

# Duty to Country

## *Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project*

### **Interview Transcript: Marlan Maralit**

*Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there are significant errors. The times noted are taken from the unedited audio files and do not match the edited videos.*

**Marlan Maralit** [00:00:06] Up and down the East Coast, I was born in Portsmouth, Virginia, to second generation Filipino American son of a retired chief petty officer, the Navy and son of a medical technologist who retired from George Washington University Hospital. I mean, as part of the generation of Filipino Americans, young, I'm sorry, young Filipinos who who came abroad to find opportunities for their families. Both who were college educated in the Philippines but came there looking for opportunity. It's probably so the center of my you know, as I was a college student sort of defined who I was defined my experience.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:00:56] It wasn't something that's growing up in American that I was that I embraced or was surrounded with. It wasn't till I got to college that that I realized that it was something that had defined who I was but didn't know too much about it. So I spent much of my college tenure seeking out information, looking for resources, and then realizing that there was a whole world of history legacy that was know. I wasn't familiar with being surrounded by other folks who had similar questions. Right. And just gone through high school and experiencing dynamics where you kids wouldn't kids would drop out of school. They would respond to like. The lack of culture in their lives. And so getting to a place where we could be OK with ourselves and figure out our own identity and being Filipino was a large part of that, that not only I sought out, but others did as well. On campus, there was organization called the Filipino Culture Society.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:02:11] I had an older sister who who was a couple of years ahead of me and had been involved in the organization prior to me getting on campus. And she encouraged myself and others who I came in the school with to get more involved. And it was through that organization that I had met a mentor, someone who within the Filipino American movement in D.C. was who many considered a mentor. John Greedo was our student advisor at the time and among other things, embraced us and just shared sort of his world view with us. And that's probably one of the critical things that lent itself to not only myself, but others finding home in the community shaped by social justice, economic justice, making sure that our stories are being are being told and that, you know, for us to create spaces in our own lives where we can see value in those stories. So as a college student, much of my exposure to the Filipino American history was through the lens of culture and food, less on politics and our history of. Resistance, for example. So he was pivotal in, again, opening our world view. It wasn't until later on that sharing of stories and our families, my eventually my wife's grandfather was a Bataan Death March survivor. I think what shaped my ideas around why this issue was so important in it was I think was because it was a generational issue, right.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:04:08] As a college student in the 90s now was afforded certain luxuries, going to college, being able to explore community history, being able to get involved and share with others, and in shaping our sense of community was around. How can how can we as a community sort of how our how is our community defined by our experiences in know hearing about the story of a generation of men who were denied benefits after their their service? It seemed like a no brainer in terms of why can't we support this issue after literally 30 or 40 years after they had completed their service to this country. So in that sense, we had an obligation to not only champion their issues, but to get involved locally by virtue of us being in D.C., being close to the decision makers who ultimately can decide whether or not veterans receive full equity or recognition was sort of within our grasp. So we had to do something.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:05:27] The early 90s. Was a period, especially on college campuses, that was defined by multiculturalism and. For us, it meant being able to create spaces where our experiences were validated, but that happened outside the classroom and so the community was our way to not only inform but also educate and inspire others to take a more active role and what it meant to build community here in D.C., there were a number of in the early 90s community dialogs where not only stakeholders, but students like us at George Washington University and other college campuses can get involved. And so community stakeholders were interested in engaging youth in a much larger discussion. And it wasn't until we actually had spaces on college campuses where students from all over and down the East Coast were coming together to explore some of these some of the critical issues of our time, whether it was Filipino World War Two, veterans representation and media access to higher education or all the things that we discussed. In terms of our local work, you know, we were college students and one of the questions that we were posed with was how come we were the only ones that were getting access to this information on college campuses? Why wasn't it that younger folks couldn't be informed or get access to this information so that we could start at an earlier age?

**Marlan Maralit** [00:07:12] So we began a battery of cultural programs to engage youth, both middle school and high school youth throughout the Washington, D.C. area. One was through a four day youth youth conference, and then there's other programs that we had to engage youth. One was the idea of, well, I can't young folks have access to information because classrooms weren't reflecting our own experiences. And so peer education became one tool that we can use to, again, inform, educate, inspire young folks to get more involved in the the World War two veterans issue was probably one of our one of the major issues that we took on as part of our youth organizing work. And it meant that to create spaces where young folks can get engaged, but also discuss and dialog about why these issues were important. And because of that dialog, we learned that more of them were impacted by this issue than than they thought. Right. In terms of their doing their own personal exploration, finding out that their grandfathers were involved as veterans. And so more and more young folks got involved.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:08:36] Not only did we do educational forums, but we mobilize them. We mobilize them to do actions, mobilize them to do advocacy work. And we did that for a number of years through our youth organizing for over a number of years. Whether it was the White House or the Capitol, I could remember one of our actions was was one of the first time we had some of our activists change themselves to the fence outside the White House. Even even in nineteen ninety eight, there was a student wide conference that was being held at George Washington University. And as part of the conference activities, we took all of the conference delegates on a march through from from George Washington

