The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Arturo Aviña

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon Valadez
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Transcription by Maria Fernanda Barajas and Technitype Transcripts

Valadez For the record, state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Aviña Arturo Aviña.

Valadez Your birthdate.

[00:00:12]

Aviña I was born May 27th, 1943.

Valadez Are you married?

[00:00:18]

Aviña Yes, I'm married. I have three children, three grandchildren, and next month I'll have four grandchildren.

Valadez What are your children doing now?

[00:00:36]

Aviña One is a teacher, the other is a speech pathologist, and the third is returning to get his doctorate degree in speech pathology, my son. The other two are women.

Valadez Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:57]

Aviña I was born in Baja California, Mexico, in a very small village, en route, actually. My parents were coming from the state of Michoacán en route to the United States. During the time that my father was involved in arranging for coming to the United States, I was born, along with my younger brother, in Baja California.

We came to California and lived in Chula Vista for a short time. My father was a laborer, did not receive any formal education, but taught himself. He spoke six languages, he played four or five different instruments, had a beautiful voice, which I didn't get any part of, unfortunately. [laughs] My mother also worked in farm labor and later in the home, but neither of them received any formal education.

Valadez What did your parents do for a living?

[00:02:23]

Aviña Farm labor, farm labor in general. My father, as I said, was self-taught. One of the reasons that we came to the United States was that he was offered a job in Chula Vista as a foreman for a ranch, for a farmer there, as a result of his contact with him. When the farmer went to Baja California on vacation, he met my father there and was very impressed by his life experience and his capacity for quick learning, and offered him a position here in Chula Vista and to bring us, his family, along with him.

Valadez How did he come about learning to play as many instruments? What did he play?

[00:03:18]

Aviña He played the guitar, the mandolin, a couple of different kinds of guitars and the *mandolina*, I think just from being around it. He had a spectacular ear for language and, appears, also for music as well. So languages he learned from interacting with people in a very short period of time, I'm assuming, because when I was born, he was already at home. During get-togethers, he would sing and play along with my uncles. So I'm not sure how he it was he learned it, but I assume it was the same way he learned languages, from listening.

Valadez Some people have that gift to learn that. Brothers and sisters?

[00:04:16]

Aviña Yes, I have three. An older brother, he was in the Marine Corps. He's seven years older than me. And then there's me, and I have a brother. I was also in the armed forces. My brother who is three years younger than I, he was also in the armed forces. He was in Vietnam during that conflict. And the youngest in my family is a sister.

Valadez Can you describe for us some of your experiences as a child, a youth, young adult?

[00:04:55]

Aviña As a child, I was very outgoing. My family recounts how easy it was for me to interact with people in general. Adults, I seemed to be more comfortable with them, and so I enjoyed listening to their stories and participating when I could. I was very active, very athletic.

By the time we came to the United States, I hadn't learned to speak English yet. I was three and a half years old, and so I learned to speak English with the other

friends that I interacted with. And later, through my athletic activities, I was able to get a scholarship in basketball. I played at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and then later in the service, I played in Europe a couple of years.

Valadez Anything else about the neighborhoods you grew up in? Were you raised in Chula Vista?

[00:06:10]

Aviña No, actually, we were in Chula Vista for only a short time. My father had been in the United States as a very young man. Initially, I believe he left home when he was eleven or twelve years old and worked as a waterboy in the United States and learned English very easily, very quickly, so he had contacts already from having been here as a child, actually. Then later as a very young man, he came and was here illegally and worked in whatever jobs he could, primarily in farm labor.

So, shortly after we immigrated, we moved to a very small town in Northern California, in Tuolumne County, as part of our motherlode area, where gold was first discovered, so in a very small community. I grew up there with very close, intimate friendships, and we pretty much were free to go and do what we wanted with one another. There was very little danger of the kinds of things that children have to endure nowadays. So we had those freedoms to go, and we hunted, we fished, we did all those things. We lived very close to an Indian reservation, so we became very close friends with some of the youth of the Miwok Tribe, and many of those friendships have lasted our lifetime. I actually lived in the *rancheria* for a short time with my friends.

