

Melissa Cariño - ILLUMINATION interview

Thomas [00:00:00] Welcome, everybody, to another conversation as part of the ILLUMINATION project of the Springfield History Museum. My name is Thomas Hiura. I'm the story collector for 2022-23, and I'm co-leading this project with my amazing partners, Melissa Nollado, who is our photographer, and Aimee Yogi, who is our consultant for the project. We are all very blessed right now to have with us, Melissa Cariño. How are you, today?

Melissa Cariño [00:00:23] I'm doing well, thanks. How are you?

Thomas [00:00:25] I'm doing well, thank you very much.

Melissa Cariño [00:00:27] Awesome.

Thomas [00:00:28] Good to be here with you here in Springfield. The opportunity to talk about Asian identity in Springfield is an exciting one.

Melissa Cariño [00:00:34] Yes, indeed.

Thomas [00:00:35] So the fact that you're willing to jump onboard, I know that you have recently worked for four years in the planning department of the City of Springfield, and that you continue to be involved with SAFER: Springfield Alliance For Equity and Respect. So we're gonna have a great conversation. But I do want to just try to get to your origin story and your background. So can you tell me a little bit about that?

Melissa Cariño [00:00:56] Yeah. So let's go way back. 44 years ago, I was born in San Francisco. My parents were young immigrants from the Philippines, and I was the second of two children, and grew up mostly in the Bay Area. San Francisco Bay Area. But by the time I was in third grade, my parents decided to move us to the San Joaquin Valley, which is the rural kind of farming community in central California. And the demographics were very, very, very different. Where I was surrounded by a lot of brown folks growing up, and I was surrounded by a lot of white folks when I went to school in, it was Ripon, California. And so I was there for third grade through eighth grade. And then I hurried back to the Bay Area for high school, because I felt very alienated and didn't belong in that town. Let's see, I ended up going to high school and college in the Bay Area, and then I moved to New Mexico after that. And I actually met my partner there. And I did New Mexico before grad school just because I really wanted to experience being out in the field, rather than just staying in academia.

Thomas [00:02:07] Right.

Melissa Cariño [00:02:08] So I did some community organizing and youth mentorship in New Mexico, and then I went to graduate school. It brought me to the East Coast, and I ended up staying on the East Coast for about 20 years. Mostly Boston, New York City, upstate New York. And for me, that was such a wonderful experience because it was a place I had not known. It was something strange. And I got to learn so much about the culture, the people, the communities. And I still consider myself a Masshole, actually.

Thomas [00:02:38] Really.

Melissa Cariño [00:02:38] And I miss it, terribly. I do not miss the winters. I will very much say that.

Thomas [00:02:44] I love direct attitudes. That's what I like about it.

Melissa Cariño [00:02:47] Yes, direct communication is so key. I don't... you can be nice to some degree, but let's be direct. I really, really appreciate that. Thanks for bringing that up.

Thomas [00:02:59] Yeah. "Masshole" being a Massachusetts butthead.

Melissa Cariño [00:03:02] Yes, exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

Thomas [00:03:05] Well, I had a chance to live in New York for a year, and I had previously done some summer programs for educational empowerment for youth in New Jersey. So I had some experience out there. And, you know, as a person who grew up in Eugene-Springfield, it was definitely different.

Melissa Cariño [00:03:24] Mm hmm.

Thomas [00:03:24] But one of the things I would say is, I had a homie who is a Mexican-American. And he's mixed, and he's my best friend, Brian. People who know me know that he is my best friend. And, you know, he got to go to D.C. in eighth grade, which was really exciting. But other than that, he'd never been to the East Coast.

Melissa Cariño [00:03:41] Mmm.

Thomas [00:03:42] And I was a grad student at Columbia at the time, and I unfortunately had a class at the time-- I was going to fly him out to do, you know, we're on a talk show right now. I found out you get free tickets to things. And David Letterman was doing his show, it's called My Next Guest Needs No Introduction, on Netflix. So I got free tickets and then I flew him out.

Melissa Cariño [00:04:02] That is so cool.

Thomas [00:04:03] It was super exciting, you know? And he is a mixed person. Often people will think he presents a sort of South Asian or Indian looking, but everybody kind of was like hmmm, you know, you get that face that people make. And, you know, this is a long-winded tangent, but.

Melissa Cariño [00:04:18] No, this is awesome, keep going.

Thomas [00:04:20] It's an open conversation, right?

Melissa Cariño [00:04:20] I like it.

Thomas [00:04:21] At the time that he arrived at LaGuardia [note: It was actually JFK airport], I was in class. And I had intended to be able to go meet him at the rail station closest to LaGuardia, or even at the airport itself. However, I had failed to work that out with my calendar, so I was in class. So he had to get on, you know, three trains to get to Upper Manhattan where I was.

Melissa Cariño [00:04:44] Yup. Yup.

Thomas [00:04:44] And there were two things about it. One very positive and one very negative. The negative was, Everybody's running by me. You know, like the pace of movement is so dramatically different than north Eugene, where we grew up.

Melissa Cariño [00:04:58] Totally. Yeah.

Thomas [00:05:00] So that was really intense and kind of frightening and disorienting for him.

Melissa Cariño [00:05:03] Yeah.

Thomas [00:05:04] The other thing he told me? It's really refreshing that no one's just looking at me like I'm the person of color. You know, and just giving that extra glance or that could look of concern or confusion or whatever it may be. Because I'm just a person here.

Melissa Cariño [00:05:18] Right.

Thomas [00:05:18] That's what he said. And that's something that a lot of people growing up here might not ever get to experience from being here. And it can lead to this, well, we know what it leads to. It's frustrating.

Melissa Cariño [00:05:29] It is. Yeah.

Thomas [00:05:31] So I wanted to share that. But with that experience of living in the northeast, you know, it sounds like some of that culture continues to drive you.

Melissa Cariño [00:05:41] Definitely. It does help that my partner is from the northeast as well. So he's here with me. He reminds me about my massholiness. But yeah, no, I I'm so grateful for my time there. Because I think what people need to do on their journeys, in my personal opinion, is to get yourself out of your comfort zones and try something new. And so moving to the East Coast was, you know, strange. I didn't have any family or friends close by. But you make the community, what you make of it, like what you put in, you'll get out. So that's what I really appreciated. And I still adore a lot of my chosen family, still out on the northeast.

