

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Sandra Samaniego

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by David Rasul

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California State University, Sacramento Library

David Rasul Good morning, you all, my name is David Rasul. I'm a committee member of the Sacramento Movimiento Oral History Project. And today we're interviewing Sandra Samaniego. This interview will be video and audio recorded, and will form part of the Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project, which is archived at the Donald and Beverly Gerth Special Collections and University Archives at CSUS. Do you agree to this recording?

[00:00:47]

Sandra Samaniego Yes.

Rasul Today's date is July 27, 2023. Time of the interview is approximately 11:00[am]. We are located in the city of Sacramento, California, at the Language Academy. Please state your full name and spell it.

[00:01:10]

Samaniego Sandra Samaniego, S A M A N I E G O.

Rasul Please provide your birth date, month, date, and year.

[00:01:21]

Samaniego November 1959.

Rasul Sandra, where were you born?

[00:01:26]

Samaniego I was born in Sacramento, California.

Rasul Do you remember the hospital?

[00:01:30]

Samaniego I was born at the Sacramento County Hospital, which is now the UC Davis Hospital.

Rasul Please -- this is about your early life; where were you raised?

[00:01:44]

Samaniego I was raised in South Sacramento, just off of Fruitridge Road. My parents came here in probably just before I was born, so probably '57, '58, from Mexico. So my mom was telling me the other day that my dad had -- they had \$22 between them, and got in the car and drove here. And they came here, landed in Sacramento. And it was great -- well I thought it was great being raised here. They bought a house.

When they first got to Sacramento, they lived downtown at 12th and C, yes, by the cannery there --

Rasul Yes.

[00:02:28]

Samaniego Which I don't remember which cannery that was that was down there. It's Almond now, but it was something else before. Anyway, we lived at 12th and C, and they rented an apartment there until my dad was able to buy a house and we lived over off of Fruitridge and we were raised there. And it was a lot of -- well I thought it was a lot of fun.

We were really poor, though. We -- in the summertime, you know, you ran around barefoot and rode bikes. My dad was a master mechanic so we always had bikes around. We played -- you know, got together, we scrounged whatever gloves and bats and did -- played baseball. And there was an empty field next to our house and we played there. It was a lot of fun.

My dad -- they worked -- my dad ended working at Campbell Soup, he got a job there. Before that they were migrant workers so they worked, you know, trabajar in los feles [phonetic], they worked in the fields. And in the summertime my dad would get a phone call, and he was like, "Los mandaron fruta," [phonetic] and so we would pile in his -- my dad -- we had a '47 Cadillac. We'd get in the Cadillac and go downtown to the 8th and L at the bus station, at the Greyhound bus station and pick up these crates, these wooden crates and come home and he'd pop them open and we'd have these big peaches. And I thought that's how everybody got fruit. We -- so we always had fresh fruits and fresh vegetables, because they worked in the fields, esparragos and cherries, lo quera la coche [phonetic], whatever was in season. And it was -- so we always had fresh. We had -- in the summertime -- it was a lot of fun; I thought it was a lot of fun at my house. A lot of family members would come, a lot of tios and tias, por -- because they work in the fields. A lot of them worked in the tomato fields over by Clarksburg and Holden [phonetic] out there. And so they would come and stay the summer. And so, you know, somebody was always taking care of us or watching us. Even my grandparents came one summer and stayed. So it was a lot of fun.

Rasul Yes. You mentioned they came from Mexico.

[00:04:27]

Samaniego Yes.

Rasul What area of Mexico [overlapping] --

[00:04:29]

Samaniego My mom was born in Durango, but they were raised in just outside of Yuma, Arizona in the border town in San Luis, Rio Colorado. So they were -- my mom's family is from there; still there, we still visit. We still go in the summers. And my dad was actually born in Brawley, California, and but was

raised there in San Luis. And so they met there. But we still go and we -- so when we were little every year we would go in the summertime in the Sonora Desert in the heat, every year for a week. And in the winter-time we went at Christmastime. It's crazy.

Rasul You kind of mentioned it already, what did your parents do for a living; you said he was a master mechanic?

[00:05:17]

Samaniego Yes. Dad -- my father was a gifted master mechanic. He fixed anything. I don't care what it was, vacuum cleaners, radios, bikes, cars. So if your car wasn't working, my dad was the one that fixed it. And my mom would be so mad because, you know, he would fix everybody else's car but his; but so we always had cars at the house and fixed, you know, anything. But yes, but his work, his paid work was at Campbell's Soup Company. That's what he did.

And then my mom stayed -- didn't work at Campbell's Soup at that time; but she did. But most of -- yes most of the work was migrant work.

Rasul How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:05:57]

Samaniego I have one brother and one sister.

But when we were growing up, one of my aunts, my tia, Ophelia, passed away and she left four daughters and three of the daughters came to live with us and one still lives there. But yes, they came to stay with us. Our house was just -- is full of people.

Rasul What was the primary language growing up?

[00:06:24]

Samaniego Our primary language at the house was Spanish. It's still Spanish. We still speak Spanish at home; and which was really interesting because other families -- a lot of other families wouldn't speak Spanish at home. They discouraged it, and they only spoke English at home. But my father didn't believe that. My father believed, you know, it couldn't hurt you, like it's not a disadvantage to learn two languages, or to know two languages. So we always had Spanish at home, and still do.

Rasul Growing up, what was your experience as a child? And you kind of answered that already, but if you wanted to elaborate [inaudible]?