Valadez Anything else that you remember from your childhood, young adult? What were you doing before you went into the service?

[00:08:19]

Aviña Actually, before going into the service, I was in college. I was born deaf in one ear, so I stopped taking my student deferments. I had friends who had been called who had hearing problems, they weren't deaf, but they had hearing problems that were rejected, and so they got the classification of 4F. So I let my student deferment expire just so that I wouldn't have to do that every year.

It was the time of the Vietnam War. But they surprised me and took me [laughs], so I went immediately into the services and I was trained in artillery. My specific training was in fire direction center, where we plotted range and deflection of where the artillery was going to be fired to. That was my training.

My brother was drafted about a week apart from me and, unfortunately, he was sent to Vietnam. I was sent to Berlin, which was quite a unique experience also. It was the time the [Berlin] Wall was up and Berlin was still part of East Germany. I was only there a short time, because everyone who goes in an area like that is very closely scrutinized in terms of background and what have you. So it came up that I was a basketball player, and was asked to be part of the Berlin Brigade basketball team. Basically, we toured Europe playing basketball along with other very good basketball players. Our team was exceptional. We had All-Americans on the team, and all of them had had minimally college experience. Berlin was referred to as a spit-and-polish city for the military because that's really all that it was. So having

exceptional teams in various sports was important to highlight our presence in that way.

So after I returned was when I had to finish my education after a couple of years of work in the East Bay Area, San Francisco, where I worked for an educational research and development laboratory. We trained teachers in a model called the Responsive Environment. The teachers were in Head Start and followed through classrooms at the time. So I had a wonderful opportunity to be part of curriculum development and looking at what might be available in the way of bilingual materials where there weren't any at that time. This is 1967. So there wasn't much around. So that experience, although I didn't have my bachelor's degree yet, gave me an experience that put me ahead of the game, even though I hadn't completed my formal education. It gave me hands-on experience with teacher training and the development of curriculum.

Valadez Where did you go to college at that time?

[00:12:23]

Aviña University of Nevada at Las Vegas. This is before I went in the service. Then, like I said, after working there for those couple of years, I applied for the Fellowship here with Mexican American Education Project and was fortunate enough to have been selected as one of the participants.

Valadez So that brings us to that question about whether you were a Fellow or Felito.

[00:12:47]

Aviña Yes, I was a Fellow.

Valadez You were a Fellow. And the year was ‘71?

[00:12:53]

Aviña Seventy or ’71. [laughs]

Valadez You don’t remember. It’s too far back, huh?

[00:13:01]

Aviña Yeah.

Valadez How did your participation with the Mexican American Education Project influence your thinking and involvement in the Chicano community? How do you think that participation helped you?

[00:13:15]

Aviña My first real involvement came during the time I was in East Bay Area. I met people like Bobby Seale, founder of the Black Panthers, and so in having met people like him, and Cesar [Chavez] had already started work in trying to unionize and assist with the farmworkers. My contact with the farmworkers at that point was very limited, but the issues of social justice as they relate to ethnic groups and the hurdles that many of us had to go over to achieve some success, that gave me some awareness of those issues, although it wasn’t primarily with Chicanos. The Black experience, had a lot about what my Black brothers and sisters were going through that gave me a sense of understanding of that process.

So coming here was an opportunity to have many likeminded brothers and sisters who were engaged in the struggle for justice, so it provided for me, then, a sense of empowerment in knowing that there were others who were struggling along with me to improve and help open doors that were closed to many of us.

Initially, I was born light-skinned, I have blue eyes, and so people wondered how is that someone who looked like me could go through that kind of experience, so my response has always been that I can't remember a day in my life where waking up was with the knowledge and sense that I was different. I was treated differently. My name, Arturo, was different from others, and so if I went through the kinds of experiences that I went through, looking in what might be termed a favorable light to many, then those of us who were darker-skinned and darker eyes, what they went through must have been much, much more difficult than anything that I endured.

