# Oral History: Dominique Bautista

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| Title | Title of Document | Rebeca\_Salas\_With\_Dominique\_Bautista\_081516 Complete |
| Accession Number | Catalogue Number of the File | (Administrator Only) |
| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) | Dominique Bautista |
| Interviewer | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) | Rebeca Salas |
| Interview Date | YYYY/MM/DD | 2016/08/15 |
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| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) | Dominique begins the interview describing the historical and cultural significance of the name her mother and father gave her. She explains her grandfather’s migration story from China to the Philippines as well as her parents’ journey to Vancouver. The first place they settled in was an apartment on 777 Burrard Street, Vancouver. Her parents came to Richmond based on recommendations from friends that it was an up and coming city. Dominique then tells the interviewer how the Richmond and Thompson community centers contributed to her personal and professional development. Near the end of the interview she then details her parents’ first impressions of Vancouver, what surprised them about Richmond, and how their journey has impacted her on a personal level. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) | Philippines, Manila, Vancouver, Vancouver Technical Secondary, Richmond, UBC, University of the Philippines, Minoru, Granville |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. | Surname, Migration, Philippines, Vancouver, San Francisco, President Marcos, Martial Law, 777 Burrard Street, Vancouver General Hospital, Steveston, Richmond Community Center, Childhood |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss | 01:03:24 |
| Interview # | Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) |  |
| Session # | Session # of the recording (X of all interviews in the session) |  |
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## Transcription Legend:

. . . = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

### START OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

### [00:00:16]

REBECA

Why don’t we start with your life story.

DOMINIQUE

Sure, actually, I will probably start with my name since you have introduced me. My full name is Mercedes Dominique De Joya Bautista as you mentioned but I just typically go by Dominique Bautista just for ease sake. It tends to fit better in terms of name blocks. My name is quite long and it actually has a lot of personal significance in terms of the family history and the greater migration narrative that exists in my family history. I was actually named after both of my parents. So my mom’s name is Mercedes and my dad’s name is Domingo and so I always joke with them because [laughing] they must have really loved their names that they wanted to keep it within the family. They did something very similar with my brother who also shares the same, kind of, initials. His name is Domenico and so they are kind of elements of both those names there. My middle name is actually De Joya which isn’t, you know, a typical kind of Western middle name but in Filipino culture it’s quite common for the children’s middle names to be their mother’s maiden name. So my mom’s maiden name was De Joya, or is De Joya and in terms of Bautista, so, it’s funny because I grew up going to Mandarin school, Chinese school, and so when we did the attendance role call [laughing] the teachers would always be confounded about how to translate my last name into a Chinese name. So, I do have a Chinese name but Bautista is the product of my grandfather’s migration story. All my relatives, or my ancestral relatives, on my father’s side were from a village in Fujian in China, southern part of China, and then during communist China’s outbreak my grandfather and his father decided that they didn’t want to stay there anymore and so in search of a better life they left, travelled across the South China Sea, and ended up on the sandy shores of Manila. Actually, a lot of folks who were migrating, exiting, ended up in different parts of Southeast Asia. When my grandfather and his father got there they wanted to be able to better assimilate and become part of the local environment. To do that, they decided that they would change their last name so that they could better reflect the local culture. So, our Chinese surname is Cai and so, switching to Bautista, my grandfather he went to go get it legally, the last name, changed. The name of the judge who was presiding over the name change was Bautista and my grandfather really liked it and so he decided that he would ask for it [laughs]. So that’s how we got Bautista. Bautista, again, is kind of a Hispanic last name as well and that reflects the colonial history between the Spaniards and the Philippines. With Bautista, that surname, my grandfather and our family after that they would be able to get access to resources and services that you would if you were naturalized or if you were born a Filipino citizen; education, owning a home, businesses, etcetera . . . But, yeah, that is my name history [laughs]. It’s always really interesting, I think, because people don’t necessarily expect the face that comes with that particular name. It’s a very ethnic name. Dominique, for example, is also a male name in the French culture and so, Dominique Bautista, you might think that someone is a European boy. That’s definitely happened to me before [laughs] but, Dominique, as well, has a different layer of personal significance. My same grandfather on my dad’s side, he had a knitting company and so one of the products that they had was this towel called Dominique and so I always joked with my dad and would say that he named me after a towel [laughs]. There’s that, so it’s really interesting and really compelling, I think, really important that someone’s name can reflect so much history, both personal and kind of a larger historical migration narrative. So that is my name. In terms of what my Chinese name is and how you translate any of that into Mandarin . . . I mentioned my Chinese surname is Cai. In the Filipino-Chinese culture it’s Chua. My full Chinese name is Cai Cheng En. I was named . . . My grandfather on my mom’s side actually helped pick out the last two characters for that. In terms of . . . So that was, kind of, the history of my paternal side of the family but on my mother’s side, a very similar history as well, but I know that my maternal grandfather he was born in Matanga which is one of the many many many many islands that existed in the Philippines. So he grew up on the island. My grandmother has a lot of mixed ethnicities. There’s some talk that she has some Vietnamese blood in her; she tells me. She herself is not too sure [laughs]. She can’t remember too well, she says. She’s moved around so much that, you know, she’s like “You know what, I’m a part of everybody and everything that I’ve met. So, I’m just what I am.” All my family, I would say, except for one uncle and his family, they all live in Manila in the Philippines still and then, except for that, there’s my nuclear family my mom, my dad, my brother, and myself. We live here in Richmond. Yeah, my entire family lives in the Philippines and so every so often, now that my grandparents are getting much older, we go visit. We meet them halfway through somewhere to Asia but, yeah, they phone a lot. So we talk to them quite often. Yeah.

REBECA

That’s lovely. That’s a really nice story and you’re right there’s a lot in a name which you’ve demonstrated quite well. That’s lovely. Maybe we can delve into your life story a little bit?

### [00:06:18]

DOMINIQUE

Sure.

REBECA

If you want, we can start with where you were born.

