

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Sam Rios Jr.

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Bernardo Rios

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[00:00:08]

Q Question one, what's your full name?

[00:00:11]

Sam Rios Jr. Sam Rios Jr.

[00:00:12]

Q Yeah. This is a quiz, so you think you're going to pass?

[00:00:15]

Rios Yeah.

[00:00:16]

Q Yeah? You know enough about yourself that you're going to pass?

[00:00:20]

Rios Yeah, I think so.

[00:00:21]

Q Yeah. All right. What's your birthday?

[00:00:26]

Rios 3/4/31.

[00:00:28]

Q All right. Say it in the month and the day and the year.

[00:00:33]

Rios Fourth of March, 1931.

[00:00:36]

Q All right. What's your marital status?

[00:00:40]

Rios Married with three children.

[00:00:42]

Q Yeah. Married? Happily married?

[00:00:46]

Rios Yes.

[00:00:47]

[Laughter]

[00:00:49]

Q All right. You have three kids?

[00:00:51]

Rios Yeah.

[00:00:51]

Q All right. Are you sure?

[00:00:56]

Rios I've got --

[00:00:57]

Q What about your first marriage?

[00:00:59]

Rios My first marriage, I got five.

[00:01:02]

Q Okay. And then the second?

[00:01:04]

Rios Three.

[00:01:05]

Q So how many total?

[00:01:06]

Rios Eight.

[00:01:07]

Q All right. You passed the first quiz.

[00:01:10]

[Laughter]

[00:01:11]

Q That's level number 1.

[00:01:12]

Rios All right.

[00:01:13]

Q Do you think you're ready for level number two though?

[00:01:15]

Rios Yeah.

[00:01:17]

Q So now we're going to talk about your childhood.

[00:01:20]

Rios Okay.

[00:01:20]

Q Yeah. Was that a long time ago?

[00:01:22]

Rios Yeah.

[00:01:23]

Q Yeah. All right. But you remember a lot of stuff, right?

[00:01:26]

Rios Most of it.

[00:01:26]

Q Most of it, all right. Well, where do you consider home? Where were you born and raised?

[00:01:32]

Rios San Francisco, California.

[00:01:34]

Q Yeah. Where in San Francisco?

[00:01:35]

Rios The Mission District.

[00:01:36]

Q The Mission District?

[00:01:38]

Rios Yeah.

[00:01:38]

Q Where is that in relationship in the city. What's it close by? Like, what was around your neighborhood and stuff?

[00:01:48]

Rios Dolores Park.

[00:01:49]

Q Dolores Park was by there?

[00:01:51]

Rios Yeah.

[00:01:52]

Q Yeah. What else? Do you remember anything else that was around your neighborhood?

[00:01:58]

Rios The Mexican district.

[00:02:00]

Q Yeah. It was a full of Mexicans?

[00:02:02]

Rios Yeah.

[00:02:03]

Q Okay. So you fit right in then?

[00:02:05]

Rios Yeah.

[00:02:05]

Q All right. [Laughter] All right. What did your parents do for a living? What did your mom do?

[00:02:13]

Rios They were migrant workers.

[00:02:14]

Q Yeah. Your mom?

[00:02:18]

Rios She worked in the fields.

[00:02:20]

Q Yeah. All right. And so, did you grow up with brothers and sisters?

[00:02:25]

Rios Yeah.

[00:02:26]

Q In the Mission District?

[00:02:27]

Rios Yep.

[00:02:28]

Q Yeah. Who were they?

[00:02:30]

Rios Brothers --

[00:02:31]

Q Or how many brothers and sisters did you have?

[00:02:33]

Rios I had seven brothers, and five sisters.

[00:02:38]

Q That's a lot.

[00:02:39]

Rios Yeah.

[00:02:40]

Q Yeah. Do you think you can name them all?

[00:02:43]

Rios Brother John -- no, Brother Pete, Brother John --

[00:02:52]

Q Bill.

[00:02:54]

Rios Bill.

[00:02:56]

Q Mm-hmm.

[00:03:00]

Rios George.

[00:03:02]

Q Yep.

[00:03:03]

Rios Abel.

[00:03:04]

Q Yep.

[00:03:05]

Rios Jesse.

[00:03:06]

Q And what about, there's one more you're forgetting. He's on the Walls of Washington, isn't he?

[00:03:12]

Q Lupe.

[00:03:13]

Rios Brother Lupe.

[00:03:14],

Q Yeah. And what about your sisters?

[00:03:19],

Rios Sister Fel.

[00:03:20]

Q Mm-hmm.

[00:03:21]

Rios Sister Lucy. Sister Margaret. Sister Jenny. Lydia.

[00:03:32]

Q Okay. And so, where are you on the list? Are you the oldest, middle, youngest?

[00:03:39]

Rios I'm third.

[00:03:41]

Q Third?

[00:03:42]

Rios Yeah.

[00:03:43]

Q Okay. Third oldest?

[00:03:44]

Q You're the oldest son.

[00:03:49]

Rios I'm the oldest son.

[00:03:50]

Q I'm the oldest son?

[00:03:52]

Rios Yeah.

[00:03:52]

Q Okay. So who did you hang out with when you were little? Which one of your brothers and sisters? Did you have any running partners?

[00:04:03]

Rios Me and Pete.

[00:04:04]

Q You and Pete?

[00:04:05]

Rios Yeah.

[00:04:05]

Q You were running partners?

[00:04:07]

Rios Yeah. Me and Fel we're closer though.

[00:04:10]

Q Oh, yeah. Tell me a story about you and Pete or you and Fel when you were little.

[00:04:16]

Rios Pete was the fastest guy on the field. No matter whether we played baseball, football, he was Mr. Speed.

[00:04:27]

Q He was quick?

[00:04:30]

Rios He was fast.

[00:04:32]

Q Not faster than you though.

[00:04:33]

Rios Yeah, much faster.

[00:04:35]

Q Yeah. So did you guys play on the same team in the neighborhood?

[00:04:45]

Rios Yeah. Pete and I were always on the same team, but they would split me, John, and Pete. They wouldn't let us all three play on the same football team.

[00:05:00]

Q Why is that?

[00:05:01]

Rios Because we would beat them all. [Laughter] So either Pete or John had to be on the other team with me. And we were championship ping pong players, championship marble player, championship -- I can't think of what the --

[00:05:34]

Q Jacks.

[00:05:35]

Rios Jacks. We'd beat my sisters.

[00:05:40]

Q In jump rope?

[00:05:43]

Rios Playing jacks.

[00:05:44]

Q Oh, yeah. Did mostly girls play jacks or what?

[00:05:49],

Rios Yeah, mostly girls played.

[00:05:51]

Q But you played too?

[00:05:52]

Rios Well, we played too.

[00:05:55]

Q That's good. What about Fel, what did you guys do together?

[00:06:01]

Rios Fel was my running partner.

[00:06:03]

Q Oh, yeah?

[00:06:04]

Rios Everywhere we went, we went together.

[00:06:11]

Q So what did you guys do as kids? Did you just go around the neighborhood?

[00:06:15]

Rios Yeah, pretty much so.

[00:06:18]

Q Yeah. Did you guys get into trouble or do you remember a story from when you guys were young?

[00:06:24]

Rios No.

[00:06:26]

Q No? You don't have any stories with Fel? Do you remember anything about hanging out when you guys were kids?

[00:06:38]

Rios I can't recall one right now.

[00:06:40]

Q No, all right. What was it like growing up in the Mission District?

[00:06:51]

Rios I used to run the streets a lot.

[00:06:53]

Q Yeah. What years was this?

[00:06:56]

Rios Just before World War II.

[00:07:01]

Q Uh-huh. What was the city like? What was the neighborhood like?

[00:07:06]

Rios 24th and Mission?

[00:07:08]

Q Mm-hmm.

[00:07:10]

Rios A lot of fruit stands and [inaudible] and vendors. Open stand market.

[00:07:28]

Q What was the music like back then?

[00:07:35]

Rios Mostly polkas and American music, Western. My parents would play Western music because that was the only music they understood or they would be playing, on records, operas.

[00:08:07]

Q Operas?

[00:08:08]

Rios Yeah.

[00:08:09]

Q Did your mom like opera?

[00:08:12]

Rios Yeah.

[00:08:12]

Q Or was that the only records that you could get?

[00:08:19]

Rios No. We got other records.

[00:08:22]

Q Yeah. What records did you like as a kid?

[00:08:27]

Rios Roll out the barrel, roll out the barrel of fun. Roll out the barrel, we've got the blues on the run.
Zing boom and tararrel da da da da da. That's the way we roll the barrel and we all have fun.

[00:08:51]

Q You like that one?

[00:08:52]

Rios Yeah.

[00:08:52]

Q That's the one you remember the most?

[00:08:58]

Rios No. [Foreign Language]

[00:09:16]

Q Yeah. So there was some good music when you're young?

[00:09:20]

Rios Yeah, Mexican music.

[00:09:21]

Q Yeah. Was there always music in your house or what was the environment like in your house? Was it like our house with kids running in and out all the time, friends visiting and stuff or no?

[00:09:34]

Rios Mostly family visits.