[00:07:11]

Samaniego I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

Rasul Please describe your experience as a child and your family and neighborhood.

[00:07:18]

Samaniego Yes, it was tough because we were poor. And actually I'm impressed that my dad even bought land, because I -- right now you read about the areas being redlined and no car -- you know, no home loans and they didn't lend any money. And my father didn't believe in banks or like banks, and he

didn't want to get a loan. So I don't know how he worked it, but he ended up buying a one acre lot from the -- like my mom said, from a gentleman, señor, you know, you who had happened to want to I guess get rid of the lot, and so he ended up buying it like on payments; so no bank or anything. But so we lived right at the edge of the city; right at the county. But it was fine.

So the area where we lived it was really poor; you know, hardworking like lower middle class I guess. But it was poor. I remember we just -- like a bunch of kids we would, you know, go to school. You know, who wore the shoes in the summer, and you know, we didn't have pools and all that now. We just -- you had your bike and whatever. And there was a store down the street from us about a mile and we would walk there for ice cream, and it was fun.

[Off-Topic Dialogue]

[Background Sounds]

Rasul Go ahead.

[00:08:47]

Samaniego Well, I was going to say, and so at that time we didn't have -- they didn't sell tortillas, so my mom used -- yes she, you know, taught us to make tortillas. So we had to make flour tortillas. Because there were so many of us, so we had to make our own tortillas, and we just have stacks and stacks of tortillas that we had to make. And she taught us to cook too, so -- because we were -- there was a lot of us so, you know, we were the ones that when we were little we started cooking for everybody. You know, because as you got older then that became your -- you know, your responsibility.

Yes, she would go to work because they were working in the fields. And then she would leave us like the frozen chicken, "Okay," you know, "cut it up and -- " you know, "[speaks Spanish]." Yes, and so, you know, you did; so that's what you did, yes.

Rasul Tell me, did you or your family experience discrimination [inaudible]?

[00:09:46]

Samaniego I remember my father telling a story that when he first got here he wanted to work for the CHP. My dad had gone into the army. He was a sergeant in the Air Force. And when he was discharged, he wanted to be in law enforcement. And so he went to the CHP to, you know, see if he could get a job. And they looked at him and told him that in order to get a job at the CHP you had to be a minimum of six feet tall. And so, you know, my father was not six feet tall, and so couldn't get a job at the CHP. But he was really upset about that. He just knew it was because he wasn't -- because he was brown, he was Mexican.

Anyway, so he ended up working at Campbell's Soup. And so one day -- so at Campbell's Soup -- I was asking my mom the other day about who worked there, because it's at Campbell's Soup over -- off of Franklin. And Sacramento at the time had several canneries. And but I told her I said, "Mom, see, si trabajan en Mexicano." "Oh, si." You know, "Oh, yes, Mexicans work there. A lot of Filipinos work there." And I said, "And blacks." And she's like, "Well -- " she says, "the blacks -- " she's like, "well there were six." I said, "Six?" She's like, "Yes, there was a -- one man and one woman on each shift. So there were six blacks." And I'm like, "What -- " so and the work was according to your race. So if you were Mexican

and Filipino, most of the work you did was cleaning. That's what you did, you cleaned. So there were pre-designated based on your race. That's what you did, cleaned. So anyway, my dad I remember he wanted -- he had worked there several years and wanted to be a supervisor -- you know, get promoted. And you couldn't get promoted there unless you were white; a white male. Anyway, he was -- he didn't say anything, he was frustrated; but didn't say anything. So one day I guess the supervisor he was working in the bodega, I guess it was cold like a freezer section of the Campbell's Soup. And so he was wearing a beanie. And so the supervisor told him, "You've got to take your beanie off. You can't wear that." And he was like, "No, it's cold." "No, you've got to take your beanie off." "No, I'm not taking my beanie off." And so I guess he threatened my dad with, "We're going to fire you if you don't take off your beanie." So other people are hearing this. Then you start hearing that, "Uh-oh, there's trouble -- " you know, "in the bodega," and that he was going to get fired. And so my dad's like, you know, not taking off the beanie and so they had a conflict.

Well, the next thing you know, there was a strike. There was a strike at Campbell's Soup Company because of the unfair treatment -- well, and basically because of the discrimination. And so they had -- and my dad would be really frustrated because at that time it was the Teamsters Union. And of course the Teamsters Union weren't very helpful to my father. And so my father would say, you know -- I don't remember how old I was. I was young. It was probably about ten or 11 I think. I remember him saying that they had a sweetheart deal. That was the first time I had ever heard that. I didn't know what it was. "Yes," you know, "the union's got a sweetheart deal with the union so they're not doing anything," bop, bop, bop. So anyway, my mom hears. Somebody called her and said, "Hey," you know, "there's trouble with your husband. Your husband's not going to come home today," or, "He's going to come home late." She saw -- she told me -- was telling me the other day she's like, "Yes," she's like, "what's going on? So I called so and so and we got all the kids in the car, and we drove down to," you know, "Campbell's Soup Company to see what was going on with your dad." But she said, yes that they tried to fire him and that's how the strike came, so -- with their disputes. So I'm not sure how that dispute ended up.

