Guadalupe Speaks: Joe Talaugon Interview
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Stevie Ruiz: Today is November 19, 2003. It's about 5:30 p.m. and we're in the Guadalupe Cultural and Arts Center with Joe Talaugon. Could you please state your full name?

Joe Talaugon: My name is Joe Richard Talaugon.

Ruiz: And where you were born?

Talaugon: I was born in Los Angeles and moved here when I was a baby…grew up in Guadalupe.

Ruiz: What date were you born on?

Talaugon: I was born on October 1, 1930.

Ruiz: And your ethnic identity?

Talaugon: My ethnic identity is Chumash Indian, Filipino and Mexican.

Ruiz: Where did you grow up throughout most of your childhood?

Talaugon: Most of my childhood I grew up right here in Guadalupe. I lived out on a ranch and went to school here in Guadalupe.

Ruiz: Could you describe your elementary school experience?

Talaugon: I can remember pretty well the very first day I started school in 1937 . . . when we lived out in the country we'd ride the bus into school, get off and go to class and then after school you get the bus and go back out to the country. My first years in grammar school, first it was kind of scary you know, after a while it was a very good experience.

Ruiz: And your middle school and high school experiences?

Talaugon: In those days, we had grammar school from kindergarten or first grade on. We would complete the eighth grade here in Guadalupe. Then after the eighth grade we'd go into high school. From here we would go to Santa Maria High School once we graduated. We didn't have a middle school in them days.

Ruiz: What types of dynamics existed as far as groups?

Talaugon: You mean the [cultural] make up of the people? We had so many different nationalities of kids going to school here because of the make up of the community. We had Mexicans, Filipinos, Japanese, Chinese, Swiss-Italians, Portuguese, Anglo-Americans . . . there was no African-Americans that I can remember, however we had some Hawaiian, Native-Americans. That's pretty much it.

Ruiz: How do you think that impacted the dynamics of going to school in Guadalupe?

Talaugon: As far as I can remember everybody got along fine. Some groups kind of stuck together . . . kids would hang together, the Mexicans, the Filipinos and the Anglos, it was kind of like they'd hang out with their own kind. It was still a good mixture because we all got along. I can hardly remember any racial issues.

Ruiz: During high school did you ever have a part-time job, and what impact did this have on your adolescence growing up?

Talaugon: We grew up on what we called farm ranches. The kids who grew up on the farm - most of our parents were farm workers, the poor families. So, we had to work every Saturday, sometimes on Sunday, but mostly on Saturday helping our parents working in the fields and then go to high school during the week. The impact it had on us kind of limited us [in participating] in extra-curricular

activities in school because we had to work and help the parents. It was because our parents were poor, living in a ranch and they were farm workers.

Ruiz: Did you participate in any sports?

Talaugon: After I got probably in my second year of high school, I would work in the summer months. We had three months off, so I would work all summer long in the ranches. I saved my money during the summer for my school year and bought my school clothes, etc. It kind of freed me up to participate in sports because it was the only activity that we had as kids growing up to participate in. In order to do that, we couldn't work on Saturdays. [We'd] go participate and go to the games, which was a lot of fun. Nevertheless we had to work all summer long. If there were no sports going on then we would work on those Saturdays.

Ruiz: So you were really active?

Talaugon: There were always activities . . . even around here as teenagers we always had some kind of sports activities going on. Probably one of the most significant things I remember about sports here in Guadalupe was that there was a baseball field. There was a diamond with lights at night, so there were always games going on at nights under the lights. Everyone in town participated. We had teams - softball.

Ruiz: Could you describe what role, if any, the Rialto Theatre had on your life in Guadalupe?

Talaugon: You mean the Royal Theatre?

Ruiz: Yes, I'm sorry, the Royal Theatre.

Talaugon: The Royal Theatre had a big value for us as kids. When they built the Royal in 1939 it was a big deal. It was a new theatre. I could remember days where carpenters were working out there building the theatre. Once it was built everybody went to the movies. There were movies every night, matinees on the weekends, everybody went, all the families. It didn't matter if they could barely afford it, but somehow or another they managed to go to the theatre. It was an activity that was entertainment. The theatre had a big impact on us as far as something to do in the evenings.

Ruiz: What type of people would come to the theatre?

Talaugon: Everybody came to the theatre, all nationalities. Later on, in the forties and fifties, they started showing Mexican movies. They started showing some of the famous Mexican movie stars. Then they had Filipino movies on certain nights of the week. The other thing I remember was that they would have live performances. Movie stars would come. Performers would do acts on a stage. There was a lot of community participation with amateur nights. A lot of the kids, when they got old enough, worked there. There was the lobby and selling tickets. It gave an opportunity for us to work. The theatre wasn't the only activity we had. We had a bowling alley. We had a skating rink. The bowling alley was very busy. It was very busy and active for everybody. All these activities were places where everybody participated. Often this participation reflected the diversity and nationalities of Guadalupe.

Ruiz: Could you talk about what businesses existed in Guadalupe during the 1940s and 1950s?

Talaugon: During the years when I was growing up, every building had some kind of business. There were hardly any empty buildings. There

were restaurants, hotels, nightclubs, clothing stores, drug stores, three grocery stores, and different nationality restaurants. It was a community [with] a lot of activity going on. We had less than three thousand people who lived in Guadalupe during the 1940s and 1950s. Yet for that amount of people, everybody spent their money here in town. Hardly anyone went to Santa Maria. People spent their money here, ate here and had a lot of fun here. Then, we had festivals, celebrations and parades.

