

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Willie Chacon

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon M. Valadez

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[00:00:08]

Valadez State your full name.

[00:00:10]

Willie Chacon My full name is Jose Guillermo Chacon Portillo.

[00:00:14]

Valadez And your birthdate?

[00:00:15]

Chacon March 19th, 1950.

[00:00:19]

Valadez Chacon -- [Foreign language] How do you want me to call you?

[00:00:26]

Chacon Willie. Willie Chacon.

[00:00:27]

Valadez Willie. Okay.

[00:00:28]

Chacon Yeah. The Commo Nira [assumed spelling] knows me as Willie.

[00:00:29]

Valadez Yeah. Okay. Willie, marital status?

[00:00:34]

Chacon Single.

[00:00:34]

Valadez Single. Okay. So no children?

[00:00:38]

Chacon No. I have two sons.

[00:00:40]

Valadez Two sons. Okay. Tell me about them, sir.

[00:00:42]

Chacon My sons? Well, one of them passed away about five years ago in a car accident.

[00:00:48]

Valadez Okay.

[00:00:49]

Chacon And the other is living very well in Elk Grove, a family, three children. I do happen to have six grandchildren.

[00:00:57]

Valadez Okay.

[00:00:57]

Chacon Three from each son.

[00:00:59]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:00:59]

Chacon Three from each son. And they're doing very well.

[00:01:06]

Valadez Okay. Willie, where were you born and raised?

[00:01:08]

Chacon I was actually born in Chihuahua [foreign language] Chihuahua, the Chihuahua in Mexico. Yeah. Then we immigrated to the United States in 1956, you know, when my father had already been over here in the United States as for several years. And when my parents saved up enough money, we fixed the papers and lived in Juarez for about four or five months while the papers were getting cleared. And then we moved into Arizona. And I began a life of on the ranch.

[00:01:46]

Valadez And until when?

[00:01:48]

Chacon Until 1960, my father had a competitor here in Sacramento, who said there was a lot of work up here. And we moved up here in 1960. It must have been the summer of 1960. My parents always made sure that the school year was over before we did any moves. You know, we were migratory in terms of work. In Arizona I lived in like, it must have been four or five different towns until we landed on a ranch where we lived there for two years. And that was prior to moving to Sacramento.

[00:02:28]

Valadez What did they do? What did your parents do?

[00:02:31]

Chacon My father was basically a ranch hand, ranch hand cattle, horses, pigs, lots of pigs, in a very isolated part of Arizona, Southeast Arizona, in the Cochise County. One school town, no stoplights, but that town, Cochise was about 15 miles from the ranch where we lived, you know? And so my sister and I would walk daily from the ranch to the main road to catch the shuttle, the bus --

[00:03:05]

Valadez The bus, yeah.

[00:03:06]

Chacon -- and take us to school.

[00:03:08]

Valadez `Brothers and sisters?

[00:03:09]

Chacon I have five sisters.

[00:03:11]

Valadez Five sisters. Okay.

[00:03:12]

Chacon Four of whom are still living here in Sacramento. All of my immediate family is here in Sacramento.

[00:03:17]

Valadez They followed you after '60?

[00:03:20]

Chacon No. We all moved here. We were all little. I am the eldest of the family of my siblings. I'm the eldest, and I was 10 years old when we moved to Sacramento.

[00:03:28]

Valadez Oh, okay.

[00:03:29]

Chacon And my sisters were all younger. My mother had all six of us within a 10-year period of time. And my baby sister was born here in Sacramento. She's the only one born here at the old general hospital.

[00:03:46]

Valadez What was life like for you here when you came to Sacramento?

[00:03:51]

Chacon It was very difficult. First of all, having come from a ranch, you should have seen the look on our faces when we came up on Los Angeles coming up Route 99. My goodness, our eyes were as big as silver dollars, you know, to see such a big place. And sure enough, when we descended into LA, we got lost, but we were, you know, quickly directed back onto Highway 99 and made our way up to Sacramento. But in arrival in Sacramento it was very difficult initially, you know, to get shelter, to find, you know, a suitable place near where my father worked. He was employed at a steel foundry, and we lived in that same neighborhood, which happens to be the Fruitridge neighborhood now. And that's where I grew up.

[00:04:48]

Valadez Fruitridge, south of Fruitridge?