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maybe my life story begins before me. So like I mentioned, my parents, they actually were born in the Philippines and they met as high school sweethearts and they continued and they got married. My dad left the Philippines on vacation with my grandfather one summer and they came to Vancouver and just checked out the place and decided that my dad and a few of his siblings would actually come to Vancouver to continue their high school and their university education. So, my dad didn’t complete . . . He completed high school here at Van Tech Secondary and then he went to UBC. My uncle also went to UBC and a couple of my aunts went to UBC as well. My mom finished high school in Manila and then she did a couple years at the University of the Philippines there and then she managed to badger my grandparents enough to let her go abroad which was very unheard of at the time. That would have been in the, I want to say, ’75, ‘80s maybe. She’s the only girl with four brothers so it was very, kind of like, “woah, she really must have been really convincing” but she ended up completing a degree at the University of San Francisco. She got her MBA as well. During that time my dad and her kept in contact. My dad was in Vancouver, she was in San Francisco. Eventually, both of them ended up back in Manila for different family reasons and they rekindled their love. Basically, they got back together there and eventually got married. So, they basically began their life there and then they had my brother. When that happened, my brother was born in 1989, that was, again, during the time of, I want to say President Marcos, and so martial law was in effect. My family, for a second time, or my dad for a second time decided they were going to move. He was thinking about what cities in North America would be a better place for the family and, you know, he had lived and gone to university in Vancouver and my mom had experienced . . . She was in San Francisco for a long time and so North America wasn’t something that they weren’t considering and so they decided that they would settle in Vancouver. The three of them hopped on a plane and came to Vancouver and, kind of, left everything. The first place that they settled was in downtown in an apartment on 777 Burrard Street. It was really right in the core of downtown. It was really busy and it wasn’t necessarily the most conducive place to have a family so they decided that they were going to move elsewhere. At the time, they didn’t really know too many people in Vancouver so it was kind of, it was scary. You know, it’s your first time arriving to a new place. There are maybe one or two Chinese-Filipino families who are there but they had heard from recommendations that Richmond was a really up and coming kind of city. My mom always tells me, back in the time Number Three Road was so large. There were, like, six lanes of cars where you could just drive and it was really open and free. They decided on Richmond because . . . what I’m told is because my dad really loves Chinese food. You know, Richmond was the place to go apparently. So they went to Richmond, they got a small place out in Minoru in the core center of Number Three Road, kind of that area, but then as they were a family planning to have a larger family, to have me presumably, they ended up moving to the family home now which is on Number One Road in Granville. We moved and I was . . . That’s basically where I’ve grown up, in that particular house. I was born in 1993. I was born in Vancouver General Hospital. Where was I, I don’t know [laughs]. Like I said, I have an older brother. He’s four years older than me. The rest of our family is in Asia so we kind of grew up just the four of us. I’m very close with my brother. I have a few photos to show you that really signify our relationship. So this particular photo here is my mom and her mom and me. So three generations of [Dahoya?] women. This is the month after I was born. This is in the house in Minoru before we moved to the big house. My grandma came to help my mom and childcare and all of that. This is me, I’m chubby [laughs]. I’m chubby.

REBECA

So cute.