Thomas [00:06:17] Yeah. And then I could connect it to, many Asian cultures have different expectations around customer service and things like that. So some people will think you go to a Chinese restaurant, and maybe they aren't as attentive to you as some other restaurants would be. And they think that's different and rude, potentially. And the reality is, I mean, these East Asian cultures tended to be in places where there's a lot of population density. And the idea that everybody is going to give you the same really deep, warm interaction and talk about your kids when you're at the cashier or when you're paying for your pho or whatever, it is not that way. So that can be a really nice thing about the East Coast is just, you know, people aren't in your business all the time, thinking that they're being polite.

Melissa Cariño [00:07:07] But yeah, I agree. Agreed. Yeah, I miss that. I'm glad to know that you lived out there, too.

Thomas [00:07:11] I did, I did. And then I, but I had to leave. I just, you know, I love being around here. You know, that's what it came down to. And now I want to learn more about you, and what makes you have love for Springfield.

Melissa Cariño [00:07:24] Sure.

Thomas [00:07:24] And so, you know, connecting from the the origin. How did you come out to here?

Melissa Cariño [00:07:29] Yeah. So, I got sick of New England winters. And you know, I grew up as a California girl, so I needed to get back to milder weather. But actually, the major driving force was my brother had a child in 2008. And I don't have any children, but I really wanted to be an aunt in person. I didn't want to be an aunt from the East Coast, possibly seeing him once a year. That just wasn't what I wanted to have as a relationship. It's kind of like the relationships I had with my aunts and uncles growing up. I wanted them to be there, you know, and and they were always there for me. So that's what brought me here to Oregon. And then, you know, I moved here in 2016, literally the day that Donald Trump was elected.

Thomas [00:08:14] Oh, wow.

Melissa Cariño [00:08:15] And here I am, kind of cruising around my new home community. And I remember distinctly thinking, where are the people of color? Because I need them right now. And I did find some, which is good, but it took a while. And so when I came here, I started looking for work and I got hired by the City of Springfield. And I'm super, super grateful for that because I feel like they took a chance on me. I've been mostly in the community organizing social justice sector and working mostly in nonprofits. Didn't do a lot of public sector work until coming here, actually. And so I am so grateful for Springfield for taking a risk, a chance with me and investing in me for the last four years. And I feel like I gave back, too. You know, I helped work on city planning projects that focused on affordable housing. I got to work on celebrating Indigenous People's Day in Springfield, which was a pretty big deal a few years ago. In fact, a lot of tribal council members were like, What? Springfield's celebrating Indigenous People's Day? That's got to be something. So that was really great to be part of. I became involved in their DIY committee as well. Before I left, I was one of the co-chairs and we were really trying to infuse equity work in all the city, and all city departments. But now I did leave City of Springfield in September of this year, and I am now working at another municipality, but I really miss Springfield. It's, you know, the four years that I was here, it's literally left a-- made a special place in my heart where I think I'll always be invested. And I think that's why I'm still volunteering with SAFER, even though I'm not working in Springfield or living in Springfield for that matter.

Thomas [00:10:12] Well we certainly value all the work that you've done, and I think you're probably able to watch the continuation of some of those seeds that you planted in the municipal government here. It's worth mentioning very briefly that you're obviously not here as a representative of your current position with the other municipality or anything like that. This is a personal discussion. And as part of that discussion, Melissa, I have to push back on something you said, because--.

Melissa Cariño [00:10:36] Please.

Thomas [00:10:36] I do not think that they would have hired you into that position where you said they took a chance on you, unless you had robust, you know, experience.

Melissa Cariño [00:10:45] Thank you.

Thomas [00:10:45] So for you to believe that, I am seeing so many of my friends and peers who I who I've heard say, They would never hire me, or I don't have this or that.

Melissa Cariño [00:10:55] Right.

Thomas [00:10:55] But what was some of the experience that you had that led them to not only take a chance, but to say, We absolutely would love to have this person on board? Which is what happened.

Melissa Cariño [00:11:06] Yeah. Can I first just say thank you for pushing back on that, because I think it's true. Like even today, we look at job descriptions and postings and we're like, Oh, I don't meet that, so I'm not going to apply. And we're selling ourselves short. I sold myself short. You're right. And so I think my experience was I was hired for a senior city planner position, and I've never held a city planner position in my career, you know? So that was like, Oh, am I an imposter? Is this something I'm going to be completely a novice at? But you know what? The supervisor who hired me, he said, Your experience in different sectors and jurisdictions and doing equity work and social justice work can easily be translated to the City of Springfield. And so I think that was another, him saying that actually helped encourage me to get more involved in that kind of work as well, in addition to the city planning work. But you're right, I think I did bring a lot to the table and I learned from all my other team members as well. But yeah, I deserved to be there. So thank you, for saying that.

Thomas [00:12:10] Right on. Yes, absolutely, we all in the room agree.

Melissa Cariño [00:12:13] Thank you.

Thomas [00:12:15] There are deep intersections between urban planning and the ways that white supremacy and racism have proliferated, in this country.

Melissa Cariño [00:12:23] Oh, heck yes.

Thomas [00:12:24] And I think that when you look at the previous cities that you've lived in, I think that it's a different dense landscape, etc.. But you had that value that you brought to the table of just knowledge, personal knowledge of what it's like to navigate a Boston or a New York.

Melissa Cariño [00:12:40] Yes, definitely.

Thomas [00:12:41] You know, and they're at later stages of development in terms of having a few more decades and centuries of actually building things [Thomas' correction: Indigenous communities were building things long before colonial settlers. I regret my phrasiology.]. But we should always be looking to the future when we're here. So can you tell me anything about, in Springfield, where those intersections have affected your job and where you where you've considered them? Or even just thought about, it doesn't have to be about racial justice, but in general, equity, fairness, when it comes to city planning.

Melissa Cariño [00:13:11] Sure. That's a great, great question.

Thomas [00:13:15] Yeah, I didn't tell you before, I was gonna ask.

Melissa Cariño [00:13:17] I was like, wait a second, now you're gonna make me think. But no, you're right. Urban planning and that intersection. And actually what got me really into urban planning was learning about the housing injustices, how certain communities were treated unjustly, and just oppressed. I mean, we're talking about redlining, you know, certain neighborhoods where certain people could not live. Or buy.

Thomas [00:13:39] Right. Denied bank loans.

Melissa Cariño [00:13:41] Exactly. And we live in Oregon. I mean, let's not forget our history where the whole state didn't allow people of color to own homes or property or land in here. Even though they said they would not have any slaves. Yeah. We won't go there.