So it helped to bring that kind of awareness to the present and begin to look at it from a perspective of how do we change this? How do we change this situation? I came to learn that freedom just isn't given to those who have the power, but it comes in asserting our own empowerment, our own sense of a right to be here and to participate in all of these processes in the same way as anybody else. How to change that became a focal thing for me. It taught me that as an individual, that this kind of empowerment by the group at some point has to be translated into our life by feeling the same way, whether someone has my back or not. And for many of us, that was a necessary component in empowering us to go on and to be engaged in that process.

In fact, my master's thesis came as a result of incorporating all of these experiences and ideas. The title of my thesis is "The Psychology of Chicanismo," which was a very important awareness that I could share with others who wanted to understand their own process for group and individual identity.

Valadez Did you later publish that book or that thesis?

[00:18:40]

Aviña You know, I've never published it. I've used it in classes. I taught at Fresno State for a year, and I used it in the class that was entitled "Psychology of the Chicano Child." That was very much the foundation for that class.

Valadez Yeah, I bet.

[00:18:59]

Aviña And the classes that I had overflowed, first of all, because it was the class that none of the people had even heard about, so it was a very novel and a new way of them looking at themselves as individuals and how they fit in the scheme of things, their families and their communities and in this country.

Valadez That's got to be an incredible work, because I know that in some of the courses that I was trying to teach about the Chicano child, that psychology was very difficult to describe so that it could be understood by people that were not from that experience. They automatically assume and lump everybody together, and it's not quite like that.

Do you think that your participation in the Mexican American Project influenced your career or your life's work?

[00:20:14]

Aviña Oh, definitely. As I mentioned, immediately, almost, that work that I did influenced the way I taught that particular class. It gave me an understanding of the teaching/learning process as well. I helped to put together the first ever bilingual/bicultural program in San Diego. When I moved down there, I became a psychologist. So we put together a cadre of professionals that included—and all bilingual—a bilingual psychologist. There weren't a whole lot in those days. In fact, I

was in Santa Maria at that time. I was the only Chicano psychologist in the county, and I was called often for assistance with how do you deal with a lot of farmworkers live in that area in Santa Maria. But we developed one of the first programs. The cadre included a bilingual psychologist, bilingual/bicultural, because that was an important component of the bilingual program. At the time, there were bilingual programs being developed; they aren't anymore.

There was a bilingual/bicultural speech pathologist. Art teachers in the classrooms in the Resource Specialist Program and in the self-contained classes in that program were bilingual and bicultural. Community participation was part of that. We had a coordinator who participated as a segment of that evaluation process, because we had to determine whether if a child was having a difficult time learning, whether it was because of the learning disability or whether it was a language-related issue, so those distinctions were critical, because prior to that, many children were placed in special education programs, including mental retardation programs, for no other reason than language differences. So I felt very proud of being part of that group.

They had been trying to develop a bilingual program prior to my coming to the district, Sweetwater Union High School District, but it had never bore fruit. So we were able to get enough components to develop a program like that, and had observers come in from all over the country, actually, to see how we did what we were doing and how we were doing it.

Valadez Did the fieldwork or the field experience being out there working support, substantiated, backed up your initial theoretical framework?

[00:23:34]

Aviña Absolutely.

Valadez That's fantastic. I'm very interested in that work, that master thesis. Probably Sac State must have a copy.

[00:23:47]

Aviña Yes, they should.

Valadez Next question has to do with the cultural part of the study of anthropology. Did your study of cultural anthropology or your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movement?

[00:24:08]

Aviña Yes, definitely. My concern was always that it seemed that those people who wanted to become aware of those kinds of issues looked at it from a framework of as if culture was canned, as if it was something that was not dynamic. So when they went about trying to understand cultural differences, it was looked at from that perspective, "Let's go get that can of culture, open it up, and this is what it is, period," not understanding that because culture is dynamic, there may be some characteristics and some values that were part of that culture that no longer even exists anymore.