Ruiz: Could you describe those types of festivals?

Talaugon: The festivals were something you couldn't forget. Let's say for example, they would block off a certain part of the street and have music in a certain part of the downtown area. There were parades earlier in the day and [a] dance at night at LeRoy Park in the pavilion. They had music and bands. There was a lot of activity as far as festivals. The Filipino community was large at the time. The Portuguese also had festivals. These festivals weren't limited for just certain nationalities because everybody attended and participated.

Guadalupe had a lot of bars and places to drink and celebrate, so it was always a place everybody liked to go to. In the forties and fifties, there were gambling dens. People would congregate and gamble. There was Chinese gambling and Filipino gambling. The amazing thing that I remember was that even though these activities were illegal, there was no trouble. There was no crime. The crime was very inactive. It was just a way these people wanted to enjoy their time with something to do after work. Most Filipinos worked all day and every day. It was a way of relaxing after work. Everybody gambled. There was a need for it, even though these things went on and most people didn't approve of it.

Most law enforcement [people] turned their heads. The crime rate was almost none at all. Although years later, they shut all those things down. In the 1970s and 1980s, it got a little out of control. But earlier the gambling was much more under control.

Ruiz: We're going to talk a little bit about your parents and your family life. How did your parents become acquainted with Guadalupe?

Talaugon: My father was an immigrant. Most of the families here were immigrants who came from different countries. During the 1920s, in the Philippine Islands where my father was from, there was recruitment in those years for workers to work in the sugar plantations in Hawaii. These big companies went to the countries and recruited young men to go work. My father was a young man and he was poor. He came from a poor family. He went to Hawaii to work on this crew. They took thousands of Filipinos to work in these plantations. It was cheap hard labor. Once there of course they'd congregate. He had relatives and friends. They decided to come to America. So from there, in 1926, he got a ship to come to San Francisco. He landed in San Francisco in 1926.

When you're new in a country, you look for friends or people that you're familiar with so that's what he did. In those years, there were thousands of Filipinos in California so he searched out his relatives and went to Stockton, California. He stayed there about a year and found out that his cousins were living in Ventura, California. So that's where he ended up, in Ventura, working in the lemon orchards. There were a lot of lemon orchards.

He and his friends were living in these camps. In those days wherever immigrants went to work there were labor camps. These camps were pretty much populated by these types of workers.

Labor camps were mostly made up of shacks, barns, and bunkhouses where there were really bad living conditions. So he was living in a camp in Ventura in the late 1920s in 1929.

The Filipino young guys used to play sports like volleyball, basketball or baseball. He was playing a certain game that they used to play in the Philippines. It was a kickball type of game. They would draw an audience of people from the neighborhood in south Ventura. That's when my mother and her girlfriends would come and watch them play these games. My mother was just a kid and they would watch them play. They got to know each other, one thing led to another, and he and my mother eloped in Santa Maria in 1931. They ended up in Santa Maria living in the ranch camp again. Once he got here, there was only type of work that he was going to do - work in the fields. He went to work for a Japanese farmer out there in Santa Maria on Blosser Road towards the river bottom.

The river in those years extended pretty much into the city limits of Santa Maria, so we lived out there in a camp. I was just a baby, a year and half year old, and then my brothers and sisters were born. We didn't live there all the time. We lived there till 1935 in that area. Then, we decided to move here to Guadalupe in 1935. We lived out in a ranch and grew up out there. I started grammar school.

My father stayed here for the rest of his life. He worked for different farmers, particularly the longest for the SA Gerard Company, a big grower here. My father was kind of a specialist in his work in the farm. When he started working in this farm he used to drive a team of horses to pull the plow or the cultivator. He got pretty good at

that. He was pretty much skilled at that - then in the late 1930s the horses were kind of taken over by machinery.

They started inventing tractors and machinery to work on the farms, so he learned how to drive a tractor and became really skilled at driving a certain rubber wheeled tractor to cultivate the plants. In them days, they used to plant lettuce, celery and different plants in long rows. The rows were really thick with plants so he had to cut away from the plants and get them prepared for other worker to come and thin them out. He was skilled in cultivating and knifing. That's what he did all of his life.

Unfortunately, in 1969, after he had been working for nearly thirty years, he died out on the ranch [from] an accident that had happened on September 30, 1969. There was a fire that burned the farmhouse he was living in. He and my uncle died in this fire. My mother and father had separated back in 1950, so once he left he never remarried - stayed single the rest of his life. He was still only 69 years old and working hard. He was a hardworking man, but it was an unfortunate accident.

I kind want to talk about that because I think that was part of my life. It changed a lot of my direction and where I was going to go at the time. When my father burned up and died in this farmhouse, I was living with my family in Northern California in Sonoma County and we used to come down and visit with him. He lived with my uncle out in an old farmhouse.

We always encouraged him to leave and move out of the old house. We wanted him to move in with one of us kids. We wanted him to come up north with me. But my father was so stubborn in his own ways that he didn't want to leave. Even though he didn't

have anything he still wanted to live there. I finally convinced him in the early part of 1969 to come up north to live with my family. He agreed to it but he said that he wouldn't leave right away and [I should] come back in the latter part of the year in the winter months. I said okay.