Thomas [00:13:57] Hmm, yeah. It was their-- they thought they were being magnanimous, to say we won't have "the race problem," you know. And it was just full exclusion.

Melissa Cariño [00:14:04] Yup. Yup.

Thomas [00:14:04] I think we have an exclusionary view of, it's not our problem if it's not around us.

Melissa Cariño [00:14:11] Right.

Thomas [00:14:11] You know, and I had a friend who the other day said something about how, Do you think a person who committed this violent act should still be in society? Or they should they be in a prison? And I thought, a prison is part of our society, my friend. You haven't removed-- is it Audre Lorde, or is it-- [it was Angela Davis]. You know, prisons do not disappear social problems, they disappear people.

Melissa Cariño [00:14:35] Yes.

Thomas [00:14:36] That's a different story, and that's a different side of things.

Melissa Cariño [00:14:40] Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up. But I think the continuation of the intersection of urban planning and oppression, you know, you talked about planning for the future. You have to look at your past to plan for the future. And a lot of times when people or communities are planning for the future, there's a lot of voices left out. And that, for me, is a passion about participatory planning. That we need to get all the stakeholders' voices. And you can't just assume like one person from one group is going to think the same thing as another person in that same group. So it's really about that really targeted outreach and investment in the process to really get into the outcomes, because I think that's what plays into the injustices today. Some of our voices were never heard in the planning of cities and communities, and therefore we're struggling with that. So include us and we can be part of the solution.

Thomas [00:15:34] And then with Springfield, there's such a ripe opportunity. Business owners that are here, they're here intentionally. They want to be in Springfield. They value something about Springfield. They they will come to the table. Constituent groups of all kinds. Students, parents, family members, educators. Everybody that's here tends to want

to be involved in the conversation. So it's not as hard to get, you know, that widespread engagement.

Melissa Cariño [00:16:01] You're right. I think there is that. I think I have seen that diversity of folks coming in. But again, I keep thinking about, Who else's voices are we not connecting with? You know, do they even hear about this outreach? Is it in their language? Were they at work when they got it? So it's always about making sure as a community organizer, meeting people where they're at. Even though there's some challenges with that comment, too. It really is about, Hey, if you're there, we need to come see you as well. And not expect you to come, always, to us.

Thomas [00:16:32] And then the other thing that people have to realize when they're wanting to do that work, and let's say they're a white ally to the cause of advancing racial justice, is they might have considered every little way in which they want to not re-perpetuate those harms. And they might actually do a very inclusive job of something. And still, the historical experiences that those marginalized groups have had might still be such tha they're still experiencing skepticism, or,

Melissa Cariño [00:17:04] Oh, heck yeah. Distrust.

Thomas [00:17:05] Why would I do this? You said last time that you were going to include, but then you did that.

Melissa Cariño [00:17:09] Exactly.

Thomas [00:17:09] And so that trust is something that's not going to be rebuilt overnight.

Melissa Cariño [00:17:14] Nope, not at all.

Thomas [00:17:16] And honestly, as we have this conversation, this is the most, so far, direct conversation about equity, marginalization, of any of these. And I think that's totally great. I think hopefully there's people that have committed to watching all these, and listening to all these conversations. They might be uncomfortable, you know, from this. And feel free to lean into that. And I encourage you to be willing to continue to listen regardless, because things need to be said, and the light needs to be shone on these issues.

Melissa Cariño [00:17:44] Yes. And that's how we grow as individuals, too. Getting into that uncomfortable spot and growing from there. So, yes, please lean in.

Thomas [00:17:51] Yeah, exactly. And so how long have you lived in our area here? I need to get that clarified in my head.

Melissa Cariño [00:18:00] Yeah, so I moved here to Eugene in November 2016. Literally the day Trump was elected. Not my favorite day, to remember.

Thomas [00:18:10] Right, right, Okay.

Melissa Cariño [00:18:10] But then, actually, I have been here--

Thomas [00:18:13] How did it get on your radar, if you don't mind.

Melissa Cariño [00:18:15] About, Eugene?

Thomas [00:18:16] This area, and moving here.

Melissa Cariño [00:18:17] Good point. So I didn't know where I wanted to live in Oregon. Originally it was Portland, but couldn't afford it. And actually it was too close to my brother. Like we wanted a little bit with space and healthy space, so we decided we could be at least two hours apart. So we checked out some other municipalities and communities in Oregon. And I think what spoke to me here is that I heard there was a Filipino community here. And my mom actually knew somebody who lived here. So she really encouraged me to move here. And I've been glad for the experience. I will also add that my partner is a white man, and he is a Deadhead. So he, like, did his research. And learned about Eugene, and the history of the Grateful Dead and Ken Kesey and all that stuff. So that's kind of another factor that brought us here. And I live in rural Cottage Grove now. Again, that was an opportunity made from my connections in the social justice world. I feel very, very lucky. But if I had to leave rural Cottage Grove, I would totally come to Springfield. I've really enjoyed being here, working here, and I would love to be a community member, actually. But while I'm in rural Cottage Grove, you had asked me a little bit about my hobbies and talents, and I'm an animal whisperer.

Thomas [00:19:40] Oh, wow.

Melissa Cariño [00:19:41] I love animals. And so my favorite things to do is hang out with my animals. In our place, we have six goats, 20-plus chickens, two roosters, four house rabbits, three dogs. And I'd really like to add a llama into the mix. At some point.

Thomas [00:20:00] Wow. Exciting.

Melissa Cariño [00:20:03] So that's really my passion there, and I also love, I shouldn't even say this. I wish I had a green thumb like my parents. But I don't. So I focus on the animals.

Thomas [00:20:12] Oh. My girlfriend's been getting really into it, and it'll take over.

Melissa Cariño [00:20:15] Really? Nice. Tell her to come on over,. I got plenty of space for her to work on..

Thomas [00:20:18] She's so excited about it. But nowadays, with everything through, on social media and stuff, they like to find out what you're interested in, then bombard you with it.

Melissa Cariño [00:20:24] Oh yes, those ads.

Thomas [00:20:24] She's like-- everything in her feed is plants, plants, plants. You know, but it's lovely.

Melissa Cariño [00:20:28] That's great though. It is lovely. And to be surrounded by it, to enjoy it, too.

Thomas [00:20:32] You talked about being an animal whisperer. And I, as somebody who loves, for example, the English language, I've found so much depth and passion engaging with humans.