Oh, I -- my dad wanted to decertify the Teamsters Union. He ended up working with a guy named Ruben Reyes. And Ruben had showed up and was helping him to try to get the union decertified. Of course they didn't, but there are a lot -- you know, a lot of organizing and awareness. I remember my dad would do a lot of meetings and stuff. That didn't pan out. So I think they ended up -- my father ended up suing Campbell's Soup Company in federal court, right, because that's what you do. Yes, suing them in federal court. And I remember my father would tell -- say, "Yes, you know, they offered me a million dollars. I don't want a million dollars. You know, I want them to stop discriminating." So instead of the money -- my dad didn't get a money settlement, instead he made Campbell's Soup Company do like equal employment, EEO, do a training, hire more people. And my mom said that yes after that they started hiring more blacks and, you know, promoting and getting the supervisors that were non-white male.

So I thought -- because that's what my dad wanted. So from what I saw from that was, "Oh, there are injustices in the world. We can fix them. You can raise your voice. You can say something. You can correct it, or at least try to."

Rasul That's a great experience as a kid. You know, other canneries were Hunt's, Libby's [inaudible] --

[00:15:19]

Samaniego Quantarina [phonetic]?

Rasul Burkett [phonetic] Richards [overlapping] --

[00:15:21]

Samaniego That's right, Burkett Richards.

Rasul Yes. So what are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to El Movimiento?

[00:15:30]

Samaniego It was probably my dad's experience with that. And I remember at the time -- and I want to say I was in junior high, Prop 14, seeing the fliers. I remember the boycott the grapes. And I remember -- God, it must have been -- I must have been really young because I remember seeing -- we had a black and white TV, and the Black Panthers had -- were at the capital. And they had guns. And I remember seeing that going, "Wow." And I remember my dad saying -- he goes, "Yes," he was like, "there's nothing scarier for a white man than seeing a black man with a gun." And I thought, "Wow." I'm like, "Yes." So but they -- because they wanted changes, you know, because of the racism and what was going on. That would have been kind of the late '60s I guess when they showed up -- when the Black Panthers showed up at the capital. But anyway, so what was interesting to me is the -- all of the meetings, the work that my dad did to decertify a union to, you know, make sure what was fair and raise your voice -- like why wouldn't you want what was fair?

So that's what I did. And then of course at that time too -- because my parents came from farm workers, my mom would just, you know, love Cesar Chavez, loved him and, you know, blessed him every day. She was like, "Yes," you know, "if it wasn't for Cesar Chavez, we would still be using a short hoe." And you know, I didn't know what a "short hoe" was. You know, she showed me. It's just like, "Yes," she's like, "[speaks Spanish]," you know, like the little [inaudible] and made -- you know, so that they could use the long hoes. But still, that was like hard backbreaking work in the heat and anywhere you were working. That was really hard work.

So she always -- you know, Cesar was always a hero in our home for that. But yes, it was just too making sure that -- of doing what's right, fair wages, you know, good working conditions.

Rasul How do you think Mexicans and Mexican Americans reacted to the term "Chicano"?

[00:17:53]

Samaniego I know for my mom it was -- she bristled; didn't like it. I think for my dad it was neither here nor there. You know, it's, "Let's go to work and let's get it done," and you know. But I think Jose was the one I think who kind of put it more perspective -- or at least for me, you know, because [speaks Spanish] like to -- you know, in Mexico we were too white, here we were too brown. So what are you? But and I just thought, you know, "We're just going to do the best we can do, right?" So and I do thank -- I'm so glad my dad made us, you know, that we still speak Spanish at home, that we are bilingual, that we are bicultural, and that we do -- it is two worlds, and it is different, and you still can walk I think among the both. But what does Mom say, "[Speaks Spanish]." It's like, "Dude, you're brown, you're brown." But she did bristle at it. She didn't like it. She thought we were always, you know, somos Mexicanos, you know, that's --

Rasul Yes.

[00:19:11]

Samaniego Yes. But I --

Rasul Yes, you mentioned Jose, were you referring to Jose Montoya?

[00:19:17]

Samaniego Jose Montoya, yes.

Rasul You kind of alluded to it already, but had you heard of the civil rights movement at that time? If so, what were your thoughts about it?

[00:19:31]

Samaniego Only -- like I said, it's what we saw from like the Black Panthers and Cesar Chavez and other sort of movimiento sort of coming up of like the women's rights, blacks, and some of the others, the labor. But the one that I saw the most was mainly the labor with Cesar and what that brought with it. You know, we used to have -- I remember we used to hand out fliers at the Lucky Star over on F Street to boycott grapes.

Rasul Okay.

[00:20:14]

Samaniego I remember that people would be angry, would be really mad if you gave them a flier.

Rasul Yes. There was a [inaudible] project at that date. Were you aware of it?

[00:20:31]

Samaniego I was not aware of it.

[Inaudible]

Rasul Did your knowledge of [inaudible] involvement and participation in the [inaudible]?

[00:20:42]

Samaniego Yes, we started -- Probably the -- handing out fliers and then we met, you know, the people, Jose and Esteban from the RCAF, and going to the -- we attended the -- and there are some pictures that I brought for you, the Jose Montoya's Pachu Guard show.

Rasul Yes.