[00:04:52]

Chacon Yeah. It would be south of Fruitridge. Yeah. Powerin and Fruitridge Road.

[00:04:56]

Valadez Okay.

[00:04:57]

Chacon Grew up with a group of fellas that we were known as the Diamonds. That was back in the day.

[00:05:06]

Valadez Yeah. Back in the day. Yeah. Anything else about the neighborhood? You lived there until sometimes then you moved out, or you lived there until '68?

[00:05:19]

Chacon We lived there in three different places there in that same neighborhood until we bought a house in the heart of a neighborhood in fact, right next to Max Baer Park.

[00:05:34]

Valadez Okay.

[00:05:35]

Chacon And, well, we lived there until I moved out. In 1968 is when I started going to college. And my first year was at Sacramento City College, 1968 in the fall that I enrolled. And that's when my awareness about Chicanismo began.

[00:06:00]

Valadez Yeah. You met Juanita Ontiveros here?

[00:06:04]

Chacon Not here at the college.

[00:06:07]

Valadez Okay.

[00:06:08]

Chacon I met her in the community.

[00:06:09]

Valadez Oh, okay.

[00:06:11]

Chacon I forget exactly where we met.

[00:06:12]

Valadez Okay.

[00:06:13]

Chacon But there was so much activity going on at that time.

[00:06:15]

Valadez Yes.

[00:06:15]

Chacon It could have been almost anywhere on a march, it could have been at a rally, at a meeting, at the original Concilio.

[00:06:23]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:06:23]

Chacon Yeah.

[00:06:24]

Valadez Okay. We're going to shift over away from the early experiences. Were you in the Mexican American Education Project? That was a master's degree program that was going on in 1968, '69, '70.

[00:06:42]

Chacon No. I wasn't part of that.

[00:06:43]

Valadez Okay.

[00:06:43]

Chacon No.

[00:06:44]

Valadez Were you in EOP or --

[00:06:46]

Chacon Yes. Yes. In fact, that's how I -- what happened was, while we were actively involved in the Movimiento, there were some college students from SAC State, from the university, who were coming around and telling us about education and the importance of education. And they were telling us about a new program that was starting at the university called the Educational Opportunity Program, EOP. And that program would enable us to enter the university system and allow us to become educated. The old saying was that it was time to put down the rifle and pick up the book as we said. And that was in conjunction with knowing that I was a part of a group known as the Brown Berets. So we were being solicited by college students to enter the educational system. And a lot of us did.

[00:07:51]

Valadez And the courses that you took through EOP, did you have courses in culture? Did you take like anthropology or did you take anything in culture?

[00:08:04]

Chacon Yes. I did in fact. And that was prior to, or around the same time that ethnic studies was being instituted. Because I remember taking a class or two but I was trying to follow the program at the same time also trying to let people know that cultural classes were important to us, that we wanted to learn more about ourselves so that we could share that information with others as well. And when I say ourselves, not necessarily our personal selves, but culturally speaking. But I don't believe that ethnic studies was implemented yet, because I remember that later on, a year or two later after that I had enrolled at the university, there was a call for more participation in ethnic studies, which had now been implemented because there was talk about the state complaining that not enough students were being enrolled or were participating in these ethnic studies classes. And we were concerned that the state was going to take classes away, ethnic studies away. So there was a call put out to have students become aware of these classes and to enroll in the classes for two main reasons. One, to learn about yourselves, and two, to keep

ethnic studies going. And we did. By golly, we filled those classes up. Partly as a result, I ended up graduating with about 50 more units than I needed.

[00:09:50]

Valadez Yeah. It was highly motivate. You joined the Berets in 1968.

[00:09:57]

Chacon '69, actually.

[00:09:59]

Valadez '69. Okay.

[00:10:01]

Chacon In 1968, when I started attending here at Sac City College, it was like the height of the movement. There was a lot of activity going on nationwide, you know? And here in Sacramento, there was a lot of activity with regards to the peace movement. The Vietnam War was going full blast. And there were a lot of other students. Many of the hippie lifestyle activities had come from the Bay Area to the Valley, and we were kind of imitating what was going on in San Francisco. And so there were rallies being held here, talking circles where jugs of wine were passed around. And if I remember correctly, there was a group called the Third World Liberation Front. And that was basically an awareness type of group that advocated, you know, self-awareness, community involvement, an end to the Vietnam War. And during that time, I became aware of other groups, you know, in particular groups that related to my culture. And so I wanted to participate in that. And one of the groups that I was very interested in was the Brown Berets. I became aware of them in the winter of '68. And in the spring of '69, I started attending meetings towards that goal of joining the Brown Berets. And I did. I became a member until we disbanded.

