

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education  
Oral History Project

**Xochitl Arellano**  
Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Nancy Milan  
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Transcription by Ursus Garcia and Technitype Transcripts

**Milan** Please state your full name.

[00:00:09]

**Arellano** Xochitl Arellano.

**Milan** Please provide your birthdate.

[00:00:14]

**Arellano** So it's August 29, 1958.

**Milan** Please provide your marital status.

[00:00:22]

**Arellano** I'm single.

**Milan** Do you have any children? If yes, how many do you have?

[00:00:29]

**Arellano** No biological children or blood children, but one child that consider my son, Brando. His name is Brando Broca.

**Milan** Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:51]

**Arellano** I was born and raised in Mexico City.

**Milan**           What did your parents do for a living?

[00:00:59]

**Arellano**        So my father worked for—he was a policeman in Mexico, and then he later worked for the government. My mother was a homemaker, and she did lots of things at home, including putting signs outside of the house to say, you know, “I can do permanent.” Remember those permanents that people did? Or color your hair. She knew how to do everything. She knew how to cook well, and she was a seamstress. She did all of our clothing. So that was my life as a child.

**Milan**           How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:01:49]

**Arellano**        I have two older sisters, Lucero and Rocio.

**Milan**           Please describe your experiences as a child and youth in your family and neighborhood.

[00:02:01]

**Arellano**        Wow! Thank you. [laughter] So one grows up just knowing how happy you are in the surroundings of your family, and I grew up in Mexico City with my parents and my two older sisters in a very poor neighborhood, but one didn’t know those things. All we knew is that we were happy. My sisters were always doing fun things. One would always do like a marching band with cartons or would cut cardboard, make it into a trumpet or whatever, and then have all the kids from the neighborhood walk with them.

We also had cows going through that street, and then you also had folks playing soccer outside in that street, and if you walked through the street there, you might get hit by the ball. It was that kind of a thing. But I was very, very happy.

Went to a school called Milton Guzman Romero. Actually, I only went to second grade in Mexico City. I grew up there until I was about nine years old, and then I came to the U.S. But it was a very happy, loving childhood that I had. Went to a crazy, I say crazy, elementary school because, again, you don't realize that you have a lot of needs until you grow up and you realize, "I went to that school? Oh, my god, the bathrooms were terrible. Oh, my god. We had all these needs." You don't realize it until later. But you were happy.

**Milan** Were you a Fellow or Felito during the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:04:19]

**Arellano** No.

**Milan** So what are the earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:04:30]

**Arellano** Well, I came to this country when I was nine, and we went to Chicago, my parents, my family, and we were there eight months, and then we moved to Southern California, and I remember seeing lots of folks that had a lot of khaki pants and bandanas and those white top—or what do they call them—T-shirts for guys. And I remember my father saying that he didn't like that, saying, "Oh, my god, if

these folks represent us in this country, no wonder they don't like us." And so I was like, "Oh, my god, yeah, those guys, what are they doing? That's terrible."

And then after that, when I was eighteen—so I came here when I was nine, and when I was eighteen, my father and my mother and my sisters, my father's goal, every Mexican's dream was, I think, to go back to Mexico and just live there. So, actually, my father was able to do that, and when I was eighteen, we moved back to Mexico City.

So long short to answer, we came back to this country after a year of being in Mexico in 1976, because the peso had devaluated completely and so there was no way to sustain ourselves there, and we had to uproot once more and come back to the U.S. So when I came back to the U.S., we came back to Sacramento, not to Southern California. My grandmother lived here and my mother's sisters.

Then that very summer, just as it probably would be now, because we arrived late April, April 30<sup>th</sup> of 1976, I began a summer program called Centro de Artistas Chicanos. Long short, but I started to get to know who the Chicanos were in a very different light, through poetry, through art, through all kinds of disciplines of art, and immediately I fell in love with that and I started respecting so much the Chicano culture because I had no reference to it before. The only reference I had to whatever was sounding like Chicano was folks that had khaki pants and bandanas, and that's fine, but I never really got to know and heard what that reality was about.

**Milan** Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change your personality or your persona? Please explain.

[00:08:03]

**Arellano** Well, I think I'll stay on that same note. That summer was fantastic. I was so lucky to be in all kinds of classes. It was glass cutting and wood cutting, and it was art and listening to the words of the *artistas* Chicanos, which they were the Royal Chicano Air Force who were presenting these workshops. I didn't know who they were.