University to the White House. So there was some of the pivotal moments not only to engage youth, but to engage college students pretty pretty broadly. I mean, there is a number of folks that we had the heroes, I wish I could remember their names, but. To say that our work had an impact on the on the outcomes of Filipino war to veterans recognition. I think, by and large, the impact was on the community itself. The the struggle between recognition and full equity was a long and arduous struggle for for community members, stakeholders who were involved. Before our generation, I think the student activism really lent itself to us defining, you know, making sure that we define this issue as part of our generational experience. So to the question about the generational differences on college campuses between now and the early 90s, I think what defined.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:10:47] Our work, by and large, was. Many of my colleagues, whether it was here in Washington, D.C., Virginia or Maryland, we operated on the premise that. We had a social contract with our community, right, that it was built on relationship building and that was key to us being successful organizers. And, you know, without much said, we discovered that that was also the, you know, the M.O. for many other community efforts throughout college campuses across the country from the northeast to. To the southwest and then to California and even in places like Texas, where regardless of our, you know, recent history and student organizing, we saw a lot of common threads in our work. Right. That. You know, we approached it with the fact that we had to create the space where there was none. And that we relied on each other to to do the right thing and to discover information that was, you know, that was there before us and recognizing that, you know, we were part of a much larger struggle that existed way before us.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:12:30] And how that now, I think it's fairly different in terms of information is more accessible and we rely less on the network or the relationship building that we had to rely on, otherwise we wouldn't have the information that we did. And because information is so readily accessible, sometimes we do forego having to build those deep connections, that's saying that it doesn't exist or it doesn't happen. By and large, relationships are to happen faster without really having to put the working. So in that sense. Does the work of community building, because it can, that will withstand the test of time, can that withstand tension and conflict, cannot withstand, you know, the unknowns. And so, you know, for the most part, we again, we were able to develop those relations that were that were built on trust and. You know. Understanding that we were had. So the lack of a better word, vanguards for our community. So to the question of how does my activism in the 90s continue to resonate today?

**Marlan Maralit** [00:14:06] Well, as a. Nonprofit worker. Activists now, it's still continues to shape the work that I'm doing in Virginia, so in Virginia, Asian-Americans represent a considerable population in the Commonwealth, over six hundred and fifty thousand statewide. A majority of them are in Northern Virginia and tasked with engaging them to make sure that they're involved in the electoral process. Virginia is one of the states where we have elections every year. And by and large, Asians vote generally through the general elections, which means federal presidential elections, not necessarily elections that changed the political landscape of local and regional politics. So the task is to encourage them to be more engaged voters. And I lean on a lot of the experience I had as a community organizer doing youth organizing work. And I find myself, you know, doing the same things right, creating a space where there isn't any, and in trying to encourage what's so broadly pan Asian community to see value in doing community organizing work. So to the question of. How the story of a generation of men who fought for recognition for their service during World War Two. Is relevant to people today.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:15:52] I think most people, by and large, assume that we live in a country that where a government does right by our people. Yet when we uncover the story, it's only part of the story. And the struggle that not only this generation of men. Had the. Fought and died for. It's a story that we need to remember. So that we can remain vigilant, right, and then thinking about our own experiences as a second and generation second and third generation Filipinos in this country today were. We feel that, you know, for the most part, that we've. Been accepted. It's a good reminder to not only. My kids and upcoming generation that we need to stay informed. And inspired by the story of the Filipino World War two veterans. What does the story of the Filipino or to veterans mean to me? Well, I wasn't necessarily impacted personally in terms of my family having members who were. Or to veterans, but that does not mean that it hasn't shaped my experience as a Filipino American growing up in the Washington, D.C. area.

**Marlan Maralit** [00:17:47] The people that I met the Mornings who. We stood beside. The women and the youth. That challenged us to. To learn more and to do more, to shape my saves my world view, right, that your a generation of men in the twilight of the years that were. Fighting for. Some basic dignity, and it's a reminder to all of us that nothing is given to us, that we do have to fight for fight for justice and fight for dignity. And it's a constant reminder that. So the interesting thing about John Miller, Greta, was he was our student, Viser. To our student group, the Philippine Cultural Society. On campus and there was no really formal introduction with at least students of my ear and him as our adviser, the way we got introduced to John was that we would go to the student union on weekends and see a number of rooms reserved in the name of our organization. But none of us knew about it. And it turned out that he was also a director for a local theater group, Filipino, where he would leverage his position as a student adviser on GW to reserve rooms for his community group. And we all took a step back. We're like, what are we going to do about this guy who's reserving rooms in our name and not telling us? And so we we had this plan to sort of stomp into his office at the. In one library where he worked and have a word with him and it turned out to be this gentleman who was a wealth of knowledge not only on Filipino culture and history, but he himself was a social justice warrior through the 70s and the 80s and 90s. And it's because of him that students that went through George Washington University, you know. Have the world view that they do so. To his credit, thank you to John.