### [00:11:13]

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, my . . . Apparently, my mom tells me that I cried so much my dad would just keep shoving noodles into me and so I would always just get really chubby. A specific noodle, it’s called miswa. It’s birthday noodles. They’re noodles that are very soupy. You typically eat them on birthdays. Noodles in Asian culture means ‘long lasting life’ and so . . . but I really liked it apparently because you didn’t really have to chew. Now, I really don’t like it. I think I had my fill when I was a child so that probably explains that [laughs]. I’m pretty done with it. This is a picture of me and my brother. His name is Nicco. He’s, like I said, four years older than me. He is a lawyer now but we’re still . . . Yeah, growing up he’s always been very, like, my role model and I’ve always been that really annoying kid sister. I think this displays our dynamic. I’m pinching him and he’s not doing anything about it. He’s always been a really, really sweet older brother; very close, I learned everything I ever knew from him. I learned about hip hop, and rap, and sports, and Pokémon, and everything, and power rangers. So I kind of always just tagged along and, you know, he was really good to me. He was really, really good to me. So, here’s another photo of us. That’s just me. [laughing] I’m really chubby. It’s a little ridiculous. This is in our current house now. We’re out in our yard. There’s a park right near our house so we would always go, but yeah, just chilling in the stroller. This photo is taken at said park. This was the day . . . I’m in this polka dot outfit with a hat and I really don’t like it [laughs] but my parents decided that they wanted to take photos of me. They apparently found a promo at Sears where you can get portrait shots done of your child and so they dressed me up in ridiculous outfits. They made me go to these ridiculous photo shoots and so then after that we went to the park. So, at home now we have dozens of these photos of me in these polka dot suits and just posing in portrait sessions. It’s very awkward. Yeah, so that park . . . This is actually Steveston. Because we still live quite close to Steveston, this is me and my dad, we would go out to take walks in Steveston. So, growing up in Richmond that’s definitely the classic Steveston kind of thing. This is my family. I think we went up to either Cypress. I think it was Cypress. This is snowfall, my parents are really young here [laughs], which is really cool. I know that relatives in the Philippines have always been wondering what snow is like because they’ve never seen it before but, you know, that’s something that’s very common for us over here out on the west coast. When it does snow . . . speaking of which my dad’s family came to visit us on a couple of occasions so this is my maternal grandmother with the orange hair and that is my dad’s youngest sister, one of my aunts. I think we took a trip up to Butchart Gardens, Bouchard Gardens, I’m not sure if I’m saying that right, in Victoria. So they came to visit and I’m already really big here [laughs], losing all the baby fat. But yeah, so my grandparents when they were much younger they would come and visit quite often because they themselves really enjoyed the quality of life and the quality of air here in Vancouver. It’s quite interesting now because in the work that I do in my own studies and interests in research around migration and asking folks about why they ever migrated here to Vancouver, it’s still the very same pull factors. It’s the quality of air, the quality of life, and so many of the same things that my own family resolved to pursue as well. It’s interesting, over a span of how many years Richmond or Vancouver is still one of those places in the world that everyone really strives to be at. So yeah, I loved the park, I love this outfit, I love Snoopy, I love everything. Yeah, this park is just at my house. This is my maternal grandfather. He’s a very classy gentleman. He’s really sweet and nice. I love him very much. He came to visit and this is our current house right now and, as the youngest granddaughter he dotes on me very much. Our thing is always to go get ice cream and so my grandmother . . . and it’s a thing where, I don’t know, it’s a thing because I’m the youngest in my family that people just make fun of my weight because I was an overweight child [laughs]. I would always bother them for ice cream and they would say “no, no more ice cream” but eventually they would give in because it was just a bit of ice cream. So, vanilla, vanilla was the thing. So he came over for Easter and then . . . my cool Easter floppy hat and the bubbles in our backyard. So I was three there and then more just, like, fun times with my brother. He would be really good at just, kind of like, using his imagination to come up with games just because we weren’t allowed to have videogames growing up. So, for example, we would . . . My mom would drag us to T&T and we would buy pears and they would come in those foam wrappings and my brother, at that time I think we were maybe like six or eight and he was like ten, he’s really into baseball. So he would take the foam squares and he would come home and reuse them as bases and we would play baseball around the house with the foam squares. My mom would always wonder where the foam squares went [laughs]. He was always really resourceful, really big imagination, and I always just tagged along because that’s what little sisters do, they just tag along. He loved basketball, I loved basketball. We’ve got a little bit of a basketball hoop outside. We still play basketball to this day; a very Filipino thing to play basketball [laughs]. We grew up playing in basketball leagues at West Richmond Summer Slam and that’s actually kind of how community centers in Richmond became a central part of my life which I will transition to now, actually. We lived on Number One Road so we were right in the middle of West Richmond Community Center and Thompson Community Center. Every Easter West Richmond would put on a Easter egg hunt. I remember one year I won one of these really big prizes and they would hide little plastic poker chips around the playground and I collected a whole bunch and I won this really massive, twelve inch Purdy’s chocolate bar. I was really taken by it but I always had a really big love for being around these community centers that had programming, even here, as the library did art upstairs and, you know, pottery classes and swimming classes. My mom really took advantage of the different services that were accessible for us and our relatives may not necessarily have had those opportunities but I learned how to swim, I learned how to skate, I learned how to . . . I did dance. Here, it’s funny I learned how to bike at Thompson Community Center and that’s Thompson in the background in the basketball courts and that was in ’99 so I was six years old. I would go on later, and it’s quite funny, I worked at Thompson for about six years going out through high school and university. Just being in Richmond and the Center of Richmond in this community center and its spaces were really important to me both as a child growing up and then as a young adult. I learned so much, like, so, so much. I worked day camps for Thompson, summer programming, summer coordinator for a few years and my core friendships came out of that. You know, learning how to deal with kids and parents; what it’s like to plan and organize programming; and, you know, the safety concerns when you take kids to the beach; and, you know, what it’s like to translate waiver material into Mandarin because a lot of the student participants are of an Asian background and don’t necessarily speak English and so a lot of soft skills that I learned growing up were formative enough that it really influenced my career and a lot of the things that I know now in my job, but, yeah. It’s so funny, as I was going through these different photographs that I found, like, Thompson and West Richmond and the community centers when I was a kid and then, like, growing up now it’s really surreal. Yeah. That’s one bit about community centers [laughs].

### [00:19:45]

REBECA

That’s great. These pictures are so great. You can really see you and your brothers, your relationship.

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, when I’m not making fun of him. I’m always making fun of him, yeah. There are worse ones but I think he would get really mad if I . . . [laughs]. Really embarrassing because he, yeah, he’s going into his glasses phase and he did the whole headgear thing and that was not his best moment but now, now, now, now it’s better [laughs]. We still bully each other but it’s okay. Yeah.

REBECA

I’m sorry, is your brother still local?

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, he is.

REBECA

Are you finding a photo of him?

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, so this is another one of those family portrait shots. I was just really unhappy, always [laughs]. I was really unhappy. My mom always called me a doll because I looked like a doll. This is graduation a few years ago, my graduation. He’s very tall, my brother is six-foot tall.

REBECA

Why don’t you tell me a little bit about your . . . So I’ve heard a lot about your childhood. Maybe a little bit about your school experience and also your university experience because I think your projection in life is really interesting.