[00:09:38]

Q Yeah. Was it a busy house, do you think, or quiet?

[00:09:43]

Rios It was a busy house. My mama was cooking. My dad -- when we had company, the men sat in the parlor and the women sat in the kitchen. And so I was a little teacher when I was -- I was always hanging around the kitchen with the women. So they gave me a nickname Pangingi.

[00:10:20]

Q Uh-huh.

[00:10:22]

Rios Which is the card game you play with -- you don't play with a full deck.

[00:10:28]

Q Oh, is it like --

[00:10:29]

Rios Rummy.

[00:10:31]

Q Like rummy or euchre?

[00:10:32]

Rios Yeah.

[00:10:33]

Q Yeah. And so the ladies used to play that, all the women?

[00:10:38]

Rios Yeah. The women used to play. That's where I got my nickname, pangingi. Pangingi is a card game.

[00:10:46]

Q And you used to hang around?

[00:10:48]

Rios Yeah. I used to hang around the kitchen with my mom, my aunts, and my grandmothers.

[00:10:59]

Q Why did you hang around in the kitchen? Why not with the old guys?

[00:11:09]

Rios I did that too.

[00:11:10]

Q Yeah. But you liked the kitchen more?

[00:11:12]

Rios Yeah. The kitchen was warmer.

[00:11:14]

[Laughter]

[00:11:16]

Q So --

[00:11:16]

Rios Besides, that's where all the food was.

[00:11:19]

[Laughter]

[00:11:22]

Q So you stayed close to the food?

[00:11:24]

Rios Yeah.

[00:11:25]

Q And where it was warmer?

[00:11:28]

Rios Yeah.

[00:11:29]

Q Yeah. What kind of food was there in the kitchen and stuff or in your neighborhood? What'd you used to eat all the time?

[00:11:36]

Rios Avena for breakfast, avena for lunch, avena for dinner?

[00:11:41]

Q Yeah. What's avena?

[00:11:43]

Rios Oatmeal.

[00:11:44]

Q So you had oatmeal for breakfast?

[00:11:46]

Rios Yeah. Sometimes, I would have oatmeal three times a day because we didn't have much. My mom had athenas full of flour, Athena full of rice, athena full of beans. Athena was an old tin containers. So we had athena for every occasion.

[00:12:23]

Q Oh. So there wasn't a lot of food then, huh?

[00:12:28]

Rios No.

[00:12:29]

Q What did you do for money then? Did you try to get money in the streets?

[00:12:33]

Rios Yeah, I used to sell rags. I used to sell bottles. I used to sell old clothes. There was a company right across the street where me and Fel and Pete, we would go around the neighborhood collecting bottles, rags and we would take it to this place, a recycling place where they recycled old clothes. So me and Fel, we had a wagon and we put Pete in the wagon and we would take him from one plant to another collecting oil rags. Pretty soon, they got to know us and the workers would save the rags for us, the oil rags, and we would collect them and we'd sell them to this recycling place. So we would get enough money to buy some avena, some sugar and that was it.

[00:14:12]

Q And you guys were -- so you guys were survivors then, huh?

[00:14:15]

Rios Yeah.

[00:14:15]

Q Yeah?

[00:14:15]

Rios I guess so.

[00:14:17]

Q And so, did you live your whole life in the Mission or did you live other places too?

[00:14:24]

Rios No. When I was I think 10, I got into trouble in the Mission District so they put me in foster care. And I was 10. It was 1941.

[00:14:39]

Q Is that right when the war was?

[00:14:41]

Rios When the war started. And I spent six years living on a chicken ranch in Petaluma, California.

[00:14:50]

Q Yeah. With a foster family?

[00:14:52]

Rios Yeah.

[00:14:52]

Q Yeah. So how was that? You were in the city, did you like the farm life?

[00:14:58]

Rios No, I didn't like the farm life at all. It was too much work.

[00:15:03]

Q Yeah?

[00:15:03]

Rios We got up 5 o'clock in the morning, we went to bed 11 o'clock at night. We worked all day.

[00:15:11]

Q Oh. Did you go to school there too?

[00:15:13]

Rios I went to Petaluma Junior High after I went to St. Vincent's, a Catholic school.

[00:15:22]

Q How was Catholic school?

[00:15:29]

Rios Catholic school was hard. But I was able to get a better all-around education in Catholic school than I did when I transferred to Petaluma Junior High School.

[00:15:47]

Q Yeah. Do you think you learned a lot in the Catholic school?

[00:15:50]

Rios I must have because, when I was at Catholic school, I was a C student and, as soon as I transferred to the public school, I was an A student.

[00:16:03]

[Laughter]

[00:16:06]

Q So the nuns helped you out, all the sisters at the Catholic school?

[00:16:11]

Rios Yeah. They were tough though.

[00:16:12]

Q Yeah. Do you remember any of their names?

[00:16:15]

Rios Sister Teresa.

[00:16:16]

Q Yeah.

[00:16:17]

Rios That's the only one I can remember.

[00:16:20]

Q What did she teach you?

[00:16:20]

Rios Math and art.

[00:16:23]

Q Mm-hmm. And so you think that helped you?

[00:16:33]

Rios I didn't realize it at the time, but they were preparing me for life.

[00:16:38]

Q Oh, is that right?

[00:16:40]

Rios Because, when I was in Catholic school, I was taking courses that wouldn't have been available to me. So like, I had algebra in the 7th grade.

[00:16:57]

Q That's early.

[00:17:02]

Rios Yeah. Where were we?

[00:17:04]

Q At the Catholic school. So what did you do after Petaluma?

[00:17:12]

Rios I ran away.

[00:17:14]

[Laughter]

[00:17:19]

Q Why did you run away?

[00:17:21]

Rios Because Fel ran away.

[00:17:22]

Q Where was Fel?

[00:17:24]

Rios She was in Ukiah.

[00:17:25]

Q In foster care --

[00:17:26]

Rios The Albertinum.

[00:17:27]

Q -- too? She was in foster care too?

[00:17:29]

Rios Yeah.

[00:17:30]

Q What year was this?

[00:17:32]

Rios Nineteen forty one.

[00:17:34]

Q Yeah. So --

[00:17:36]

Rios They took Fel, Pete, Bill, and Lucy to the Albertinun in Ukiah, California and they sent me to Petaluma.

[00:17:52]

Q Why were you separate?

[00:17:55]

Rios I don't know.

[00:17:58]

Q Yeah. So then, how did you know they ran away then?

[00:18:03]

Rios We used to write letters to each other.

[00:18:06]

Q Okay.

[00:18:07]

Rios And Fel was the first one that she ran away from foster care, the Albertinum.

[00:18:19]

Q And you guys all went back to San Francisco?

[00:18:25]

Rios Yeah.

[00:18:26]

Q Yeah. And then?

[00:18:29]

Rios To the housing projects in San Francisco.

[00:18:32]

Q Yeah. And then, what high school did you go to? Did you go to high school then?

[00:18:38]

Rios Yeah. I went to Mission High.

[00:18:39]

Q Mission High. And you were an A student then?

[00:18:42]

Rios Yeah, I was an A student then.

[00:18:44]

Q Okay. And you played sports?

[00:18:48]

Rios Football.

[00:18:49]

Q Yeah.

[00:18:50]

Rios And track.

[00:18:51]

Q Okay. And then, what about after high school, what happened?

[00:18:56]

Rios I joined the service.

[00:18:58]

Q Yeah. Did anybody else join the service in your family?

[00:19:01]

Rios Yeah. My brother Pete was in the Airborne, my brother John was in the Air Force, my brother Bill was in the Army, my brother Lupe was in the military.

[00:19:22]

Q But, Sam, you were the first in the family, males in the family, to join the service?

[00:19:30]

Rios I didn't join, they drafted me.

[00:19:33]

[Laughter]

[00:19:34]

Q You didn't want to go?

[00:19:37]

Rios No.

[00:19:37]

Q No. Wasn't your father in the service?

[00:19:39]

Rios Yeah.

[00:19:40]

Q Yeah. So when they drafted you, you didn't want to go?

[00:19:47]

Rios No. In fact, when I got drafted, I went and joined the Air Force because I called my dad, I said, "I just got a draft notice." And he told me I had so many days to sign up for one of the other branches other than the Army. He spent -- I forget how many years. He was a military guy with the National Guard, but he told me to join the Navy or join the Air Force, but stay out of the Army.

[00:20:33]

Q Why is that?

[00:20:34]

Rios Because, according to him, there were going to be a lot of people who were going to get killed.

[00:20:40]

Q Was he right?

[00:20:42]

Rios Yeah. Korea was a massacre.

[00:20:45]

Q Yeah.

[00:20:46]

Rios But I ended up in the Air Force. And when I was at Lackland Air Force Base, I got my draft notice. And the officer in charge -- I took the draft notice to my commanding officer and I said, "What am I supposed to do with this?"

[00:21:18]

Q You're already there, right?

[00:21:19]

Rios Yeah. He said, "It was too late, we got you." So I stood in the Air Force.

[00:21:25]

Q Oh. Well, that's good. Yeah. What did you do in there?

[00:21:30]

Rios I went to tech school, radar training tech school

[00:21:35]

Q Radar training?