Unfortunately, he died in September and never was able to get away from that type of lifestyle. He was 69 years old, but he wasn't an old man. He was pretty well ready for retirement. That was a tragedy that changed me into thinking about all of the lifestyle and all of the struggles that people like him: immigrants that lived the same type of life, not only Filipinos, but Mexicans, black people, and all nationalities that struggled in the early years and even today. It [changed] my way of thinking into being a little more involved in community grassroots level. It was all the things that might help make a change.

That's pretty much what me and my wife have been doing the last thirty five years, being involved in the community that try to make a difference with immigrant issues. There were a lot of things that happened, not only with my own father. We lived in different parts of California that had similar types of problems and issues in the community, with people not having services, senior citizen problems and youth problems.

So, I've dedicated my life from that time on when he passed on - the very first thing we did was to have a big investigation with the county because of the living conditions, not only of my father, but a lot of the other workers that lived in these hovels and run down shacks and cold buildings. There was an investigation by the county and they found that there were a lot of poor living conditions

so they condemned a lot of those camps. They condemned 90 percent of the camps where the men lived.

We filed a lawsuit against the farmer and the county, but it didn't go anywhere because it was a very complicated case. It hung in the courts for a while but it didn't go anywhere. Because of that I continued with my involvement in the struggle of those types of issues. The positive side of it was that in 1969, it was also the farm worker's movement. Cesar Chavez was beginning to be active.

Things started changing after that tragic accident. They started bringing water and toilets out into the fields. Once they condemned those camps, all of these workers and people had to move into town. Once they moved into town, there was no housing. It was an overcrowded situation. That's why I think from that point on we've had housing problems. There wasn't enough housing within the city limits, they have a lot of overcrowding in the cities like Santa Maria because they have no place to live except to crowd into single housing and live in garages.

If they weren't living in these garages or crowded conditions, if the camps were still alive they'd still be living out there, so what's better? You can't justify those living conditions because they weren't good anyway. I think the government and the state have been lacking in providing farm workers' housing. In some areas, they've done well. I think in Santa Barbara County, because of the strict code enforcement of housing on farmland, they don't provide the housing for the workers. That's where the biggest problem is. Again, there's the issue of farm workers and immigrant workers that come to this country to work, and they work. But there's no housing provided. So, the same problem is repeating itself.

The immigrant farmers came in cycles. In the early years from what I've researched, in the 1900s, Chinese and Japanese came here. Then the Filipinos came in the 1920s and 1930s and kind of dominated over the labor force. In the 1940s, Mexicans came as a result of the Bracero Program and dominated the work force. The Filipinos faded out because of lot of them were too old now and the younger generation went on to other types of work. Then, after that came the new immigrants. The new immigrants are the ones that are pretty much here today. They're from South America, native people from Oaxaca, and different parts of San Salvador. You still have the housing problem, but yet you still have the need for the work. It's in cycles. The mechanism now is to take away some of the work, but you still need people to harvest those crops. California has probably the largest agricultural production in the world, yet we have poor conditions for the workers. That's my opinion on that issue.

Ruiz: You talked a little bit about your diverse ethnic identity. You're part Native American, Mexican and Filipino. Your mother was Native American. Could you talk about your cultural identity growing up in Guadalupe and how that affected you?

Talaugon: To me, it's been quite interesting how I learned of my identity. When I was a kid, I only knew what my father's customs and his traditions were at home with food. One unique thing about my father being from the Philippines was that, although he spoke English, he also spoke his own language. My mother was born in California. She has some Mexican blood in her from her father's side, but she didn't hardly speak any Spanish. So the primary language in our house was English.

My father was a very determined man as far as respecting in supporting the American way. He wanted us kids to become American as much as possible. We learned the English language and went to school. I think it was a setback that I didn't learn the other languages because I'm kind of limited today. Nevertheless, I learned my father's culture.

My mother never really expressed her Native American culture in those childhood years. Again, you have to try to understand why mother didn't identify as a Native American or Chumash Indian. She hardly ever talked about it. I knew her mother and her father were Native-American but she never talked about it. She identified more with the Mexican side. She did eventually speak Spanish to her friends and somewhat at home. I really never knew anything but the Filipino and the Mexican cultures or language or customs in my household or in my community. That's kind of how I grew up with my friends and relatives. We were in that same kind of atmosphere.

Most of my friends were Mexican American and Mexican. There's a big difference between a Mexican born here and a Mexican from Mexico. So, we had a lot of similarities as kids growing up in this town, as far as being Mexican and Filipino. There were a lot of families that were mixed or intermarried. That's the way we grew up. When I got married and became an adult years later, I realized that my mother never spoke about her Native American blood or her relatives. I wondered why because I was curious about it. I would ask her when I was already 40 years old, [and] she wouldn't want to talk about it.

My grandmother died when my mother was a young girl. My grandmother was only 30 years old when she died. Unfortunately,

there's a lot of sad of things happen or tragedies that happened on my mother's side of the family. Indian women of that time in 1913, (her mother and that generation) had lost their Native American identity and culture because of the influence of the European and the Church's missionary system. It kind of stripped them of their identity and culture and language.

By the time my mother was born there was hardly any culture of the Chumash Indians that she grew up with. By that time, my grandmother was already an older lady who was not participating in any kind of Native American activities or cultural traditions in Ventura, Santa Barbara or Santa Ynez. She identified as a Mexican person. There was a lot of alcoholism, [and] Indian women of that time were promiscuous. One of the things that they tried to do was not to identify as Indian, but rather identify as Mexican or something else. When my grandmother was dying, she told my mother not to ever identify herself as an Indian.