DOMINIQUE

For school I . . . It’s funny because Richmond has always been a place where I lived, played, and worked, and now I even taught there. So it’s very much been home but I’ve also gone to school and worked and lived in Vancouver as well. So I went to elementary school in Vancouver. I’m quite familiar with the two cities and they’re both like home to me. My parents worked in downtown so we went to school in Vancouver. It was just, kind of, on the way in terms of commuting. I went to school at Immaculate Conception on Dunbar Street and then for high school I went to Little Flower. My brother went to Vancouver College. It was the brother-sister equivalent of it. In terms of university . . . I’m just going to gloss right over high school [laughs]. I have much to say about high school. High school was high school. I’m a high school teacher so I can say that high school is high school. I went to UBC and, I think . . . So I’ve always been really compelled by the humanities. My dad, at a young age, was really encouraging of the humanities which isn’t very typical for Asian families but he would always, like in the summertime, he would get me to read the newspaper and write about current events to, kind of, hone my writing skills at a young age. My mom always brought me to the library. I was here all the time. So reading and writing was super, super important. I mean, yes, I did Kumon as well but I wasn’t . . . because I needed to do Kumon [laughs]. I really needed to improve math. I was kind of your reverse Asian stereotype in terms of that. So through high school that really became evident. I was in English-lit and law, and History, and basically as many humanities as I could possibly take with the bare minimum of the Math Eleven and the Chem Eleven. I took Math Twelve just in case I wanted to go into business school. I didn’t end up going into business school. I ended up going into arts at UBC and I took a first year program called Law and Society because I was really interested in, you know, the opportunities that were out of like “what is Sociology?” and thinking about History and Poli Sci. I ended up really hating Poli Sci so that wasn’t . . . I think that’s just the product of first-year courses. They’re just really general and it’s meant to weed out folks so I didn’t end up doing that but I had always been really taken by English so I decided I would pursue an English literature degree accompanied by a Sociology degree because I was always really curious about relationships and systems and relationships between systems and the world. So I did that. It’s funny because I think throughout university and undergrad and high school I’ve always kind of had this kind of little bit of an identity crisis and I think a lot of young people go through that identity crisis particularly during undergrad. For someone who is born here, grew up here but has really strong roots to Asia . . . at home I spoke English and my parents spoke to me in Tagalog and Hokkien which is a dialect that we speak in Fukien . . . and so just like a mix of languages I went to Mandarin school, I learned French in high school for twelve years, and so just really ethnically charged, I think, and so trying to make sense of that identity piece and so am I a Chinese Canadian? What does that mean? Am I Filipino-Chinese-Canadian? Starting in university, starting to meet people who were coming here from the Philippines who were of Chinese descent coming here to Vancouver to study . . . so very much like my cousins in terms of the way that they were brought up. Chinese-Filipinos in the Philippines are now coming here to Vancouver and so, you know, I recall joining the Filipino Students Association Club on campus thinking, you know, “I just kind of want to meet you people” and kind of find out more about that portion of my identity but not really feeling like I necessarily fit in and it was kind of troubling, I think, in terms of trying to find where exactly my identity rests. You know, looking like some of the people who are Chinese-Filipino who grew up there but not necessarily sharing the same values as them or my accent in Mandarin or Tagalog or whatever it is. I was really kind of navigating that as I think most folks are in undergrad. Throughout high school I had always been kind of a floater in terms of friend groups so I was really close with the few Filipino students in the school and then having really great friends in the Cantonese community who taught me everything I know about ordering food at restaurants and so, kind of that hybrid identity. I was always really curious about it, really, really curious about it. I think it was in the summer of second year I was part of the Filipino-Chinese Association here. It no longer exists but at the time I was involved as one other youth member but we reached out by, UBC, by folks. Some professors over there, Professor Chris Lee and Professor Henry Yu were looking to start an Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies program at UBC and they were doing a community consultation. We were invited and so I attended and I was a university student at that time at UBC. That was found out. There was a conversation about whether or not I would be interested in pursuing an Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies program as one of the first graduates of that particular program. At this point, I was already set on my English literature degree and my Sociology degree and I was like “I’m good” but I went with Henry who would later become my mentor and boss. He was very convincing and he really pointed out the merits in pursuing something that hadn’t been pursued before and the importance of these conversations about identity and race and migration and discrimination that exists. So, focally, here in Vancouver it yet doesn’t exist. I was really compelled by that so I graduated with the Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies program or ACAM and I worked with them for the last year in different projects and different capacities. It’s so interesting and just like my name that both professionally and personally there’s such meaning when those two elements converge. Being able to say that my university degree has been structured around my search to find out more about my family history and my identity isn’t something that I think people can typically say. It’s been something that I’ve had to explain to my grandparents about the value of the work that I do. Even in the last year just visiting with my grandfather, you know, talking to him about his own growing up stories and explaining to him why it is that I’m so compelled by that that I would want to pursue undergraduate studies made him really happy that, you know, these stories are being shared like I am today and that these stories are being preserved. The idea that everyone’s personal family history is unique, sure, but it definitely speaks to a larger pattern of global migrations. It’s uncommon and yet common at the same time so I think that really was compelling to me, particularly as an English student and then as an ACAM in Sociology student. It all really fit really well. I was really curious about why it is that we’re here and settlement and identity. It’s still something we’re still trying to figure out and I don’t think you’ll ever have a direct answer but I think what’s really wonderful is it’s been opening up spaces for young people like myself, students who are still in undergrad, to kind of feel comfortable asking questions that haven’t necessarily been asked in the past or having spaces to have conversations that haven’t been had in the past. So yeah, I’m really grateful for that. What else can I tell you?

### [00:29:00]

REBECA

That’s awesome. Maybe . . . One thing I was interested in is hearing a lot about your family and obviously your family means a lot to you. I can see that you’re very close. You mentioned your grandfather but maybe starting with your parents, are there any, sort of, special memories that they’ve passed onto you about . . . you said they were high school sweethearts and that they knew each other at a young age . . . talking about their journey a little bit, some memories about home, and then maybe along the way any special memories that they shared with you about their travels.