[00:21:10]

Samaniego And I remember at the house getting dressed for that; we were getting dressed up. And my dad was like, "Oh," like, "where are you going?" And then my mom, I remember my mom, "Mom," you know, "help me with my hair." She's like, "Well, this is how the -- " you know, "the ladies wore it then." Then she helped me with our pompadour and our outfits at that time. But it was really interesting because nobody really talked about, you know, the Pachucos and what happened with him, and the

riots, and that. And my dad talked a little bit about it, and he knew like the -- you know, he spoke -- yes I didn't know, he spoke Calo and he knew. And I thought -- I don't know why, he used certain words. I thought everybody used them, but Jose was the only other one. But it -- to me it was like raising that awareness and that consciousness about people's history, and not having somebody -- what is it, the victors write the history.

Rasul Yes.

[00:22:11]

Samaniego So here we weren't the victors, we were the colonized people, so let's write our own history. So let's bring that back up. But anyway, so I brought some pictures from the Pachuco show. So that was like really interesting and a lot of fun. And so I -- yes that was good. Attending that was a lot of fun.

Rasul So the culture issues, how did that influence your participation in the Movimiento?

[00:22:42]

Samaniego It really inspired me and made me want to help others, to help people, and having that consciousness sort of that you can make change. So I ended up working -- we used -- we went to so many meetings, and I remember hanging out so much at Alkali Flat and working with Tim Quintero and being on the Alkali Neighborhood Association at that time. And I worked at the Legal Aid office, which -- and everything was right there, or right down on 12th Street. You know, it was right down the street; yes. So the Alkali office was there, Legal Aid was there, La Raza Bookstore was just, you know, a block down. Everything was there; and the Reno Club was right there and, you know, everything was right there. I lived right there. So everything was close. But it was really to help people and, again, address those working conditions, labor conditions, living conditions, wages, you know, and parity, I guess, you know, getting into schools.

Rasul Did your participation in the Movimiento affect you personally, okay; or changed you personally?

[00:24:05]

Samaniego Well, I think it helped raise -- it helped me know -- I didn't know there were like so many books, like history books, or artwork, or education about and for Chicanos. I didn't know that. So that was interesting for me to read. It's like, "Oh, okay." But again, it was really because I wanted to, "Oh, okay, let's help." You know, one was, "How can I help?"

Rasul What road do you still believe that the Chicanos paved in the Movimiento?

[00:24:50]

Samaniego I really do believe that the women were the backbone of the Movimiento. I remember when Cesar would come to town and Juanita Polendo, Rosemary, Manuela, everybody -- I don't know, people would get together and they would line up where he would stay, all his accommodations, you know, feeding them, if there was a lot of them, how that was going to work, who would feed them and do that. I mean, and I mean a lot of the women did that. They took care of that. You know, the men

were, you know, working and handing out fliers, but it was the women who were -- figured out what to feed them and where they're going to sleep.

Rasul Yes.

[00:25:30]

Samaniego Yes, they did that. But Jenny Baca, I remember Jenny being the, you know, one doing the cooking and making sure that it got done, and people were being fed; you know, but it was Juanita, too.

Rasul Yes.

[00:25:48]

Samaniego Polendo. That was Juanita Polendo.

Rasul Can you describe any women [inaudible]?

[00:25:56]

Samaniego So the person that I remember the most when I was reading the question was Rosemary; Rosemary Rasul. And I think when I met her, she was the director of Concilio. And the Concilio was really the hub for a lot of I think what happened in the city. But I remember going to meetings at the Concilio and she was always working; she was always there, and she was always working. But she was the one who -- and she was such a presence. I remember her being just like a large presence with a deep voice. And God forbid you would want to, you know, get spoken to by her in the deep voice. But she would be the person who would, you know, kind of give the orders and, you know, "Do this," or, "Do -- " you know, it got done. Whatever it was, it got done for -- and you did it for Rosemary. But she was the one who was really an inspiration to me about getting that -- doing the work, having that presence, and doing that voice. I thought it was amazing that a woman was a head of an organization like Concilio; because it's -- I don't know, to me it was like real male dominated. You see a lot of that. But it was the women who kept that running.

Jenny was another one. Jenny worked hard too. Man, she worked tirelessly for Breakfast for Niños. I found out later that that was one of the programs from the Black Panthers out of Oakland. And I thought, "Wow." But yes, we did Breakfast for Niños. I remember we would hang out at the offices over behind Guadalupe Church. Yes, there -- I don't know, I remember we were there a lot. But they had offices there. And I remember because they used to do screen printing there too, so I guess the RCAF must have had an office there, too. Because you hear some of those -- the poems I think from Jose. He always talks about the Mulberry tree, and that was the Mulberry tree out -- yes out front right there at the Breakfast for Niños. Tere[zita] Romo was another one. I remember when at La Raza Bookstore Phillip Santos -- well Tere[zita] and Pike [phonetic] both had opened the bookstore, but it was Tere's vision who wanted to have the gallery. And I remember helping to clean out the spot next door. It was an older cleaners and we helped clean it out. And her vision to do the art and the art component, and having them. I mean, she really worked tirelessly, too. I mean, she really had a vision I think at that time, and we saw amazing artwork through the years from people now who are at the Smithsonian.

I mean, we saw, you know, Carmen Lomas Garza, and Luis Jimenez, and Sonya Fe, and Esther Hernandez, Yolanda Lopez.

Rasul Oh, okay.

[00:29:01]

Samaniego I mean, we were seeing installations -- I think we saw -- we saw a living installation. I was telling Jima [phonetic] the other day -- this is my daughter, I'm like, "Don't you remember?" She was like, "We went to an art show opening there and Rene was there, Rene Anyas [phonetic] from San Francisco, and he taped -- he took duct tape and taped Vincent Montoya to the wall. And he's -- and Vincent was playing the guitar." Living installation; like who would have thought it? And that was -- to me that -- well it was Rene but --

Rasul Yes.