This stuck in mother's head throughout her life. When I started inquiring about this she was totally against it, so I had to do most of the research on my own. My kids were very enthusiastic about doing research on their family and our bloodline. I traced [mother's] ancestry and mine all the way back seven generations in the Santa Ynez area. There's a long history in that area.

One of the situations that happened in the Santa Ynez area, how the reservation was created, was that in 1905 the Catholic Church in the area, Santa Ynez Mission, decided to go to the federal government and ask for some land for the Indian people. During those times the missions converted the Indians to Catholicism. They lived around the missions. The Church felt that they needed some land for these Indians to live on. They wanted to acquire that

piece of property where the reservation is today. I think it was about 100 acres.

So my relatives and family occupied that land from the very beginning. There were five families that lived on this 100 acres and my mother's family was one of them. Most of the Indian people that live on Santa Ynez reservation or in the Santa Ynez area are originally from that area around Los Olivos, Santa Ynez, Buellton and Lompoc near the ocean. So, they all migrated to the Santa Ynez reservation. My mother was born there, but she never lived there. She left there as a child and never went back in all her years.

That's how I found out where my relatives were. Till this day, my mother who is almost 90 years old, has been to the reservation probably two times in all her life from the time she left. She's still very determined not to accept what her mother stood for culturally. I think it has a lot to do with not knowing and not understanding. But I understand. I understood and learned the culture of the Chumash. I mainly identify with that because I know that better than I do the Filipino culture. I know Filipino culture but I don't speak the language and I don't know how it is back in the Philippines, but I know what it is here in California as a NativeAmerican. That's where I come from as far as that goes. Nevertheless, even though I identify that way, I still have the feelings and the understanding of how I grew up in this town. It was very international and I had a diverse mixture of friends. So, it doesn't play a big role to identify with one nationality.

Ruiz: Did your mother work, if so, what impact did that have on your family?

Talaugon: When I was growing up, my mother didn't work too much because she stayed at home and raised us kids. It was hard times in those years. Later on in our life, when we were grown into high school age, she started working. She was already in her forties. My mother started working in Santa Maria in the early 1950's. I think that made a big change or impact in her life. When she married my father she was a young girl. She really never knew or learned too much by living in those ranch houses in the country. The only time she would come to town was to buy some groceries or come to town for some errands.

Once she started working and meeting other people and getting out into the world, she learned that there's a different world out there. That's probably why she left when my brothers and sisters were still pretty young. So, it had an impact on us because, not so much in my early years because I was already an adult when she left, but it had a bigger impact on my younger brothers and sisters. In those days, most women didn't work. It was too hard to raise kids in them days. In the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, most of the wives started working because there was more work available as far as working in Santa Maria in the packinghouses and the freezers. Columbia Records was a company that women worked for. In the early years they didn't work much.

Ruiz: You talked about your father and his working. Could you talk a little bit about what type of crop he worked on and the working conditions?

Talaugon: Being an immigrant, he didn't have much of an education, he could only do stoop labor or cheap labor. Yet, he had to accept whatever was offered to him as an immigrant worker. Most of the time, in those times, the farmers and the growers offered housing on the

farm. For example in 1935 or in the 1940s, there were camps for the single men, but a lot of the farmers, if they had available housing, would give the family man a house for his family [to live in]. The house usually wasn't the best house. It was a shack or some kind of house that had a roof on it where we grew up in. The housing wasn't that great but it was a home and we made it into a home.

He specialized in working mostly with vegetables: lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage. He didn't work too much with the other types like cotton, artichokes and asparagus because he worked mostly what grew in Santa Maria Valley, like tomatoes. He stayed in that type of work. Even though he didn't have an education, he was a smart enough man to know where most of the work was. I, myself, my brothers and my kids have learned the work ethic from my father because he was a hard-working man. He always felt that if you worked hard and you do your job good and you respect your boss and do your work, you could keep your job because the job lasted longer. If you were to research that part of history of farm labor in California, you will probably find that Filipino and Mexican workers are the devoted workers in the farms because they're hardworking. They know this is their life because they have to raise their kids on that. They do the work.

Ruiz: What type of ethnic groups worked alongside your dad? You said there were Filipinos and Mexicans.

Talaugon: It was very mixed and very interesting. He worked on the farms and the labor force consisted mostly of Filipinos and Mexicans. Most of the time the Portuguese or the Anglos were either the foremen or the boss or held some kind of supervision position. The

Japanese most of the time worked amongst themselves in work crews.

They had different crews of workers. Filipinos were very good at harvesting and irrigating. The majority of Filipinos had their own crew boss and had their own men who worked for them. They would go out and work in the lettuce fields. They would cut it, pack it and ship it. The Filipinos were dominant in that area because lettuce was a big product that was produced here. All of the farmers grew a lot of lettuce. The Filipinos were the best at working in the lettuce and it was called dry packed lettuce.

My father didn't work in that type of work. He was more of a machine worker and was skilled with a tractor. There weren't too many that worked with him. He was kind of a loner. The other workers around him were mostly Mexican, Filipino and Japanese. The Portuguese and Italians were usually the boss figures. That was pretty much it in those times. It was seasonal work because the workers would work for a certain farmer a certain year, go away and come back to work again. The farmer knew pretty much who his workers were going to be all the time.