[00:21:36]

Rios Yeah.

[00:21:36]

Q How did you get in there?

[00:21:39]

Rios I got assigned.

[00:21:41]

Q Yeah.

[00:21:42]

Rios They give you a bunch of tests that figure out where your educational level is and they assign you according to your scores. And I must have scored high on electronics so I got sent to electronic school.

[00:22:07]

Q So you're pretty decent at math then?

[00:22:09]

Rios Yeah, I was good. I was good at math.

[00:22:12]

Q So Mother Theresa got you into tech school?

[00:22:15]

Rios Yeah.

[00:22:16]

[Laughter]

[00:22:18]

Q Yeah.

[00:22:19]

Rios Sister Mary and Teresa.

[00:22:22]

Q Sister Mary and Teresa got you into tech school?

[00:22:24]

Rios Yeah.

[00:22:25]

Q Yeah. But you didn't know it at the time?

[00:22:27]

Rios I didn't know. I didn't realize how well they had trained me.

[00:22:31]

Q Well, that's good. Yeah. And so what did you do in the military? How many years were you in there?

[00:22:40]

Rios Four years.

[00:22:41]

Q Four years?

[00:22:42]

Rios I went in '52, got out in '56.

[00:22:45]

Q Okay. Where were you during that time?

[00:22:50]

Rios I was at Lackland Air Force Base, Keesler Air Force Base in Florida, Biloxi, Mississippi. I went to tech school there.

[00:23:07]

Q In Biloxi, Mississippi?

[00:23:09]

Rios Yeah.

[00:23:10]

Q How was that?

[00:23:11]

Rios It was rough.

[00:23:13]

Q Why is that?

[00:23:14]

Rios Segregation.

[00:23:16]

Q Black and White?

[00:23:19]

Rios Black and White.

[00:23:21]

Q But you're Brown.

[00:23:22]

Rios I know.

[00:23:23]

Q So where'd you fit?

[00:23:24]

Rios I didn't fit anywhere. [Laughter] I tried to go to the Black section of Biloxi and I walked into this bar, ordered a beer, and this Black bartender served me and he said, "You're not Black, are you?" I said, "No." He says, "Well, finish this beer, then get back in the other side of town where

you belong." And I said, "All right." So I went back to the other side where I belong and they didn't want me.

[00:24:07]

Q They wouldn't give you a beer either?

[00:24:09]

Rios No. They wouldn't serve me.

[00:24:11]

[Laughter]

[00:24:12]

Q So then where did you go?

[00:24:15]

Rios To the club on base.

[00:24:19]

Q That's the only place you could go, huh?

[00:24:22]

Rios Yeah.

[00:24:22]

Q All right. Where else did you go when you were in the military?

[00:24:32]

Rios Okinawa.

[00:24:35]

Q Where's that?

[00:24:35]

Rios Off Japan.

[00:24:36]

Q Oh, an island off Japan?

[00:24:38]

Rios Yeah.

[00:24:39]

Q And how many years were you there? What did you do there?

[00:24:42]

Rios I was there one year.

[00:24:44]

Q Yeah. What did you do?

[00:24:46]

Rios I was a radar technician. I played football.

[00:24:51]

Q You played football?

[00:24:53]

Rios Yeah.

[00:24:53]

Q For the Air Force?

[00:24:54]

Rios Yeah.

[00:24:56]

Q What position did you play?

[00:24:57]

Rios Halfback.

[00:24:58]

Q Yeah. You're kind of small though.

[00:25:02]

Rios But I'm fast.

[00:25:04]

Q Yeah.

[00:25:04]

Rios I was fast.

[00:25:06]

[Laughter]

[00:25:07]

Q All right. So you made the team as a halfback?

[00:25:12]

Rios Yep.

[00:25:13]

Q Yeah.

[00:25:13]

Rios No, I made the team as a quarterback.

[00:25:15]

Q As a quarterback?

[00:25:16]

Rios Yeah. Third-string quarterback. But halfway through the beginning of the season, they moved me to halfback and I ended up with a starting position at left half.

[00:25:34]

Q Yeah. Did you play with good guys?

[00:25:37]

Rios We won at the Typhoon Bowl, the island championship.

[00:25:42]

Q Oh, so your team was pretty good?

[00:25:44]

Rios Yeah.

[00:25:45]

Q You had guys from all over the country?

[00:25:50]

Rios Yeah. Yeah, they were from all over the United States.

[00:25:54]

Q Good players?

[00:25:55]

Rios Very good players.

[00:25:57]

Q Big guys?

[00:25:59]

Rios Big guys, fast guys, we had them all.

[00:26:04]

Q Yeah. You remember any of their names? Any of the really good guys on your team?

[00:26:12]

Rios W.J. Parker, a linebacker made all the Air Force.

[00:26:18]

Q Good player, huh?

[00:26:21]

Rios Yeah.

[00:26:22]

Q So what did you do after the Air Force?

[00:26:26]

Rios Moved back to San Francisco and enrolled in City College at San Francisco.

[00:26:38]

Q You did?

[00:26:39]

Rios Yeah.

[00:26:40]

Q So you went to college when you got back?

[00:26:42]

Rios Yeah.

[00:26:43]

Q Why'd you go to college?

[00:26:44]

Rios I wanted to get a degree in electronics. I wanted to be an electronic engineer. But I transferred to Sac State.

[00:27:01]

Q What year was that?

[00:27:11]

Rios '58, I think it was.

[00:27:13]

Q Late '50s?

[00:27:14]

Rios Yeah.

[00:27:15]

Q Yeah. So you transferred to Sac State?

[00:27:20]

Rios Yeah. My high school coach recommended me to go to Sac State. And I was introduced to Johnny Baker, my football coach. And he got me a job working at --

[00:27:43]

Q Was it AeroJet?

[00:27:49]

Rios -- AeroJet

[00:27:50]

Q At Aerojet?

[00:27:52]

Rios Yeah.

[00:27:53]

Q Oh.

[00:27:54]

Rios Driving a truck.

[00:27:57]

Q Driving a truck?

[00:28:01]

Rios Yeah. And then, I worked during the summer and decided to stay on. I applied for an electronics' job at Aerojet and I got promoted to electronics equipment repairman.

[00:28:38]

Q GI Bill made it.

[00:28:39]

Q Oh, yeah. So you went back to school. Did you finish school at Sac State?

[00:28:46]

Rios Eventually.

[00:28:47]

Q Yeah. And so you used the -- did you get the GI Bill?

[00:28:51]

Rios Yep.

[00:28:52]

Q And so that helped you. Did that go to, used it for City College and Sac State?

[00:28:56]

Rios Yep.

[00:28:57]

Q Yeah. So do you think that helped out?

[00:29:00]

Rios Well, a lot.

[00:29:02]

Q Yeah. Do you think you earned it?

[00:29:05]

Rios Yeah, I earned it.

[00:29:07]

[Laughter]

[00:29:11]

Q Yeah. You earned it, right?

[00:29:12]

Rios Yeah.

[00:29:12]

Q You had to go to Biloxi, Mississippi and Japan.

[00:29:17]

Rios I went from Lackland Air Force Base to Biloxi, Mississippi, to Long Island, New York, to Chanute in Illinois, back to Biloxi, Mississippi for another tech school. And so first two years in the service, I just went to tech schools. And then the next two years, I signed up with a football team. So I was Special Services while I was on Okinawa and Hamilton Air Force Base.

[00:29:58]

Q Special Services?

[00:29:59]

Rios Yeah.

[00:30:00]

Q So you just played football then?

[00:30:02]

Rios Yeah, I was a football player.

[00:30:03]

[Laughter]

[00:30:05]

Q So you got lucky then?

[00:30:06]

Rios Well, lucky I guess, but all my partners were getting killed in Korea so I felt bad that my buddies, we all had joined the service together and, like [inaudible], he got killed early.

[00:30:40]

Q So were there a lot of guys from the neighborhood then that didn't come back?

[00:30:45]

Rios Yeah, quite a few.

[00:30:47]

Q Yeah.

[00:30:48]

Rios The ones that were able to come back came back all shot up.

[00:30:54]

Q Yeah.

[00:30:55]

Rios So I felt bad that, here I'm Special Services and they were having wipe outs in Korea in Chosin Reservoir where they wiped out a couple of thousand GIs. They got trapped and --

[00:31:35]

Q They didn't make it out?

[00:31:38]

Rios Yeah. They got out in a basket.

[00:31:51]

Q So you got to play football though?

[00:31:56]

Rios Yeah, I played football while they were dying.

[00:32:02]

Q So you think you're fortunate?

[00:32:06]

Rios In a way.

[00:32:14]

Q So do you think you had a duty or a responsibility then?

[00:32:20]

Rios Well, I met the needs that were required at the time.

[00:32:26]

Q What about after the service, do you think you had a responsibility then?

[00:32:32]

Rios Yeah.

[00:32:33]

Q To do what?

[00:32:35]

Rios To finish my degree.

[00:32:37]

Q Yeah. Did you finish at Sac State?

[00:32:41]

Rios Yeah.

[00:32:42]

Q What'd you do after that?

[00:32:47]

Rios I got hired as Chicano studies director.