DOMINIQUE

My dad, like I mentioned, he left the Philippines at a very young age and so if you ask him he is Canadian at heart and this is home, Vancouver is home to him. I don’t know, from a very academic, theoretical perspective home, as you know, is very much a personal construct. It’s not necessarily geographically located it’s more like imagined for some people as well and so because my extended family, they all live in Asia and Manila, that will always have an aspect of home for my parents but because they’ve been here, what is it now, twenty-five years, Vancouver is very much home and I don’t think my mom, she would never consider going back to Manila to retire just because of the quality of air. She’s very concerned [laughs] but in terms of special memories I think, um, let me think. I have to think about that one. Yeah, so my maternal grandparents, so my Guakong and Guama as I call them, they lived in Quezon City in Manila in this house on 95 Cordillera Street. I still remember it . . . or is it 75? But it was a really big house and it had a really red gate and that was the childhood home where my mom had grown up with her four brothers. At one point her cousins, they all kind of lived in this one complex. She would tell me . . . So when we would go visit that place from time to time because my grandparents eventually moved out of that . . . because it was such a big house they downsized and so they moved somewhere else but when they were still living at a big house and we would go to visit she would tell me kind of the stories about what it was like growing up there as a child. It was a really large house. They had an attic and they had a ball room. They had, like, a backyard with a swing set. They had like, like it was just really large amounts of land that they had used because there were so many families that were coming and going living in the space. They also had a temple space upstairs and so my grandfather’s aunt, so my grand aunt, practices Buddhism. She’s a Buddhist monk basically and so that was kind of her area. That was her space but it would always be a really creepy space at night time because it was severed off from the rest of the house. You’d have to go through this walkway and she had these curtains and it was very eerie. In the Philippines at night time the crickets are chirping and it was just really moist and everything is really musky and eerie. So, as a child, you know, you’re always told “don’t go bother your grand aunt. She’s doing her thing. Don’t go and bother her.” Also, it was really terrifying and scary but, of course, as children you’d still go anyway and my mom would do the same thing when she was my age apparently, too. She would always tell me how she would climb up to the top of the temple space and, with her brothers, sit on the rooftop. You’re not supposed to do that and so there are just a lot of stories of people falling off the rooftop. One time someone’s slipper fell off the rooftop and then the slipper fell and then my grandparents saw it and then they knew that they were on the roof [laughs]. They weren’t supposed to be up there and so there’s a lot of little stories about, you know, just goofing off with her brothers and, again, she was the only girl so kind of just being there with your brothers and just being at their beck and call. So she would tell me stories about that but, of course, they moved out of that house. I think it was the last trip that we were in Manila we were actually on our way to the airport driving passed the old house and my mom asked to stop the car, if they could do a detour to the old house and so we drove by it and so she was reminiscing. So far the land hasn’t been taken over or anything but, it’s still there. It had a really big mango tree and all these different things. Yeah, I think it’s quite interesting just kind of, like, moving place to place and being transient in the sense that, you know, she lived, maybe, eighteen years of her life there but then went abroad and then, immediately after, moved to here. So, yeah, just homes and I’m trying to think of other memories.

### [00:33:53]

REBECA

Did your parents ever pass on, and it might be difficult depending on the age they arrived in the Philippines, but any first impressions . . .

DOMINIQUE

Of Vancouver?

REBECA

That would be great to hear but maybe moving, sort of chronologically, any from the Philippines. Maybe for your father? He might have been too young but . . .

DOMINIQUE

Well, they were both born there so, um . . .

REBECA

Okay. Oh, sorry, your grandparents.

DOMINIQUE

Oh, my grandparents?

REBECA

Sorry, yeah.

DOMINIQUE

Not that I recall. I know that when my mom was growing up she spent a long time in the kitchen learning how to cook from her grandmother who had migrated from China as well. So there was really instilled in her the value of being a good housewife and being able to cook. A lot of different recipes were passed on in that way but not any first impressions unfortunately. But I can remember, um, yeah I know that my maternal grandparents traveled quite often. My maternal grandfather has a car supplies part company and so he would often entertain business from different parts of the world when he was still expanding partnerships and so he was learning English and I think he was saying that his colleagues were from Australia. He ended up picking up some Australian-English slang. He’s lost it now [laughs]. It’s so interesting, even through his work. He primarily speaks to me in English because he’s fluent in English, Filipino. He’s fluent in Fukien and Mandarin. My grandmother has since lost her English fluency because she no longer needs to entertain guests but, yeah, they used to travel and I remember just going back to their house and they have pictures from all different places. I would be like “you traveled to Australia? Really?” I would have never thought that because they’re my grandparents [laughs]. They’ve had adventures, too. But, no I can’t think of any first initial impressions.

REBECA

Fair enough. Moving from your grandparents to your parents, let’s talk about if your parents had passed on any first impressions to you when they came to Vancouver.

### [00:36:12]

DOMINIQUE

Sure. I know my dad . . . I know they both really just loved it, I think, because they had gotten tastes of it as young adults studying overseas and abroad. My mom fell in love with San Francisco and she loved the freedom of it. I think they also really appreciated the fact that there was a really big influence of Asian culture here, anyway. So elements of home, or whatever they defined as home, were still, kind of, intact. You know, you could go to the supermarket and you could still buy ingredients. You could go to the market on Fraser and buy “lechon” which is, like, the pig, roasted pig, and you could still get that. You’re in Canada but are you really in Canada? And then particularly moving in Richmond it was like, you know, they loved it because they were so close to things that were familiar but also new, I think. My dad, I don’t know. One of the stories he loved to tell me was that when he was in high school here he . . . So he went to Van Tech so he was living in East Van while he was, maybe, seventeen or eighteen but he would frequently cut out of classes and he would go play basketball instead or he would go get, I think it was the Church’s chicken that’s still on East 41st and Fraser I think it is, that Church’s chicken. He would always just go and have fried chicken and bring it back to class but he just liked the idea that the education system was different as well. A bit more flexibility he was able to challenge courses when he felt he had already learned a lot of the things and didn’t necessarily want to sit there [laughs]. So I think they appreciated that as well and that’s probably . . . I mean, like, most of the migrants these days come here for a better life for their family, for their children, and the education system as well. It definitely is one of those big reasons why . . . Hm, first impressions . . . Yeah, I think just . . . I think it would have been hard for them and I know my mom had mentioned this before, she had gone to university in San Francisco, my dad had basically grown up in Vancouver for his formative young adult years and then when they suddenly had to fly back to Manila for various family reasons, and then when they got married there, you know, the idea of them settling down there, I think, was a little bit foreign for my mom because she missed having the freedom. She was used to being a little bit more independent, doing things on her own. You know, cooking her own food, driving her own car, and so to marry back into a family, a really big traditional family where, you know, you live with your husband’s family. I don’t think that that was something that she was thinking about. I know that she would have been happy to do it but, you know, at that age . . . and I can imagine because I’m closely getting to that age and I’d imagine the difficulties and the tensions of wanting to be, you know, a modern woman. She had worked in New York and she had an MBA and she was highly skilled and very intelligent. So, I think there’s a little bit of relief of coming to North America and being able to come back. Ironically enough my mom ended up staying full-time at home. She was a full-time mom to me and my brother and she ended up going back to work when we were in high school but, you know, that kind of unconditional love that mothers go through and, you know, that she would give up her highly educated background to stay home with me and my brother. We deeply appreciate it and, obviously, now. It’s really interesting in that way, that it ended up being like that because I don’t think that she necessarily would have imagined her trajectory in that way.