[00:20:44] Totally.

[00:20:45] For my whole life.

Melissa Cariño [00:20:46] Yes.

Thomas [00:20:47] And then-- actually, it's my partner. I'll say her name: Hailey. Love you, Hailey. She really imbued in me that deeper level of, like... There's a certain patience that you have to have, to understand what an animal is feeling. Dogs and cats. I always kind of thought cats were kind of cool, but now I've begun to like dogs more. And she's got this pit bull, Bella. And I learned that Bella is the number one name for a female dog.

Melissa Cariño [00:21:15] Really? Huh.

Thomas [00:21:15] I didn't even realize. So much to learn. At least in the US. And yeah, there's something about now. It's not that it's totally flipped, because I still love humans and I love being able to engage verbally. But I just find that I actually have so much to learn as a fellow mammal or life form. Just a fellow participant in this world, just observing how animals are dealing with life. Because there's a lot there.

Melissa Cariño [00:21:45] Totally. We can learn a lot from them. And I also love engaging with humans. I also am an introvert, so I need breaks, which is why I go to the animals. But yeah, I learn a lot from them in so many ways. They also center me and ground me, so I stay, like, more calm. And I actually feel a sense of belonging with my animals, too. And you mentioned your partner's pit bull. I also have a pit bull pandemic puppy. And speaking of marginalized and just, you know, discrimination? How much pit bulls are discriminated upon, too.

Thomas [00:22:17] Oh, yes. Huge prejudice.

Melissa Cariño [00:22:18] And so actually having a pit bull, now I'm experiencing it and trying to combat it. But we all have our work to do.

Mimi Nolleto [00:22:27] [Talk to my husband. My husband, for some reason...]

Thomas [00:22:30] Yeah. No, that's interesting because people sometimes will have a bad negative experience early on with a dog, and then they'll write off dogs.

Melissa Cariño [00:22:38] Yes.

Thomas [00:22:38] And in this world where we're such separate species from one another, I guess that's a permissible form of discrimination. But should it be?

Melissa Cariño [00:22:48] Right.

Thomas [00:22:48] Or should we try to unpack, you know, why is it okay to then write off all dogs? Because of something that happened with this dog, when that dog probably felt afraid and threatened of you.

Melissa Cariño [00:22:57] Mm hmm, exactly. Yeah, if we can even draw those, like, kind of commonalities and common ground between animals and humans and how we treat

them. I think there'd be a lot to learn. In fact, actually, I worked with a dog trainer who really, really focuses on her training, not just for the animal, but also for the human. And she infuses social justice terms into her work. So, for example, during a lot of the Black Lives Matter protests, dogs were sicced on protesters, right? And so how are these dogs being used to oppress others? And they don't really have that control. They're being controlled by other humans. So it's just interesting to draw those patterns and really speak to it..

Thomas [00:23:46] Yeah. I mean, since you brought up those protests, in Eugene and Springfield, I was just-- I got to tell you, during the pandemic, I think obviously the lockdown that began in early 2020 had an effect on how much people were excited to engage with that issue, right?. After Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor were murdered and then George Floyd was murdered in May of 2020, it was unlike anything I'd ever seen. Because so much of the collective sharing of pain, and frustration, and also wanting to increase accountability for this BS that's happened for so long. It went from being so much online and everybody being at home, and then people saying, We can go out into the streets and go do this. And it happened in such a deep and powerful way. I'll say that I saw, I was there, like not every night, but a lot of those events. And, you know what? One of the things that, as someone who's kind of a citizen journalist, I try to be aware of, is that I'll go to an event. I'll be there. I'll see it from beginning to end, and really try to immerse myself in it, and then see how it was reported afterwards.

Melissa Cariño [00:25:11] Oh, heck yes.

Thomas [00:25:12] And those corporate biases and the narrative biases of different publications and groups and and sources and even just people posting to a Facebook group that's like we're the tough on crime Facebook group or something, you know, it comes with such a incredibly skewed. And then I know people are at home getting angry of what they think is happening because a video looks like a certain thing happened. Right. And the nuances of this is there's things that happened in those events that I probably wasn't comfortable with me as just an individual. And that doesn't mean that I would tell people not to act in a certain way, but I would observe and support what I felt needed to be supported and what I felt needed to be supported was racial justice. What was it like for you going through that experience of 2020?

Melissa Cariño [00:26:04] Yeah, well, I actually.

Thomas [00:26:06] And Stopasianhate as well as.

Melissa Cariño [00:26:08] Oh yeah. With COVID and everything. And I actually go back. I mean, we can go back to Emmett Till if we want to, but I was really involved in the movement, the Black Lives Matter movement back in 2016, 2015.

Thomas [00:26:19] Trayvon Martin.

Melissa Cariño [00:26:21] Eric Garner, you know, all of those were, I just remember my heart hurting so much. And luckily at that time, I was surrounded by people that felt the same way and thought the same way. And we organized together and we joined actions together. I think moving here, including the time that Trump was in as President, and I shouldn't just blame Trump. I'm just kind of noting that time, and with COVID happening. I actually didn't participate in any of the actions around George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. One, because I wanted to stay safe, because I have some family

members who are immunocompromised. But in so doing and not engaging, I felt super isolated. To the point where I was reaching out to my friends and people not in Oregon. To just say, like, Hey, I'm going through this. I don't feel my sense of community that's here to help me, kind of, deal with these emotions. You know, I think what I did was just kept donating to the Black Lives Matter-- or the Movement for Black Lives, and helping other organizations that I really love and support. But to being isolated and not feeling a sense of community to just air our frustration, our anger, our pain.

Thomas [00:27:53] Right.

Melissa Cariño [00:27:54] That was hard. And I think what thing was helpful is having a therapist of color to be there for me. And we met with telehealth all the time, and that helped. But yeah, I always sometimes think, I'm like, would I have cared about risking my life or other people's lives if I could just go there and commune with folks that felt the same way? So I go back and forth. I'm glad COVID is kind of dissipating, not dissipating, but we're getting better at managing it. That I would feel way comfortable participating in action again. But I didn't, at that time. And that played a role. And I also have to say that there weren't a lot of, there's not a lot of people of color who work in the City of Springfield. And I think all my other workplaces, I've always had that community, and I felt even more isolated as an employee in Springfield, and not having someone directly to connect with about it. So, that's hard.