[00:32:50]

Q Yeah.

[00:32:50]

Rios I spent the next 40 some years teaching.

[00:32:58]

Q So were you part of the Mexican American Education Project then?

[00:33:02]

Rios I was unofficial member of the -- I wanted to enroll in the program, and I had to go see Warren Snyder, the chair of the Department of Anthropology, to get permission to enroll in the courses offered by the Mexican American Education Program.

[00:33:30]

Q Mm-hmm.

[00:33:30]

Q At that time, you were pursuing a master's degree and you were a reentry student?

[00:33:38]

Rios Yeah, I applied to -- my grades went bad so I had to reapply to get back into school. So I applied through EOP because I was a student at City College at Sacramento.

[00:33:55]

Q Uh-huh.

[00:33:57]

Rios And I got interviewed by Senon Valadez and got readmitted into Sac State and I finished my master's degree at Sac State.

[00:34:11]

Q And then, so when did you first hear about the Mexican American Education Fellowship?

[00:34:21]

Rios It was around 1969.

[00:34:28]

Q How'd you first hear about it?

[00:34:32]

Rios Through Steve Arvizu.

[00:34:36]

Q Uh-huh.

[00:34:37]

Rios He was a fellow in the first program, I think in '69.

[00:34:44]

Q So you first heard about it through him?

[00:34:47]

Rios Yeah.

[00:34:48]

Q And what did he study?

[00:34:51]

Rios Cultural anthropology.

[00:34:53]

Q Yeah. What did you study?

[00:34:57]

Rios I became an Anthro Major.

[00:35:00]

Q So Steve tricked you into it or what?

[00:35:06]

Rios There were a number of people in the program that I became familiar with. Steve Arvizu, Diego Vigil, Senon Valadez, Warren Snyder, Joe Serna, Joe Pity, Duane Campbell, Frank Bautista. There was a whole bunch of them.

[00:35:42]

Q A lot of early members then?

[00:35:44]

Rios Yeah.

[00:35:46]

Q Did you study cultural anthropology?

[00:35:48]

Rios Yeah.

[00:35:49]

Q Yeah. And so how do you think that helped you with understanding people and places and what was going on at the time?

[00:35:57]

Rios Well, working with Steve Arvizu and Diego vigil, and Warren Snyder, we produced a pamphlet that had basic models that we used to teach other students the process of inculturation and assimilation, and the differences between cultural anthropology and applied.

[00:36:30]

Q What's the difference?

[00:36:40]

Rios The difference?

[00:36:42]

Q Yeah. What's the difference between regular cultural anthropology or applied anthropology? How did you apply what you learned to the community?

[00:36:52]

Rios Well, we learned by the acculturation models the differences between cultures and how culture is learned and how it's passed on to children, how you acquire culture, and trying to figure out how the inculturation process turns young people into grown adults.

[00:37:38]

Q Okay. And so, do you have anything else to say about the Mexican Education Project, some of the early stuff?

[00:37:52]

Rios A lot of activity.

[00:37:53]

Q Other than the parties.

[00:37:56]

Rios We didn't have time for parties.

[00:37:59]

Q No?

[00:37:59]

Rios Except at the Reno Cafe. [Laughter]

[00:38:04]

Q You might mention how the Mexican American Project courses influenced community involvement and activity. For instance, the breakfast for Ninos.

[00:38:27]

Rios Well, that's the difference between cultural anthropology and applied anthropology, is that you apply the models of acculturation and assimilation and you distinguish between what is culture, what is imitated.

[00:38:56]

Q Or assimilated.

[00:39:00]

Rios Yeah, assimilated.

[00:39:08]

Q And so what's some of the stuff that you did then early on?

[00:39:11]

Rios What?

[00:39:12]

Q What are some of the things that you helped out on early on?

[00:39:17]

Rios The Chicanito Science Project, Breakfast for Ninos. I developed a course in Cross-Cultural Aging.

[00:39:34]

Q And so, who helped out with the Breakfast Program? What was that about?

[00:39:41]

Rios Well, my sister Jenny introduced me to the Northgate Hacienda Low-Income Housing Project, because she lived there. So she wanted to bring the Breakfast for Ninos Program to Northgate Hacienda. So I was a student of [inaudible] and I got introduced to the Breakfast for Ninos Program.

[00:40:10]

Q And what did you do there?

[00:40:13]

Rios Well, we got up in the morning and made breakfast for the kids

[00:40:20]

Q Before school?

[00:40:21]

Rios Before school.

[00:40:23]

Q Yeah. How do you think that helped?

[00:40:30]

Rios Well, we took the approach that kids can't do well in school unless they have a healthy breakfast.

[00:40:41]

Q Yeah.

[00:40:43]

Rios So, people didn't like our program because they thought that we were doing the jobs that the mothers should be doing.

[00:40:54]

Q Oh.

[00:40:55]

Rios But our attitude was, we don't care why the kid is hungry. We're not going to blame the mother or the father or blame anybody, we're going to just feed kids. And we're going to feed kids different than they have been fed before.

[00:41:20]

Q Oh, at the schools?

[00:41:21]

Rios At the schools.

[00:41:23]

Q So what was your approach then?

[00:41:25]

Rios Let them eat as much as they wanted to eat, fix the meals so that they were palatable.

[00:41:40]

Q They didn't taste good before?

[00:41:43]

Rios No. Like the avena, they made avena, they put salt in it.

[00:41:49]

Q Salt in the oatmeal?

[00:41:50]

Rios In the oatmeal.

[00:41:52]

Q That doesn't sound very good.

[00:41:54]

Rios It's ugly.

[00:41:55]

Q So how did you --

[00:41:57]

Rios The kids used to throw it away.

[00:41:59]

Q So how did you fix it?

[00:42:01]

Rios Put sugar in it. Took the salt out.

[00:42:05]

Q And then they ate it?

[00:42:08]

Rios Yeah.

[00:42:09]

Q All right. What about the science program, what was that?

[00:42:16]

Rios The Chicanito Science Project?

[00:42:18]

Q Yeah.

[00:42:19]

Rios Alvino Chavez wasn't -- I don't know if he was in the Mexican American Project or not, but Alvino Chavez come up with the idea to start a science project. And because I had electronics background from the military, he recruited me to help him write a proposal. So we wrote this proposal through the Associated Students, Incorporated that we applied for funds through ASI. And they funded us for supplies and student assistant positions.

[00:43:18]

Q Student assistants?

[00:43:19]

Rios Yeah.

[00:43:20]

Q So you got supplies for the science projects and you got college students or high school students?

[00:43:25]

Rios College students.

[00:43:26]

Q Student assistants?

[00:43:28]

Rios Yeah. So we recruited the students for the science project that didn't have a background in science, who didn't have a background in teaching.

[00:43:46]

Q Those don't sound like very good student assistants. Why did you pick college students that didn't know science or didn't have a background in teaching?

[00:43:58]

Rios Because, we wanted them to learn alongside the kids how to do the science project. So Frank Bautista came to my classroom and introduced all these different science projects, and the students would work three-on-one. One student assistant with -- one college student with three grade-school students. So the college students would be trained on how to do a project and we would help them in teaching. So we built rocket ships, electric motors, electronic kits, we built radios, and all just with grade-school students that were doing bad in school.

[00:45:17]

Q So you had bad students? Why were the bad students taking science and engineering class?

[00:45:24]

Rios Because we asked for them.

[00:45:26]

Q Why did you ask for the bad students?

[00:45:28]

Rios We were after the kids that didn't want to come to school.

[00:45:39]

Q Why is that?

[00:45:41]

Rios Because, they were doing bad in school. What we were trying to do is start a program that would turn on the college students to science, that turned on kids that didn't have any science background to science. So, we looked for the untrained and let the untrained train the --

[00:46:12]

[Laughter]

[00:46:15]

Q Let the untrained train the troublemakers?

[00:46:19]

Rios Yeah.

[00:46:20]

Q But most of the activities were hands-on --

[00:46:25]

Rios Yeah, hands-On projects.

[00:46:26]

Q Yeah.

[00:46:27]

Q -- with mentors, right?

[00:46:29]

Rios Yeah.

[00:46:29]

Q Experts at the local Air Force bases. And Sacramento State mentors in the education department, a lot of them were Mexican American Education Project Fellows, former.

[00:46:48]

Q So it was a lot of fellows that helped out too?

[00:46:54]

Rios Yeah.

[00:46:54]

Q How did you find the school to participate, the elementary schools?

[00:47:01]

Rios We went to the Sutter Junior High School where we started. I went to the principal and introduced the project and what we planned to do with the project, how we were going to get funded, and who the students would be for the project. Community Involvement in Poverty and Education was the title of the course, but it became known as the Chicanito Science Project.

[00:47:39]

Q Cool. So what are some other projects you worked on? So you had the Breakfast for Ninos, the Chicanito Science Project. What are some other stuff that you did at Sac State with the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:47:58]

Rios I got involved with Steve Arvizu and going out into the field and working in the field. I went to -- I'm trying to think of where we went.

[00:48:24]

Q Where'd you guys go, Senon?

[00:48:25]

Rios Went to Guam.

[00:48:27]

Q Guam. Guam?