Ruiz: How were the wages?

Talaugon: In the years that my father was working, the wages were very poor. In the early 1930s when he first came into the area, he was making fifteen cents an hour, driving horses. When he became a tractor driver, he advanced to 35 cents an hour. I think the most my father ever made in a farm up until 1969 probably was $1.25 an hour. The wages were very low. When I mentioned earlier that there were Filipino or Mexican crews, they would work on a contract basis, not work by the hour. They would contract so much work and get paid by the row or whatever, so that's how they got paid.

Still, it was really cheap. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a lot of sharecropping going on in Santa Maria with strawberry sharecropping. But it's always poor, hard and cheap labor. The farmer makes the money but the worker doesn't.

Ruiz: We're going to talk a little bit about World War II. What impact did World War II, particularly Pearl Harbor have on Guadalupe?

Talaugon: I could remember the day it happened: December 7, 1941. It was a Sunday morning and we were living in a ranch out here. We were heading to Santa Maria and we had an old Model-8 Ford, and had all six kids in it at the time with my mother and father. He pulled into the gas station to buy some gas. I'll always remember it because I'm the oldest kid in the family. When he went into the gas station, they pumped the gas in the hood of the car. [The attendant] hollers at my dad and said, "Hey boy, why don't you go back to the Philippines and fight against the Japs!" [My dad] said, "What?" and the guy said, "Didn't you hear that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor this morning?"

My dad thought the guy was lying and didn't believe him. The guy said afterwards, "Yeah, after they bomb Pearl Harbor, they're gonna go to the Philippines next and kill your people."

We went out to a ranch with his Filipino friends and when we got there they were all talking about it. They had the radio on and the news said, "Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor this morning." It went on and on. They all got excited. From that moment on there was a lot of war activity. Guadalupe became very war oriented because we were so close to the ocean and there were a lot of Japanese here at the time. There were a lot of Japanese businesses and there was a Japanese community. The people started getting very

uneasy about it and suspicious of the Japanese. That was in December.

In February, I remember that we were in school. I really don't remember too much about the government or how they decided to round up the Japanese. All I could remember was one day in the early part of February, I was in school here in the fifth grade and I had a Japanese friend. We lived out on a ranch here and we had a neighbor who was Japanese. He was in the same classroom as me. We were talking about the war. By that time, the schools already got word about the war alert, so they started setting up air watch control. They were afraid the Japanese were going to invade the coast. They had air raid warnings. They showed us pictures of Japanese warplanes and had big charts with warplane pictures on it. My Japanese friend was looking at this chart and said that Japan had the best warplanes. He said, "Look at the Japanese Kamikaze." I looked at it and we were comparing the American and Japanese planes. For some reason, I said, "It does look like you have a better plane." He said, "Japan's going to win the war." I said to him, "Yeah, because you got a better airplane." We kind of joked about it.

We went home, it was in February, and rode the bus out to the ranch. We got off the bus and walked down the dirt road towards our house. Their house was the first house as you walked down the road. We noticed that there were cars around their house and men in suits, standing around the yard. There were old type buses. They were loading up stuff from the house and suitcases and the mother and father. The kids ran up there and asked what was wrong and we just stood back and watched. They were rounding them up to take them to a camp somewhere in the valley. We

really didn't know what was going on. We just seen them get loaded up in their cars and get driven away.

When we went to school the next day, the teacher told us what happened. She told us that they rounded up all the Japanese families and took them to Tulare or Fresno and got them ready to ship them to internment camps. The governor at the time decided to round up all the Japanese because they were a war threat to the United States government. He passed a law at the time. From that time on, there was a lot of suspicions and activity going on in town. All of the Japanese businesses shut down, and as kids we were very confused and hurt by the whole thing because these were our friends. I remember just feeling really bad about my friend being taken away.

Months went by and we were right in the middle of the war and there was all this activity going on with war bond sales. There was patriotism. Guadalupe was one of the most patriotic towns that I could remember as far as supporting the war. Being a kid, you got involved with all the activities. There were blackouts. They always had a fear that the Japanese were going to the bomb the coast, so we had blackouts where all the windows had to be painted black and every light in the building covered. You could come downtown in the night and you wouldn't see a light in town. It was all covered.

There was gas rationing and food rationing. One of the most significant things I remember [is that] in 1942 or 1943, in Camp Cook near Vandenberg, which was an army training camp, they had German war prisoners out there. One day they came through town hauling these prisoners over to Camp Cook. There was a convoy of military trucks coming through. I always remember because we had come downtown and watched this convoy heading

for Camp Cook. Well, they stopped out here by the American Legion Building and these German prisoners got out and they had P.O.W. written on the back of the shirt and they let them sit down. We watched them and we were in awe watching these military guards guarding these prisoners. They took off again and it seemed like hundreds of trucks going by. To us, we thought it was a big deal. They went on. That was one of the most highlights of the war.

In Camp Cook, there was a lot of activity there as far as troops getting ready to go overseas. Camp Cook and Camp San Luis Obispo were the training grounds for two of the biggest Filipino regiments during that war. Since Filipinos were young men they wanted to go to war and fight for their country. The United States government drafted them in the army and trained them right here in Camp Cook. Most of the Filipinos from Guadalupe, Santa Maria and the surrounding areas were inducted into this. They formed this regiment and took the training right there. My brother-in-law was in there. There's a great history of that fighting regiment that was trained here in San Luis Obispo.

