

Interviewee: Bobbie Lizama

Interviewer: Ryan Okazaki

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Ryan Okazaki (RO): Hello, my name is Ryan Okazaki. Today is Wednesday, May 30th, 2018. Today I'm going to be interviewing Bobbie Lizama at the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club in San Diego. So Bobbie, could you please introduce your name, your year of birth, and your place of birth?

Bobbie Lizama (BL): So my name is Barbara Ann Lizama, but everybody here at the Guam Club know me as Bobbie. I was born on the island of Guam in the village of Yoña in August 11, 1955.

RO: If you have a hometown, can you please describe it?

BL: Yoña is a village. It has gone through different phases of urban renewal. It's gone from wooden-frame homes to cement homes because of typhoons and stuff.

RO: So could you please describe your childhood home?

BL: My childhood home that I grew up in was a wooden-frame home. Most of our neighbors were families. My dad's sister, their children (who are my cousins), and then of course like

first and second cousins of my dad, children all got together and we just kind of grew up playing and going to church. And church is basically 75% of what we do.

RO: So you talked about some of your childhood, but could you please tell me about some of your favorite childhood memories?

BL: [chuckling] Playing war games with the boys is my favorite childhood memory. And then of course being the oldest of eight children, I was responsible for my siblings so I was kind of like the extended father-mother figure over my siblings.

RO: So do you have any, like, memories from your childhood, like, with your siblings?

BL: Say it again?

RO: Do you have any memories from your childhood with your siblings?

BL: Oh lots of memories with my siblings. I mean, we, even though I was kind of like the lead of the siblings, we had chores—daily chores that we had to do—and I had to make sure that when it was time to eat, everybody was together. We ate together as a family. So, um, that's what we did and then we all went to Catholic school, when we get home from school. We did chores, but we also, I helped my siblings with homework and that kind of stuff.

RO: So you said you have eight siblings. Can you tell me their names?

BL: Okay so I'm the oldest, and then I have two brothers below me. One is Patrick Edward and Michael Anthony. My brother Michael retired from the Navy. My brother Pat—Patrick—we call him Pat, he served in the Army, but he passed away in 2007. And then I have a sister named Vivian Marie. She's married and lives in Philadelphia. She also served in the U.S. Marine Corps. And then I have my sister Donna Sue who's married and she has three children of her own. And then I have a sister named Linda Mae and she's married and she's got three kids of her own. And then I have my sister Corina Rose. She's married and has two boys. And then my sister Lena Jean who's the youngest and she's...she lives in Wisconsin.

RO: Um...so out of your siblings, uh, who would you say you're the closest to and who do you still keep in touch with?

BL: I'm close to all of them. Being the oldest, I'm kind of like the go-to contact for things that are happening at home or things that are happening within the family. So I'm kind of like the main point of contact but, like I said, well my sister Donna lives here in Ramona. My brother Michael lives in Peñasquitos, and then my sister Vivian used to live with me but then she moved back to Philadelphia. So I'm not close to anyone, I'm close to all of them.

RO: So you talked about your siblings a little bit. Could you tell me what your parents' names are and what were they like?

BL: So my parents' names are Jesus Toves Lizama. He passed away when he was 65. And then my mother's name is Magdalena Manipusen Lizama. She's 88 and she's still around, she lives on Guam. My dad was kind of like the head of the house, and in Guam it's customary that the father, or the man, always makes all decisions and the wife kind of, like, just agrees with it, but the wife's main responsibility is to keep the house and make sure that the children, you know, are fed and that kind of stuff.

RO: And what did your parents do for a living?

BL: My dad was a musician by heart. He played music. And my mom was a homemaker. She basically stayed at home until my youngest sister was of school age, and then she started working at the school cafeteria where my sister went to school at just to be close to where my sister went to school. So she worked for the school system as a cafeteria worker and then she retired from that.

RO: How did you parents meet?

BL: My mom and dad met when my mom was, uh, she was kind of like a store clerk at a local mom and pop store. My dad was coming home from one of his music gigs and he stopped by the store to buy something. And then that's how they met, and then he would stop by there all the time and then they kind of hooked up.

RO: Do you know how long it took for them to get married?

BL: I think my mom and dad were boyfriend and girlfriend for about a year before they got married.

RO: Could you tell me what their relationship was like or how you saw their relationship?

BL: Their relationship...they got along. It was a happy home. I mean, even though my dad made all the decisions, that's just the way it was in Chamorro homes where the father is kind of like the head and the mother just comes along for the ride.