[00:29:31]

Samaniego Tere had the vision for that, you know, to put those together; to do the announcements, to -- I remember I would always help her with the reception and the food; always made sure that, you know, it looked nice and presentable. And so we did -- it was so many.

Rasul Oh, yes.

[00:29:45]

Samaniego Yes. We did a lot. But it took a lot of organization and stuff. But again, because we were all close; you know, Alkali office was right there, La Rasa Bookstore was right there, the Reno Club is right there, 524 -- [Inaudible] Well, I didn't know about a party, but I thought about it. And I'm like, "Well, yes," because it was all right there close; and the 524 was there. Yes. Martha Bustamante was another one. She was there; lived in Alkali Flat. She was part of the neighborhood association there. And she had been there a long time, and she lived in the housing projects there, I think. And she was really one of the founders and established -- and I know Tim wouldn't -- well I found out later Tim wouldn't do anything, I think, without Martha's approval because you wanted to make sure because she could really call up people and whoever, get the [inaudible]. Then the next thing you know, your office is full of screaming people at your face because Martha sent them. But she was -- so you didn't want her, you know, as an enemy. You certainly wanted her as an ally. Boy, and she got things done. She was the one who I think they ended up naming -- I remember they named La Valentina Station, she's the one that approved that name. And Henry Ortiz -- and Henry Ortiz lived there, too, and he did the artwork for it; he redesigned the artwork for the station there at Alkali Flat. But yes, a lot of the -- I remember her also being a force there and making sure the neighborhood --

[Inaudible]

Yes, because it was -- there was a lot of drugs and, you know, prostitution problems in that area; but you know, we did the best we could.

Rasul Yes, yes. When did you first initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento?

[00:31:36]

Samaniego I'm just going to do a couple more women, if that's okay. I'm sorry.

Rasul That's all right.

[00:31:43]

Samaniego Lupe Portillo. And I always remember Lupe because she would always help, too, with the Breakfast for Niños and help Jenny do that. But Lupe was really the key person who helped keep Dia de los Muertos traditions alive. She still to this day does the altares. But Lupe was really helpful because when -- at that time in those -- she would call up and we'd do mask workshops. So we did the mask workshops at Breakfast for Niños at different schools locally. We'd get, you know, supplies and whatever. But yes, Lupe is still -- and her kids; so it was help -- and you know, you couldn't have any kind of an event without Senora Cobb.

Rasul Yes.

[00:32:29]

Samaniego Yes, Senora Angelbertha Cobb. And I was thinking about it the other day and I'm like, "Yes, they did posters," but can't have a Dia de los Muertos celebration without Dan Santes [phonetic].

Rasul Yes.

[00:32:38]

Samaniego So at every festivity, every get-together, there was Dan Santes, Senora Cobb was our person. And she's the one -- God love her, who when she would burn sage and, you know, prayers and, you know. I always think of her and yes, to do -- make sure we've got the good spirits.

Rasul And Mother Santes in Sacramento.

[00:33:02]

Samaniego [Whispers] My God.

Rasul Absolutely.

[00:33:03]

Samaniego But she did all of the cost -- I mean, can you imagine the work that she did? I mean, that's like -- aside from organizing, and teaching them, and training them, she did all the costumes, making sure everybody knew when to show up, when to be there. And she was still doing that not too long ago.

Rasul Yes.

[00:33:19]

Samaniego So but she was a -- and then the last person I think I thought of was Olivia; Olivia Castellano. And I met Olivia when I was going to school at Sac State. And I mean -- and there were more women, but she was the one who was teaching the Chicano literature class who really opened my eyes to -- and critical thinking in terms of analysis for Chicano literature writers and authors.

Rasul Yes.

[00:33:48]

Samaniego And so I got exposed to other authors, which I'm ever eternally grateful. But there were others. I mean, Isabella Serna was also at Sac State, Gina Montoya, and of course, Charlotte Gutierrez, whom I miss. And she was really good to my kids, Jima and Pearl; the Garcia sisters, Lorraine Garcia and all the Garcia sisters, Lucero and Sochil Arellano [phonetic] -- [Inaudible] Right, Channel 13. We couldn't do without Sochil, and Josie Talamantez, of course, who was always present and there. And there were others, but those were the ones that I think I really thought of that were the women who -- at least in Sacramento that were just really the backbone of getting things done here. I'm sorry, then that was [overlapping] --

[Inaudible].

Rasul What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento?

[00:34:54]

Samaniego [Sighs] You know, I worked with -- and we would always go to the Concilio and then the Concilio I worked for a bit with American GI Forum, the Alkali Neighborhood Association, of course the RCAF. And then for a while, I was with the Southside Park Neighborhood Association. When I was at school, it was MEChA. And of course, I had a lot of years at La Rasa Bookstore in the Galeria Postada helping them. So I don't know if I initiated anything, but I -- certainly I think I helped, you know, at least participate in all of those organizations to help at least in promote and, I don't know, raise awareness, raise voices. And it was interesting because they knew -- there was a lot of overlap. They knew everyone and everyone else. So if, you know, "Well, I don't know anybody," "I will call somebody and we'll get you hooked up." So they knew; the network was there.

Rasul You probably answered the second question about how did these organizations -- would their activities affect the Movimiento?