The perspective is important to understand where people's experience is coming from, but I was always concerned that it be seen that way and not changing. And, obviously, that's a danger because then that creates stereotypes. That's how those things get engrained in people, because they're easy, they're easy to remember. So the hard work of getting to know Senon Valadez is another matter than having

read about him and what he was like when he was between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five.

In understanding culture, you can't do that unless you get involved with that kind of lifestyle and belief system and what have you, so often my concern was that I wasn't portraying a picture of a culture that had long since changed or was in that process of changing, that when we look at each other, even, there was a time where "You're not Chicano enough" meant what? Meant I'm not doing what you do? That makes me not a Chicano? Understanding that term was an important part of the cultural methodological component, because anyone who is of our ethnicity, if you go to Mexico, you're not Mexican.

Valadez That's right.

[00:26:51]

Aviña You're not Mexican enough. [laughs] I don't care what you say or what you've done. And here, of course, we're not enough either. So what fits, the only thing that can come close to it fits is something that we choose.

Valadez That's right.

[00:26:51]

Aviña And I felt that that's what we did with that term. So that makes me a Chicano. I'm not Mexican, I'm not really Mexican American either, but I am Chicano, and I can say that whether someone understands it or not. Generally what they'll follow up with is, "What does that mean?" But that's what I want to hear. I want to hear that question, because now it gives me a sense that, okay, now you're

interested. Now you're interested in what people call themselves this name, what we're about, and not just accept that we're this and that or the other.

Valadez Somebody else's definition. Very true.

What are your earliest memories of the Chicano Movement, earliest recollections of hearing the word *Chicano* or the events of the Movement? [00:28:08]

Aviña You know, in terms of the Movement, I would say during the time I was at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, because at that time, Las Vegas in a lot of ways was a very backward city. It never occurred to me when I first went there, until I asked one of my best friends who got a scholarship there with me also. We've been friends since were in kindergarten, so our friendship goes back sixty-seven years. We grew up with other ethnic groups. He is Irish through birth. So us growing up knowing each other as children gave us a different perspective not only of each other, but of other people. His name is Robert. I say, "Robert, where's Rosie? Where's Rosie? Where's Lilace [phonetic]? Because they're not around here."

He says, "You don't know?"

I said, "Know what?"

"Their apartments are on the west side."

"What do you mean, they're on the west side?"

"Yeah, none of the athletes—." These are athletes, okay, with the same scholarships as we had, who weren't able to live on this part of town. That was a shock to me, because from the time I was a child, I had competed against different ethnic groups and it was never about what color you were, because you either have

the skills to compete or you don't. That's the even playing field. So them not being able to live where we were living didn't make sense to me.

Then later, shortly after that is when I went into the service. But that set up a an awareness within myself. I mean, I had always felt—and I was treated differently from the time I was a child. My teachers tried to change my name to Arthur, you name it. So I always was aware of my own cultural difference, but in terms of the Movement to change things, that probably triggered an interest and awareness to familiarize myself with that process and how our institutions made it so difficult for those changes to take place. Once the system is set up, becomes institutionalized, changing that is very difficult, takes a lot of work. Well, in fact, it's taken people's lives. So that awareness, I would say, it started then, certainly when I was in the service, and then after coming back home.

Valadez The word *Chicano*, acceptable to some people, misunderstood by others, and not understood, period, by many others. What was your experience with it?

[00:31:30]

Aviña Misunderstood by most. In fact, it's probably misunderstood more now than ever. You would think that over time changes take place and people are more knowledgeable and understanding of that particular term, but I find that it's just the opposite. That hasn't happened. And what I've always feared is that we, as a cultural group, come into positions within these institutions and that we become part of that institution and part of the problem. I've always feared for that to happen. And it does happen all too frequently. So many of our young people who have these

opportunities now forget who and what made it possible for them to be accepted into a college or university or receive the kind of training that many of our brothers and sisters before us never had an opportunity to do because of the mechanisms that were in place kept us out. They were the locks that kept the doors closed for many of us. And unfortunately, I see many of my brothers and sisters, both Black and Brown, who have those keys, don't realize the responsibility that they have to not continue to do the same thing that was done to us, that there were others who helped open the doors for them to be able to hold those keys. And that's still a fear of mine.

