. You had all the Filipino women cooking, Mrs. Flora Agbayani. There was a group of Women who would cook there and they would hold their meetings and they would have the business there, and we would just go in and get some food. As a young kid, you watch what was all going on. It was an exciting time.

SARMIENTO: It was majority Filipinos in this time period?

AGTANG: Yeah. I think later, it was soon after that AWOC went to the [National Farmworkers Association] and Cesar [Chavez] and asked to join them in the strike. The Filipinos were on strike, and the Mexicans were breaking the strike. I had some friends actually, some Mexicans who went on strike when the Filipinos went on strike. But the majority of them were still working. So, Larry [Itliong] and the leaders of AWOC knew there was no way to win the strike if the Mexicans were breaking the strike, so that's when they went to see Cesar. So they joined forces at that point.

[15:00]

SARMIENTO: Were the Filipinos who initially went on strike, were they relatively old, or

was it a mixed age?

AGTANG: There were probably more single individuals than there were families back then. So they were like, mixed.

SARMIENTO: So it wasn't like– because I think the highlight of the people who were on the strike were called the "Manongs," correct?

AGTANG: Yes, well what's highlighted. They were all older. They were in their 60s already when the strike started.

SARMIENTO: Just to jump a little bit around, the Nationality Act of 1965 resulted in an increase in Filipino immigration. Do you recall any of these new Filipino immigrants that joined the strike?

AGTANG: In '65?

SARMIENTO: Yes.

AGTANG: The thing with Larry, Andy Imutan, Philip Vera Cruz, Tony Armington, Pete Velasco, they were all community leaders. People followed them because they were all community leaders. So, when the strike began, all the Filipinos were on strike. When they go on strike, everyone went on strike, I'm sure. I don't know of any that did not join them.

SARMIENTO: Did you actively participate in the strike.

AGTANG: No, I was young kid. At that point I needed to go back to school.

SARMIENTO: Unfortunately, most Americans regard the farmworker activism movement as an achievement in Mexican-American history. Why do you think Filipino-American involvement has been largely forgotten by the general

public?

AGTANG: I don't know why, because to me the whole time I was involved from the time I was a child, because I went on going back on strike in '73 and worked with the union for many years after that. I was always around the Manongs, so it was always clear to me that they started the strike. When anyone who came to 40 Acres had exposure, everybody knew. People who were close in the movement, they all knew the Filipinos started the strike. Maybe historically, after Larry left, Cesar was always the leader of the union. He was the focus. Even with Cesar, he would come out to 40 Acres and always see the Manongs. They were like the rock stars of 40 Acres, the union headquarters. Everybody loved them, everybody knew why Agbayani [Village] was built for them because they didn't have places to live. After the '73 strike, Larry was gone already, Andy was gone already. The only two people left were Pete and [Philip Vera Cruz]. During the '73 strike, I was at the picket line with the Manongs, so I knew all of them.

AGTANG: After the strike I went to work with the union, I went to work at the clinic. When I was working at the clinic at 40 Acres, Agbayani [Village] was being built. The Manongs were coming to the clinic to see the doctors.

[20:00]

AGTANG: When Agbayani Village opened, I was asked to be the first manager. So I was with the Filipinos managing Agbayani Village. As a matter of fact, just a couple of weeks ago, I saw the first receipt book back from 1973-74

when I was writing receipts for their rent. I was always around the Filipinos. I guess people in the cities just didn't know. What they hear is Cesar. They hear about the strike in '65. So, maybe they made the assumption it was a Mexican [movement]. Things live on because there are people there just support that cause. After the [Filipinos] left, I was the only young Filipino around. Even as I talked to friends now that are Filipinos in Delano, because they become interested in what really happened. People say that their parents really wanted them to go to college. One of them even said he was talked out of working for the union, saying that he could better serve the community if finished college. That was the goal for that age group to get an education, get a good job and get out of the fields. I wasn't going to go anywhere at that point by working at the fields. I had a family. So there weren't any Filipinos around that were a part of the struggle. Mexican kids were often had less money…so I don't know. There was a group of kids, who Filipinos that only worked on the grapes, some, during the summer. But the rest of the time they were in school. Talking with friends of mine, it's at some point the union no longer took care [of them]. It's so hard to look at that history know, because their parents are dead and all the Manongs are dead. There were a couple oral histories done, one done by a young man named Allan Gonzalez, who is half-Filipino and half-white, and one done by Johnny Armington. There is some histories for us to look back at. They interviewed some of the Manongs, I think all of the Manongs that lived at Agbayani. So we could

get a better picture of that history of what happened.