[00:11:40]

Valadez Was that through Frank Moniz, or who was the leader of the -- or the leadership in the Berets?

[00:11:49]

Chacon Right. I remember Frank Moniz. He was around during that time. I don't know what ever happened to him. But there were other members who were very aware of what was going on. I say that they were very aware because I was still just learning about myself. I was just learning about the movement and I was trying to find my place. But our first unit leader was Robert Rodriguez.

[00:12:14]

Valadez Okay.

[00:12:15]

Chacon And he was a student at Sac State at the university, and he was one of the members who were recruiting us. And Frank Moniz was one of them also.

[00:12:25]

Valadez Yes.

[00:12:25]

Chacon But Robert Rodriguez was our first unit leader. And then we had meetings and we elected some of the other ministers as we called them.

[00:12:35]

Valadez Yeah. What do you think was the first instance or moment or time, you know, that attracted you to the Chicano Movement? When did that happen? What was the event that pulled you in?

[00:12:54]

Chacon Self-awareness. Self-awareness and pride. Pride was a key factor. I had always had pride in being a part of, like my barrio, for example, and we were very protective of that. That's a whole another story. But carrying that pride with me, and then knowing that there was this movement going on nationwide, and that there was a movement going on here in Sacramento, and in specific a movement with the Chicano theme, that interested me because I knew that I could do two things learn more about myself, and my culture, and my people, and also by doing so, I could in turn help others become aware and perhaps, you know, do other activities.

[00:13:51]

Valadez The word Chicano, when it first began to be used by a larger number of people created sort of dissonance or created not that acceptance in many communities. How did you -- what was your experience with the word Chicano?

[00:14:18]

Chacon It was a good experience. It was a term that individualized me at the same time made me a part of something that was larger than myself. I never let any -- I never thought there was any negativity towards it. I wasn't around people who were negative about it. I knew that there was negativity out there, but it never affected me. My pride and my self-awareness was too strong to let anything, you know, put a dent in that.

[00:14:55]

Valadez Yeah. The civil rights movement was going on, you were saying already, at that time, and you were aware of the different components of the Civil Rights movement?

[00:15:09]

Chacon No. Again, in the beginning I was so ignorant about what was going on. Bear in mind that I had just come from the barrio. I had just come from being a [inaudible] as we call that. You know, in fact, I was so into that, that I didn't think that I was college material. The only reason that I

started attending college was for my parents' sake, you know, because they wanted me to do that. I never thought much of it. I was going through the motions. But when I started attending college and learning not only about culture, but about many other things, you know, literature, science, history, I found out that I liked learning. I found out that I liked education. And I felt that I could do anything because I was smart. You know, I felt that I had the capability to absorb information and digest it and make sense of it. And in turn, you know, put it out there for other people to see.

[00:16:12]

Valadez So you believe that the movement had a lot to do or had something to do that affected you personally?

[00:16:22]

Chacon Absolutely.

[00:16:23]

Valadez You were --

[00:16:23]

Chacon Very, very much. So it was a very personal situation.

[00:16:34]

Valadez What role do you believe that Chicanos played in the movement? In the Chicano movement there were a lot of women that became involved, young women that were going through the same process often as you were. What role do you think they played and, you know, what's your feeling about those roles?

[00:16:58]

Chacon Well like I feel now, you know, I felt then that women Chicanos were equal in every aspect, you know, to the males, to the men. They were supportive of us and we were supportive of them. They did what they could, you know, to help the movement. And we did what we could. It was hand in hand. I believe now that women are just as much in importance as anybody else.

[00:17:37]

Valadez Did you participate in the -- what is it? The Washington Neighborhood Center? Did Berets meet at the Washington Neighborhood Center?