After the war, my father was too old already. In 1941, he was 41 years old so he couldn't join. There was a training grounds and the war went on. The next thing you know we were in high school. I'd like to mention that in the eighth grade, while I was in the Guadalupe school, some of the entertainers like Bob Hope and those types of movie stars would come do shows at Camp Cook. Sometimes they came to the Royal Theatre and did a show. They used to sell war bonds and raise money that way.

They even had kids in grammar school buying war bond stamps, ten cents a stamp. We would buy these stamps. We could

probably afford two or three stamps. Once you bought eighteen dollars worth of stamps, then you were awarded a war bond. In the eighth grade, we did all this fundraising. These war bonds and war stamps were very popular at the time.

The war went on and it ended in 1945 and I was in high school. I'll always remember the day that the Japanese came back because if you look at your eighth grade picture, there were no Japanese in the picture. But when we went to high school, they came back. We had gone to the swimming pool in Santa Maria for a swimming class and while we were finished, we went into the dressing room to get ready to go back to class. I heard this person say, "Hey Joe is that you?" He asked if my name was Joe Talaugon and I said that I was Joe. I looked over and it was a Japanese kid. He said that his name was Masau and there was the kid that I hadn't seen since 1941 and he came back after the war.

He said, "Well, I guess we didn't win the war after all." He was trying to make a joke out of when we compared airplanes four years earlier. We went back to school. It was very sad, knowing these Japanese families and growing up with them and being from Guadalupe where there were no race lines. I felt "Why did it have to happen to him?" The families were uprooted and some lost their businesses and some never came back to the area. Like this friend, he and his family only stayed for a short while and then they left.

Some of the families [stayed] wherever they were interned, like Arizona, Colorado, and Northern California. Some just went into other parts of the country and never came back to Guadalupe or California because it hurt too much. They lost too much. Fortunately, some of the richer farmers were able to save their land

- the Minamis, the Tamukas, and a couple of other families. They're still in farming today. The war had a big impact in Guadalupe, but at the same time it brought people together and they supported each other throughout the war.

Ruiz: Did any family that stayed during the Japanese internment keep the land for any type of person?

Talaugon: I heard of one or two families that left their land entrusted with other people. That's why Minami and Tamuka were able to save their land: because somebody took over and kept it up for them. When they got back it was still available. There's a great history about George Aratani, called *The American Son*. George Aratani came to Guadalupe in 1922 and started farming. He did very well. He was a part of one of the first farming Japanese families. They did packinghouses and shipped crops because the railroad tracks ran right through town. They built these packinghouses right next to the railroad tracks so they could load all the crops onto the boxcars and ice them down. They shipped them back East.

George Aratani became very rich. When he was here in the early years in the early 1920's, he also organized a baseball team. He was very fond of baseball. Guadalupe was always an athletic town, more so in those years. There were a lot of good ball players here, so he formed a mixed team. There were Japanese. There were probably more Mexican and Anglo guys and less Japanese on this team. He took them to Japan in 1927 and they toured Japan for three months. They beat everybody over there and they only lost three games. That was his contribution to Guadalupe. There were a lot of local guys on this team.

Years later, George Aratani dedicated a piece of property where they built this baseball stadium. [His son] George grew up in Guadalupe and his father farmed here. His father died in the 1930's. The kid George grew up and went to the internment camps as a young man. He had gone to Stanford University and was a well-educated young man and went to Santa Maria High School. He got into an interment camp. He had such a hard time trying to keep up his father's farms that he sold it and he just didn't come back. He went on to Los Angeles and is still alive today. He's probably 82 years old. He owns a lot of property, owns electronic companies, and owns Mikasa pottery. He's a real rich man today. He's contributed a lot to Guadalupe. The Japanese left a legacy in this town and I've always admired them. I think they were business minded people and the work ethic of Japanese contributed a lot of the growth of this town. Other people learn from it too. We learned how to get along and work for these people.

Ruiz: You said that you felt somewhat hurt by what was going on with Japanese internment. Was there any type of protest at all going on maybe in this area?

Talaugon: There were people who were upset. The Japanese-Americans, the generation that was born and raised here were Americans but they happened to be sons of Japanese immigrants. I think the Nissei, which is the second generation and the Issei, which is the first generation, formed organizations to protest the internment camps. They did quite a bit of organizing. I did hear that some of the actual Nissei that were interned protested and I think they were blackballed. They were not accepted in some of their communities because of that type of activity. I don't think that it was fair. A Japanese-American is like a Native-American, Mexican-American or English-American or whatever, we're all immigrants. I think

some of the Japanese young people were more patriotic in a lot of ways than some other Americans. They joined the service and fought for America. I think it was a sad time in our history in America, similar to the Native-American. I kind of relate those two situations in my own way because once I learned and studied my Native-American history and culture all the way back into the early years of European invasion into this country. A lot of it is very tragic and a sad time in American history. I think we should take what we can learn from it.

In my mind, I cannot see any justification as to how Native-Americans were treated. That's history. The only thing that I can say about the history in America is that we should tell the truth. The history should be the real truth about what happened. It's kind of like the Holocaust. If you understand it then you'll know what happened. It's the truth and you can accept it more.