SARMIENTO: In some history books I've read, some Filipinos switched over to the Teamsters. Do you think that had an effect on Filipino membership in the union?

AGTANG: Sure it did. After the '65-'70 contract was signed, it ended in 1973. It was like in the middle of the summer, instead of renegotiation the contract with the farmworkers, the growers invited the Teamsters into the valley and they had some Filipino leaders. So, then the [some] Filipinos went to the Teamsters. They actually signed – they called it the Sweetheart Contract – they just brought the teamsters in. [Filipino] membership went into the teamsters. Those were days in the '73 strike. My husband was Filipino and my parents–we went out on strike – and my husband stayed and work.

[25:15]

AGTANG: It was like a really difficult time, because it was a real split in families. Not everyone went on strike. As I recall, the only Filipinos in that strike were the Manongs.

SARMIENTO: In the '73 Strike?

AGTANG: In the '73 Strike were all the Manongs. There were, gee I can't even venture how many back then. But I was in the picket line with Willie, and my Uncle Pete and my dad.

SARMIENTO: Going back to 1965, do recall how the Filipino community in Delano felt about the merger between the National Farmworkers Association and

AWOC? Was it generally positive or was there some resentment?

AGTANG: I wasn't there, but I heard stories that when the Filipinos asked Cesar to join the strike, some of the Mexican workers didn't want to join. At that point, Cesar got very angry because Cesar knew. Cesar was an organizer. He was slowly organizing back in '65, house to house. Having house meetings, going out to the fields, and meeting families, and was looking at wanting to have a good strong organization before they went on strike. So he wasn't quite ready for the strike that fell on his lap. So Cesar said "well you know what, I'm going to join the Filipinos. If I have to quit to do that, I will do that." So, at that point the Mexican workers agreed. They had a big strike vote at Guadalupe Church, the Catholic church in the west side of town. And they had a vote, and the people voted to join AWOC and the strike. So, I think there were some that were saying, for what reasons, because they were discriminating… But like I told you, I had Mexican friends. One was my boss when I worked for the farmworkers. She and her family went on strike when the Filipinos went on strike, before the [NFWA] joined AWOC.

SARMIENTO: I think you mentioned earlier that you had family friends, the Agbayanis?

AGTANG: Yes.

SARMIENTO: I recall one of them passed away during the strike. Do you recall that event?

AGTANG: Paul Agbayani, who was a farmworker at…a wine company. A wine company that was just on my mind. In Delano it's on Pond Road, there was

only like one or two wine companies. He died on the picket line. So, Agbayani was named after him.

SARMIENTO: And was this a family friend of yours, or just the same last name?

AGTANG: No, he was related to the Agbayani family, we were friends. Flora, and, I keep forgetting her husband's name, but it was her husband's cousin who died.

SARMIENTO: Do you think his death invigorated the movement?

AGTANG: Sure did. It invigorated the Filipino movement too. The Filipinos and the pickets. Any time someone dies on the strike, you're all brother and sisters there. You're all working for a common cause. I think that was the significance that Cesar and Larry, and all the leaders of both unions brought, was that united front. There has never been.