REBECA

Mhm. Did your parents ever tell you any stories about what surprised them about Richmond or Vancouver?

DOMINIQUE

I think, again, it was the Asian-ness of it and not . . . They comment, now, on the changes because they’ve been here for the past twenty-three years. They’ve seen the different waves in 1997 in Hong Kong and the different rises of Cantonese migrants. Now, when you have folks from different parts of China who are coming over . . . They’ve just seen it all. At one point they became, kind of, points of contact for folks from Manila who were hoping to migrate over here because they had been here so long they were considered veterans. People would ask them, you know, “what’s it like here? What’s the immigration process like? Who do we need to talk to?” because they had gone and lived through it themselves. I think the surprise as well is that the land has been taken over so quickly. You’ve seen the aerial photos of the Garden City area and the large masses of land that were vacant and now it’s just, like, condo on condo. It’s getting smaller and everything is getting higher. I think that’s something that they always comment to [laughs]. I miss having, you know, more space on the road, like, yeah. If that makes sense. Their surprises . . . I don’t know, I think just having Richmond be so close to Vancouver as well and the accessibility of it because, like I said, we all work in Vancouver as well. I think that was definitely something that came as a good surprise. The house that we live on, I know that we personally bought it because it was outside a bus stop and that was like a necessary thing [laughs], transit-wise. Yeah.

### [00:41:17]

REBECA

Are there stories of, maybe, challenges of settling in Richmond, settling in Vancouver that your parents had told you about?

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, so like I said, their move from Manila was because of political push factors; political uprising. So it was kind of more of a sudden one and so, you know, a young family, my brother I think he had just turned one or whatever when they had hopped on the plane. He was very, very young. They were a very young family. Arriving here in Vancouver for the first time, I think, for my mom, is just kind of being overwhelmed by the loneliness of just being by yourself, not really knowing anybody and not many other families or connections that they had known of were there. That explains why my grandparents would come to visit, to help kind of get settled in. Just kind of imagining they could take only a few things at the time, um, but setting up an entirely new life and not really having the luxury of having the time to choose a nice home where you could see your entire future, which is why they eventually moved, or things like that. I think it’s a very common struggle that a lot of people face today but now it’s different in so far as there are more settlement services that are available in larger chain migrations. So larger amounts of connections that kind of help make the social settlement process a little bit easier. I think definitely, you know, not having a car at one point and my mom has told me a story about when they were much younger, my brother was much younger, my dad was working full-time and, you know, it was like the first snowfall or whatever and they used to go out and get groceries and my brother was really tired but, you know, they would like put on all these jackets and still go outside and she would carry him as they went and go got groceries and came back home. You know, like, things like that I think really stand out where you’re in a completely new environment. Um, yeah, but definitely the resiliency and, now, looking back it’s like no big deal. You still hate snow but it’s fine [laughs]. I think just being a really young family by yourself in a new place can be very daunting.

REBECA

Mhm. I’m curious about, just talking about impressions and surprises and that sort of thing, you impression of the Philippines.

DOMINIQUE

Oh, my impression? Oh, okay. I think the first time I went back was for a wedding. I’m mostly there for occasions; weddings, funerals, birthdays. Unfortunately, I was a flower girl, I remember, and I fell asleep at the wedding. That’s what I remember, because I was so jetlagged. That doesn’t count but I know that when I got older I am allergic to mosquito bites and mosquitos love me for my Canadian blood, my relatives like to tell me. So I would just be completely devoured by mosquito bites and it would be really uncomfortable for me to be there, and the heat, the heat is also something I couldn’t deal with. It’s just too hot [laughs]. It’s just too hot even in December. It’s like twenty-seven degrees. It’s just way too hot. So that made me really irritable but, like, I think in terms of the social aspect of it . . . In the Philippines my family, for example my grandparents, they needed more help in the house so they had someone to help do the dishes, someone to cook for them, someone to drive them places. I wasn’t really used to that, just having extra help in the house because we’d been raised, you know, “wash your own dishes. Don’t leave these things” and my mom drove us everywhere. So I was uncomfortable, I think. You know, I had to be like “okay, I have my dishes. I’m ready to wash them” but somebody would take them and I’d be like “no, it’s okay” and “no, it’s really okay. I can wash them myself” [laughs]. That was a little bit uncomfortable for me. The language barrier, I have an accent in broken Tagalog. It’s passable now but that was really difficult, that language barrier. I think getting along with my cousins as well, just because we were so estranged. We only saw each other once every few times for these occasions but other than that we were raised kind of differently in terms of, like I said, in more Western kind of, like, “you need to do things on your own” versus the Philippines you have a little bit more help. I think that was a little bit awkward and difficult for us and, you know, we’re just guests [laughs] so you don’t want to make too much of a big deal. But, yeah, having people come in to make your beds for you in the morning, that’s kind of . . . Yeah, these things that I wasn’t really necessarily super comfortable with, that was definitely a first impression. As I’ve gotten older, I’m finding my own way of dealing with that. My cousin, she drives her own car. Instead of having someone drive her she’s a lot more independent but she was also schooled abroad for quite some time so it’s quite interesting that way. You know, conversing with the cooks about “it’s okay. I can make my own breakfast” or maybe they’ll just leave some supplies out and then I’ll just do it myself but “there’s no need for you to do it for me in the morning.” It’s still a little awkward, I think. Being someone who was educated at UBC in a program that’s about Asian migration studies and about ethnic labour and all these different kinds of really contentious issues, but, these are lived experiences that I’ve experienced personally, too. It’s very interesting what you read on paper versus what you’ve experienced in a different country. It’s really contentious. It’s uncomfortable but something to learn from, I think. So those were my impressions. It’s still really hot. I still really hate the mosquitos. It’s really busy and the cockroaches freak me out. I love the tropics but the mosquitos and the cockroaches are my two big no-no’s. The Philippines is really heavily populated. There are people everywhere all the time. It is not the most efficient country [laughs] in terms of traffic because you’ll sit in three hour traffic jams and so it’s really frustrating when you’re trying to get from one meal to another meal. That’s what it often feels like, just lunch to dinner because by the time you cross the highway it’s like three hours of your day is gone so it’s not necessarily the most efficient in terms of transportation. I’d love to explore more. When I’m there I’m mostly with family, kind of visiting different people that we get to see. As an adult now I’d love to go to the beaches and get out of the consumerism because the Philippines is very consumer-heavy which is the influence of American colonization [laughs]. So, a lot of malls, they have tons and tons of malls. It’s good for shopping. I like shopping but up to a certain point. Yeah, my impressions, I think it’s different for me now. It’s, you know, “what are the purposes of my visit?” Now, it’s really to see family, to see my grandparents. I’m sure when I have more time, when I’m older, maybe I’ll go explore the islands and have a real vacation but when we go it’s mostly for the purposes of seeing your family.