Valadez Why do you think it happens like that or it's happened like that?

[00:33:28]

Aviña I think in part because of the fear of losing it, like, "Okay, even if I believe that I did this all on my own, I don't want to lose it." So they don't take the risks that are necessary to keep those doors open. Just because they were opened by others doesn't mean those doors don't close again. They can and they do. So whether they feel like they don't have the support to help them keep them open or not, they don't seem to have the inner strength that is required to make those kinds of things available on an ongoing basis. The fear that "I'm going to lose mine" is part of that fear, and so many of my fears related to that have come to fruition, and I hate it.

Valadez Do you think that your involvement in the Chicano Movement changed you personally?

[00:34:51]

Aviña Definitely, absolutely.

Valadez In what ways?

[00:34:52]

Aviña It helped me to understand that where my individual strength came from is a source of pride that enables me to keep that strength and that perspective, that it's easy to lose it. You know, it's easy to go back and it's easy to let somebody call me Arthur. It's easier not to deal with it. But I can't. For me personally, I refuse to do that. I'll help them pronounce it. If it gets to the point where they really mangle it, then I let them call me Art. [laughter] Because, in a sense, prior to this, in my youth, I was Art, I was Art Aviña, and that was my whole athletic part of my experience. In fact, my son said, "You know, Dad, you got to write a book and title it *My Life as Art Aviña*," and then bring into that my involvement in trying to make change, to a point where I say, "I won't let you call me Arthur. That's not my given name." So I'll do a little backward buildup, and if they still can't do it. Then I'll say, "Okay, you can call me Art."

Valadez Our names the way that we became used to people calling us is directly connected to that experience.

[00:36:43]

Aviña Absolutely.

Valadez When you've gone through a change like what happened to many people when they got involved here in Sacramento, it seems like there is an identity redefinement. You think of yourself in a different way. You define yourself in a different way.

[00:37:04]

Aviña Absolutely.

Valadez And so for those that were in there, *Chicano* made sense. That was a new identity. That was the new creation. And for the most part, most of the people interviewed still go by *Chicano*, but they are surrounded by the next generation of people that were more distant from those events, that now have slipped back into permitting other people to define who they are, rather than to define themselves.

[00:37:40]

Aviña Right. And also I think that that many of us don't understand that your name is who you are. It's not your name; it's who you are. My children, when you ask them, "What is your name?" they don't say, "My name is." They say, "I am." "I'm Marissa." "I'm Sonia." Because that's your essence. If you allow people to change that, then you're giving away—you disempower yourself, because now I'm letting you define me. And you can't do that.

Valadez What happened to young Chicanas, young women getting involved in the Movement? What do you think their role became?

[00:38:33]

Aviña You know, I was extremely fortunate, first of all, to have an incredibly strong mother, so the respect for females in general has been ingrained in me since I've had any conscious memory. My religion, my country have all put power into that, and at the same time, provided a contradiction. Mexico's, for example, patron saint, is la Virgen de Guadalupe, yet women are treated in Mexico as second-class citizens still to this day. Same thing here. While we hold these images of people on a pedestal, we treat them very differently. I have always felt embarrassed about that dichotomy.

In the Movement, I saw the same thing. I was asked to speak here on campus on women's issues in '73, '74. 1974, I think it was. I'm not sure why they asked me. I think it may have been because some of the women involved in putting together that forum had some information about my background and my feelings about that. Because women, and Chicanas in particular, I mean, we hold them up to be these grandiose human beings, but they're not treated in the same way. In terms of the Movement, they've been in the backseat, and that's unfortunate, because we have not realized that being in the backseat like that, we've diminished our own strength and we haven't taken advantage of their position, their position of strength to incorporate it in the kinds of social changes that we wanted to make. We've not done a good job about that as men, and that's not something to feel good about, because their participation is and has been as great or greater than ours as men. We didn't take advantage of that. I wish we had done better, but that doesn't mean we can't change it.