RO: Thank you. Let's see...so when we talked before, you've mentioned you were in the military. Could you tell me more about what you did or what that was like?

BL: Okay. So, I joined the military, actually I was in the Army, in 1974, and I stayed in for five years. My first duty station was in Germany. It was an experience because it was the first time that I left Guam, and I didn't join the Army until I was visiting one of my family members up in Boston, Massachusetts, and I didn't have enough money to pay for my way home. And I couldn't get a job in Boston because back in those days, they kind of had a caste system between...it's either you're White or you're Black, so I was considered as Black because I was dark in color. And that was my first experience with prejudice in the United States. But because of that, um, the good that came out of it is that I joined the Army. And I got to see another side of the world where I probably never would have been

able to see that part of the world because I would have never had enough money to travel to Germany. Then, like I said, I stayed in the Army for five years, and then once I got out of the military, then I started working for civil service. And my first five years of federal service, I worked for the Department of the Air Force as a human resources clerk and then got promoted and started working for the Department of the Navy as a human resources, then at the time, I got promoted to a specialist and I worked as a human resources specialist for about, maybe 20 years and then I retired in 2013.

RO: Um so [pause] so how exactly did you join the military before, like, doing all that?

BL: I joined the military because it was the only way I could get a ticket back to Guam without having to come out of pocket money. Back in those days, when you join the military, your return ticket would be your home of record, and my home of record was Yona, Guam. So after my stinch with the Army, I was able to get back home to Guam. I had to out process in Hawai'i before I went to Guam.

RO: What did you miss most about Guam when you were away?

BL: I missed my family the most, and then after that, it's the environment that I grew up in, which is beach, beach, beach. I mean, I missed the oceans. I always showed pictures of the ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the different hues of blue. People couldn't believe that the color of the ocean was that color, but mostly I missed my family.

RO: Can you tell me about some people you met in the military who were influential in your life?

BL: I don't think I had anyone that was influential, it was more the other way around. I was influential to them because a lot of the people I was in the military with never really heard of Guam. And to the extent that when got together, I always talked about Guam and my family, and you know, most of the people that were in the military with me only lived within the United States and never left, really, their hometown. In some cases, never got out of state. They stayed in their state, so I feel like I was influential them in terms of knowledge and them learning about other cultures and other customs and traditions that we had on Guam.

RO: For those people that you influenced, like, do you know...or what are some, like, memories of you, like, telling the about Guam and how they received it?

BL: Actually, one memory that really sticks to me is, at the time, we got done with basic training in the Army and I was stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and one of my [pause] I guess, other members in the military, she was from New Hampshire, and she never flew in a plane. And I was going to fly to go visit my uncle before I went to, what they called advanced individual training, which is your specialized [pause] job that they assigned you at the time. You didn't have a choice of where they assigned you, so I was assigned to the communications branch of the Army and I wanted to go visit my uncle who was up in Virginia so I was going to fly. So that girl that I was with, she wanted to fly home to New Hampshire but she was afraid to fly. So we ended up getting a ticket together and I got off in

Virginia and she flew on to New Hampshire. I didn't know where, I forgot now it's been so many years, what her duty station was and where she went, but I know that once I got done in Virginia, I flew back to Georgia 'cause that's where the communications school for the Army was at the time. I was in Augusta, Georgia.

RO: Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to live in San Diego?

BL: Okay so I was in Guam after I got out of the military, and I was working for the federal government at the time. And then I came to San Diego for my brother Mike's wedding, and that's when I submitted a résumé at NAS North Island. And then I just submitted my résumé, and then I left San Diego and went back to Guam. About two weeks later, I get a call from the human resources office in North Island that I was selected for a position. This is back in 1989 and [pause] but at the time they didn't pay for moving expenses so I had to make a decision as to whether I was going to accept the job or not. So I talked to my dad, my dad is my mentor, and we talked about it and he told me he'll help me with my move because he didn't want me to have any regrets. What if I didn't take the position because I didn't have enough money to move myself. So he was all behind me 100% and he gave his support. And then I moved to San Diego back then and I'm still here.

RO: Could you tell me more about what it was like to live here?

BL: Big difference here in San Diego compared to Guam, because Guam is a closely knit family environment. Here in San Diego, there is a big Chamorro community so basically

when you go...when you meet the Chamorros here in San Diego, that would be your family. So I kind of, like, inherited a family here in San Diego just by church functions and social functions. And, um, kind of different, but a lot of our customs and traditions are still practiced here in San Diego.