[00:48:29]

Rios Guam.

[00:48:30]

Q Oh, geez.

[00:48:32]

Rios G-U-A-M.

[00:48:34]

Q Guam. That's far away.

[00:48:36]

Rios Yeah.

[00:48:37]

Q Yeah. What'd you go there for?

[00:48:39]

Rios To work with local schools on introducing culture into the curriculum?

[00:48:53]

Q And so you worked on a lot of projects that involved curriculum and community?

[00:48:59]

Rios Yeah.

[00:48:59]

Q Yeah. Why do you think that's important?

[00:49:06]

Rios Because, we went to Palau to do a workshop and we were trying to determine whether the English teaching projects that they had were valid when it comes to Applied Anthropology. And we found that Palauans wanted to learn -- they wanted their kids to learn Palauan first and English second. They wanted them to be competent bilinguals. So that's what the projects total aim was, to produce competent bilinguals.

[00:50:09]

Q And so the curriculum at the time wasn't set up for that?

[00:50:13]

Rios No.

[00:50:15]

Q Oh.

[00:50:15]

Q Was the project based with some of the premises of the Cross-Cultural Resource Center that had been developed at Sac State?

[00:50:28]

Rios Yeah. Most of the projects that Steve Arvizu developed out of the Cross-Cultural Resource Center was to get as much of a cultural reality into the curriculum.

[00:50:58]

Q Do you think that's still a problem?

[00:51:03]

Rios Sure, it's a problem.

[00:51:05]

Q Still today?

[00:51:06]

Rios They've never really addressed it.

[00:51:12]

Q Yeah. Do you think the curriculum helps though?

[00:51:19]

Rios A curriculum change is needed.

[00:51:21]

Q Yeah.

[00:51:22]

Rios Well, you've got to get the teaching Institute to change their approach to teaching.

[00:51:39]

Q And so, do you feel like that your experience then, or your experience with the Mexican American Education Project, do you think that influenced your teaching too --

[00:51:52]

Rios Yeah.

[00:51:52]

Q -- or your approach to teaching?

[00:51:55]

Rios It influenced my approach to teaching because Diego Vigil, Steve Arvizu and Warren Snyder were the leaders into changing the curriculum by producing research models that were positive models. Like the Diego Vigil, his book From Indians to Chicanos, I used that all the way through college and helped him update his outline. So I kept using his texts every year. And --

[00:52:50]

Q In your coursework?

[00:52:53]

Rios In my coursework. So, Diego Vigil was a pioneer in Chicano studies. He and Steve Arvizu, Warren Snyder, [inaudible].

[00:53:15]

Q And Senon.

[00:53:17]

Rios And Senon.

[00:53:20]

Q That guy over there?

[00:53:24]

Rios Yeah.

[00:53:26]

Q He helped out too?

[00:53:27]

Rios Yeah.

[00:53:28]

Q So all you guys then. So what was going on at that time then? Did you hear about the civil rights movement going on around the country? This is after you got home, right, pretty much?

[00:53:42]

Rios Well, when I transferred from Aerojet, I got laid off so I applied for a job at McClellan Air Force Base and I got hired as electronic technician, which reflected my background. But while I was at McClellan Air Force Base, I became an equal opportunity official.

[00:54:13]

Q Officer.

[00:54:13]

Rios Officer,

[00:54:15]

Q What were you again?

[00:54:16]

Rios Equal Employment Opportunity officer. So I had a job of investigating cases of discrimination against employees. And --

[00:54:34]

Q So this is part of human resources?

[00:54:42]

Rios Yeah.

[00:54:42]

Q On the base?

[00:54:43]

Rios On the base. So I investigated 137 cases of discrimination, and I won every one of them.

[00:54:56]

Q You won every single one?

[00:54:57]

Rios Every case that I took on of discrimination on the base, I got the grievance settled in our favor, me and the employee. But they had some ridiculous rules and regulations. There were some easy cases of discrimination and there were some hard cases of discrimination. But the hardest part in investigating a case of discrimination is trying to convince the victim that they were discriminated against. And then, when they finally would get up the guts to file a discrimination case, I was the Equal Employment Opportunity officer and it was my job to investigate each case and come up with a report on it. And based on my writeup of the report, they would determine whether it was discrimination or not. But one of the saddest cases that I encountered was discrimination against Black women.

[00:57:05]

Q On the base?

[00:57:06]

Rios Yeah.

[00:57:07]

Q How?

[00:57:10]

Rios Well --

[00:57:11]

Q What was going on?

[00:57:17]

Rios They made them cut their hair because management said that they were a safety hazard to have an afro and work on the job because you had to wear a hard hat, and the hard hat wouldn't fit right. So --

[00:57:46]

Q That was their argument?

[00:57:47]

Rios Yeah. So, for safety purposes, they wanted all Black women to cut their hair. And I went to the hearing with three Black women and the first one, she blew up and, and just stole the ball. And I'm telling myself, "Damn, what am I going to do now?" I said, "If I get another answer like this one, we won't have any case." So the second Black woman, she broke down in tears. The first one cursed them all, the second one started crying and wouldn't stop crying.

[00:58:54]

Q So then you were back on track?

[00:58:57]

Rios And then I'm telling myself, "Please, don't react." So the third one stood her ground. She knew why she was there, she knew what was discrimination, and they were being treated unequally. Anyway, using her, we won our case and they were allowed to not cut their hair. Because, at the time, the Black hairdo was a symbol of identity.

[00:59:56]

Q For what was going on at the time with civil rights?

[01:00:01]

Rios Yeah, civil rights movement.

[01:00:03]

Q Yeah. And so --

[01:00:05]

Q So most of your work as an EEO officer on discrimination issues had to do with a person's ethnicity?

[01:00:19]

Q That's not the ethnicity, that's race.

[01:00:24]

Rios The what?

[01:00:25]

Q Or most of the discriminatory issues at the base were based on racial discrimination or ethnicity?

[01:00:37]

Q Or were they just civil rights issues?

[01:00:40]

Rios They were civil rights.

[01:00:42]

Q Yeah. And so did a lot of the discrimination stuff mimic what was going on at the time or a lot of the frustrations with people in the community and the public?

[01:00:55]

Rios Yeah.

[01:00:56]

Q Yeah. And then, so when did you first hear the word Chicano? When did you --

[01:01:03]

Rios The word Chicano's been part of my life since I lived in the Mission neighborhood.

[01:01:11]

Q Yeah.

[01:01:14]

Rios Because, anytime you had a question about who you were, you would ask, [foreign language] Chicano? And the response was [foreign language]. Then, it meant you were part of the group.

So I was in Okinawa and I was walking down the street in Okinawa and I heard somebody, a woman, yelling [foreign language].

[01:01:55]

Q In Japan?

[01:01:58]

Rios In Okinawa. So I walked over and I said, "Where'd you learn that?" She said, "From my boyfriend that was stationed on Okinawa." She learned how to speak Chuco.

[01:02:22]

Q Oh. She was a native?

[01:02:24]

Rios Yeah.

[01:02:25]

Q Oh. But she learned some phrases and words?

[01:02:30]

Rios Yeah.

[01:02:31]

Q Oh.

[01:02:33]

Q During what period did you start being cognizant of the use of the word Chicano?

[01:02:43]

Rios When I was a teenager in the Mission District Hunters Point.

[01:02:55]

Q Was it accepted by all the generations?

[01:02:59]

Rios No. The term Chicano wasn't accepted by the older population because the older population would say "[foreign language] Mexicanos," and the term Chicano was frowned upon.

[01:03:22]

Q Yeah.

[01:03:23]

Rios But for the young people, the term Chicano was prevalent.

[01:03:30]

Q What are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano or Chicano Movement? You mentioned an event by your mother, a request by your mother.

[01:03:54]

Rios Yeah. My mom was working with Guadalupanas in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. They were putting together food packages for the farm workers march. And she asked me to take a load of food to Stockton, to the Farm Workers headquarters in Stockton. This was in '65. I think it was '65. And Cesar Chavez was marching from Delano to Sacramento in one of the protest marches. So I drove out there to Stockton, delivered the food. And while I was there delivering the food, the marchers came walking through from just out of Stockton. So I got in the march and started marching with them. And before I knew it, I was out of town, [Laughter] So I had a retreat, go back and get my truck and get back on the road and get back to Sacramento. But it was marching with the farm workers, that was my first march and my first involvement in the boycott. And --

[01:05:44]

Q Why did you feel like you needed to walk with them?

[01:05:52]

Rios Unity. Because I was a farm worker myself, I know what it is to pick fruit, 40 boxes to a ton fruit. So we used to pick prunes, we used to pick cherries, pears.

[01:06:20]

Q Peaches.

[01:06:21]

Rios Peaches.

[01:06:27]

Q As part of your background in the City of San Francisco, how did farm working get into the picture? During the summers?

[01:06:38]

Rios Yeah. Every summer, my mom and dad, we'd head back out to the fields to get money for school, school clothes. So we used to live in tents. And in San Jose, one time, we didn't even have a tent. But my earlier memories of when I was a kid, always having an oily tent.

[01:07:31]

Q An oily tent?