I have to say this, and I do create some controversy on this issue. The mission system in California contributed to the beginning of the end of the California Indian cultures and traditions. When the missions came in here, they looked upon the native people as pagans who had no spirituality and no beliefs in any spiritual ways. Once they became converted into the mission system, they were kind of lost. It didn't happen overnight. It took generations. That's why it took till my mother's generation to totally be lost. It took one hundred and some years to reach that point. I always feel that the mission system has contributed in a negative way. The only justification or alternative today needs to be said is that the truth be told. When you go to the mission or look at the history, they make it look like it was different. I don't go to the mission and I don't support it. I think the people who run it are misled too. It's all education. It comes back to education and how we learn things -

how we understand is very important for students today. To learn the true history is very important.

Ruiz: Going back to the Japanese, you said that once they were moved, they made a big part of the agricultural industry in Guadalupe. With them gone, we know that there was a Bracero Program. What impact did that have as far as immigration?

Talaugon: The Bracero Program was developed at the time because of the labor force. They needed more workers. A lot of the Mexicans came into the area under this Bracero Program and worked especially in Guadalupe. We had a big need because of the shortage of farm workers. It kind of filled the gap because of the Japanese being gone. The Japanese farmers were no longer operating so other farmers took over. They changed the crops and the ways the way they farmed. [We] needed these workers. The Filipinos weren't enough at the time with all these labor needs. The packinghouses were booming. Not only were they working in the fields, but they were also working in the packing sheds.

The impact of the Bracero Program was significant [in that] the majority of our Mexican community, their grandparents came in the Bracero Program and stayed. We have a large group here that were descendants of the Bracero Program who are seeking some reparations for those Braceros of that time who worked here and their wages were taken out and put into a fund back in Mexico. Now, they're trying to retrieve it for their benefits. They're running up against problems with that. But, I think the Bracero Program was necessary to fill in the need. I don't think it would work today. I know there were some people talking about reviving it. During the Bracero Program, they would have to come for a period of time and have to go back. I think it should be a permanent situation, where

people can come here like any other immigrant and if they decide to stay and make a life they should have that freedom. I don't think they should come on a work visa because I don't think it would work.

Ruiz: You said the UFW movement had come to Guadalupe during the 1960's. Could you describe what type of impact they had on Guadalupe? What was occurring in the agricultural fields for them to come here? Why would there be a need for them to be here?

Talaugon: I wasn't living in Guadalupe at the time when the United Farm Workers and labor unions came into play but I do remember some incidents where the United Farm Workers were very strong coming into the area and started organizing workers. They also had opposition from the other unions like the Teamsters. There was some violence. From what I understand, knowing what took place in other areas with the UFW, in 1978, there was a strong organization of United Farm Workers. There was also Teamsters. There was another union organized by a younger generation of farm workers who didn't want to be apart of the UFW and they were mostly non-Mexican. These other workers were a younger generation of mixed nationalities. There were a lot of Filipino kids who organized their own union.

There was some violence in the fields. One of the problems was that some of the local Mexican establishment looked upon the United Farm Workers as activists who were anti-establishment, maybe more of a Communist oriented type of thing. Some locals didn't want have anything to do with them. There was a division in the Mexican community. There were also the union factors that were developing. You did have a mixture of feelings and attitudes

towards unions. The United Farm Workers were strong at one time, then they kind of dispersed and moved into other areas.

An interesting part of the history of the United Farm Workers was that when Cesar Chavez first organized the United Farm Workers in Delano, California, back in 1965, what isn't really known was that prior to Cesar Chavez organizing the United Farm Workers, there was a Filipino segment of union organization going on at the same time, not only in Delano but in Coachella Valley. The union was headed by Filipino union organizers like Philip Veracruz and Larry Itliong who were very experienced union organizers from the early 1930's. They had the experience already. When Cesar Chavez became very active in Delano and he struck against the growers, Larry and other Filipinos were also striking against grape growers in Coachella Valley. They came back to Delano and kind of got together the Mexican and Filipino workers and became a single union of workers.

What happened was that the Filipinos felt that they were not accepted into the union at the time. They felt alienated in a sense because most of the meetings were spoken in Spanish. Filipinos don't really speak Spanish so they felt alienated. There was a difference in opinion there between Cesar Chavez and Larry Itliong. Philip Veracruz kind of joined up with Cesar but Larry Itliong kind of stayed out so there was a falling out. Nevertheless, the union became strong and the rest is history.

As far as locally, I don't really know because I left in 1980. By the time I came back, the United Farm Workers were no longer in this area because they had moved on to the Central Valley. One of the deciding factors as to why the union didn't become strong in the

local area was that a lot of the younger generation activists Mexicans that were active in the union moved on. They didn't stay in the area. The ones that did stay were mostly immigrant workers that were exploited by the growers so they really didn't have the organizing skills and the knowledge of union organizing. They were kind of taken advantage of. They really never got off the ground as far as forming a strong union. In the 1980s and 1990s, it's been more immigrant type workers made up of people who are more determined to work and earn wages than organizing. Nowadays, they're probably more afraid of losing their job or being deported. I think that's what's happening today.

Ruiz: What type of working conditions existed before the United Farm Workers came?