[00:36:09]

Samaniego Yes; and you know, it was hard because I was thinking about it the other day, and this was like the '80s. Like we barely had a fax machine. I mean, there was no internet. There was nothing. There was no social nothing. So you really had to know somebody to -- and be there. I think you really had to be there to be involved; like physically there, get in your car, drive down there, walk down there, and be involved. And it was difficult, it was challenging, but I think it also kept people engaged. And Alkali Flat office did that a lot, because if you want -- yes, you just walk in and see Tim and Tim knew or didn't know or he'd call somebody who knew. But that office there I thought was really key for the neighborhood association. And he was good about getting I guess grants and whatever for the neighborhood.

Rasul It was always vibrant; always something going on there.

[00:37:07]

Samaniego Well, yes, because, you know, it was right there. Yes, it was right in the middle right there.

Rasul Did the Movimiento raise your consciousness regarding social or cultural and political issues?

[00:37:27]

Samaniego As I mentioned, because my parents had come from migrant farm worker backgrounds in the UFW, it was really close to home for me. They worked in the fields. Some of my family members still do. It was hard because there -- the UFWs worked -- had like direct impact like on my family, you know, and like the [inaudible] thing. It's -- so it was -- I saw the links there. And I think my father understood. He knew like the value of a voice and work interruptions, I guess, there, so that that has a positive outcome on you. Ultimately, I think -- because what my dad saw was, you know, education is your way out. You know, he'd always say, "[Speaks Spanish]," and like I didn't know what it meant at the time. But it's like oh, you know, yes, you break the barrier and you do that with education. And he told us, he goes, "We came to this city," he said, "because there are schools here." You know, "There's schools here and I want you guys to go to school." And so that's why we kind of like -- we went to Sac State. I graduated from Sac State and my sister did, too. So two of out of three is not bad. But he really wanted to know -- to break that. But we're still brown. I mean --

Rasul Yes, [inaudible].

[00:39:00]

Samaniego We're -- yes I mean -- but visually I think at the time -- I remember seeing posters from the Chelonen [phonetic]. Remember that, la -- [Inaudible] and the Chelonen? I think -- wasn't Tati Romo [phonetic] the first Chelonen princess? I don't know, it was one of the Romo sisters.

Rasul The younger one, yes; yes.

[00:39:21]

Samaniego But I remember making -- trying to make a connection between like the Aztec and indigenous, you know, and the Chelonen Primavera Festiva, and that -- when they were doing it at Southside Park, I just thought it was really interesting. And it really had an impact. I mean, I'm telling you. And I still to this day I love and collect and look for, you know, Aztec-inspired jewelry, anything, you know, that's like -- looks Aztec, or Mayan, or Native American I really do enjoy. But that Senora Cobb, you know, you put that together and putting those rituals together of the cleaning, the cleansing, the -- you know, the pure individuals I think it was putting it altogether for me about the impact it has on like, "Oh, okay, you know, yes, we are Mexican, yes," you know? "We're bilingual; they're our roots. It's okay. We don't need to be ashamed."

Rasul Yes.

[00:40:26]

Samaniego Yes. So that was -- at least that's what it was for me that I saw that indigenous past being brought to life by Senora Cobb with Dan Santos and having the visuals from the posters I thought - to me was impactful.

Rasul Kind of going over some of the questions here that you probably have already answered, but how did these changes affect your personal relationships with family, peers, and significant others?

[00:40:58]

Samaniego You know, we -- I found the most people then it rubbed people the wrong way. Even the term "Chicano" was offensive --

Rasul Yes.

[00:41:10]

Samaniego To some people. So you know, they weren't close friends. So you know, it kind of just -- so we mainly stayed with people who were likeminded and understood what it is to be Chicano, to be bilingual, bicultural, to [speaks Spanish].

Rasul Yes.

[00:41:37]

Samaniego So that was helpful to be with likeminded people. But I remember when I started working with the state, I really had to tone it down about being Chicano. You know, I would say -- because people would be confused. And so I would like, you know, "What are -- " "Oh, yes, I'm Latin." You know, well because I couldn't use the term "Hispanic" because I always thought of Jose, you know, the "panic". So I didn't want to be Hispanic, so I was Latina.

Rasul Yes.

[00:42:07]

Samaniego But I did that for work because people kind of bristled, or didn't understand, or -- you know, then you're explaining -- I tried explaining it to somebody, a coworker and I'm like, "Yes, this is not working. 'Latina', thank you." But yes, it's mainly I've tried to just be with likeminded people.

Rasul How do you think your involvement with the Movimiento affect your personal career?

[00:42:35]

Samaniego Well, I've got to say, it was a little difficult for me. I graduated from Sac State and I got recruited by the state of California to work for them; and I did. And so I worked in healthcare. I worked for the Department of Health for several years and left there, and then I worked for the Department of Corrections. I learned about the school-to-prison pipeline. And then I got recruited by a manager there to work in labor relations. And I didn't really understand like what it was or what they did, and -- but I worked there because I had a background in healthcare. So I worked in labor relations. Well, after all my years of training with Cesar Chavez, worker rights, really so now I'm going to work for management? [Laughs] So there I am. I did, though. And I thought, "Well, it's just a job. It's cool." But I had a hard time with it, of representing management after being trained -- after so many years of, you know, the Movimiento, Cesar Chavez, and worker rights, and that, and there I am. So am I traitor? Am I a turncoat? Am I a coconut? So I thought, "You know what, it's just a job. And what better place to be than on the inside?"