There've been some consequences as a result of it, too, because there's some research that was done some years ago related to what happens in the classroom in terms of the relationship between that teacher. In this case, it was women, Chicanas. Chicanos sent for discipline and other kinds of issues, Chicanitos, to the principal's office at a faster and greater rate than any other ethnic group. Chicanitos, not the Chicanitas, but the Chicanitos. So their relationship there now from the psychological perspective, how did that come to be is another dynamic that needs to be explored. But there has to be some relationship there, about why that happens. And I hope that we rectify it, because we won't ever have our full strength until we do.

Societies, in general, I think do that, but our cause, *nuestra causa*, was significantly different at one time than any other cause that I know about, because we wanted to be in positions to not do the same things that were done to us, and in many cases we are; we're doing those things to each other, from using the key more frequently to the way we treat women.

Valadez Can you tell us a little bit about what you personally initiated or helped initiate in this Chicano Movement?

[00:43:37]

Aviña Well, I've mentioned a couple of them. I haven't mentioned anything about at the CSUS campus. But along with my brother Tanis [phonetic] and Roberto and the Senate that was elected that year, we did some pretty unique things. We appointed women to various positions of leadership. Gays, which at that time was not anything like it is today, we made appointments to gays, women. We broke ground on the Student Center; we did that.

Valadez Go back and tell us a little bit about what that event was. What is it that happened?

[00:44:37]

Aviña What made that happen? Talking about what I just mentioned, that we not do the same thing that's been done. It seemed that previous to our election, the appointments that were made were because of friends of friends. You know, "You're my friend, so I'm going to pay you back with appointing you to the Athletic Council," whatever. Those kinds of things had been going on for a long time. It became what I call "sandbox government." It was a place for guys, primarily, to go

play—sandbox government—and I felt that at this level, we're grown-up men and women, and we should treat each other that way. So if I'm saying these things are important and I don't do them, then I'm as much at fault as anyone else. So those conversations that took place gave us perspective about providing opportunity for people who may not have had that opportunity before.

Valadez So there was an election?

[00:45:56]

Aviña For these positions, no. These are appointments. The Childcare Center was one of those areas where it affected women but students in general, and what had been available was only available there for people who could afford to send their child to any kind of care center. Those that were low income, there wasn't anything available.

So we worked through Mervyn Dymally's office to secure funding that would enable students to take their children, because many of us were here with a child. I had a child. My oldest was a little three-year-old at the time, two-and-a-half-year-old. So the opportunity to free a student up to be able to participate in the learning process was very important to me. So that affected women, but it affected socially economic people who would have not had that opportunity had we not done that. So we wanted to do something that we were preaching that we didn't want to do the bad part of it, like others had done before us.

So that's what I mean about what I spoke earlier about "Let's get into positions where we're empowered to not do what was been done to us," which, to my

dismay, is happening. We didn't want to do that, and so we made sure that was not going to happen while our term in offices was going to be in effect.

Valadez What year was that, that term of office?

[00:47:48]

Aviña Seventy-two. Seventy-two? [laughs] My memory bank over there.

Plus we had experience that many students did not have. I had had this background in child development, in curriculum development, in areas that was pretty unusual for someone coming into school to get their degree. Tanis [phonetic] had had experience in the business models, and so we knew that there was money. We weren't just going to throw it out there. We were going to use it in ways that benefited students on campus, Chicanos and others as well.

So from that, into the larger community after having left Sacramento State, and I did the kinds of things that I mentioned before with special education, bilingual/bicultural education, teacher training, child development, those kinds of things.

Valadez Your master's degree was in what, in the social sciences, or did you go in psychology?

