

Dear Watsonville: A New Documentary Sheds Light on Filipino Migrant Stories

Dear Watsonville is a mixed-media documentary offering an intimate glimpse into the lives of the manong¹ generation, the first generation of Filipino migrants to arrive en masse to the U.S., as seen through the eyes of their children. It unfolds in three distinct vignettes, each focusing on the migration stories and day-to-day experiences of three Filipino families. Directed by Sandra, a Filipina filmmaker passionate about exploring Asian diasporic experiences and belonging through film, this short documentary distinguishes itself with its experimental use of community-sourced oral histories, archival images, and hand-drawn illustrations. Together, these elements weave a moving narrative about resilience, placemaking, and childhood.

Dear Watsonville was closely developed with producers Meleia Simon Reynolds and Christina Ayson Plank, the co-directors of the Watsonville is in the Heart (WIITH) archive. Their extensive research and dedication to community engagement have significantly enriched *Dear Watsonville*, grounding the film in authentic voices and stories.

Departing from traditional documentary techniques, *Dear Watsonville* does not solely rely on interviews conducted by the filmmaker. Each narration in the film is pulled from raw, 1–2-hour oral history interviews from the WIITH archive. Conducted by Meleia, Christina, and other members of the Filipino American community in Santa Cruz and Watsonville, these interviews capture the unvarnished voices of the children of the manong generation, offering a rare and honest perspective on life in the farming town.

As viewers listen to edited excerpts from the oral history interviews, they see three main visual assets: present-day images of the narrators, archival images, and hand-drawn illustrations by artists Lauren Song and Juliette Le Saint. The film shifts the narrative beyond the manong's labor and spotlights the community's lifeways and everyday acts of placemaking. This approach not only documents but deeply humanizes them.

The film is set to premiere at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History as part of the exhibition, *Sowing Seeds: Filipino American Stories from the Pajaro Valley*. With the invaluable contributions of WIITH and The Tobera Project, a grassroots Filipino heritage organization, *Dear Watsonville* harnesses the power of oral histories and personal archives to expand traditional narratives about Filipino Americans and migrant farmworkers.

Dear Watsonville stands as a testament to the power of film to bridge past and present, personal and collective. It's a call to recognize and honor the significant cultural and historical contributions of the manong generation to American society.

For more information, inquiries, or to schedule an interview with the filmmaker, please contact sondylu.press@gmail.com.

¹ manong: Ilokano word for "older brother"