Thomas [00:28:58] Yeah, I think people just simply cannot understand deeply what it's like. The positive of having a therapist of color, if that's something that, you know, with the traumas in your life, you just want somebody who has kinship and understands certain things. And I think people also, so many white folks have never really had the experience of walking into a room of ten plus people 15, 20, 40, 50 people. And being the only person of color. The only person whose skin color presents in that way. And, you know, I want to pretend like these issues are not issues anymore, because I know some people want to pretend that, and it's really fun. You know, you bury your head in the sand.

Melissa Cariño [00:29:48] Yeah.

Thomas [00:29:49] It doesn't affect me. Therefore, how much could it really be affecting you? And I just, again, have to encourage people to open their minds and be challenged. And let me ask people of all stripes to be open, open-minded and challenged on some things, too. I mean, in the world that we live in today, I would submit to you that people in police officers' uniforms, probably every day are doing things that are important and necessary. And I've had positive experiences working to make sure accountability happens for something violent that I saw on the street, or whatever it may be. And still, so let me say that for anybody who really believes, you know, law enforcement is extremely important. And then you also have to understand, like the legacy of policing and where it came from and the history of evolving from slave patrols. And how if you just simply don't reckon with that history and understand that public safety can mean some different things to different people, then we're not having the same conversation. And I want us all to have the same conversation. Part of why I was interested in fighting for justice against police brutality that exists, is because I've been a victim of it. And I'm not Black, but I've been treated very badly, and physically treated badly by at least one police officer before. And so I just felt by participating in that, I felt it was very liberating to be like, yeah, that happened. And that's happening to other people. And we can talk about that, and it doesn't mean every police-- it was actually a weird thing, too, but I'm making this all too much about me and ranting.

Melissa Cariño [00:31:36] No, I love it though. It's great, I'm learning about you, too.

Thomas [00:31:38] I would go to these rallies and I would chant along to most things. But once it comes out of my mouth, I feel accountable for it as my words. So, "all cops are bastards," I usually wouldn't say it. Because I, my friend's dad, my old coach, whatever it might be. I know that those people are, in many cases, doing their best. And so it was weird to go to an event and be in support, and everyone's kind of like, you know, riling you up to be like, thank you for showing up. Keep showing up, keep being a part of our movement. It's like, I am a part of your movement. But I might not agree with everything all of the time.

Melissa Cariño [00:32:12] Yes. Yeah. And that's okay.

Thomas [00:32:15] I believe so. I believe it's okay.

Melissa Cariño [00:32:17] I think we're all very different people with different experiences. And even though we're trying to create a movement of folks for different issues and different causes, we're all still different people. And we're not all going to agree. And I think that needs to be respected and honored as well. But finding that commonality and where you fight together, that's where the focus should be. Now, speaking about police brutality, this is very interesting. Because, you know, agreed. Public safety, community safety looks different for different people. I actually wrote my thesis on community policing as an asset to community development. And a lot of police departments might boast that they do community policing. But it's not what I believe is real community policing.

Thomas [00:33:03] Well, what is community policing?

Melissa Cariño [00:33:04] Thank you for asking. So I think community policing, first of all, I don't think I'd actually call it policing. It's really about being that bridge to that community. If there's anyone who is having issues or if they commit a crime, finding out what causes that. Finding the root cause, and finding resources and opportunities for that person to move away from that criminal activity. To something that is really meeting their needs. So, for example, I worked with a very highly gang-involved youth center in Lowell, Massachusetts. And man, just how-- something about the police and how they engage with, you know, they think that they were doing community policing. But I witnessed how aggressively rude and discriminatory they were to many of our teens of color. And I had to fight back, you know, and try to collect badge IDs and complaints. And, you know, there's also these forces fighting against you in holding police accountable, too. So that was frustrating. But as a community organizer, I think community organizers make the best community police officers, because you're about making those connections and building those relationships. And it's not about just the laws, and black and white rules, regulations and stuff. It's really about being part of the community, not policing the community. I don't know if that makes sense.

Thomas [00:34:37] Yeah. I have one problem. You know, the movement, some people people say, what did it articulate? Well, if you were listening, it articulated a lot of things.

Melissa Cariño [00:34:47] Yes.

Thomas [00:34:47] And one of them was that it's a problem that a lot of officers don't live in or around the communities that they are responsible for in their jobs. And that is

something that, you know, everybody is susceptible to unconscious bias. To give a little bit of sympathy to police officers, people think of unconscious bias and I think they immediately think of police officers, now. Everybody's got unconscious bias. We should all unpack it. You know?

Melissa Cariño [00:35:14] Yeah, totally.

Thomas [00:35:16] I have unconscious bias of what our conversation is going to be like, before we start it. And then it goes in a direction, and I think, okay, that's great, you know? And it's just something that we have to unpack and unravel. And, and the only way I think to do it is listening to each other.

Melissa Cariño [00:35:34] Yeah.

Thomas [00:35:34] And so I'll try not to talk more than I already have. I just don't know where to go.

Melissa Cariño [00:35:40] We've been all over the place, yeah.

Thomas [00:35:40] We have, we have. And it's beautiful. And so SAFER is Springfield Alliance For Equity and Respect. And they have a decades-long history.

Melissa Cariño [00:35:54] Yeah, 25 years anniversary today. They're a group, a project under CALC, which is Community Alliance of Lane County.

Thomas [00:36:03] They're hiring. CALC is hiring.

Melissa Cariño [00:36:04] Yes, that is true. Yes, indeed. And it's a good organization. So Springfield Alliance For Equity and Respect, I realized we're the grassroots community organizing crew in Springfield, so I needed to connect with them. I shared with them that I was a community organizer as well, and we really tried to figure out how to collaborate while me being inside the city as a staff person, and then them as representing a lot of the progressive community members who deal with a lot of resistance. And there's, you know, people have called SAFER out for certain things. Maybe they're not as diverse, but the work that they're focusing on, the values that they're focusing on align with mine. And for me, that is enough of a reason to get involved. And if I could be instrumental in bringing more people to the table, and joining this movement, and making Springfield even a better and more welcoming place, I'm there. I'm in it.

Thomas [00:37:03] Heck yeah. And white people who want to work towards racial justice, and a world where everybody's safe and valued?

Melissa Cariño [00:37:09] Yes.