### [00:48:33]

REBECA

Did you have any thoughts about, maybe, what your parents told you about the Philippines versus when you went there for the first time? Any sort of differences?

DOMINIQUE

Not really. My parents had always . . . Well, the reasons for leaving was that it was becoming a really politically unstable, unsafe place and so that was the kind of picture I had always had in my mind. Yet, I was always curious about how it is that the rest of my family, who lived there, were able to live there given that, I had this idea that, it was such a dangerous unsafe place. Especially for a girl, but what I can still recall is that it’s still really a tumultuous place to live and that people are just making the best of the situation as it is now, given the current president, given the commotion that came out of the recent election. I would say that now I can have a more informed opinion because I’m a little bit older, a little bit more educated, but it’s still not somewhere I would live; somewhere I would visit. I think that also has to do with the fact that I’m considered a Westerner. You could pick me out of the street and know that I don’t belong there. The language barrier as well or the lack of my language skills, it’s not fluent, that makes me feel uncomfortable and maybe it makes me feel unsafe but as a whole the fact that my family still lives there and they can sustain their lives and their futures there I think that it must be fine [laughs]. For someone who’s more westernized and is more used to comfortable, safer spaces I think, definitely, it’s a challenge for me in terms of impressions. Because, you hear all the stories right? I remember just driving down Edsa, which is the really big freeway that connects everything to everything, and just having younger children knocking on your door or begging or trying to sell you things and, like, a lot of just, like, the impoverished. There’s a really big distinction. The wealth gap in the Philippines is quite large and it was very shocking to me, very, very shocking to me that you could be at a restaurant and yet there are these people literally outside just not being able to sustain themselves. The empathy that comes from when a child is begging, it was a child who is handicapped for some reason, and now older you know that these children are probably relegated to work for this because they are being taken care of by some kind of street gang, for example. You know it’s not the best situation but you know it exists at the back of your mind. So that added to the whole “it’s a dangerous place” kind of feeling. It’s definitely very uncomfortable. You know, people your age. You can be in a mall but somebody else is doing what they need to be doing on the street and it isn’t like that everywhere but it’s definitely noticeable, I think. Even for tourist guides in the Philippines it’s always something you need to watch out for. Watch out for pick-pocketers, watch out for people in the taxi cab who will drive you far away, and I think that really common narrative now has been spread a lot more and so Westerners might be a little bit more afraid to visit different parts of Asia and I don’t think it’s limited to the Philippines. It’s a conversation that’s happening everywhere. It’s kind of tainting the beauty of the tropics and the culture.

REBECA

I’m wondering, hearing about some of the challenges about being in the Philippines, living in the Philippines, and thinking about your parents . . . Obviously there was a specific reason why they left the Philippines but what were their, and you touched upon this a little bit talking about careers with your mom but, some hopes and dreams that your parents had upon leaving the Philippines.

### [00:52:28]

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, well my dad graduated from Sauder, the business school at UBC, when he did that he was actually wanting to go into law school but he had to fly back to Manila for a family emergency and then he ended up helping with the family business until he went out and got married. So plans for law school were put on an indefinite hold. I know that he would have probably wanted to pursue that but wasn’t eventually able to do that but then flying to Vancouver, starting life anew, I don’t necessarily know or I don’t necessarily think that their ideas of pursuing their personal dreams were the first thing on their mind but I think it was more so making good, rational decisions to plan long-term for the future and to put family first. That certainly was the case with my mom in the sense that she stayed at home and for my dad where he went to go and work for a printing company for a little while. My dad eventually opened up his own printing company himself and then he opened up a . . . from that it emerged into this business that was interested in supporting paralegals in the legal profession in terms of giftware but also in terms of providing professional development courses. In that way my dad has been able to kind of pursue that dream of wanting to go to law school. My brother went to law school and I took the LSAT and so, you know, it’s kind of that prophecy that was fulfilled through other means. I don’t think it was . . . I mean, unfortunately it wasn’t the number one priority at the time, right? So family planning and same thing with my mom she went back to work after a few years and she continues to work to this day. I’m sure her dreams of wanting to be that same person who worked at Wall Street in New York for a few years and I mean, you know, very ambitious . . . different when you become a mom and have children and family. Yeah, I think that’s probably it.

REBECA

What do you think their hopes and dreams are now? I mean, you were just telling me that they’re moving house.