[00:17:50]

Chacon No. We never really met at the Washington Neighborhood Center. But the Washington Center played a big role in the Chicano Movimiento here in Sacramento. It happened to be located in the Washington Neighborhood Center, which at that time anyway, was the largest Latino or Chicano neighborhood in Sacramento. And it also happened to be that many of the Brown Berets lived in that neighborhood. I also lived in that neighborhood for a number of years as a

student. As a student at the university, I lived there for a long time. But the Brown Berets, usually we met initially at the Concilio, which St. Joseph's Center happened to be located also in the Washington Neighborhood Center. And St. Joseph's Center became the original, the first Concilio of Sacramento. And that's where we used to meet initially. Afterwards we would meet at the RCAF headquarters, which was located at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the back in St. Rose anyway, at the St. Rose school. But if I remember correctly, we never met at the Washington Neighborhood Center.

[00:19:10]

Valadez Okay.

[00:19:10]

Chacon Coincidentally, I ended up working at the Washington Center for a while.

[00:19:16]

Valadez And that work, is that where you -- what did you personally get involved with during this time period of the Chicano movement? What do you believe is your contribution or was your contribution to the development of the Chicano movement?

[00:19:40]

Chacon Well, I think --

[00:19:42]

Valadez Start it that way.

[00:19:44]

Chacon I think it's all relative, but, I think the biggest contribution was making myself aware of not only my person, but of my role of what I could do in the community. In addition to being a student and being in the Brown Beret organization, I also participated in other activities such as the Breakfast for Ninos program. At that time, I also helped out with the EOP program. During the second semester as a student at Sac State I became employed by the EOP program as an advisor. I felt that I could benefit the EOP program because I was knowledgeable of many of the incoming students or the students that wanted to come in. We had a program where we were enrolling students who would not qualify otherwise through the front door, so to speak. And so the EOP program was in a position to interview and look at the background of these students in an effort to enroll them.

[00:21:04]

Valadez So you worked in that job, you had that opportunity.

[00:21:08]

Chacon Yes, I did. And I felt very good about that because we did a lot of work in bringing in many, many Chicano students. We didn't have the Migrant Farm Workers program at that time. I think it's called the Puente Program now. I'm not sure.

[00:21:24]

Valadez Puente Camp Program.

[00:21:26]

Chacon We didn't have those programs at that time but we did have the EOP program, and we did the best we could with that.

[00:21:33]

Valadez Who else was working in EOP at that time?

[00:21:36]

Chacon Gosh, we're talking over 40 years ago.

[00:21:39]

Valadez Yeah. I know.

[00:21:40]

Chacon My goodness.

[00:21:40]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:21:41]

Chacon At that time, I think Heliodoro Besera was working with us at that time, but I really can't remember anywhere else. I don't think Justarango was on board yet.

[00:21:54]

Valadez Okay.

[00:21:56]

Chacon Yeah. He came from another town. And during that time Sac State for some reason became very attractive to many students from other cities. And we became a magnet for a lot of activism.

[00:22:12]

Valadez Yeah. Yeah. They came in from Stockton, and Woodland, and Davis, and --

[00:22:18]

Chacon Fresno.

[00:22:19]

Valadez Yeah. Yeah.

[00:22:19]

Chacon San Diego. We have many students from San Diego.

[00:22:23]

Valadez Yeah. San Diego. Yeah. Organizations other than the Brown Berets, what other organizations opened up for you or looked favorable for you?

[00:22:34]

Chacon MEChA. At Sac State as a student, MEChA was a key factor in maintaining the awareness of what's going on in the community, what's going on on campus, how we could improve relations between the students and administration and faculty for that matter. So MEChA was an important organization. Other than MEChA, we had community organizations going on that, you know, we always wanted to keep, you know, in contact with the Concilio, of course, the Washington Center.

[00:23:11]

Valadez Were you involved with the Pinto program?

[00:23:17]

Chacon The Pinto? No. I was never involved with that one.

[00:23:19]

Valadez Yeah. That came in I think '74.

[00:23:23]

Chacon Yeah.

[00:23:24]

Valadez In '74, I came back and the Pinto program was already going on. Drug effort in the community, mental health, LOR, La Familia.

[00:23:38]

Chacon Right.

[00:23:39]

Valadez A lot of those were beginning to find their way out, away from Concilio and establishing themselves.

[00:23:46]

Chacon And I'm glad you mentioned that, because a lot of those organizations I was able to participate with during my tenure at the university, I was a student at the university off and on mind you, for a good 10 years.