But one thing I knew and I had very clear in my mind throughout my life was my father's life, and my father's life was hard. I mean, he was a policeman in Mexico City, he was a government employee, but then also he became a *bracero*, and the *braceros* came to the United States when the Second World War was going on. He came here as a single man and he did all kinds of things, but he was working all over the southwestern United States, picking all kinds of fruits and picking all kinds of vegetables. And in the end, he would always show me the way, and the way was to know your history, to know the past. He always talked about the Mexican Revolution and the inequalities of the "haves" and the "have-nots." So something was instilled in me to know why some people have and some don't. Why the inequalities? And what's going on behind that?

So, seeing my father's life and my mother's, and getting to know as a teenager in Sacramento back then a new group of folks that were Chicanos, and seeing how they were like the front line for the rest of Latin America because they were in the belly of the beast, the United States, and they were suffering lots of discrimination from both sides, you know. They weren't Mexican enough or they weren't from the United States enough.

So that changed me, enriched me, and I wanted to talk about all of those inequalities, and I sort of jumped into wanting to communicate all of that. I went into journalism and wanted to talk about that and report on it, and I did it for Spanish language for twenty years in Sacramento through Univision.

**Milan** So can you please elaborate? You mentioned you were working for Univision for around twenty years. Can you explain some of the projects you were involved in during that time period?

[00:11:48]

**Arellano** Well, so that little worm always stayed in me of wanting to know why some have and some don't. I graduated from Sacramento State. I actually came to Sacramento city, and then through a Puente Project went to Sacramento State and graduated in journalism and communications, and immediately I started working in radio and television, all was in Spanish. I think I wanted to communicate to my community that was monolingual, that had no access to services, that had no knowledge of how the system worked, because I saw that through my parents. My parents wanted us to go to school, but they didn't know how to tell us where to go, so I felt there was a big need to do that.

So I was hired as a news director in Modesto. For nine years I was there, and so I was a news director, but I was also an anchor, I was a reporter, I was a producer, was everything, you name it. And that's where you're able to have the luxury to cover issues in the way that you really want to focus on them. I had that privilege to do that.

Then I came to Sacramento as a correspondent because I was always very, very interested in covering the Capitol, I wanted to know what it was going on under

that dome, who was being affected, how is it that they divide that cake called a budget, and who got to do that, and how come some got more and some got less? So I came here to Sacramento and started being the correspondent for Univision and the affiliates across the state and the nation.

My projects were always trying to cover that, the government, trying to decipher what government was doing and what it needed to do to help out more and how to have the audience ultimately participate as voters, because that was the most important thing to do. You have to react with your voting voice.

One of the projects that was my dream, and it sort of just came into being when I arrived to Sacramento as a correspondent, was having a political show where we could sit down the lawmakers or anybody in government and ask them directly, “What’s going on? Why this? Why that?” It was called *Voz y Voto* and it started back in ’98, I think, ’98, and it became a statewide show where the Latinos watched every Sunday morning, for half an hour, everything that had to do with politics.

Politics is just another word for how your everyday life is. I always wanted to tell my community, “You know what? Don’t worry about that word. It’s too complicated. Politics, what’s that? It’s your everyday life. How are you living? Are you receiving the services that you need to receive? Does your lamppost work? Do you have a sidewalk on the side of your street? Is your kid going to school? Is he receiving the services and the classes that he needs to receive?” All of that, somebody decides it in that Capitol. So you need to know that they’re doing that so you can act on that. So that was one of the projects that I was very, very proud of and very, very happy to be part of, and I did it for eight years.

We did not only cover government. One thing for sure, I always wanted to cover what I haven't told you, the other vein in me, very strong, is art and culture, art and culture, and sometimes they go together, politics and art and culture. So we always did in that show, since I was the director of that show, or producer, I always put in there art, culture, politics, and not only state politics, I put in there national and international politics.

**Milan**            Would you like to elaborate more on what type of arts that you were passionate about? You mentioned poetry before. Have you written certain types of poems or have you designed things for your projects, like flyers, things like that?

[00:17:56]

**Arellano**        Oh, okay. Let's go back a little bit in time. Then we'll go back to the *Voz y Voto*. My first job was being in radio right after college. Graduated Saturday. Tuesday, I was already working. It was Spanish-language radio, and I was the public affairs director and I was the reporter in the beat, urban beat covering, but I always managed to go to the Capitol.