Rasul Yes.

[00:44:02]

Samaniego So and I always thought of my dad, right, "Do what's right. Do what's right." And so I thought, "Well, this is okay, I can do this." And I can -- "I'm the one telling management, "No, we're going to make this right. Let's make this right for this employee." So it was tough. That one was a hard one, but there I was representing management.

Rasul Yes.

[00:44:23]

Samaniego Yes, I ended up being appointed by Governor Brown. I was a Governor Brown appointed -- [Inaudible] Yes. I only did that for a year, though. It was -- yes, so did that. But yes, my background in labor relations I did that for, gosh, almost 20 years.

Rasul Wow.

[00:44:43]

Samaniego Yes, long time. But it's not an easy job. It's -- I think it's a tough job. But I'm glad I could do it at least to do what's fair --

Rasul Yes.

[00:44:55]

Samaniego And to do what's right.

Rasul Yes.

[00:44:57]

Samaniego And so that's kind of how I saw doing that, yes; so but it was tough.

Rasul Sandra, can you describe how the Movimiento impacted community life here in Sacramento?

[00:45:17]

Samaniego I was thinking about that this week, and I think with the RCAF here in our own backyard, I think I took it for granted a little bit. You know, I guess I thought everybody had an RCAF in their backyard. And I feel very fortunate and grateful that I did, you know, work with them, worked for them, knew them, all of them, Jose and Esteban, Ichi [phonetic], Stan, Rudy, all of them, that I go to know them. But I think that that impact was certainly a -- I think, a positive impetus for so much more in this community. I mean, just the murals, you -- mean you read about the murals just in Sacramento, about them popping up everywhere, and the ones at Sac State, and the ones that, you know, got away. And I remember there was a big, I think, mural behind the Reno Club that it's gone. A lot of them are gone now and disappeared. But you know, thankfully, some of them have stayed, like the Southside Park mural; because I remember helping to paint that when everybody was working on it, and you know, I helped, too. But just from that visual of being -- having the murals able to provide a visual past. Like, you

know, I remember reading about what murals did for -- like in Mexico for the masses. You know, the masses many couldn't read, so what did we do, we're going to give them [inaudible] -- give them a visual so they can see. So I think of it that way, too, "Okay, well, you know, we don't know about the history. We're not putting -- you know, let's put up a mural, so mark it there or make sure that people remember it." So but I don't know that everybody is going to remember them because I think some of those murals have disappeared. But hopefully we'll have the new murals; because the mural -- I was at downtown the other day and the metamorphosis one by Stan, yes, really needs a little bit of love and --

Rasul Yes.

[00:47:29]

Samaniego Yes. So I was going to email my councilmember going, "What are you going to do about it?" But I think it was -- has a positive -- and that's just the mural part. But I mean, there was like printed, and written, the activism. I mean, Sacramento was really a political hotbed, too. I remember, you know, we had the Chicano -- our police chief at the time, oh Chief Onegas [phonetic].

Rasul Yes.

[00:47:57]

Samaniego You know, and I think people like that came up like, you know, Joe Serna and from the politics side, you had more of Chicanos coming up through the political side; because you know, that's -- honestly, that's where the voice comes from, that's where the money is going to come from, that's where the empowerment is going to come from. So again, because it's Sacramento, I think that impact had a lot to do with this. You know, you've got the education, all the professors at Sac State turning out, I guess the state workers went, yes; that there is a big impact, a positive one, I think, that it had on this city.

Rasul Yes.

[00:48:43]

Samaniego Yes.

Rasul Okay, you -- many activists have passed on, like Joe [inaudible] that you mentioned earlier. Can you identify an individual or individuals that you felt has impact on the Movimiento, and please explain their significance.

[00:49:12]

Samaniego Yes, I really do think that that was Rosemary. And I don't ever remember Rosemary not working, or not being at work, or having a home life, or -- I mean, like she just worked all the time. And I think she had such a positive impact on this community and what she did. And I don't ever remember -- please correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't ever remember her being publicly acknowledged for her work, ever getting recognition, or a plaque, or you know, I'm sure -- you know, I'm sure I thanked her for the hard work. But between her and Manuel La Serna, [phonetic] I mean, they pulled off all those events at Southside Park. Every -- those big events that happened here and just as -- I think right in the Sacramento Concilio, which is a large probably job in itself, it had to be a big deal. But she was the one to me that had like the big -- between her and Manuela like the biggest impact. The other one probably

is Jose for me. It's probably Joe Serna because of these political connections, but -- and his son's still on the supervisor right now. But it was -- to me, it was Jose.

Rasul Yes.

[00:50:52]

Samaniego And he really -- hearing him -- and again, because it was in my backyard, I really -- I think I took it for granted. And I regret that now. You know, I probably should have gone to more concerts. I probably could have bought more CDs. I wish I had. But we knew him; he was our friend. But -- and as a writer, that use of language that he had -- and both languages, that made it to me -- at least at that time hearing him, it was okay. It was okay to be bilingual, it was okay to -- you know, to do Spanglish and speak other languages, you know, even with an accent. You know, he made that okay. He really brought that home for us and his play on words, too, was very clever. And I still listen to his music. You know, he's on my playlist, and have his work, so yes. But probably for me, it's probably Rosemary, and mainly because I think she was unsung hero. And I'm sorry I didn't keep in touch with her over the years.