[01:07:32]

Rios Yeah. Army tent --

[01:07:34]

Q Oh.

[01:07:35]

Rios -- that we would take from camp to camp. And then, we finally settled in a city, where my dad got a job as a longshoreman and my mother was working part-time waitress in a Mexican restaurant. So whether we were working in the fields or not, San Jose was just a trip down the road to be back in the fields again.

[01:08:27]

Q So do you think your involvement then, or your participation in that moment in the Chicano movement helped to -- how do you think it changed you, or did it change you?

[01:08:42]

Rios Yeah. I became an activist. And then, when I was hired as Chicano Studies director, I became more of an activist. I put my whole heart and soul into being the best Chicano director possible, and I did that for 37 years.

[01:09:03]

Q What year did you apply for the position of director of Chicano Studies?

[01:09:12]

Rios I think it was '72.

[01:09:13]

Q Give us a little background. Who was the first?

[01:09:18]

Rios Manuel Alonzo was the first director of Chicano Studies, Frank Godina was the second, I was the third.

[01:09:30]

Q And you served for how many years in Chicano Studies?

[01:09:33]

Rios Thirty seven years.

[01:09:41]

Q And what about the role of women in the Chicano movement?

[01:09:45]

Rios Well, I mentioned earlier my mom was involved with the Guadalupanas and they supported the farm workers.

[01:09:58]

Q What about your grandmothers, what role did they serve? They were independent?

[01:10:15]

Rios The what role?

[01:10:23]

Q Or your sister. The women in your family, what role did they serve besides your mother as a Guadalupeana serving the farm workers or helping the farm workers?

[01:10:42]

Rios Yeah.

[01:10:43]

Q What about your sister?

[01:10:46]

Rios My sister Jenny got involved early in the farm workers movement.

[01:11:04]

Q And she was also actively involved in the Breakfast for Ninos Program?

[01:11:09]

Rios Yeah. Well, Jenny was a resident of Northgate Hacienda so she became involved with Breakfast for Ninos. She got the women to organize and help the kids with school and homework.

[01:11:33]

Q What role did you see, the women's role in the MEChA Program, which you served as an advisor in the early days?

[01:11:53]

Rios Well, I belong to the National Association of Chicano Studies and supported women's movements within the group and supported women's activities. We had a National Association for Chicano Studies. The women lobbied to get the name changed to the National Association of Chicanos and Chicana Studies. So anytime the women wanted to organize, I supported the women. And we had a conference in Illinois and the woman came up with the idea of forming a Chicana caucus separate from the men. So they came around lobbying me to support them. So I asked the women to give me a rationale why we should set up a separate Chicana caucus just for women and she said, "Well, because we have different issues to" -- anyway, they gave me a long list of demands so I supported them. And in San Antonio, we had our first Chicano caucus. And --

[01:13:57]

Q Was that the following year?

[01:14:01]

Rios The following year. And I showed up to their first caucus in San Antonio, Texas. And I'm trying to think of the other professor that showed up. Anyway, two of us showed up and all the rest were women.

[01:14:44]

Q There's just two men?

[01:14:48]

Rios Two men.

[01:15:01]

Q Yeah.

[01:15:22]

Rios He was from UC, Riverside. Do you remember his name?

[01:15:35]

Q I don't recall. I don't remember. But how were you accepted by the women caucus since you two had supported them the previous year?

[01:15:45]

Rios Well, they thanked us for showing up and promptly invited us out.

[01:15:51]

Q And they kicked you out?

[01:15:54]

Rios Yeah. The caucus was just for women. And they said, "Thank you for coming, but do you mind leaving?"

[01:16:03]

Q They had issues to discuss?

[01:16:06]

Rios They had issues to discuss.

[01:16:08]

[Laughter]

[01:16:18]

All right.

[01:16:18]

Q Are you ready?

[01:16:19]

Rios Yeah.

[01:16:19]

Q This is a tough one though.

[01:16:22]

Rios Okay.

[01:16:23]

Q So in the 37 years you were a director of Chicano Studies, what were some of the organizations you were involved in and what significance did those organizations or activities -- how did they play a role in the Chicano movement?

[01:16:53]

Rios Well, it developed my interest in cultural anthropology, and the different models that Diego Vigil, Steve Arvizu, and Senon Valadez and Warren Snyder put together to guide us into developing curriculum that was applied.

[01:17:33]

Q And so how did that change over the years?

[01:17:39]

Rios It became less applied.

[01:17:41]

Q Over the years?

[01:17:42]

Rios Over the years.

[01:17:44]

Q Why do you think that?

[01:17:47]

Rios Because, you can't change traditions. I think Sol Tax, an anthropologist, first developed the models of applied anthropology.

[01:18:24]

Q Yeah.

[01:18:25]

Rios And --

[01:18:34]

Q So you think then, if it became less applied over the years --

[01:18:39]

Rios Yeah, less applied.

[01:18:41]

Q Yeah. Do you think, is applied anthropology where change happens then or?

[01:18:49]

Rios Was that the what?

[01:18:50]

Q Do you think applied anthropology is where change happens or no?

[01:18:57]

Rios Yeah, applied anthropology. You apply the models to see how the culture is reacting to outside forces.

[01:19:21]

Q All right. So do you think this helped raise your awareness of the social and political issues that were happening?

[01:19:32]

Rios Yeah.

[01:19:33]

Q And so, as a director, how did those changes influence how you directed the program over time?

[01:19:47]

Rios My whole approach to the study of Chicano studies was to enlighten the population as to the changes that were taking place with families and their children, and how you could use these models to analyze how much culture they're losing, how much change was being accepted by them and how much cultural reinforcement they were getting from the school in general. Because, I thought at the time that we were living in a society where Dick and Jane was the dominant model with their little dog,

[01:20:56]

Q Spike.

[01:20:57]

Rios -- Spot.

[01:20:58]

Q No, it's Spike.

[01:20:59]

Rios Spot.

[01:21:00]

Q Is it Spot?

[01:21:01]

Rios Yeah.

[01:21:02]

Q I thought the dog's name was Spike.

[01:21:04]

Rios No, Spot.

[01:21:05]

Q Oh. [Laughter] Yeah. And so that was the dominant model?

[01:21:13]

Rios It's a reigning model. It still is. And we haven't been able to get away from the Dick and Jane books.

[01:21:25]

Q But the perspective at the time was to retain traditional culture and have events that exemplified the cultural traditions, for instance, the Da Santes --

[01:21:53]

Rios Well --

[01:21:54]

Q -- Play. Chicano faculty were hired in the drama and theater.

[01:22:05]

Rios Well, we built the program around addressing all the issues that would impact students, cultural revitalization, cultural reinforcement --

[01:22:25]

Q Whatever their interests were?

[01:22:28]

Rios Yeah, what their interests were.

[01:22:30]

Q What were some of the organizations that you were actively involved in in the community as part of Chicano Studies faculty?

[01:22:45]

Rios The Chicano Art Program, Barrio Art, Theatral.

[01:23:01]

Q The Sacramento Concilio.

[01:23:03]

Rios Sacramento Concilio. Washington Neighborhood Center. [Inaudible] drug effort.

[01:23:13]

Q The Farm Workers Union, were you involved in the boycott at the time in the early '70s?

[01:23:21]

Rios Yeah, I joined the boycott and I didn't eat a grape for 40 years. That's how long I boycotted.

[01:23:47]

Q As a Chicano Studies faculty at the time in the '70s, were you involved in any way or were there Chicano faculty involved in the D-Q University, an indigenous university that originally served to serve the Native American and Chicano population?

[01:24:13]

Rios Yeah, I got involved developing a curriculum for the social sciences.

[01:24:21]

Q At where?

[01:24:22]

Rios DQU.

[01:24:23]

Q What was that school about?

[01:24:30]

Rios It was a Native American school and Chicano school.

[01:24:36]

Q Where was it located?

[01:24:39]

Rios Davis, California.

[01:24:40]

Q And what was its purpose? Who did it serve?

[01:24:44]

Rios It served indigenous native American and Chicanos.

[01:24:56]

Q And so did the Chicano Studies Department help develop curriculum for D-Q?

[01:25:03]

Rios Yeah, Social science curriculum?

[01:25:06]

Q What other types of events or stuff did you collaborate on?

[01:25:14]

Rios Chicano studies courses, powwows. We helped build a sweat house out there.

[01:25:30]

Q The youth and elders gathering that happened every year, there were Chicano faculty at CSUS that were involved, for instance Jose Montoya, Senon Valadez, also was involved in the summer programs.

[01:25:56]

Rios Yeah.

[01:25:58]

Q But the early days of D-Q University, what were some of the things that you were involved in?

[01:26:11]

Rios Curriculum development.

[01:26:21]

Q So over the 37 years of you being the Chicano Studies director, doing a lot of community stuff, do you think being an activist for your community changed your personal relationships with your family, your peers, and significant others? Do you think being an activist had an influence on your family?

[01:26:47]

Rios Yeah.

[01:26:48]

Q How?

[01:26:49]

Rios It gave them an orientation of that you have to stand on your feet at times, hold your ground. And -- -- it made my whole family become involved with the Chicano movement.

[01:27:17]

Q All your kids too?