But on Saturday nights, I had a Spanish-language rock program, *musica de rock pero en español*, and it was a lot of fun. I called it *La Cueva, The Cave*. Back then, it was in '84 or '85, the regime of Francisco Franco in Spain had ended back in '76, but the music wave of all their artistic expressions did not come to us until later, and somehow I got wind of it and grabbed it, since I was in radio, and then I started playing it. I was able to write to six record companies in Spain, and they all sent us all kinds of music and videos, and I started playing it on a radio station that usually

would play very rural Mexican music, very conservative. This one was off the charts and very crazy.

So I started doing a lot of posters for that program, *La Cueva*, and it said “Para Mentalidades Desarrolladas,” “For Developed Minds,” right? Freddy Gonzalez was the one who did the posters. He’s the brother of Louie “the Foot” [Gonzalez], who was part of the RCAF. So I was always involved with those gentlemen that were always having a wonderful expression of art. I had a lot of fun with that too. It was two years of doing *La Cueva*, and a lot of folks had never, ever heard that kind of music back in 1985 in this metropolitan Sacramento area.

Later on, fast-forward in ‘98 when we did *Voz y Voto*, art never left me. My first love was dance. I always wanted to dance, but every expression, whether that was theatre, I was in theatre in college and writing my poems or my thoughts, those are for me, but I would invite on that program, *Voz y Voto*, different poets from around the city. We had Olivia Castellano, wonderful poet and professor at Sacramento State University, English professor, and other folks that were part of the—oh, Mr. José Montoya as well, a part of the RCAF. He was on our show. I made sure that poetry was on that statewide political show, because, for me, it is as important as any politics or any government issue to have poetry and to have art as a way to communicate to people, so that’s what I did.

**Milan** Can you describe more how the Movimiento Chicano has impacted your community life here in Sacramento?

[00:22:14]

**Arellano** When I was in Modesto as a news director, I had only a few things that I wanted covered on television. I said, “For sure I want the government to be covered, the Capitol, the state. I want the schools to be covered, the city council, and the school board meetings.” But the one that was very close to my heart and I went all the time to cover, was the farmworkers. So we went and always covered around Modesto or anywhere around Stockton or in the Woodland areas in Northern California, covered all of the terrible labor conditions that the *campesinos* have endured. That was immediately connected to everything that the RCAF had been doing, which was back in the Teatro Campesino days, where they were doing theatre about what the life of the *campesino* had, and it was terrible.

Back when I started doing the news was in '88. Eighty-eight through '97, I covered all of the *campos*, Modesto, Sac, and made sure to link that reality of the *consciencia* that the Chicano had to what the work of the *campesino* was doing, and then, of course, finding out from the *políticos* why or why not. “Why are you not paying attention to them?” I felt that was my number-one goal, to always cover the farmworker. The Teatro Campesino, kind of their heyday had already gone, but these RCAF folks in Sacramento were always very much present and always telling us, “What are you doing to make people think about their *familias*? What are you doing to help them?”

One thing that I remember when I was in the newsroom in Sacramento, my news director would say—because back then I was a correspondent and there was a different news director—it was all geared to Mexico. Yes, that's great, the Mexicans, yes. We always talked about Mexicans, but then I always brought up the word

*Chicano* in my newsroom, and it was never well accepted. The word *Chicano* in my newsroom for my news director was, “What’s that?”

And I would say, “You know what?”

He would say, “To me, that word *Chicano* is, like, militant.”

And I would say, “Really? Well, maybe it is militant. To me, it means social conscience, and if you don’t have that, then why are we here? I’m here for finding out what the conditions of our people are, and they talk about it.”

So, for me, it was always trying to, as a reporter, trying to cover that angle and it always stayed with me, and it covered all kinds of issues of labor and how it connected to government and how the artists were talking about it.

**Milan** Did you have any interesting finds as you were reporting and looking in to the farmworkers as well as the politics, the political side of it?

[00:27:03]

**Arellano** That one didn’t know anything about the other and that one didn’t care anything about the other, and you probably know who.