[00:24:03]

Valadez Oh, okay.

[00:24:04]

Chacon From like 1969, '70 through 1980. And during that time, I was working at various community based organizations, CBOs as we call them, such as La Familia. I did a six month internship there as part of my education. I used to like to use the term a well-rounded out education. And by that I meant that I was getting the book knowledge at the university, and I was getting practical experience in the community by working with these various organizations. Again LA Familia, the Aquarian Effort at that time, the Aquarian Effort. Gosh, which other ones?

[00:24:46]

Valadez Tell me a little bit about that effort, the Aquarian Effort.

[00:24:50]

Chacon Okay.

[00:24:50]

Valadez What was that about?

[00:24:51]

Chacon The Aquarian Effort? Well again, bear in mind that during those years, there was a lot of drug activity going on.

[00:24:58]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:24:58]

Chacon As a consequence there were many tragedies that were happening. And the effort was in a position to help people who wanted to be helped to learn about the effects of what was going on in the, in the community. You know, the effects of drugs on the body, the effects of drugs on the mind, and the effects of drugs on the family, on job status. And we were hoping that by this awareness people would be able to make a more educated decision on the use or abuse of drugs.

[00:25:41]

Valadez Was this part of Concilio? Was it a separate program?

[00:25:44]

Chacon Oh, the Aquarian Effort? Oh, it was a totally separate program.

[00:25:47]

Valadez Oh, separate program.

[00:25:49]

Chacon Yeah. It was totally funding, was separate from the Concilio. At that time, Concilio was more political because it was struggling. It was wanting to get off the ground and build itself into a multi-faceted organization. It wanted to be more comprehensive in its services. And they had to play the game of politics in order to get the funding and understanding of government. But the effort was more main street, so to speak in that it worked with everybody. We were successful though, in having the Aquarian Effort to understand that culture was an important part of recovery. And we were able to implement the minority project with the Aquarian Effort. This happened a few years later but we were able to implement a minority project whereby we had counselors of various cultures that would work with client that appeared to benefit from having a cultural worker.

[00:27:07]

Valadez Yeah. I remember hearing of the Aquarian Effort but, you know, this is the first time I'm hearing more detail on it.

[00:27:14]

Chacon They're still around. In fact, they're bigger and stronger. They dropped the Aquarian part of it. They are now the Effort. But I worked with them on two different occasions in 1970 and again, in 1983 through '86. So I was able to contribute.

[00:27:36]

Valadez So the Chicano Movement changed your consciousness from how it had been before you went to Sac State. It's a question. Did the Chicano Movement change your consciousness from the way you used to think, the way you used to be before you went to Sac State and after you were there for a while?

[00:28:05]

Chacon Did it change my consciousness before I attended Sac State? The Chicano Movement.

[00:28:11]

Valadez After you were at Sac State and got involved in a lot of these things, your consciousness changed from the way it was before you went to college?

[00:28:22]

Chacon Well, yes, it did. Yes, it did. And I think one of the biggest changes was that I found out that by joining these organizations I could help in a larger sense. As an individual in a community based organization, I was able to help maybe one-on-one, but if I joined an organization, I could affect

more people. And that was my goal. My goal was for some reason, I ended up in the field of social work. And I think that the Chicano Movement helped me to make that decision, that I wanted to help. And one of the things that the Chicano Movement made me aware of is that I could affect more people by joining organizations.

[00:29:18]

Valadez Yeah. That's in fact one of the other questions, you know, that if the Chicano Movement had influenced your career decision, or what became your career, and you're saying yes.

[00:29:33]

Chacon Well, yes, it did. Yes, it did.

[00:29:35]

Valadez So you became a social worker?

[00:29:37]

Chacon Yes. That is my career, a social worker, 35 years. Twenty-five with the County of Sacramento and another 10 or 12 years in the community. Again the Aquarian Effort or the Effort, LA Familia were just two of the programs that I worked with. I also worked with about a half-dozen different community-based organizations during those 10 years that I was a student at the university so that when I did graduate I felt I was pretty well prepared.

[00:30:12]

Valadez Yeah. Yeah. You had a, well-rounded like you were saying --

[00:30:17]

Chacon Education.

[00:30:18]

Valadez -- experience already education. Yeah. Excellent. How many years as social worker?

[00:30:24]

Chacon As a social worker, I would put it at 35 plus years.

