The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education

Oral History Project

Name of Interviewee: Elizabeth Contreras

Name of Interviewer: Senon Valadez

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1 BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

2 [00:00:01]

3 Senon: Okay, please state your full name?

4 Elizabeth: Elizabeth Contreras

5 Senon: Elizabeth Contreras

6 Senon: Your birthday?

7 Elizabeth: March 17th, 1959.

8 Senon: Marital status?

Elizabeth: Single, *solterona* [single].

Senon: *Solterona*. So, no children, no?

Elizabeth: Claro que no! [Of course not!] [laugh]

Senon: Where were you born and raised?

Elizabeth: I was actually born in Fresno, California and actually I am like fifth-generation Californian, so we're the original Californios [Californians] and I moved to Sacramento when I was 15 years old.

Senon: What did your parents do for living?

Elizabeth: My mother actually, my mom actually, started out in the fields since she was five years old, picking cotton, picking grapes. We lived in Central Valley, *papas* [potatoes] the whole thing basically she hated the fields so did my father, so actually her and my dad got married. She actually started working to record store back in the '50s when they had all the records and all that. She worked in the Westside of Fresno from there, she went to go work at a really exclusive clothing store called Gottschalks and she was actually an accountant, so my mother became an account and my father actually was kind of a little rebel rouser got involved in the Chicano Movement. My dad got involved in the Chicano Movement when he went to Fresno City College in the '60s. So basically, he ended up getting a Masters in Rehabilitation, but he came in through State Rehab and work for the State. So that is how basically we got to Sacramento. He moved here as Affirmative Action Officer in the '70, '73.

Senon: Brothers and sisters?

Elizabeth: I have two brothers, my one brother is a pharmacist, he has a doctorate in pharmacy, married to a pharmacist. My other brother actually is a– he runs a company– like a company for like irrigation type stuff, and he has a bachelor.

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Senon: They still living?

Elizabeth: Yeah, Yeah.

Senon: In the Central Valley?

Elizabeth: No, we all live up here in Sacramento, so we all moved up here to Sacramento. So we moved from Fresno from the barrio to Orangevale, California which was a culture shock for us. Basically, because you know we were just finally lowriders and our cars and we were in Orangevale with just about 3% Latino probably 5 now because our family grew cuz they all live there, but it is basically not a lot of Latinos.

Senon: Can you describe a little bit more about your experiences as child growing up?

Elizabeth: So basically, we grew up my father was very involved in the Chicano Movement in Fresno, so my cousins were in the Brown Berets and my dad went to an all-Black school which is Edison. So, he actually knew a lot of the African American men that were also in the Black Panthers. So, my dad kinda had the *movimiento* [movement] on both the Black, African American side and Black Civil Right stuff and also the Latino with the Brown Berets. So basically, we grew up. I'm the oldest of 37 grandkids so there's like 20 something on one and 16 on the other, yeah big like that. We all kind of grew up in the same little barrio, same little neighborhood in Fresno. We were very traditional in a lot of ways; you know with are food with

our language with all of that. Of course, we spoke Spanglish which we do here and basically just really, really my parents just kinda moved up and it was kinda bittersweet that we moved to Sacramento cuz my father became the Affirmative Action Officer under the Jerry Brown era for the Department of Rehab in '73. So, they pulled me out in the middle of high school, so it was really kind of a culture shock that in Fresno the *raíces* [roots]. We grew up, my grandmother was the *presidente de comité patriótica* [President of Patriotic Committee].

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So we would like make food for César, you know, we knew all about the marches in Fresno. So in Fresno we were already involved in the marches. We knew Luis Váldez. We used to see Luis Váldez when he had a little church in Fresno before he even got big and he had this church that he would actually practices his plays in, and we would go on Friday nights and sometimes we're the only people as family we were the only family in the whole thing watching so we've seen every single *teatro* [theater] that Luis has done. My father knew, of course, Luis because my dad went to Fresno State. So from Fresno City he went to Fresno State. So, we always kept in ties with Luis Váldez, so he was kind of my hero actually when I grew up. He was somebody that you could aspire to him, and César and all the good work that he was doing and actually I was kinda the *alcaguete* [go-between] in terms of my father would be involved in all this movement and he would take me as a little kid cuz if he took me then he wouldn't get so much trouble for begin out so late. So basically, you know I was there very little. I remember meeting Ted Kennedy, Joan Kennedy. I remember one time, this is a really funny story, he was at the Selland Arena in Fresno. We were pretty small we were in grade school and they said to do a photoshoot. So César, and my mom, my dad, and Joan, and Ted Kennedy, and they said to get on the stage and hold hands and so I remember going up on stage and my little brother, he was little at the

time, he was probably like maybe first grade, maybe kindergarten. But he looked up at Ted Kennedy and he goes "man those people are white" and it was like cuz we're all so *prietos* [dark skinned] cuz Fresno is like hot and we were laughing and I always think this is a teaching moment.

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My father just looked at him goes, "son, cuz where they live there's no sun" and he goes "oh okay" and it was like a squashed, which was really cool and just really– understanding later on I understand the impact of the Kennedy movement, and César, and Dolores, and all of them. We were, in rooms with them, when they were having meetings as a little kid and so we grow up, and I grew up, in all that era. So, when a moved to Sacramento, it was a natural transition to actually be involved here in the Chicano Movement. And it was so odd because in Orangevale, of course, there wasn't. So I would have to drive all the way Downtown to the Sacramento to the RCAF, to La Raza Bookstore to kind of get some of my excitement, some of my passion back because it was real different here in Sacramento cuz I didn't know anybody and it spread out so it was real different.

Senon: Where did you complete your community college?