[01:27:18]

Rios Yeah, my kids.

[01:27:20]

Q Uh-huh. So how do you think that -- how do you think standing on your ground influenced your career? Do you think it influenced your career?

[01:27:32]

Rios Well, I never gave up on any issue.

[01:27:36]

Q So you're stubborn?

[01:27:40]

Rios Persistent.

[01:27:42]

[Laughter]

[01:27:46]

Q What were some of the issues that you didn't give up on in your career?

[01:28:00]

Rios I never gave up in believing that you can create change and you could change for the better through Chicano studies. Chicano studies could prove that you could change and not lose your own reality.

[01:28:30]

Q And so what were some of the issues then that you fought for on campus?

[01:28:40]

Rios Affirmative action, promotions.

[01:28:49]

Q Faculty promotions?

[01:28:51]

Rios Faculty promotions. Chicano graduation. So --

[01:29:02]

Q When were the first Chicano graduations initiated?

[01:29:08]

Rios I think it was 1969.

[01:29:16]

Q Did that coincide with the Mexican American Education Project? The Chicano graduation as a separate event from the regular graduation.

[01:29:34]

Rios I think it did. It started early.

[01:29:48]

Q The Chicano studies program, how did that develop over the time when it first began?

[01:30:01]

Rios Well, it began with four courses in Department of Anthropology, Native American Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, and Chicano Studies.

[01:30:20]

Q That was all the ethnic studies?

[01:30:22]

Rios That was all the ethnic studies, four courses in anthropology. And then out of Chicano studies, we developed courses in Spanish, English.

[01:30:43]

Q Chicano Literature.

[01:30:45]

Rios Chicano literature, Chicano art, Barrio Art.

[01:30:55]

Q Theater.

[01:30:57]

Rios Theater.

[01:30:58]

Q And so out of that, that stuff grew?

[01:31:04]

Rios Yeah.

[01:31:06]

Q Can you talk a little bit about one of the early faculty in the Music Department that was a big part of the Chicano faculty?

[01:31:22]

Rios Joaquin Fernandez taught people music of Mexico, music of Latin America and music of Spain. And he developed courses in general education that would offer it under the Music Department. And he was really supportive of the Chicano movement. He was a great man.

[01:32:04]

Q And so, how do you think the Chicano movement influenced your career? Did you think it helped it or do you think it changed the way you looked at things as being a director, a faculty member, an activist on campus?

[01:32:27]

Rios The more I stood in the department, the more I was involved in general with Chicano studies. I developed a Chicano graduation. I developed the Jalapeno Award.

[01:32:53]

Q The Jalapeno Award?

[01:32:55]

Rios Yeah.

[01:32:56]

Q That sounds like hot stuff.

[01:32:59]

Rios Yeah. The Jalapeno Award was given to any Chicano graduate from Sac State that had not lost their chili-eating ability.

[01:33:14]

[Laughter]

[01:33:16]

Q Or their culture.

[01:33:17]

Rios Or their culture.

[01:33:19]

Q That weren't assimilated? Yeah?

[01:33:25]

Q The other departments, who designed the Jalapeno Award?

[01:33:32]

Rios Ricardo Favela put together the certificate and we awarded them at the graduation. But it was meant to attract Chicano students that there was an alternative to assimilation and that you could --

[01:34:10]

Q Retain.

[01:34:12]

Rios you could retain your culture by working at it.

[01:34:20]

Q And so, how did you use that to develop personal relationships with your family, your peers, or other people? Do you think that influenced how you raised your family?

[01:34:38]

Rios Yep.

[01:34:40]

Q Yeah.

[01:34:45]

Rios So all my kids and family reflect my work in Chicano studies, my research in Chicano studies, my involvement in Chicano studies, and my career in Chicano studies.

[01:35:09]

Q What do some of them do?

[01:35:11]

Rios The what

[01:35:12]

Q So what do some of your kids do?

[01:35:18]

Rios Ben is anthropologist.

[01:35:20]

[Laughter]

[01:35:22]

Q What about your oldest?

[01:35:27]

Q Yeah.

[01:35:27]

Q Sammy, What was his involvement --

01:35:28,926 --> 01:35:29,936

Q Do you've teachers?

[01:35:29]

Q -- in the Chicano movement?

[01:35:32]

Rios Sammy was involved in the Chicano moratorium.

[01:35:37]

Q Your oldest?

[01:35:38]

Rios Yeah, my oldest son.

[01:35:39]

Q When he was younger?

[01:35:41]

Rios Yeah. He was 18 at the Chicano Moratorium.

[01:35:46]

Q And was he really involved?

[01:35:51]

Rios Yeah. He was part of the Brown Berets.

[01:35:57]

Q Oh, yeah.

[01:35:59]

Q Or the Junior Brown Berets.

[01:36:00]

Rios The Junior Berets.

[01:36:01]

Q Yeah. Sammy's funny though. Was he in trouble? Did he get into trouble? It seems like he would get into trouble.

[01:36:10]

Rios No, he didn't get into trouble. I got into trouble.

[01:36:14]

Q Oh. [laughter].

[01:36:16]

Rios Because, we had a meeting while I was employed at McClellan Air Force Base, a security meeting and there was a captain in the Air Force who came to lecture the employees on the dangerous conditions that are being developed in the United States.

[01:36:53]

Q National security issues.

[01:36:54]

Rios National security. And that we had to be aware of what was going on. So we were told that, if we saw the Russian Embassy limousine, anywhere in the vicinity, we're supposed to write as much information as we could about the situation and a report any activity by them.

[01:37:37]

Q Right.

[01:37:45]

Rios He also said that, if we know any foreign speakers that speak with an accent, we're supposed to report them.

[01:37:57]

Q So it was a huge national security issue, huh?

[01:38:01]

Rios Yeah.

[01:38:02]

Q And so then how did you get in trouble?

[01:38:05]

Rios I raised my hand and, and I said, "I didn't join the military, I didn't join the workforce to become a junior G-man. I'm an electronic technician." And right away, the guy took down my name. And next thing I know, I was in court being investigated.

[01:38:43]

Q You're under interrogation?

[01:38:45]

Rios Yeah.

[01:38:47]

Q Why did they want to talk to you?

[01:38:50]

Rios Because they claimed that I had attended a radical meeting and I said, "I haven't attended a radical meeting." So they said, "Your name's Sam Rios?" I said, "Yes." "And you belong to the Brown Berets?" I said, "No." So they, they had me confused with Sammy, and Sammy was in the Junior Berets. But anyway, I had to file a grievance against them.

[01:39:39]

Q Oh, against the base?

[01:39:43]

Rios The base. The officers. The military. Anyway, they told me that my career at McClellan Air Force Base was over as far as they were concerned, that if it came to promotions or advancement, that I probably would never get promoted again.

[01:40:19]

Q Right.

[01:40:20]

Rios So I resigned from McClellan and went back to school. And I went back to school, I finished my degree and, and enrolled in the Mexican American Project curriculum.

[01:40:41]

Q Uh-huh. At Sac State?

[01:40:43]

Rios At Sac State.

[01:40:45]

Q That's good.

[01:40:46]

Q And as soon as you received your master's, you applied for the position of director of Chicano Studies and, who was the one that interviewed you at the time?

[01:41:07]

Rios Bob [inaudible]. He'd interviewed me for the position of Chicano Studies director. And since I was the only candidate, I was hired.

[01:41:25]

[Laughter]

[01:41:27]

Q That's a lot of competition then.

[01:41:30]

Rios No.

[01:41:30]

Q But he knew of your background --

[01:41:33]

Rios Yeah.

[01:41:34]

Q -- at the school?

[01:41:41]

Q So how do you think the Chicano movement influenced your life here in Sacramento? You moved us here and we never left.

[01:41:53]

Rios Yeah.

[01:41:54]

[Laughter]

[01:41:58]

Q So how do you think the Chicano movement influenced your life in Sacramento?

[01:42:06]

Rios Well, everything that I became, all the programs I started, the curriculum I developed was all focused on community involvement in poverty and education and culture change. And that pretty much determined my career here at Sac State.

[01:42:41]

Q And in Sacramento?

[01:42:44]

Rios In Sacramento.

[01:42:45]

Q So you started your work in Sacramento?

[01:42:47]

Rios Yeah.

[01:42:49]

Q And you're going to finish your work in Sacramento?

[01:42:52]

Rios Yeah.

[01:42:54]

Q So you've lived most of your life in Sacramento then?

[01:43:02]

Rios Yeah.

[01:43:03]

Q Pretty much?

[01:43:04]

Rios Well, I moved here in '58.

01:43:07,456 --> 01:43:12,706

Q And it's going to be 2015. Right?

[01:43:16]

Rios Yeah.

[01:43:17]

Q So that's a long time in Sacramento.

[01:43:21]

Rios Yeah.

[01:43:22]

Q Right?

[01:43:23]

Q What were some of the community groups that provided activities throughout the career that you were involved in, like the Galeria Posada, the RCAF artist exhibits, the Día De Los Muertos procession? How did those continue throughout your career or life here in Sacramento?