[00:30:27]

Valadez Wow.

[00:30:28]

Chacon Thirty-five plus.

[00:30:28]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:30:28]

Chacon Yeah.

[00:30:28]

Valadez That's excellent.

[00:30:29]

Chacon I retired with 25 years with the County of Sacramento, both the Department of Human Assistance and the Department of Health and Human Services.

[00:30:38]

Valadez Yeah. Looking back at the Chicano Movement, how it began, how it developed, expanded, what do you see as being unresolved issues, unresolved problems, or things that are still going on that really need greater focus in the community?

[00:31:10]

Chacon Wow. Just one.

[00:31:12]

Valadez As many, you know, like --

[00:31:16]

Chacon I think there are still several unresolved issues going on. You know, the primary one is what's going on right now with the police brutality, for example, that's happening and is being very well publicized by the media in that many, many instances of police brutality against the Black community, which is unfortunate. And I'm using the Black community as an example of what is actually happening to the Latino community as well. The Chicano community is still suffering in great amounts with what institutional racism, with the miseducation or mistraining of police forces, with the underfunding of certain programs organizations that could benefit many cultural groups. But I think the biggest part that needs more attention is the evolution of a mindset that is still not accepting of people as human beings instead of people of different colors or different cultures.

[00:32:45]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:32:46]

Chacon It's still very prevalent. It's unfortunate. But I think it needs more attention.

[00:32:52]

Valadez In the area of social work, what do you see as still being a harsh reality for Chicano Mexican communities? What are some needs that you see with that particular sector? Things that are going on that are not being effectively dealt with or could be dealt with more effectively with a different mindset?

[00:33:28]

Chacon Well, with regard to social work, many strides have been made, you know, towards addressing the needs of various cultural groups, with language workers, cultural workers now on board. That's a tough question, you know?

[00:33:48]

Valadez Yes.

[00:33:48]

Chacon What else could be done? Again --

[00:33:52]

Valadez It's like I have a friend that's in Child Protective Services. And it's like still the mindset is there from the more traditional to where the tendency is to be abusive on children, you know, sexual, verbal, physical, where the father is still playing his very physical role as opposed to, you know, another kind of father. You know, like the tendency for that to still be very prevalent where social workers in that area are having to deal with that issue, you know, often, you know, still, you know, where we should have already figured out that, you know, we got to change that mindset, that the mindset is still there.

[00:34:55]

Chacon I agree. I agree. I'll take it even a step further. You know, I feel that there are social workers that have no business being social workers. Unfortunately, either by choice or by sheer ignorance, they failed to understand the needs of certain, you know, cultural groups. Again, yeah, there are some stereotypes being used, you know, by certain workers. They may be just the individuals, but I think that it's still prevalent not only here in Sacramento, but, you know, throughout the country for that matter. I think that some social workers, you know, fail to realize the importance of understanding, you know?

[00:35:50]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:35:51]

Chacon It happens to be that my last assignment was with CPS, my last two years was with CPS, not by choice. That was a result of the poor economy that happened in 2009. The county suffered a great loss in funding. And as a result I lost the position that I had been working in, and I was reassigned to the Children's Protective Services. And I did see a lot of things that were going on that I didn't agree with but as the warrior that I always wanted to be, you know, I followed protocol and I try to, you know, make other people aware of what I thought was a better course of action.

[00:36:45]

Valadez How do you think the Chicano Movement impacted the community here in Sacramento?

There's been Chicano movements up and down the California, and New Mexico, and Texas, and everywhere where there's large populations and people got involved that way. How do you believe that the movement affected life here in Sacramento?

[00:37:15]

Chacon Oh, it was a gradual but total change. It was about time. It was inevitable not only because it was a sweeping movement, but because this Sacramento being the capital of California, there were certain expectations put on this city and the Chicanos that live here that we needed to step up and get involved. I think there was a total sea change at least for segments of Sacramento. Again, you were correct in that other segments were not appreciative of what the Chicano Movement was doing. But for the ones that did appreciate what was happening it was a big change, again, not only personally but politically, community wide, organizational wide, artistic wise.

[00:38:20]

Valadez Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It seems like the artist left a big impact in the governance with at least two Jose Cerna and Patino rising all the way to the top as far as they could do, and their short lives, because they went early.