[00:37:10] There is totally a place for you. I hope that my participation as a person who believes in these causes, as an activist, never tells somebody that they have no place. It might mean saying, in this room or in this conversation, we've heard a lot from you. You know, sometimes, people of all races and groups, sometimes they get talkative, and sometimes people need encouragement to talk. So, just self-reflection is such an important thing. You know, all the conversations we've had for the ILLUMINATION series, I've felt have been with people who are really willing to introspect. That is something that probably ties into their willingness to do an interview. But everybody should be able to introspect.

And there's just such an importance to balance of your own ego and your own self-reflection. Because everybody, I believe, should be confident, too. I mean, I can't tell everybody how to live their lives. But some people think. Thomas, why are you so big-headed? And it's like, well I want to be confident because I want to model it. For other people from my community, and for other people who are looking at role models. We're all looking at each other to see how we do this existence, this living thing, anyway.

Melissa Cariño [00:38:24] Totally. Totally. I agree, 100% on that.

Thomas [00:38:27] Yeah. And so SAFER goes back to, they actually were involved with the ICE contract?

Melissa Cariño [00:38:36] Yeah, so Springfield Police used to have a contract with ICE. And they were up for renewal maybe in 2017, 2018. And SAFER was one of those instrumental groups that rallied a lot of the immigrant community and immigrant activist community to really speak out at city council meetings. And I believe there was actually several city council meetings where the room was full. And there was not even enough time for everyone to speak, so they'd have to have a continuation. But in the end, I think because the council was hearing directly from folks who were affected and impacted-- and that was a big lift because a lot of folks only spoke Spanish or a different language. So there had to be translation as well. It worked. You know, I think the councilors, some of the councilors were more curious and they wanted to learn more, and met with SAFER organizers to kind of understand that more. And he voted against-- he or she voted against the contract renewal. So, I mean, that is just one example of the work that they've done specifically in the Latinx community. But, I'm Asian. We're also immigrants, too, you know. And I think that sometimes is forgotten, that because there's a large Hispanic, Latino and Latinx community in the U.S. and it's focused as the immigrants. Sometimes Asian immigrants get kind of forgotten, or other immigrants from other countries. So for me, just hearing that SAFER did that, and the city agreed to not renew that contract was powerful. And inspiring, and I think after I heard that, I was like, I want to continue that work that they've started here. And that they're still doing.

Thomas [00:40:22] Wow. You brought up being Asian. Asian is such a big loaded word, you know?

Melissa Cariño [00:40:26] Mm hmm.

Thomas [00:40:27] Am I Asian? I think so. And, you know, the long and short of it is that racial constructions are socially constructed.

Melissa Cariño [00:40:38] Totally.

Thomas [00:40:38] Right? But they have real life implications on how people navigate the world and navigate pain and frustration and community and all these things. But I've told you that I don't know that much about what it is to be Filipino, or a Filipina. And so I want to know about that.

Melissa Cariño [00:40:54] Sure, sure. And I'm glad you're asking that. And I should also share, this is kind of a journey for myself, too. You know, my parents were young immigrants, and I think they were really focused on assimilating us when we were growing up. And I mean, to this point, I used to say my last name was Carino instead of Cariño. When Cariño is the correct version of my last name. But because it was Americanized, we

said Carino. So there was a lot of that internalized oppression stuff going on for me as, as I was growing up. And I think it wasn't until I actually moved to New Mexico, where I was not surrounded by any Filipinos, where people thought, Hey, we are the Philippines? Is that in South America? I'm like, Oh my gosh, look at a map, people. So for me, that was like, whoa. You know, I was surrounded by a lot of Filipinos in the Bay Area, but now not being there, I felt extremely isolated and alone. And it made me realize how much I had it good, being surrounded by my community. So I got homesick. And then I moved to Boston where, you know, a lot of the Filipino community is spread out. And so it's again, feeling that isolation. And I think for me, being not connected to my Filipino community caused me to want to connect with it even more. So just in 2015, I joined an indigenous tribal tour of Mindanao, which is the southern island of the Philippines. It's mostly Muslim. In fact, a lot of Filipinos are actually scared to go there.

Thomas [00:42:27] Wow.

Melissa Cariño [00:42:27] When I said I was going there, family members were like, Are you sure? Are you gonna get kidnapped? And for me, it was about, this is part of your country. This is part of our country. These are part of our people and our history. Let's go learn about them. And yes, there was times when it was uncomfortable. I can't even speak the Filipino language or the slang. I just never learned it. And that was uncomfortable for me because if you showed yourself as being from another country, you were more at risk, when you were in there. But for me, connecting with the indigenous tribes were-- I don't know, it just felt like this intense kind of connection of my roots. But also the fact that we've always been here. These are my ancestors. So I don't know if I'm really answering your question about Filipinos, but I think for me, I've really realized how important it is to connect with my culture, to consider myself Pinay. I am now trying to study Tagalog, which is the national language. My parents speak another dialect which I am going to start learning eventually too, while I'm still trying to speak Spanish in my workplace. So, you know, it's interesting. But being Filipino, I think one thing that I really love is when you're out, just somewhere, anywhere. And you think that person's Filipino, you start looking at each other, you keep eyeing each other. Then you might say, like, Hey, are you Filipino? And then all of a sudden you say yes, and it's like, we're family. I mean, I don't know what their values or politics are. But that sense of just like, Hey, I see you. I see me and you. Let's hang out, you know? And I think that's always been something I've loved. And then, of course, the food.

Thomas [00:44:14] Yes. I was wanting to get there.

Melissa Cariño [00:44:16] Yes, yes, indeed. It's always about the food. And may I say, Maynila Restaurant is in Springfield and it's delicious. They actually cook like my mom cooks. I love my mom's cooking, and so she always gives me stuff to freeze, when I come back from visiting her. Apparently I don't like to cook, apparently, but I love to eat. And I can clean. But yeah, I think that's a lot about it, too.

Thomas [00:44:42] What should I order there? I was thinking about going tonight.

Melissa Cariño [00:44:46] Ooh. I really like their Bikol Express. Yes, that's really good. Do you like a little spicy?

Thomas [00:44:51] Yes. I do.

Melissa Cariño [00:44:53] Yeah. And the food? I've noticed--.

Mimi Nollo [00:44:54] Lumpia.

Melissa Cariño [00:44:54] Yeah, of course, lumpia. But a lot of the things is, what I've noticed about Filipino cuisine is there's not a lot of spiciness. It's more sweet. Have you noticed? I don't know if that's-- at least that's what I've noticed.

Thomas [00:45:07] Or both, sweet with the spicy.

Melissa Cariño [00:45:09] Yes. And that's always the best combination.