[29:55]

AGTANG: Historically, the Filipinos would have their own strike. They'd do it by crew. The beginning of the grape season, they were called wild cat strikes. They would want 10 cents for 5 cents more, and they'd tell the grower "you pay us more money or we'll go on strike" and they would generally get that. I really think that the 1965 strike started that way. I think that they really weren't thinking about being on strike for five years. I think they were hoping that if they had more pressure with the Mexicans join that they could get it over with quickly. But the growers were stubborn, and they weren't going to let them have control over the growers. I think historically that's another reason why the Filipinos kind of left. Even after the strike, a

lot of the families went back to work, because they had their families they had to feed. So the only people who were still a part of the movement were all the Manongs. They didn't have families. The union became their family. There was a camp, White Rivers Farms, had a camp that the Manongs lived in. Out on County Line, and the union paid the rent for that place. So that Manongs lived there, and they had a cook. That's where they lived until Agbayani opened. I think history gets washed out in the years as it goes by. Though, for me, and most of the people I was around, always knew about the Filipino history. We had Agbayani [Village] to always remind us. To people who didn't know, they would be introduced to it. Agbayani too, had a lot of students that were so interested in the Filipino community and the Manongs. Every weekend, there was a college from LA, or from the Bay Area, or some Bay Area Filipino group that wanted to meet the Manongs, because they were historical. They would come, visit, talk, eat, play music. That was a legacy that went on through until they all left. I may have gotten of space here. What was that last question, I'm sorry.

SARMIENTO: I think we were just talking about just overall Delano Grape Strikes and overall Filipino sentiments about.

AGTANG: After the Filipinos went back to work, on'73, when we were talking about the Teamsters coming it. They probably weren't ready to go on another strike. Which brought me to my other point. I think that's part of the history. I think the Filipinos weren't thinking they were going to be on

strike for a long time and they had families to take care of. They wanted their kids to go to school, and they couldn't go to college if they didn't have money. Many of them had decent sized families that they had to support, so they couldn't remain on strike. By then, everyone had got on the boycott. They decided they couldn't win the strike by doing picket lines. And several people got killed. In the '65 strike, Paulo got killed. But in the '73 strike, there was Nagi Daifallah, Arab Brother and organizer who got killed, and Juan De La Cruz who got killed on the picket line. That's why on '73 they went on the boycott, and all of the Manongs went on the boycott. All these little Filipinos going to the cities to ask the stores not to sell grapes. They won the boycott because it was the first time people across the country stopped eating grapes.

[35:00]

AGTANG: Until this day, I still know people who won't eat grapes in solidarity with the workers. There's so many wonderful pictures of the Manongs on the picket line. I have some great pictures for you to look at. I've got some great pictures from a friend of mine. There are pictures of the Manongs and of the strike.

SARMIENTO: And since we're talking about the 70's, we should probably fast forward a bit. I just wanted to ask, did you start actively participating in union activities during the 70s?

AGTANG: Yes, I went on the 1973 Grape Strike with my parents. We were working at Anton Caratan, like I said my husband was a boss. At that point, I had three

kids. When everybody went on the boycott, that split up families because my father and mother went on strike, and I went on strike. I was committed to use have better wages– I have three kids– I need to have medical benefits. I [wanted] to send my kids to college too, I didn't want my kids to work on the fields too when they get older. So, I wanted to go on strike and my husband didn't. He was a foreman, so we would go to work in the morning and he would drop me off at the picket line with my parents, and he would go to work. But then, after the strike, and after Nagi Daifallah got killed, the boycott began. And so then all the families and all the people started going on the boycott. I had three kids, and a family, so I couldn't go out on the boycott. At that point, it was in the fall of '73. I applied to work at the clinic at 40 Acres. In Delano, there was the union headquarters. They had Agbayani Village–well Agbayani Village wasn't built yet– but they had the union hall and they would have meetings. They had a gas station and a clinic: Rodridgo Terronez Memorial Clinic. I applied to work at the clinic, and I remember them asking me if I spoke Spanish and I said "oh yeah, I speak Spanish," and I really speak. As we grew up, another part of that whole history thing, our parents did not teach us to speak Spanish or nor did I learn Ilocano. I learned a few words of Ilocano from my uncle that used to hang around, because he only spoke Ilocano. Like Tanung, Maysa, Dua, Uppat, Lima. Things that he would teach is because he was like our surrogate father too. As our father traveled to work at other areas, my uncle was always there to help take care of the family. Anyways, I