[00:38:42]

Chacon Absolutely.

[00:38:43]

Valadez A lot of people, a lot of the early activists have passed away. Can you remember or identify people that were with you and participated in things and left an impression on you about, you know, those times?

[00:39:04]

Chacon Gosh, there were so many. You know, again, that pride that I had made me smile every time I saw another Latino another Chicano. You know, I was for anything that would lift us up, you know? And there were many, many people I feel that were doing just that, you know, lifting us up. I like to believe that I was part of that. But there were so many influences in my life at that time you were one of them. I remember taking classes with you, and I remember the awareness and the joy and pride that I experienced in just being a part of that class. I belonged, you know, I could claim certain things that were a part of everybody else. And I forgot your question again.

[00:39:58]

Valadez It had to do with the impact of the movement in Sacramento, you know?

[00:40:05]

Chacon Okay.

[00:40:05]

Valadez As compared to other places from your perspective, from how you saw Sacramento before the movement got going, and the aftermath of the movement, some change has taken place. How do you feel about that? You know, do you think that it has affected life here in Sacramento, so that life is today a little bit different from --

[00:40:34]

Chacon I would say things have changed significantly in Sacramento because of the Chicano Movement. We traveled, you know, we went to other cities as well to participate in rallies like the LA's high school blowouts. We'd go down there to support the youth in their activities. And as a Brown Beret, we were called to various other parts of the state to support, you know, various activities. But to answer your question, I think we were very much just like any other city. One of the things that the Chicano Movement did was to unify the cities. Before the Chicano Movement cities and even more particular barrios, I thought there was no life outside the barrios. You know, that alone education. But when the movement started happening, and then I became aware through education and through involvement in the community, I learned that other cities were doing the same thing and I learned that other cities were accepting of other cities. We were accepting of each other. Before, not only were barrios within the city separate, you know, but cities were separate. You know, but after the Chicano Movement, not only were the barrios in the city more unified, that's something that the Brown Berets did, is to unify many of the barrios by making them aware and empowering them and letting them know that their pride was justifiable and that they could transfer that barrio pride into Chicano pride as a whole peoples. And so the cities were unified in that same manner.

[00:42:36]

Valadez Yeah. future challenges for the Chicano community. What do you believe are still future challenges or challenges that are still facing Mexican and Chicano communities today?

[00:42:49]

Chacon Oh, I think there's challenges in every aspect of life, you know, whether it be cultural, political, legal, community oriented, every aspect of life in the health systems, in the correctional systems. We still are lacking, you know? I think that we Chicanos are still overrepresented in the correctional system. I think that we're underrepresented in the educational system. I think that we're underrepresented in the political system. Did I already say that? The political system. But we have strides to make in every aspect of life here in the United States.

[00:43:40]

Valadez You know, I remember meeting you before in that course that you had with me. I remember you as a junior Beret or maybe you were a --

[00:43:57]

Chacon Yeah. I was already a Brown Beret, right?

[00:43:59]

Valadez You were a Brown Beret.

[00:44:00]

Chacon I was never in the Junior Beret.

[00:44:04]

Valadez And at the Lincoln Christian Center, when they had that shootout over there --

[00:44:08]

Chacon Oh boy.

[00:44:09]

Valadez -- and the big desmate that took place. But it was like -- to me, it's like the youth were so critical in providing a different identity for what we were struggling for. We were struggling at many different areas and levels. And this is not part of the question, but it's something that I want you to walk away from here with that to me you represented that part of that youth that was going to mature into something that would be uniquely different. We weren't Mexicans, we weren't Whites, we were the fusion of two cultures in our own unique way. Those that came from the barrios, from the local areas here had been part of that klika that needed to be formed in defense of their barrios. But with the Beret forming, you know, it seems like that was a good way to be able to break down the barriers between the different gangs or clusters or klikas and the creation of another kind of identity that gave body, and spirit, and hope to a whole new generation. I'd like for you to put your cap because I saw you brought it in earlier. I'd like for you to put it on for us to close this interview with. I have not found anyone who still had the hat, the beret, and who could talk about the symbols that are on that hat. That to me, I had already been, you know, teaching four years elementary, came here, you know, went through the Mexican American project in '68, had to transform that. At least we felt we needed to create the kind of organization and program, academic program, that would initiate and instigate a different consciousness. And you represented that for me. I will always remember your image as a beret and I remember, I think I gave you a ride home that night or something, you and a couple of other people that were all together. Would you put it on and do us the honor of telling us a little bit about the symbol and about the pledge?