Talaugon: The good part about the United Farm Workers was that they made major changes in the fields as far as working conditions. They had longer lunch breaks. Toilets were brought out to the fields. Water was available. They took a morning and afternoon break. They had better equipment and machinery to work with. Before the unions, when I was a kid and my father was working, the work conditions were terrible. They didn't have toilets. They just used the natural environment. There was no drinking water and they had to drink out of the pumps. But most of all, I think one of the biggest changes were the work tools. They used short hoes and you had to bend over - stoop down - all day long with a short hoe thinning the lettuce and cutting the weeds. When the unions came in, they banned the short hoes and brought in the long hoes. It was better equipment. The tools were better like the shovels and tractors. Now, there's farm equipment with air conditioning and stereo and driving these tractors out there is like driving a big truck. I think the union has made a big impact on farm work, but you always have to

look at the little guy and who's doing the hard work: even though he's got a hoe the wages are still low.

Ruiz: I wanted to discuss a little bit about the John Birch Society.

Talaugon: John Birch Society? Well, I don't really know too much about them.

Ruiz: The next questions I have are personal questions about your attachment to Guadalupe. How has Guadalupe shaped you into the person you are today, given all you've been through and all your experiences.

Talaugon: Personally, I think growing up in this town and caring for the people has had a great impact on me and my learning skills and work ethics. I learned everything here working with the people in the fields. Working in the fields probably was the part that taught me a lot about hard work. And the encouragement I got from my co-workers: the older men would encourage me to move on and not to stay here and be like them doing the hard labor.

It also taught me to become active in community. I always refer back to Guadalupe in whatever I learned. If I learned any language, I learned it here. Whatever I learned about other people, how to get along with people and how to respect people, I learned it here. It's like taking with me wherever I go, part of Guadalupe. I'm seventy-three years old now. I left here in 1965 to go off to work and raise my family. But I always had [Guadalupe] in my mind. I always came back here and visited with family and friends. We had reunions and got together with old friends. My heart has always been here. I've never forgotten this place.

For some reason, when I moved to the Bay area and worked many years in Northern California, I knew I was going to retire some day. I told myself that if I ever retired I was going to come back here and

I did. I came back in 1988 and I was retired, but I moved to Santa Maria. I still would come over here and I had my friends here. I always knew I would end up over here. I had the opportunity in my later years to get into business and purchase a home here. To me, it's been like a homecoming.

Everyday that I live here in these years it's like therapy to me. When I walk around town or talk to some of the friends it's encouragement and therapy for me. I like it. It's something that I can't describe. It's a good feeling. Guadalupe has always been a part of me. One thing I like about Guadalupe, it's like going back in time. I talk with Harry Masatani or Shirley Boydsten who can relate to something back then and I think that's special. As far as my own personal family, I met my wife here and she's from here. We met, we went to school here, and got married here. So, in some way my kids are apart of Guadalupe too. It's always been a very positive part of my life.

Ruiz: Where do you see Guadalupe going in the future economically, politically, and socially?

Talaugon: That's an interesting question. It's a good question. I've seen Guadalupe in the early days when I could remember as a kid how it was then. I've seen it go through a period of a lot of people leaving here: an exodus of young people leaving. I've seen the town when it became like a ghost town back in the 1970s and 1980s, where sometimes people felt like there was no hope for Guadalupe. But there's always change. There's going to be change.

How's it going to grow or develop? That's up to city council, city administration or city government. In these times today, you have to look at it in a way, money is always a question. Where do you get the tax money? But, it's going to grow. Guadalupe has a lot of

potential today. One of the reasons I got involved in the business and the culture center was because of the politics.

Whatever direction Guadalupe goes in the future depends on the people. Economically, we have a good future with development. There's always farming but there's always room for other small industries. Those things need to happen. The old days when people were satisfied with working in the fields and having a few packing sheds, is gone. I see Guadalupe growing into part tourist town and part old town, keeping the atmosphere of the old buildings. We want to keep the old look of the old buildings.

It's a very unique town because we have a lot here. You have the ocean, the beach, the dunes, the lakes, the old town and the old Royal Theatre. Santa Maria is a part of Guadalupe - we're only nine miles apart but we're a lot different than Santa Maria. A lot of people or families that grew up in this town moved away but they didn't move very far. They moved to Santa Maria, Oceano, or Arroyo Grande, so people are still in close proximity. I think Guadalupe is being looked upon or being watched by a lot of people. Is it going to be a part of Santa Maria or have growth? It's going to be interesting to see what happens down the road. I look for good things for Guadalupe. It has a mixture of history and cultures. You have everything here.

Ruiz: You talked about all the advantages of tourism, what do you think could be some of the consequences from what you're talking about?

Talaugon: Unless we don't control the growth and we don't watch how things develop it can get away from you. Big developers can come in and take control. I promoted the belief that if you have good people in

place, good smart educated people, good things will eventually happen. You got to have skilled people. You have to have city engineers and finance directors which are key. It's like anything else if you have a team. You'll have a successful team. If you don't have good skilled people then it can get away from you. If people work in a teamwork atmosphere, then chances are it'll be okay. I think right now we are in that position, we have good staff. In the next couple of years, maybe three years, I think it's going to be the key time of where Guadalupe is going to go. We're going to have housing developments at the edge of town. People who live in those developments are not going to come to downtown to shop, they're going to go to stores in Santa Maria. What do you do to offset that? How do people who know their stuff come into play? We as a city council are just a figurehead. We're just there to make decisions and support people. That's the way I feel about it. There's always a chance it won't happen that way. At the present, I see it happening.