DOMINIQUE

Yeah, so we’re moving right now. So we’re moving out of our family home. We’re downsizing into a condo in Richmond as well. So we’re staying in Richmond. It’s funny because we were looking at different places. You know, my mom was looking at a place in UBC and we were like “no way.” It’s just too far but she was thinking about if I was going to grad school or continuing to work at UBC that would have been the perfect location. So, of course, mom’s putting everybody first before themselves and I was like “no, mom.” I don’t think that they could . . . like Richmond is their home. All their friends are here. They go to the community center, like, they’re so comfortable here. So Richmond definitely is where we ended up. They found a place and we’re very happy with it. It’s close to transit as usual but in terms of hopes and dreams now I think, you know, my brother and I have grown up. My brother’s twenty-seven, he’s engaged, and will get married next year and so there’s a lot of excitement around weddings and planning and where my brother’s moving to. For them I think it’s just enjoying their time now as empty nesters, so to speak. They still have me but, you know, reconnecting with a lot of friends. My parents recently got involved with more social Filipino groups, a lot of alumni associations. My mom graduated from the University of the Philippines and they have an alumni chapter here. So she joined a choir with them and they have picnics. She’s happy to meet new people and try better Filipino food [laughs]. So she’s really happy with that and they’ve been just doing a lot of self care, I think, for them. They worked really, really hard. You know, it’s that immigrant narrative story where they moved because they had to move and they put family first. They worked really hard and sacrificed a lot and now their children are something that, I hope, they’re proud of. They’re old enough now that we could take care of each other and, you know, they go away on trips. I know my brother and I were thinking about taking care of our parents now, now that they have taken care of us. My mom’s always planning her next vacation or hoping to get away for vacation and my dad is really just happy playing basketball on the weekends. So I think . . . I don’t know if they have any future plans. This is home and they’ve really enjoyed being here and setting up a life here and, yeah, becoming grandparents maybe eventually [laughs].

### [00:56:53]

REBECA

I’m sure they’ll look forward to that. I think you’ve already maybe touched on this through your narrative but I was curious about what you would say your parents’ journey to Richmond, how that sort of affected you as a person. I think this comes through in your schooling and your goals and your involvement in community but maybe just journey and travel and migration within your family, how that’s affected you personally.

DOMINIQUE

How that’s affected me personally?

REBECA  
Mhm.

DOMINIQUE

Um, well like I said I am . . . Richmond has always been home in the sense that I’ve done everything here, my best friends live here, I’ve gone to school here, worked here, done all these different things here. It would be hard for me to move away, I think. You know, one day when I have my own place I think Richmond is where I’d like to live. But having access to all the different cities around us and the opportunities that exist there . . . The migration story in itself . . . I think coming to university and, like I said, having the opportunity to study my family’s migration story as part of a larger narrative has really impacted the way I value my family, for example, value my conversations with my grandfather, value even the recipes and the way that my mom cooks things and what she tells me as she cooks things like “this ingredient comes from this place and you can only get it from here” or “I remember cooking this in the kitchen with my own grandmother” and, you know, all these things that are very unique to the moment. In terms of my professional life or so to speak, I have been so integrated into a community like Richmond, a community that has different layers of an Asian identity and I think that really reflects quite naturally who I am at my core; someone who is still navigating what it means to be bi or tri-culturally Asian, hyphenated, ethnically ambiguous where people can’t tell if I’m Singaporean or if I’m Japanese. Certainly with my last name it just throws it off but really informing a more understanding kind of lens, being more community based in terms of my practice in terms of communicating with others and wanting to connect with others and learning more about others and being more sensitive to the unique attributes of each individual. Like I’ve said, our families all have unique migration stories but we’re all the product of a larger migration stream. For example, in the 1960s there was a large influx of Filipino migrants and so there are individual stories about why they left but it was for political reasons that a lot of people left. So, thinking about that I’m always just really curious now as a storyteller and that’s something I get to do in my work and what I’m really passionate about is finding out what it’s like for people who are constantly moving, especially in our world, what it’s like for them to settle down here in Richmond, what is Richmond moving towards, is it a city that’s really changed in its demographics and how we’re responding to each other and how the city’s responding to us because there’s a lot of political ramifications that come out of migration, of course. So, yeah, there’s a lot of intersections I think between my personal and professional life and having a really rich migration story to bolster that has been really important to the work that I get to do and to the conversations that I get to have which I’m really grateful for.

REBECA

That’s awesome.

DOMINIQUE

I to no effect have answered your question [laughs].

REBECA

No, no, no, that’s great. One thing I was curious about, just hearing about your parents’ story and also most likely in the work that you do and how when you have conversations this might come across as well but, and this is sort of an aside, but was there anything that your parents said that they missed from the Philippines at all?

DOMINIQUE

Hm. Oh, like fried chicken. I think it’s the food. I think it’s definitely the food and being close to family and relatives. My grandparents are getting much older and my mom wishes she could be there to spend all the time that she could with them. But definitely I think it’s the food and the company. I don’t think any of us miss the heat [laughs]. That’s certainly not something . . . Yeah, definitely those two would be the top two.

REBECA

And do you find when you speak to people it’s quite common that food is something that people miss? Does that come up in conversation at all or?

DOMINIQUE

I think the production of how the food is made is also just as important as the product of the food itself. Lots of people have food and memory connected together and it’s the recipes that are passed on or it was the way that my grandmother cooked it and the conversations we had. I think definitely food is the focal point in terms of tying memory back. But yeah, I’m not sure if anybody misses the heat [laughs]. I have to ask. I don’t think anybody really does, or the traffic, I don’t think . . . hopefully. Yeah, food and I think the company. Yeah, I would say those are two really important ties back in the Philippines.

REBECA

Alright, well I think that’s been really great and I learned a lot about you and also your family. Whether on behalf of yourself or your parents or your grandparents was there anything else that you wanted to add to your journey to Richmond? Not to put you on the spot [laughs].

DOMINIQUE

I’m trying to think. No, I think I’m good. I’m tired of talking [laughs]. Like, normally . . . because you know what it is. A good interview is when you don’t do any talking and I’m like tired of talking [laughs]. It’s like weird to be on the other side of it, it’s so strange. What I love so much about my work is just getting to know people and taking the time to build relationships with people in our communities and things that they hold important to them so I really love doing that but . . . and I forget how much energy goes into it but I know that you can appreciate that, definitely. But, I’m good. I’m done, done.

REBECA

Well, I want to officially thank you so much for your story and your family’s story. It’s really, really awesome.

DOMINIQUE

No, thank you.

### END OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

### [01:03:24]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)