[01:44:01]

Rios Well, I continued to be involved with the Royal Chicano Air Force, the art programs, the art shows, Manuel Pickett plays. Manuel Pickett and I wrote a play together.

[01:44:21]

Q Severed Roots.

[01:44:25]

Rios Severed Roots. But it's a reflection on my training because, Several Roots is about a full blooded Spaniard that became an assimilated Native American, and how easy it was for -- I can't even think of his name now. The --

[01:45:35]

Q Who was the woman? Didn't he have a love interest?

[01:45:41]

Rios Yeah. I can't think of her name either. But --

[01:45:51]

Q What was the story about? What did he do?

[01:45:55]

Rios He became a full-blooded Aztec warrior. And it took a lot for him to desert his culture, which was Spanish, and adopt everything Indian.

[01:46:18]

Q And so, what does that have to do with your training?

[01:46:30]

Rios I wasn't trained in theater.

[01:46:35]

Q But you provided the historical background.

[01:46:39]

Rios Yeah, I provided the historical background.

[01:46:41]

Q And so, you were talking about assimilation, right?

[01:46:46]

Rios Uh-huh.

[01:46:47]

Q And so, who are some of the other people then that -- you said you developed a play with Manuel Pickett, and you mentioned some other fellows. Who were some of the other people that in Sacramento or just that you've met in your life that had an impact on the Chicano movement, do you think, or people that had a lot of impact? There's a lot of people, right?

[01:47:16]

Rios Yeah. Cesar Chavez. The reporter. Ruben Salazar. Jose Montoya, Esteban Villa, Juan Cervantes, Armando Cid, Favela.

[01:47:53]

Q What about some of the ladies, were there women too?

[01:48:04]

Rios Dolores Huerta.

[01:48:08]

Q The Comadres, that were a group of artists with artists.

[01:48:21]

Rios Yeah.

[01:48:24]

Q What about a former mayor of Sacramento?

[01:48:27]

Rios Joe Serna.

[01:48:36]

Q And so, what do you think? Do you think there's any issues the Chicano community has today, or what are some of the future challenges, do you think, that the Chicano community faces in the future or today?

[01:49:02]

Rios Well, they haven't been able to get bilingual education established as a bonafide model for non-assimilation.

[01:49:19]

Q So bilingual education's still an issue?

[01:49:22]

Rios Yeah.

[01:49:22]

Q And that's a challenge for the Chicano community?

[01:49:30]

Rios Well, we're still stuck in the Dick and Jane mode where bilingualism hasn't been accepted. It's more of a fad than a reality.

[01:49:56]

Q What are some of the educational challenges that are still prevalent as far as in the university system, as far as Chicano Latino faculty retention?

[01:50:21]

Rios Well, I think we suffer from social amnesia.

[01:50:28]

Q Social amnesia. What does that mean?

[01:50:31]

Rios We tend to forget all the things that were done to alleviate the problems and that we were confronted with. And it seems like the more things change, the more they stay the same.

[01:50:57]

Q And so, do the population change?

[01:51:01]

Rios The population hasn't changed, it's continued to grow. The population that we were trying to address was the bilingual population, and to establish programs and institutes that would give them a sense of identity. And we did that, but we're not finished.

[01:51:39]

Q And so, a lot of kids now are a lot of different things though, right?

[01:51:46]

Rios Yeah.

[01:51:46]

Q So where does a Guatemalan, Mexican, and Black kid fit into this equation then? If he's all three. Say, one of his parents is Black and his mom's half Guatemalan and half Mexican.

[01:52:09]

Rios I remember the spanners had a way of identifying different mixtures, the 16 categories.

[01:52:30]

Q Yeah. The Cacica categories or the Castillo, right? Castillo paintings.

[01:52:34]

Rios Yeah. And the last category [inaudible], there you are at the tail end of the assimilation mode.

[01:53:01]

Q So getting back to the educational achievements among Chicano students, have you seen progress or we still have some of the same issues and problems that we had in the 1960s?

[01:53:27]

Rios Well, like I mentioned earlier, we're suffering from social amnesia. We forget what we've done. And the institutions, educational institutions don't address the problem anymore. They just ignore it and hope it'll go away. But we still suffer with the assimilation. The name of the game today is Assimilation 1 and 2. Now it's Assimilation 3.

[01:54:20]

Q What's the difference?

[01:54:26]

Rios Less focus on bilingual education, more focus on monolingual education. English.

[01:54:38]

Q What about Chicano studies? Back in the 1960s, during the civil rights movement, it was established as a need. And you see other states eliminating Chicano studies. How important do you feel that that program is -- how important do you think that program is in the State of California?

[01:55:08]

Rios Bilingual ed?

[01:55:10]

Q Chicano studies.

[01:55:13]

Rios Chicano studies, I think it's still an important function in the educational system, but it can't be watered down, Chicano studies. There are no focus on Chicano Studies to accept Chicano's studies as a valid program.

[01:55:43]

Q Why not?

[01:55:44]

Rios Traditional institutions will take over. That's what I mean by social amnesia. If you ignore it, it'll go away. But there's no more hiring going into Chicano studies. I kind of feel that the only people making any progress in the different ethnic groups are the Asian population because they've been consistent at fighting assimilation.

[01:56:40]

Q But don't you feel that the Chicano community has also been attempting to retain its cultural identity and hindering assimilation? Or what do you think needs to be done to continue promoting?

[01:57:10]

Rios You need more Jose Montoyas and Esteban Villas and Ricardo Favela, Armando Cids, involved in the project.

[01:57:30]

Q What would you say to the Chicano faculty and the statewide system? What advice would you be able to provide as part of your background after having served as Chicano Studies director?

Would you say that, at the beginning in the '60s, all Chicano studies faculty was very supportive of one another?

[01:58:10]

Rios Yeah, more unity. Go back to the old models and reestablish courses that reflect those old models.

[01:58:24]

Q There was a strong emphasis on the community on the Chicano community also.

[01:58:32]

Rios Yeah, that's the applied portion of anthropology.

[01:58:46]

Q I think that's it. Are there any --

[01:58:47]

Q Is there anything else --

[01:58:48]

Q -- more specific questions?

[01:58:50]

Q -- you'd like to add that maybe you didn't have an opportunity to discuss, anything regarding your career, the Chicano community? Anything that you'd like to add?

[01:59:14]

Rios No. I still say the biggest impediment to developing Chicano studies and maintaining Chicano studies is that we tend to forget why we were doing things in the first place. Why the boycott, why Chicano studies? It was to create change. And still, it depends on the effort that people put into creating change. But like I said, the more we push for culture change, the more things stay the same.

[02:00:20]

Q And so, some kids who are, they're Guatemala American, right, their parents are from Guatemala?

[02:00:29]

Rios Uh-huh.

[02:00:30]

Q But they were born in the States, but they don't identify as Chicano, nor do they have any idea what it is really nor do they care. So where do they fit in then? Or is that part of the social amnesia that we've forgotten? Do they have similar issues, do you think?

[02:01:04]

Rios Yeah, they're identical, but --

[02:01:23]

Q So they have identical issues?

[02:01:26]

Rios Yeah, they have the same issues.

[02:01:29]

Q So what are some possible -- so where do those future problems then fit into some of the work that we still have to do?

[02:01:41]

Rios Bilingual education.

[02:01:44]

Q Ethnic studies as a core curriculum for a lot of the majors, isn't that important to continue that?

[02:01:57]

Rios Yeah. The School of Education has pretty much done away with bilingual education. They don't promote it anymore, they don't sponsor it anymore, they --

[02:02:14]

Q But Ethnic Studies 1, the coursework, isn't that still important?

[02:02:26]

Rios Yeah, of course it is, but you need more trained Chicano educators that believe in bilingual education.

[02:02:47]

Q So, is there anything else you want to say?

[02:02:50]

Q I will mention one thing. You mentioned a little bit, but many movimiento Chicano activists have passed on, especially recently in the last few years, can you identify an individual or individuals that you feel had a strong impact on the Chicano movement here in Sacramento or the state or nationally? And please explain the significance.

[02:03:25]

Rios Well, right at the top of the list would be Cesar Chavez. He died organizing the United Farm Workers. And Jose Montoya, the leader of the RCAF. Enrique Torres Trevor, education.

[02:04:13]

Q What was his relationship to California State University, Sacramento? I'm talking of Trevor.

[02:04:20]

Rios He was anthropologist. He taught at Sacramento State University.

[02:04:35]

Q How long was he there? And was he a permanent faculty?

[02:04:42]

Rios No. He went to UC, Davis as dean.

[02:04:52]

Q Or was it Santa Barbara?

[02:04:54]

Rios Maybe it was Santa Barbara.

[02:05:02]

Q Are there any other individuals here in Sacramento that had a big impact on the Chicano movement?

[02:05:15]

Rios Ricardo Favela. Armando Cid.

[02:05:20]

Q Juan Cervantes.

[02:05:24]

Rios Juan Cervantes.

[02:05:27]

Q Chewy Ortiz.

[02:05:29]

Rios Chewy Ortiz.

[02:05:32]

Q How were they influential in the Chicano movement?

[02:05:39]

Rios Well, Chewy was an indigenous dancer. And he performed the role of bringing in the indigenous reality back to the community.