[00:49:07]

Aviña My master's degree is in school psychology. See how long it was? I can't remember that either. [laughs]

Valadez Please describe some of the impacts of your involvement in the Chicano Movement on your career.

[00:49:34]

Aviña I've gone through a lot of that, haven't I?

Valadez Yeah.

[00:49:41]

Aviña Well, to this day, my family, my kids see themselves in ways that I'm sure they would not see themselves as completely had they not had my and their mother's experience in our own academic and cultural life. They would not have had that for us to pass on to them. So I see it in them, which is a source of pride for me. They will correct you if you don't say their name right, for example. [laughs]

Valadez You and your wife were both in the program?

[00:50:28]

Aviña Yes. Marie Gutierrez. It was Gutierrez at the time.

Valadez Looking back at your experiences in the Movement, are there any issues that are left unresolved?

[00:50:43]

Aviña [laughter] Absolutely, absolutely, and I guess that's something a lot of us will take to the grave, some disappointment, some pride, and some accomplishments, and some that still endured, but also disappointments in not having done a better job to leave that more with a stronger foundation, but I don't know if that's a function of individuals or something else.

Valadez If things could have been better resolved while you were here in the things that you were trying to do, what might those be?

[00:51:39]

Aviña Probably, in a nutshell, that idea of not doing to others what was done to us. I see too much of that, which is hurtful for me.

Valadez Was your family ever impacted or influenced negatively because of the Movement, your involvement in the Movement?

[00:52:11]

Aviña Yes, there was some fear. I'm disclosing this for the first time, other than Tanis [phonetic] knew. I had received a lot of threats. I had to be very careful about where I went and who I went with. And, of course, they were fearful for me. I think I was too stupid to be afraid for myself. I was too engaged in trying to do what I could, to not think. I don't recall ever being afraid. I should have been, I think. [laughs]

Valadez Almost everybody who got involved was affected in some way with the positives and the negatives, and sometimes the negatives outdid the positives, except in the long run when you can put it all in perspective and be able to go on, but families, marriages, suffered.

[00:53:26]

Aviña Yes, they did.

Valadez It went in a real bad way for a lot of people.

[00:53:30]

Aviña Yes, I had a lot of close friends, their relationships disintegrated, unfortunately.

Valadez But fortunately for yours, you weathered it. You came out at the end. It's like Steve Arvizu was saying something about that, too, that he was glad.

Sometimes he thought he was going to be sleeping outside the house forever. [laughs] You stay too involved in things and it sweeps you away.

[00:53:57]

Aviña Sure. Interesting you mentioned Esteban. He initially was the focus of a lot of negative things. He was "blamed" for our involvement. I say "blamed" in parentheses. The administration—and I'll say this only because it's a point of fact—wanted him to not be here. If they had had their way to do it, they would have fired him. But as I mentioned to our president at the time, "Your office will be occupied for your tenure here if you consider this seriously." Steve told me about it later, years later. It seemed to have had an impact, because he stayed. [laughter]

But I was careful not to abuse my power either. That's something that's always an issue, I think, for a lot of politicians, and it's unfortunate what I see with a lot of our politicians. I'm talking about our professional politicians. They forget and, I guess, after a time feel like it's their right to do with that power whatever they choose. And that's not the case.

Valadez Describe how the Movimiento Chicano impacted community life here in Sacramento at the time when you were here. What did you see going on in the community, the impact of it?

[00:55:49]

Aviña Well, I saw a lot of people involved, whether it was participating at rallies or fundraisers for the people or honoring others. It seemed rather easy for community to come together at that time. That was my perception. It seems a lot

harder now to get people engaged in almost anything, particularly if it's political. So was very visible. Seeing it gave me a sense of pride as being part of it.

Valadez The organization of COPA and CAFE, were those already present when you were here?

[00:56:48]

Aviña I think so.

Valadez CAFE has stayed on to become a very powerful organization. COPA has kind of translated by other names, but it's still is functioning to some degree.