Thomas [00:45:12] Mi goreng? Is that a Filipino dish?

Melissa Cariño [00:45:16] Mi goreng, no.

Thomas [00:45:16] That's Thai. Apologies. See, my own ignorance is on display. Recorded forever, because I'm not edit--.

Melissa Cariño [00:45:20] Good food, too. Good food, too, yes. I used to waitress at a Thai restaurant, and one of the best things was that they fed all their employees before each shift and after each shift. And their food was amazing and I gained about 10 pounds.

Thomas [00:45:36] Nice. But there are Filipino noodle dishes...

Melissa Cariño [00:45:36] Yes.

Mimi Nollo [00:45:36] Pancit.

Melissa Cariño [00:45:36] Pancit.

Thomas [00:45:36] I think the noodle might be the number one uniting force in the world.

Melissa Cariño [00:45:42] I agree. Oh, wow. I love it.

Thomas [00:45:46] Ramen, fettucine, like every kind of noodle.

Melissa Cariño [00:45:48] Yes. And it's interesting, pancit is eaten usually on people's birthdays, because it means long life. So, yeah, so that's a little culture. I grew up Catholic. I'm a surviving Catholic. I'm a recovering Catholic, perhaps that?

Thomas [00:46:04] We've had such different conversations about faith. It's really wonderful to see the different perspectives.

Melissa Cariño [00:46:09] Yeah. So it is interesting. I mean, I think a lot of times Filipinos don't necessarily connect with other Asians as much because, one, we were colonized by Spain. You know, it's a different thing. We were colonized by the United States, Japanese, Germans, Portuguese, you know, all these different things. And where was I going with that? Sorry.

Thomas [00:46:30] Different experiences of Filipinos, maybe not quite...

Melissa Cariño [00:46:34] Oh, yeah. Not feeling-- there's even a Facebook group called the Latinos of of Asia. And they're talking about Filipinos, which at the same time makes me feel a little weird because I'm like, Why are we separating ourselves from other Asians and Pacific Islanders? That's where we are. So even making that connection to my identity is really important. Catholicism. A lot of Latin communities and ethnicities grew up Catholic, as well. So there's a lot of those commonalities. But I, for one, you know, it was great. My parents said, Hey, we want you to choose your own religion and decide on it. And when I decided to say, Hey, I'm not choosing a religion, I like all faiths, I'm loving to learn it and be spiritual. And my mom was okay about it, my dad was very sad and disappointed. Because he grew up very heavily Catholic, and he still considers himself a Catholic. So there's that element in the Filipino community as well. What else can I say?

Thomas [00:47:40] Well, I can understand the thing where, oh, you have your kid, and you envision that they're going to be Catholic. And you believe that Catholicism is, you know, insert what you believe here. I'm not going to say what you believe about it. But I think communities in general are especially robust and strong when it's people who have deeply, like, chosen for themselves to be part of it.

Melissa Cariño [00:48:03] Yes. Yes indeed, for sure.

Thomas [00:48:04] You know? You can have some walls that keep people in that might kind of want to leave, but just tear down the walls and let people be where they are, and then when they actually are together still. That's beauty.

Melissa Cariño [00:48:16] Yes. Yeah. I have to say that in high school, I actually took a major religions class, and whatever faith you are out there, I really encourage you to start learning about other faiths. Because that's I think what got me interested, is that all these faiths have different things about it that I really love and appreciate. And I can't just limit myself to one. And everyone's practice is different. So I recommend, I mean, that's another way of learning about other people's cultures. You know, faith is a big part of culture.

Thomas [00:48:43] I went to college in Minnesota, and I had a Global Religions in Minnesota class, and my project I chose to do was on Jainism. J-a-i-n-i-s-m.

Melissa Cariño [00:48:53] I have heard of that one, yes.

Thomas [00:48:54] And they have basically one Jain place of worship in the whole state of Minnesota. It actually is part of a Hindu temple. And one thing that I could get into, one of the main things people know about them is they're very serious about not harming life. So they try not to harm insects and things like that. And really this gentleman, Ram Gada, I was really appreciative of him. Thank you, Ram Gada. I always remember what I learned about Jainism from that. But one story that comes to mind as like, a story of a rural community of people coming together. Very Springfieldy, in a way. Is that unfortunately there were these two young gentlemen who had whatever beliefs they had. They decided to smash up a bunch of statues at the at the Hindu temple where the Jain center was. And this is something that actually, prior to becoming a U.S. Senator, Amy Klobuchar sort of took the case in order to create, like, a peaceful resolution for what would happen. And the church asked for these young gentlemen to be involved with community service.

Melissa Cariño [00:50:00] That's cool.

Thomas [00:50:01] And to understand what they did was deeply hurtful. And their apology was very, what they learned from it was profound.

Melissa Cariño [00:50:07] Yes.

Thomas [00:50:08] And it wasn't all about, lock these people up, they're doomed to be troublemakers forever. It was the Hindu and Jain community coming together in the area and saying, what we believe is that this is a learning opportunity. And I don't know what happened with the statues, whether they were repaired or replaced. Honestly, I don't know. But I'm sure I you could look it up, I think it's near, I don't remember where [Maple Grove], but it's a powerful story. And it's about human redemption and and overcoming these boundaries between one another. Religions, races, cultures.

Melissa Cariño [00:50:39] And I actually draw the connection of the social justice movement about calling out versus calling in. I see what those folks did with the the people who smashed the statues. They called them in. They didn't say like, you're done. We don't want to see you, we don't want to deal with you. They invited them in. And I think that is really something special and important in this work, in social justice work and equity work.

Thomas [00:51:02] And most people that would do something to destroy another person's, something that's significant to another person? Again, it comes back to that, whether we talked about in the community policing topic.

Melissa Cariño [00:51:12] Right.

Thomas [00:51:12] Look at what's really going on, and look at the underlying cause. And because some people are fiscally conservative, it's usually better to solve the root cause, than try to come back on the back end and keep addressing something that is further gone.

Melissa Cariño [00:51:28] It's just putting a Band-Aid on something. Right, and then it's gonna come off. So, yeah. Dealing with the root cause is very important.

Thomas [00:51:34] Absolutely. Some of our conversations have been with people who have been in Springfield for a long time, like decades or generations. And then I also get the benefit of knowing somebody like you, who has been in different places and then chose to be here. And chose to be in this area, Lane County, in this community. So one thing I often like to parse out is the evolution of the community, or what it's been like to be Asian in this community over time. And I still am curious for you about that. You know, maybe it's redundant or something, but,

Melissa Cariño [00:52:09] No, I don't think it is.