went to work for the Rodrigo Terronez clinic, and I told them I spoke Spanish but I really didn't. Later, Esther Uranday was my boss there at the clinic. You're a volunteer when you work at the union, you get five dollars a week, room and board. That's fine, I didn't want to break the strike so I did work at the clinic. It was the first time that I had a job outside of working at the fields. It was my opportunity to learn. They put me as a receptionist, which was really tough because a lot of the farm workers coming in were Mexicans. Years later, my boss would laugh and say "you know, that was the first she saw many Mexicans speak English or struggle to speak English" because I didn't speak any Spanish. I'm glad she never fired me [Laughs]. So I worked at the clinic, and during that time the Manongs would come in. I loved that job, I knew everybody, and I knew their social security number because everything was done by social security number. That was the time that I learned that "hey, you know, I guess I'm not so dumb." I did, I got married young, by the time I was 18 I had three kids.

[39:50]

AGTANG: I went to the 8th grade and I didn't go back to school. I didn't really have much of an option for a future, because there was no way I was going to be able to go back to college or school. I had to somehow contribute to raising a family. Working for the United Farm Workers was the first time I had an opportunity to meet other people. There were a lot of people who came to work with the union from all over the world. Anglos, white people, who I

grew up not being very good friends with. All of a sudden I'm around all these people from different parts of the world, became friends. People who are still friends today. Closer than the kids I grew up with, interesting, who I spent more time with. But that was part of the discrimination, how that over the years some things don't ever change, or you're not around them anymore. That doesn't change. I had the opportunity to learn a lot of stuff working at the clinic. All of a sudden I thought "gee, I'm not so dumb after all." I was really good at what I did, and then I was taught to do some x-rays and taught to do some lab work. It was a wonderful experience for me. Later, I met Paulie Parks, who was a white girl from Visalia. She was the boycott. When she came back from the boycott, she went and helped build Agbayani because they were building [it] by then. Agbayani was right across the way, from one end of 40 Acres to the other.

SARMIENTO: So it was just across the compound?

AGTANG: Yea, across the compound. Forty Acres is a square piece of land. [Note: Lorraine illustrates the location of Forty Acres] This was Garces Highway on the south end, and then you enter through the Garces Highway and the gas station was there on your right, and you go in a little to the middle is the hall, and on the backside is the clinic. The other road, which I can't remember the name. Mettler Road? Maybe it's Mettler. Agbayani Village is right here. We used to have lunch here as they were building it, because the cook, Tony Armington, would cook there for the crew. So people building it, we would get together and eat. All groups of people; the

Manongs, the crew that built Agbayani, became a community. And with all the kids that would come on the weekends, all the Asian kids from San Francisco– got to meet a lot of San Francisco Asians– and from LA would come every weekend. KDP, was a group out of Oakland and San Francisco, and they would regularly come and bring kids to work.

SARMIENTO: Do you mind, so, explaining some of your job duties when you were working at Agbayani Village?

AGTANG: After Agbayani was built, then I was asked to be the manager of Agbayani. As the first manager, it was my job to make sure that everyone's room was fine, that there were no maintenance problems, that everyone was happy with their rooms, that everyone was well. I took in the monthly rent, I worked with the maintenance person, with Tony [Armington] in the kitchen. With the Manongs, to make sure they were eating, that they were all happy, and we were all very happy with how [Tony] was cooking. I would hold monthly meetings with the Manongs, where they would talk about Agbayani and how they would set it up. Where they would have their gardens. I remember a particularly meeting that was just a big discussion about moving the fighting chickens from the road, on Mettler Road back here. We said that the police could come by and see them, and the really conservative Filipinos, [Celedonio] Lacuesta, and I think Philip [Vera Cruz], were saying "oh, no we can't have those chickens up there. We don't want people seeing them." I remember the Manong who had the chickens, he wasn't very happy. So they had taken a vote, and he was very

dramatic and got up and said "Okay, if I have to move my chickens, I'm gunna kill them all! I'll chop all their heads off." So, that's a group process voting, and I don't recall if he killed his chickens, but that's how he felt at the time.