RO: So in San Diego, how do you stay involved in the Chamorro community and why is it important to you?

BL: I am a lifetime member of the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club, and it's an organization, it's actually the only Guam group that had their own meeting place per se. Most other groups in the United States, they kind of, like, meet at the beach or meet somewhere that is not their own. The Sons and Daughters of Guam Club belongs to the Sons and Daughters of Guam Club, they bought this building, they've improved it, and they get the support from all the different groups that has been established here. And it's basically formed based on the patron saint of the village that they come from.

RO: So why is it important for you to stay involved in the Chamorro community?

BL: I think I stay in even though sometimes I get overwhelmed with all the activities that we have, but it's our culture and our tradition, and I don't want it to go away because I want the children of the members of the Guam Club, their children, and their children's children to be able to experience the customs and traditions that Guam has and I don't want it lost.

RO: What are some of the traditions that you want to see passed down?

BL: One of the traditions that I want to see passed down is the honoring of the specific patron saint of each village. Some of our Chamorro traditions, which is like 95% church, and it's praying in our language, honoring the saint in the way that we do, just traditions that not all groups have here in the United States. And the closest group that has the same traditions that we have is the Spanish people because Guam has a really large Spanish influence, because the Spaniards, the Jesuits, the religious people, the missionaries came to Guam and that's how they started with the religion and it's Catholic.

RO: So yeah, you're very involved in the Chamorro community and you do a lot for them. What kind of changes have you seen in the Chamorro community America since you've been here?

BL: Well I can only speak to the one here in San Diego. There's so many, because a lot of the Chamorros were in the military, they were predominantly in the Navy, and they were stationed in San Diego, and they just retired in San Diego and kept their families here, I think, basically most for economical reasons because to move your family back to Guam takes a lot of money. So their children that were born and raised here in the United States actually have a place to call home when they go to the Guam Club.

RO: Okay good. Um, okay. So is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to discuss? Any stories?

BL: Um, no not really. I mean, you've seen the people in action here at the Guam Club so you know that the Guam Club is the main meeting place for most of the Chamorros here. And there is a heartfelt, what do you call that? [pause] Oh the word slips me, but there's concern when we don't see that some of our elders who normally frequent the Guam Club, when we don't see them we basically ask each other, you know, what happened to Auntie So-and-so? And it's like oh, she's sick so we pass on the word to the other groups that, you know, one of our elders is sick so somebody makes a point to go and visit to see if there's anything we can do. Because here in San Diego, the Chamorro community have extended families and you don't have to be relative by blood, just that you are Chamorro. So because you are a Chamorro, we extend a helping hand for those that need help.

RO: Do you have any, like, favorite memories at the Guam Club?

BL: No, not really. There's not one favorite memory. I just know that when I come here, I've made so many friends and, you know, they know my work ethics and if they want something done they depend on me, so all they do is ask me. And then when I give you my word that I'm going to do something, then you know that you can count on me, that I will make it happen.

RO: Okay, thank you. Let's see, so final question. What will, what would be your final words or advice to future generations.

BL: Well [exhales] I think most of the young people that I meet here at the Guam Club, because that's, this is the meeting place, my advice to them is really to join the military because Guam traditionally, you know, they stay home and they...a lot of the younger people have not experienced independency. So at home in Guam, the parents are always there to help them out, so my advice to the kids here in San Diego is join the military, even for a short period of time, because then you experience to be independent, make your own life, make your own decisions. You don't have depend on anybody but yourself. And then if the military life is not for you, they can move on and do something else, but, to me the military has a lot of benefits that you can use, like education. Because if you don't have a good job then you can't afford your education. So to me, you know, education, I know education was the most important thing that my dad [pause] drilled in us is that, you know, and we spoke English at home because our dad wanted us to do good in school, so we barely spoke Chamorro. But I learned, I know Chamorro because I speak with my cousins but in school we had to speak English. So education is the number one goal for growing up in Guam so that you can advance. But that's about my advice to the young kids who are just graduating from school is, first of all, finish your school and graduate, and if you can go to secondary education, higher-level education, go for it. You know, otherwise, join the military because you learn a lot from the military.

RO: Um yeah. Since I know that you want to go have some cake and listen to the music, I'll cut the interview here, but yeah, I want to thank you so much for, like, doing this. I really appreciate it.

BL: [laughs] Okay, you're welcome. My pleasure.