[00:46:51]

Chacon Absolutely. And thank you, by the way. I take that as a compliment. I was very proud when I joined the Brown Berets. You know, again, I was trying to make a difference. And bear in mind that when the Berets were formed it was in an effort to -- it was a result of a lot of the police brutality that was going on at that time. And a lot of us didn't have the patience that our leader César Chávez had with the nonviolent movement. We were not there in an effort to be violent, but we were there in an effort to protect and to prevent violence from happening. There were some unfortunate circumstances where violence did occur, that Lincoln Center was one example. But again, I feel that the Brown Berets were a unifying force. Not only the various barrios, but also the community as a whole. We were viewed very well by the community. We weren't looked upon as thugs or gangsters. We were looking upon as an arm of the Chicano Movement. And we were called to perform any activities to that effect. The patch that I have

here, this is one of the original patches and you'll notice that it does have the cross and then two rifles are going against the cross, and then the cap on top, and then with the words la causa that became a rallying cry for a lot of us. You know, "Que Viva La Causa." I also want to point out that behind the patch -- oh, well, first of all, next to the patches, the Farm Worker's Eagle. That was always a big part of my life. And even though I was a Brown Beret, I adhere very much to Chavez, you know, way of dealing with the Chicano Movement. But I also wanted to point out that behind the patch I have La Virgencita. And La Virgencita was always a big part of my life as well. And she continues to be so today. As well as the patch. But I always carry that behind me because that was an important part and it was also my protection. But yes, I'm very proud to put this cap on, and I still wear it from time to time. When we have the Cesar Chavez March in the springtime, and when we have other activities, I wear it proudly.

[00:49:47]

Valadez All right.

[00:49:47]

Chacon How's that?

[00:49:48]

Valadez All right, man.

[00:49:50]

Chacon Back in the day.

[00:49:51]

Valadez Yeah.

[00:49:52]

Chacon Yeah. It is something that's important to me even to this day. I'm 65 years old, I'm proud to say that, and I'm proud to say that I'm still a warrior in the Chicano Movement.

[00:50:05]

Valadez Yeah. Last part of the last question says do you plan on staying active? Now that you're retired and all of that, you still see yourself as being an activist of sorts?

[00:50:21]

Chacon Yes, I do. In fact I'm still active to this day in other ways as well because I showed you La Virgencita de Guadalupe, spiritualism has become very important in my life. That's something else by the way, that I like to credit to the Chicano Movement. It allowed me to search for spiritualism. And one of the things that I started to do 35 years ago, I started to participate in a ceremony that's called the Sun Dance. It happens to be a North American tribal ceremony, but it's very akin to what I was looking for in the road to spiritualism. And so 35 years ago I started dancing and I still am. I still am. It happens every summer. It's happening right now as we speak.

And to me that spiritualism I carry with me to other groups that we have here in Sacramento. We have groups that participate in temazcal, that's a sweat lodge as it's better known sweat lodges, Inipis, as we say in the Sioux language. And that's something that I think is important now because many of our youth don't have that foundation of spiritualism. And so I try to pass that on, you know, to whoever wants to listen. So in that respect, I'm very glad to be here as part of this oral Chicano history project. To me, this is something that I wanted to do as a contribution. I wish there was more I could do and I hope that there is. I continue to have that spark that I got back in 1968, and that is that I advocate for anything that will further our people in any of the circles that I mentioned earlier, political, educational, health et cetera. I was happy the other day when I was talking with a new neighbor that moved in and I asked him if he had attended the university, and he said yes. And I asked him what his concentration with what his major was. And it was ethnic studies. That made me feel good because now ethnic studies is still around, and now people are graduating and teaching ethnic studies because that was their major. And that's like the fourth person that I've met in the last 30 or so years that has told me that they are now teaching ethnic studies, and that they're glad at it. And then when I tell them that I helped to keep ethnic studies going back in the day, they thanked me. And that makes me feel even better.

[00:53:25]

Valadez Yes.

[00:53:25]

Chacon You know, so yes. Absolutely. There's still a lot of work to do. Lots of work to do. And I intend to do whatever I can.