Rasul Yes. Looking back at your experience in the Movimiento, are there any issues that were left unresolved?

[00:52:25]

Samaniego You know, I thought about that and I'm thinking that I don't know that we resolved any issues. [Laughs] I think more popped up. And I was thinking about that because Alkali Flat now, you drive through there and it's such a nice neighborhood. Now they've got those beautiful townhouses, and they're very expensive. And I -- yes and I wonder, "Is this what Marta Bustamante had in mind?" And I think we can call it "gentrification". And it's -- really is that what our -- the neighborhood was all about? Is that really what we worked for, to gentrify the neighborhood? And I don't know the answer to that. I just know it's tough. And it's tough because right now it's happening in this neighborhood. In this neighborhood, yes, they're building the billion dollar projects here at UC Davis and it's impacting Oak Park. And I'm looking to see how that -- but I don't know, I'd like to think that we did resolve some issues.

I think that there was enough movement to stop things like, you know, "English only" and these, you know, kinds of things that we -- shouldn't be seen or heard. But now I think it's changed. Where before, maybe, you know, passing out fliers and that, now there's social media and you get online. And you know, I don't think -- I don't know if anybody ever goes to any meetings anymore. [Laughs] But I don't know if that's easier or harder. I don't know. I don't know if it's resolved or not. I just think there's more. I mean, it -- COVID to me it laid bare the chasm of technology like, you know, people lacking equipment, lacking internet, you know, at their homes and, "Okay, so now we have them. Now, everybody's got, you know, internet and computers." And it's like, "Okay, so now what? You don't need to leave the house or how do you stay connected?" I don't know. But that and I think there's more mental health. There's a lot more homelessness. I think it affects Latinos a lot more. The cost of homes is outrageous, yes, here in our own community. I mean, and just in my neighborhood, it's really quite astonishing. So and I'm thinking, "How can I -- how can anybody afford a home now?" You know, I remember when my dad came -- and I sound like my dad. You know, you could -- what is it? And he goes -- so we'd go down, we'd buy a burger, and the burger would be ten cents and, you know, the milkshake would be a dime,

and you could eat for a quarter." And I'm like -- you know, but it's not like that. But now it's like that it's crazy. So I don't know that we -- I think there was some resolution.

I think, we did excellent. I think the Movimiento with the EEO -- and I remember we used to work -- yes the EEO office, [speaks Spanish] at Sac State, the EEO office there, I mean, is that going to go away? Because it seems like a lot of that work is being undone now in this -- today's political climate, which is crazy to me because -- yes. So I don't know, and I'm sorry and I struggled with this question because I think it just raised more.

My sister works in mental health field, and we just see a lot of -- you know, there's a lot of need, a lot for bilingual/bicultural healthcare providers.

Rasul Yes.

[00:56:27]

Samaniego So -- I'm sorry, I --

Rasul No, that's a good -- [inaudible] unresolved issues and there are future challenges. What do you think about future challenges as far as the Movimiento?

[00:56:40]

Samaniego [Sighs] I think it goes back to that being educated and being aware of not having somebody write our history for us; that we write our own. What did Jose say, "We don't want to regret being de-historified." But so I think if we're aware of the past that we can hopefully plan and go our own future route that we're able to recognize the past, avoid, you know, those pitfalls, and hopefully move forward that, you know, education is -- to me is still is to a way out and a way forward. And is it the full answer, no, I mean -- but it does it help, absolutely, yes. I mean, plenty of studies will tell you, you know, "The more education you have, the more pay you'll get." So yes, let's -- you know, education is good. I think it opens doors, it opens our eyes, "Okay, you know, what do you want to do? What do you want to study?" Because I remember being at Sac State thinking the more I learned, the more I knew I didn't know. Like I didn't -- there was just more, more to learn, more to know. But I don't know, honestly; especially with social media, the way there's so much -- there's a lot of misinformation -- you know, it's like how do you sort through it, how do you sift through it? I don't know, I feel sorry for anybody raising kids right now. I don't --

Rasul You know, I know you're retired, right?

[00:58:28]

Samaniego Yes.

Rasul So are you still going to be staying involved with the Movimiento in some way or another?

[00:58:35]

Samaniego You know, with working, and family, and health issues, whatever, I kind of dropped out. I haven't in a while. And I'm -- there's no more La Rasa Bookstore. There's really no art center to go to and see cool artwork -- well, I guess at The Crocker because I heard the RACF posters are up right there.

But like I don't know where that is, at least in the city right now anymore. But I mean, I'd like to. I try to. I'm glad my kids are still involved and, you know, with tribes. I'm going to try, David. I promise.

Rasul It's good to pass the torch on.

[00:59:27]

Samaniego Yes.

Rasul You know, I want – this concludes our interview, but you know, I really want to thank you for bringing up your experience that your dad had [inaudible]. I think that really needs to be recorded, and I really appreciate that. Again, part of it is my family was [inaudible] workers also, but the experience and what your dad did, that makes me very proud.

[00:59:51]

Samaniego Who would think you can decertify the Teamsters? I tell you who, Emiliano Samaniego, that's who, "Let's decertify them." But he did good. I mean, he won his federal lawsuit --

Rasul Yes.

[01:00:06]

Samaniego So good for him.

Rasul Right. Thank you, Sandra.

[01:00:08]

Samaniego Thank you, David.