[00:57:05]

Aviña Well, one other thing that I forgot to mention about women—you asked me that question. Sorry to regress a little bit, but it just reminded me.

Valadez That's okay.

[00:57:14]

Aviña One of the things that I did during my training as a psychologist is I did groups with different ethnic groups, and one of the most dynamic that I did was just Chicanas. I was able to see some real power expressed in a way that was hidden before that. The opportunity that was generated by these women in this group seemed that it gave license to the expression of that power within them as women that I rarely saw expressed outside of that counseling center. Your sister was one of them, by the way. She participated with our group, did me a lot of honor because her presence gave the group, and me directing it, more credibility, I suppose. But that was a wonderful experience, a very dynamic experience for me personally From what I hear of them that participated in it, they've not had another one like it.

Valadez When you left here to continue your career, where did you end up? Where did you go?

[00:58:56]

Aviña Santa Maria.

Valadez Were things going on there as well, these kind of cultural things, Movement things?

[00:59:05]

Aviña Nothing like here, but there was a cadre of Chicanos there who saw themselves as Chicanos, so that was very easy for me to become part of that.

Valadez Many Movimiento Chicano activists had passed on. Can you identify an individual or individuals that you feel had an impact on the Movement?

[00:59:39]

Aviña Oh, well, sure. I mean, the obvious is Cesar Chavez. You mean from Sacramento?

Valadez Sacramento and then beyond.

[00:59:48]

Aviña Well, beyond, Cesar has not only impacted here, this country, but he's impacted the world in a lot of ways. Mayor [Joe] Serna certainly is one of those people. Our artist groups, RCAF—he just passed away.

Valadez You're thinking [José] Montoya?

[01:00:22]

Aviña Montoya, Esteban Villa, and a number of people. I think the artists have a really important and critical component to any cultural movement, poets and artists in general. I have quite an affinity for them.

Valadez Do you remember any of the poets that were doing any of the readings on campus or off campus?

[01:00:52]

Aviña No, I don't remember their names. Well, Montoya actually did a number of readings, and Villa did too.

Valadez We're trying to locate more writers of that time period. The writers came and went depending on where they ended up on their job or their career, but I know that we had a lot of writers and a lot of poets.

[01:01:23]

Aviña Yeah, there were, there were.

Valadez But trying to identify them to bring them is difficult. It's been a challenge.

What do you see as current or future challenges to the Chicano community? We've come a long way, but what's—

[01:01:46]

Aviña Ironically, they're not all that different than they once were. The challenges remain, and I think what in some ways makes it more difficult is that there's been a loss of a history that got many Chicanos in the positions that they are in now. I think it's that lack of history that weakens the Movement in general, which is unfortunate, sad.

So if we don't talk about those things and try to revive it, remind our children, in a lot of ways it'd be like starting over again, because there's a tremendous amount of energy going into trying to convince people that we're all the same. We're not. I ask my friends that are not of color if they have ever had an experience of waking up one day, one morning, and thinking about what your life might be like because you're Chicano or because you're Black. And of course they've always said no. That's an experience. Just that alone makes you and I different. You know what that's like, is an experience that you don't have and so it makes it difficult for you to understand the ongoing survival and life of people of color. It's hard for you to understand it, and I get that, I get that. So struggle goes on, struggle goes on.

Valadez Anything else you are thinking about now as you've gone through this interview, or have been thinking on and off after you retired and are going into this other phase, about what this whole experience was about? Anything you want to share with us, your thoughts, feelings, what happened there? What did you walk away with?

[01:04:31]

Aviña Not really, other than that my definition of giving back has now all to do with that word *giving*. When I'm called for assistance or help to do something, to help a family, to counsel a child, all of those, that's how I give. There's no thought anymore of how can I benefit from this or how much can I charge to do this service or that. The operating word here is *giving*, giving back. So, I mean, that pretty much governs my activities. I should give more too.

Valadez I want to thank you, Arturo, for coming in today.

[01:05:31]

Aviña My pleasure.

[End of interview]