[45:17]

AGTANG: They were a great group of people. There were some who still continued to work. He would live there, and the only time he would work was with a union contract with Coachella that was a Filipino crew. They would go and work there, there was a group of them. The rest of the Manongs, LaCuesta, would take care any kind of business people needed. There was Catalino Taclibon, and they called him "Chairman Mao." I'm going to show you these pictures, because he did kind of look like Chairman Mao [Zedong]. George Cargo, who was like in the garden, he was the garden man. George Ibali [sp], was the grounds person, not only for Agbayani, but for Forty Acres. So all these guys had great jobs. Everybody loved them, they were like the golden treasures of Forty Acres. I was like 19 years old, so I was like around all these wise men. Everything I learned about community organizing, and being in the community, I learned from them. Respect, as you work as a community and support one another, I learned from the Manongs. It was a wonderful growing period for me to be around them.

SARMIENTO: So did you have a lot of interaction with Philip Vera Cruz when he was living at Agbayani?

AGTANG: When he was there, we would sit and we would talk. But often, he was out

doing union business and out in the community talking to people. He wasn't always at Agbayani. Some of the other men were more retired, but he was very mobile. Very mobile, until he passed away.

SARMIENTO: So he was, I guess, still active in activism even after he left the union.

AGTANG: Oh yea, I think he always remained active. There are several books about him. He would always go out in the community and talk, and talk about how the Filipinos started the strike. He never stopped. He would go to colleges, he would get invitations to come in speak.

SARMIENTO: So going back to Philip, in his autobiography, he stated that Chavez' visit to the Philippines was his final straw with the union. How did you feel about Chavez' visit to the Philippines?

AGTANG: I remember the Manongs were not happy. Paulie and KDP, they were a radical group by the Bay Area, Filipinos. They were not happy with [Chavez]. Like I said, I learned a lot from those volunteers. I learned about Marshall Law in the Philippines, and how they had political prisoners– people, win– who were locked up and incarcerated, and it's always rich people taking advantage of poor people. The Manongs weren't happy. They told Cesar they weren't happy. Again, you got people on both sides of that. Andy Imutan, who was one of the leaders of AWOC, was one of the ones who set up that trip. But the Manongs were not happy about that, and they said so. They said that to Cesar when he came and talked to them

about it.

SARMIENTO: And you were against it as well?

AGTANG: Oh yeah. Marshall Law…him and his wife and all her shoes. The way he treated the people of the Philippines, so yea I was against it. It was a bad time, it was a really dumb thing. I don't believe Cesar should have done that.

[50:00]

AGTANG: I'm not sure why Andy [Imutan]–Andy was one of the leaders of AWOC– If that was one of the reasons Cesar did it, to still support Filipino people, well he didn't understand that Filipino people–at least the Manongs– said it was a bad thing to do.

SARMIENTO: So how long did you keep on working at Agbayani Village, or I guess with the union in general?

AGTANG: I worked at Agbayani until the law was passed. Jerry Brown signed a law for there to be elections. The Agricultural Labor Relations Act, gave farmworkers to unionize, to vote and private votes to be represented by unions. At that point, I went out to organize. My boss, who was my boss at Agbayani, said "you could best use your skills helping us organize the workers." So I went to organize and work with Filipino crews. We won some elections. I organized until I left in I guess 1978.

SARMIENTO: So you were organizing Filipino crews in the United Farm Workers?

AGTANG: Yeah, they were just the general public. When the law first came into

effect, the growers thought they didn't have to. Back in the '65 strike, the sheriff thought he could just arrest people just because he was trying to protect them. Bobby Kennedy went there and had to tell them "you need to read the constitution." The growers still had that same sense about them. After the law was passed, they were just going to ignore it. It was the same, and the sheriff supported them, they would do whatever they said. We would go out and organize, the law said we had the right to talk to workers during their lunch break or where they lived at camps. They would have us arrested. I remember being arrested in the middle of the summer, and Delano would get up to 112 and 113. The sheriff would put us in the back of the squad car; handcuffed, all the windows were closed and go and talk to the grower. The growers hadn't really changed at all, it wasn't that much longer. I got arrested three times in one week once. I remember saying "you could arrest me today, and you could come back I'll be here tomorrow and you could come arrest me tomorrow. But we're fighting for something that's important to us. We had the law and it says we could do this so I'll be back tomorrow and you could arrest me again." One time I was at a labor camp and it was a Mexican labor camp in the evening. The contractor wanted us off the property and I told them no, we had the right to talk to the workers. They put up wires around the camp, it was a loosage camp. He said "no you guys better get out of here." And we said know, and he said "don't make me do something that I would be sorry for." Back then, we were kids and we were fearless. We're doing the right thing, God

is even on our side. Then [the contractor] grabbed me by the arm and threw me across the courtyard there. But, those great organizing days.