I remember one time I was in Modesto and I was pretty new to the job, and my parents would come visit me. One day, I took my TV vehicle and I was going up and down the *campos*, and I found on the floor this mattress, on the ground of the fields, this mattress, and then on the trees there was some clothes hanging there, and then there was some beer cans that were sort of smashed. And I said, “Oh, my god! Oh, my god! I can’t believe what I’m seeing, people just living like that right there. I can’t believe that. I’ve got to go tell the *políticos* about this. I’ve got to go to Capitol

with my camera and my microphone. I know they don't know about this. I know it." I think I was very naïve. They knew about it. They just didn't do anything about it.

So I was always out there trying to change that. I knew that if you talked about the farmworker and you talked about the rancher, you realized later that the middle man was the one that always took the responsibility or lack of responsibility of not having anything to do with the condition of the farmworker. So the contractor was the main person that was protecting the rancher from anything, and he could have free rein in telling the farmworker what to do. We were always going after that rancher or contractor, but you would go back to the halls of the Capitol and they would say, "Well, you know, we can't do much about it."

And I remember laws were being written to go after the contractor, and, unfortunately, also at the Capitol the powers that be did not make that happen. Unfortunately, the contractor is always sort of like an independent agent and it's not really someone who is there to take the responsibility for what occurs. But that's what I found, that in my reporting, it was very unfortunate to see how even the laws were watered down and were not helping some folks that have made this state so rich. That industry makes like \$30 billion a year.

**Milan** Did you get to interview any ranchers or contractors or any of the migrant workers?

[00:30:55]

**Arellano** Oh, yes, yes. The few ranchers that I came across were able to say that they were trying to do their best, and that was the best thing you could get out of

them, but the other ones were just telling you to get out of their property, and you did not have any kind of contact with them.

I had a wonderful time covering a time of Sacramento where the Mexican consulate, Mr. Nicolás Escalante, was completely involved in being in the fields, the farmworker fields, every single week, and I would go with him. He would speak directly to the rancher and say, “Look, all these folks, you have not paid them their money and you have taken this money away from them.” So he would take them to court. I had never seen that, a Mexican consulate taking ranchers to court. That was incredible, and he did.

I really enjoyed covering that time for the farmworking conditions. So, farmworkers, many, *many* farmworkers. Oh, my god, I can’t tell you how many farmworkers I interviewed and in terrible conditions, and it breaks your heart just to know they they’re working in an industry that earns over \$30 billion a year, but they don’t even have water, much less a labor right.

**Milan**        During one of your interviews with one of the workers, did they say anything impactful to you that you still carry throughout to this day or anything that is so vivid in your mind that you’re glad you interviewed them or they just really made an impact?

[00:33:27]

**Arellano**      I remember this one young man, he was so young and he lived in one of those—*¿como les llaman?* They lived in those farmworker dwellings. He came from Mexico, and he was, like, in a tin shed, and it was like over 100 degrees, it was

so hot, and it was this place they called the Palace of Dracula. I remember that, the Palace of Dracula. And he had such sad, sad face. I said, “What are you doing?”

And he said, “Well, I came from Mexico.” He was trying to make it over here. I just felt so just sad, very sad for him, and knowing that you’re so impotent of trying to do something, the only thing you can do is just record him and interview him and expose that to everybody and see what happens.

Folks like him, or one time I went to a dwelling in Woodland, or you had, like, so many farmworkers and they were all isolated. That’s the problem with the farmworkers, they’re so isolated. No one sees them, no one knows what their labor conditions are, no one sees what problems there are. And so they were so far away isolated in a house or dwelling, and they were there. There was this little hallway and they were all just watching—guess what—Spanish-language television, and that’s all they were watching. They didn’t have anything else to do. It was after their work hours and late afternoon. They had nothing else to do.

It’s really hard to think that they have something to hope for. They come to this country and they just want to save a little bit of money so that they can do something with it when they go back to Mexico, and sometimes they end up not only losing that money, but almost losing their life. And it’s a shame, it’s a shame that we do not help them much more. There were many cases. Most of them were men. The few women that I had encountered, they were older and you could tell that they had been here for a long time. But the everlasting memory of those days covering the farmworkers is the humbleness of their spirit, and they don’t complain. They just

need to get done whatever they need to get done and, hopefully, the next day will be better.