Thomas [00:52:10] Just over time, in your experience in this, let's say in Springfield. Did you have an expectation it was gonna be a certain way, and then you show up and it was just like that? Or was it different, you know?

Melissa Cariño [00:52:23] Yeah, that's a really good question. I mean, in the four years that I've been here. Gosh, it's been six years actually since I've been living here. I think I don't feel as unsafe anymore. I think it's been, I said not as unsafe. I feel unsafe at times. But I think it's been about connecting with other folks in the community, specifically people of color, where we would exchange and share our common feelings and frustrations. So

for me, that evolution of just connecting with community helps retain me and sustain me here. You know, I would say in the first two years, I questioned whether I was going to stay here. But until I started meeting folks and connecting with people, I'm invested, you know? I appreciate those who've been here before me and for many, many years and decades. I can only imagine the challenges that they've experienced back then. If I'm experiencing this now, you know. But again, it comes back to just connecting with folks and making your community, finding your community and feeling that sense of belonging.

Thomas [00:53:36] Mmm.

Melissa Cariño [00:53:37] And I think for me, I've been very grateful for the people I've met here, because they have made me feel belonging. Yeah.

Thomas [00:53:46] That's wonderful. I hope that's been true of your experience of city staff, good relationships there, and just people in general throughout the community. And one thing you said was something about previous generations, and what they had to endure. It makes me think that we do get caught up sometimes, I don't accuse you of doing this at all. This idea that positive social change has an inevitability to it. It's just going to happen. Oh, you know, the arc of justice is long and I love that quote, MLK, but it bends toward justice? It bends that way because people are

Melissa Cariño [00:54:20] Pulling, yup.

Thomas [00:54:21] Pulling with their might to bend it that way. So thank you for being involved.

Melissa Cariño [00:54:24] My pleasure.

Thomas [00:54:24] So thank you for being involved. In order to make sure that the future of Springfield, which is something I try to ask people about, is one that can continually be better than it's been.

Melissa Cariño [00:54:36] Definitely.

Thomas [00:54:37] What gives you hope about the future of Springfield, and this community in general?

Melissa Cariño [00:54:42] I feel like there is--

Thomas [00:54:43] Or I shouldn't even I shouldn't even make you talk about hope. How do you feel about the future of it, I guess?

Melissa Cariño [00:54:50] I have lots of hope. I've seen, even just the minute changes or very slow changes since when I was working here, gives me so much hope. And that knowing that there are people who are invested and and passionate about this as well, not just people of color in Springfield, from different agencies. You know, I've worked with people with SUB, Willamalane, the school district. And I also have to say, I really actually miss working in Springfield. My team members and city staff are amazing. So again, knowing those folks and knowing that they're here and that I'm going to still be here too, gives me a lot of hope. And makes me, you know, I hear a lot of folks, a lot of people of color come to this area and check it out. Maybe they come here for school. But a lot of times they don't stay. I want to change that. I want more people to stay and make our

community more and more diverse. And equitable, and people I can connect with. I want to find my chosen fam here.

Thomas [00:55:55] I have had a lot of friends, you know, people of color and white people and all sorts of people that it's like, keep living here, homie! Like, what are you doing? I get that that university is prestigious. Well, we have good universities here, too. And I do think that this is a place where I can understand a lot of the concerns. But but one of the things that I have to push back against is people think there's nothing to do here. People think it's boring. I just don't think that's true. I get that, you know, a Seattle or a San Fran or a New York or Chicago.

Melissa Cariño [00:56:31] Yeah, we've lived in those bigger cities.

Thomas [00:56:32] I get it. I get it. One of the things actually, though, just briefly. In New York, because I was broke as a joke, right? I was a grad student on scholarship and lucky to even be able to be anywhere near that area, economically, I'll just be honest. And I was going through a hard time at the time in general. So I would deal with negative self-talk.

Melissa Cariño [00:56:53] Yes.

Thomas [00:56:54] And I felt that New York as a city had a way of making me feel, if I had a boring or a bad day or a slow day, or a day that just didn't feel fun? It was my fault.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:05] Hmm.

Thomas [00:57:06] It was my fault.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:07] Interesting.

Thomas [00:57:07] Because there's so much to do.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:11] Yes.

Thomas [00:57:11] I can't blame anyone else.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:13] Right.

Thomas [00:57:13] And that's just something that I felt. And here, there just actually is a lot of fun stuff to do. You know, and as someone who cares about the performing arts community, I'm very involved with the WOW Hall in Eugene, but also, you know, we have the Wildish Theater here on Main Street.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:31] I want to see you perform, by the way. I've heard great things.

Thomas [00:57:33] Do you? I love performing.

Melissa Cariño [00:57:37] Excellent.

Thomas [00:57:39] That's something that it's like, I get it. I totally get it. Especially when, like, there's certain-- when you go to a bigger city, there's certain niche groups or cultural groups, for example, that I can understand. But I'm fully onboard with you, in terms of wanting to make this somewhere that's really viable to live for families, and raising kids,

and working class people. You know, and that's something that also goes into economic development, you know? Making sure there's enough good wage jobs in this community.

Melissa Cariño [00:58:07] To sustain folks. Yeah, for sure.

Thomas [00:58:10] Yeah. It's been a wonderful conversation.

Melissa Cariño [00:58:12] Likewise.

Thomas [00:58:13] Is there anything that, because this is about you, any area of life or your journey or your story that you feel we have yet to touch on, that you would like to get into?

Melissa Cariño [00:58:25] I think we touched upon a lot, and I really appreciate this conversation because it made me go introspective as well in many topics. So, no, I just appreciate having this opportunity to be interviewed, and thank you all. For the organizers and the ILLUMINATION event, I'm excited to see it come through.

Thomas [00:58:43] As am I. I'm really grateful to be working with our photographer, Mimi Nolleto. Our consultant, Aimee Yogi. And we want to thank you as well. You know, hopefully if you've watched all of these or listened to all these, you feel well-thanked. Because I try to thank you at the end of all of them. You made it this far. You care about this community, and what Asian-Americans, AAPI folks have to say around here. So thank you for that. And thank you very much, Melissa Cariño, for being here. Take care, everybody.

Melissa Cariño [00:59:14] Take care.

Thomas [00:59:15] Bye-bye!