SARMIENTO: How did the Filipino workers respond to you when you came around organizing? Were they were more opened to you because you were Filipino?

AGTANG: Yeah, and I knew them all. They would always be walking up to me if it was at a camp. I always got an invitation to come and eat. Some of the Manongs still lived in the camps. I knew them as a child growing up. My uncle used to take us around the camps that were out in the country because we would go to the chicken fights. When they would have a cock fight at one of the labor camps, it was like a carnival. There was music, cockfights, there was a lot of good food. The kids would play around. I got to meet a lot of them, they just know me as a child and the people I grew up with. They were always respectful to me, I never had any Filipinos treat me badly. Maybe the ones who didn't know me, the younger ones. It was a little more difficult to organize at another area, with people I didn't know. They might just ignore me, but I would still talk to them.

SARMIENTO: Did you have a different interaction between Tagalog workers and Ilocano workers, or were they all generally the same.

AGTANG: The Tagalog workers, they came in '65. They weren't farm workers and they were younger. They were more our age than from the Manongs. In terms of their families because they came with their parents. Their parents were older. We had neighbors that were Filipinos after we moved from the

camp into town. Their young kids went to school. Again, the big emphasis with the Asians–Filipinos– was that they didn't want their kids to work in the fields. The only times they worked in the fields was in the summer, so they knew how terrible it was so that they would work harder to go school. Was there a difference? I mean, no. Once they were out in the fields, they became workers like everyone else. The job titles were all the same, everybody gets paid the same. In terms of working, they all worked the same.

SARMIENTO: So we're going to jump a little to the present on ongoing issues. So do you still participate in union activities? At least fundraisers or speeches?

AGTANG: You know, I always had because I was one of the only Filipinos still around, along with Pete. When Pete and Philip were still alive, I would go with them. Even as manager of Agbayani, I would go around to Asian [communities]; Stockton, Salinas. We would talk to Filipinos. At that point, I was trying to talk to Filipinos into retiring, which many of them didn't know how to do. They just knew working in the fields. The sad thing about the time that they came, they couldn't get married because of the anti-miscegenation laws. They couldn't own land, they couldn't get married, so here they are living in labor camps and dying in labor camps. They didn't have families. I used to hear stories how people would find money in the mattresses because they didn't really believe in the banking system. Some of them never learned how to speak English. I told you about my uncle, who died in his 90s, and he still spoke Ilocano basically. What

was the question?

SARMIENTO: Oh, present UFW activities?

AGTANG: Oh yes. So even after I left the union, years later I still began to go and speak at different events. Representing Filipinos and being a woman involved in the union. As a matter of fact, there is a statue across from city hall [of Sacramento] that has Cesar in front of it, but on one side there is a picket line. I'm in that statue. It had to be in the late 80s or early 90s. I got to sit for the artist who lived in Davis. Recently, I spoke at the 50th union convention at Bakersfield. That was great.

[01:00:24]

AGTANG: Again, there's very few Filipinos, but my talk was about how the Filipinos started the strike. How my father and all his friends started the strike, and what that was like, and growing up in a labor camp. And everybody cheered. To me, there was never a sense that the Filipinos didn't start the strike. Because that's the first thing I always say wherever I go. When I began to hear that controversy that how Filipinos were left behind. Because even I was interviewed by Mellissa Aroy, who did the "Manongs: the Forgotten Heroes". Have you seen it?

SARMIENTO: Unfortunately, no. Was that the *The Delano Manongs?*

AGTANG: Yes.

SARMIENTO: Yes, I saw it on PBS.