**Milan** ¿Y niños [and children]? [Spanish] [Did you interview any] *niños*?

[00:37:06]

**Arellano** *Niños. No porque hubiera hecho un gran reportaje de eso también.*

*No, no recuerdo niños.* [Translation by Ursus Garcia]

**Milan** What do you see as current or future changes for the Chicano community?

[00:37:34]

**Arellano** You know, everything is fluid, and always the youth are the ones who make the change. Youth is the one that takes the torch. I'm seeing so much with the Dreamers, the DREAM Act. They are shaping our social fabric of modern-day social justice. I think they have taught us so much. They have taught us how to be compassionate and taught us how to withstand realizing all of a sudden that they are not who they thought they were. But guess what. They *are* who they think they are, and they are shaping today's world, and I am so proud of them.

Seeing so many families being torn apart, that is really disturbing me. I'm not in television anymore, for now, but if I could go back to documenting something, it would be to document the separation of children and parents. The separation is the darkest days that we will remember going back to the history pages of what we're living today. I cannot believe how we are silent. Nobody seems to worry about how horrific it is to separate a child from their father or their mother just because they

don't have the status that they need to have. We would not accept this from anyone in this planet as a human being.

So I'm worried about that, I'm worried a lot, and I'm not sure how to—I work now at the Capitol, and I went in there working for a senator that I really respected and respect, Mr. Gil Cedillo, who fought so hard for the undocumented immigrants with a driver's license. And I remain there, even though he's not there anymore, and I'm there with many other folks that are doing lots of laws that are trying to protect issues precisely as the families are being torn apart. So that's what I'm hoping, that in the future we can all have a little bit of that *conciencia, conciencia social*. I think we tend to forget that when we focus on a lot of superfluous things that don't really matter.

**Milan** So you've been in a lot of organizations throughout this time period.

[Spanish] Translation by Ursus Garcia: "Being a woman, what things have you learned? What things have you grasped that have made you stronger?"

[00:41:22]

**Arellano** *Puedo hablar en español?* [I can speak in Spanish?]

**Milan** *Sí.* [Yes.]

[00:41:24]

**Arellano** *Bueno.* [Good.] [Spanish]. Translation by Ursus Garcia: "Now I remember when I was working for *Univision*, I also made a documentary called *Braceros*, and it talked about all the *braceros* that came to this country, and that touched me very close, because they interviewed my dad, he was a *bracero*, and all the struggle they went through, right, the *braceros* in this country, and that now in

days, from what I've seen, they haven't given them the justice they deserve. Because many have left, like my dad who left and never received recognition for being *braceros*. It isn't really about the pay. It's for the recognition of a person who didn't receive justice.

Look, I believe that everything that happens in your life will be a lesson, it will be an experience that you will put away in your pocket and you will say, "Dang, I survived this." For me, the hardest thing I have lived, I know that covering the disgrace of all the things that have happened historically for our community and the good things too, but for me, what has hurt me a lot in a personal level, what has mostly hurt me is my family, that my mother was sick for sixteen years with Alzheimer's, and no one in our community, I believe, knows that sickness.

So this, for me, has been surviving this, and that my mother was also sick for so long and she passed away, and then after, my father recently passed away. For me, I've been so close to them that it is incredible how close I've been with my parents. They were never far from me, they always came, we lived together. When I was already a senior, even though I went to Modesto, I always came back to be with my mom and be with her and my dad, because there is nothing more important than family. There is nothing more important than your parents, and it doesn't matter what happens, being with them throughout life. I would never change one second for living that one again.

Our community is collectively always in the fight, and the only thing I know is that when you learn, if you learn, you have to repeat the lesson and the next lesson

won't be as hard for you, because one goes through the rocky road and doesn't pass in vain. Instead, you learn something.

**Milan**        *¿Algo mas que desea compartir?* [Do you have anything else you'd like to share?

[00:45:27]

**Arellano**     [Spanish] Translation by Ursus Garcia: That I am grateful for being interested in my life, that I feel very happy that they consider this so interesting to talk about it. I thank you very much for the care that you have for documenting a history of our community, because to know about Chicano culture is to know that a person has a social conscious, and had the pride and a lot of love for his roots, and the roots for which I will always stick to are indigenous roots. I know we are Spanish and indigenous in our veins, but I lived in both countries, right? I grew up in Mexico and here, and then I returned to Mexico. So it's like I come from Mexico and I'm very close to my parents, but I know I am like those fishes that can swim in both waters perfectly. *Muchas gracias*. I don't have any issue, but if there is something I could change in the mentality of any person, even if I'm the only one who changes, we need to be very proud of our past and our indigenous heritage, because that is the mother.

Thank you very much. *Muchas gracias*.

**Milan**        *Muchas gracias*.

[End of interview]