AGTANG: Yes, I did too. A lot of those Manongs on that are Agbayani Manongs. I loved looking at those old things, because I know them. I knew them

personally. I loved seeing their pictures and listening to them talk, because they were so gracious always.

SARMIENTO: Recently, efforts have been made to bring Filipino-American farmworker history out to the public, particularly with the passing of Assembly Bill 123. How did you get involved with supporting that bill?

AGTANG: Oh, that's a great question. As being one of the only remaining Filipinos still involved with the union, or historically involved with the union until I left. I would go to things like the assembly. The [United] Farmworkers always made sure that the Filipinos were connected and identified. So I would go and receive things for them. But when it came for Assembly Bill 123, the farmworkers were very much pushing and working towards that. So I was asked to come and speak on behalf of the Filipinos by the [United] Farmworkers. See, I never had any experiences with the Farmworkers didn't want Filipinos involved in public things. I was invited to many things being one of the few representatives of Filipino workers. I got to address the Senate Education Committee and talk about what it was like growing up in a labor camp, near Filipino workers. How there was one bathrooms for one bathroom. There was three families that lived in that camp, and one showering area that we had to share. What it was like to work out in the fields when there was no clean water often, no clean bathrooms. And the places that did have bathroom because they smelled they were never clean. I was just sharing what that story was like and what it was like growing up in the '65 strike as a young kid with my father. And

later working with the Manongs, being on the picket lines with the Manongs. All that history that the Filipinos had. Yes, I didn't realize that I wasn't part of the history books, and it should be part of the history books because they were the leaders of the strike. That was Bonta. Bonta whose mother is Filipino and whose father is white. I think he's white. [Bonta] sponsored the bill, [his parents] worked with the farmworkers. When I was working at the clinic, his parents were at La Paz, when the headquarters moved to Keene, California. He would come to the clinic as a young child to see the doctors at Forty Acres. The ones from La Paz would go to the clinic there. Here he is, as a grown man, doing good things. Good for him.

SARMIENTO: So you still remember Assemblyman Bonta?

AGTANG: Oh yes. I said "gee, I knew your mom and dad, how's your mom?" He said "She's fine." I said "give me her number" and he gave me her number because she lives in the Bay Area. We called and we talked to each other, remembering the old times, and remembering our old friends. She wanted to get in touch with Paulie Parks. Paulie Parks, she was white, she could've been Filipino back then because she always hung out with all the Filipinos. Making connections, and I spoke with her, and she will be going to the 40th anniversary of Agbayani Village.

SARMIENTO: Well I just finished all my questions, do you have any closing remarks that you would like to say?

AGTANG: Amongst all the controversy, I just would like to say…I'm having an opportunity to reconnect with some friends. Back then in Delano, because

the growers had so much power and they hated Cesar, in town people did not often talk about the union and the strike. People would lose their jobs and people were threatened. Growing up, I never had that conversation with a lot of my Filipino friends. Then a lot of them went away to school. But now, since I'm older, I've always been doing things. Recently I've been asked to do some tours at 40 Acres. I did Destination Delano, then a week ago I did the Loyola Marymount University out of LA. It's a catholic university out of LA, I did a tour for them. I talked to just my local friends. I never left the union. I later left the union, it wasn't in good terms. But you know what, the Filipino history was always my legacy. So it wasn't something that I would drop just because I was no longer with the farmworkers. That was the legacy of my parents, and part of my legacy now. I always felt at home in any union circle. I always greeted and treated well by the Chavez family. Any opportunity to come and represent Filipino workers, I was there and invited. I never got paid. I got to go speak to some Filipino law students at Golden Gate University. They're great kids, they're a new group of people. It was the first time I ever heard a young group of people that wanted to be activist. So concerned with worker's rights and activism. It was so good. I made some good friends that day. That's just a part of my legacy and part of something to continue to talk about while I'm still alive. There's not very many of us left.

SARMIENTO: Well thank you so much Lorraine, I appreciate you agreeing to do this interview. So this is concluding the oral history interview with Lorraine

Agtang, and this is Allan Jason Sarmiento with the Filipino American Farmworker Oral History Project. Thank you for your time Lorraine.

AGTANG: Thank you.