Elizabeth: So, I went to American River College, so I got my AA and at American River, I was actually very involved in the MEChA. So, in the MEChA that was me right away I was involved in MEChA, and I was also their Extended Opportunity Program Services Recruiter. So, my first year I was recruiting out in Del Paso Heights and the places that nobody wanted to go to, the other students didn't want to go there, and I said I'll take the Heights. It didn't matter to me and I loved it, so [indistinguishable] Del Rio and Grant where I recruited and then from there I became

the student supervisor the next year that was pretty cool. So one of the most exciting things I remember is that Paul Sakihara at, I think he still works there, at ARC, we went to a meeting with all the EOPS statewide and he took me to the Zoot Suit Play. And I was just like astounded because I always wanted to go and so he said, we'll get tickets and we went to the Zoot Suit Play and that was one of the most remarkable plays and it was just awesome. So, all of these kind of Chicano Movement, Chicano art you know you can call it entertainment,

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but it was more like a cultural in terms of I don't know how to explain it, like we had a thirst for it in LA it was there so that was really nice. So basically yeah, went to the play there and that was a big highlight in my era. From there, actually what happened is the late Isabel Serna recruited me to come work for Student Affirmative Action Program at Sac State. So, when I transferred

Senon: What year was that?

Elizabeth: That was actually 1979. So, I graduated in '79 and so the fall of '79 I started at Sac State, and she recruited me to come work for her. Her and Paul I guess they had talked about me, and she was so sweet and caring that she wanted me to come and work for her and do some really innovated things which I did, just to get it. Actually, the real movement during that time too with the MEChA and all that was to get more Chicanos into school and so you know when I went to Sac State, I was a Psychology major. And there was me and this *Negrito* (African American) and that was it we're just the only ones in the class that was nobody else that was Latino there in the '70s or even in the early '80s. So that just kind of true different now, but it is

a lot of it is due to the efforts that we had early on in terms of bringing in the Chicanos and the Latinos in the educational system.

Senon: Question number three is asking about the Mexican American Education Project, but you weren't in that–

Elizabeth: No, I wasn't in it. No.

Senon: In your college years you have taken some cultural classes and did those give you an orientation for you know how the movement was going on or what was going on within the movement.

[00:10:00]

Elizabeth: Actually, at American River College I took some cultural classes there, but to me it was pretty whitewashed at American River College. From there, I went to Sac State and I met Dr. Sam Rios and I was just like enthralled with all the information, and everything that he had in terms of the cultural aspects about how Latinos even got to– the Americas from the anthropological kind of philosophy that was really cool. I mean never thought about all these Latinos coming the Bering Strait or if not being Aztlán being all the way up into Arizona and California and all that was all news to me and so that really added my interest. He was one of and also José Montoya. I actually worked for his student Art Project that he had and for the Chicanito Science. So, I actually work for those two departments at the Washington Neighborhood Center. It was C street, C and 16th, and all the Chicano kids used to hang out there and what would happen is that we had we put an educational program together so as a student I was able to provide those classes and then later on to Washington Neighborhood Center hired me to work through SETA [Sacramento Employment and Training] and from there I started working

with Tony Gonzales, at the time, to do the big Lowrider Car Shows around the state and when the Lowrider Magazine first come out. So, I was doing recruitment, and recruitment meaning going up and down the state telling them about the shows and things like that.

Senon: Tony Gonzales is he passed already-

Elizabeth: Tony Gonzales, he passed, yeah

Senon: We have been trying to find other people that have the experience of working with lowriders we are…(overlapping talk)

Elizabeth: I can probably– a lot of them are passed, a lot of them died pretty young, but I can probably get some people for you. Cars whatever you need.

Senon: Yeah, so the question was asking about cultural issues if the courses in cultural Anthropology have given you sort of a broader view on understanding what was going on in the Chicano Movement.

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Elizabeth: Definitively, yeah it really added the whole– I think it was a historical component and then also just the fact that you know my dad begin so involved. We are always in San Francisco, where I have cousins that live in East LA, in Logan Heights, right there in San Diego so we were always kind of like it's just kinda natural for us and my dad always was gonna go to– a meeting or some *movimiento* [movement] or something like that was always going on. So, I got to really witness a lot of that in terms of like when the fresh paint was on underneath the bridge at Coronado Bridge and all that. So yeah, you know my cousins lived in East LA right there where the what the Watts Riots were at. I remember that my dad driving right up to it and it was just

you know he would just explain things to us. I think the nice thing was that my father would explain the movement and what it meant and the pride you know, kinda giving us an identity and pride in who we were. Cuz there's a lot of racism out there and we knew it as kids and how people would treat us. As a straight-A student and there were things that would happen to me throughout the years that it was like that, "That's no fair!" (repeat) And he would explain it– to us in terms of racism and discrimination and how we have to be better and know more and not let it get us down. [laughs]

Senon: What is a legacy way, way back, the question is: what the first instance of when was it that you first became attracted to the Chicano Movement? And that would take it way back.

Elizabeth: I'll be like 3th or 4th grade. Matter of fact, I was gonna bring my Chicano power patches cuz I still have them and some of the original *huelga* [strike] posters that I have. I still have them framed in my house. Um yeah, so we knew then by 7th grade, it was like we are already Chicanos.

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And that word Chicano was also a bone of contention, of course, cuz my mom was a *mexicana* [Mexican] even though she was like you know original Californian. She just really was against that word and my father just explained to us that it was somebody who is like a political and activist and somebody who had education behind them and who took this word that supposedly meant *Indio* [Indian] or lower than and kind of took it to a higher level. So, we were always proud of the word Chicano.

Senon: That is great! And the civil right movement you were also very involved in that, early on.

Elizabeth: Very involved! And then actually seeing it kind of come to volition [might have meant fruition] in terms of my father being the Affirmative Action Officer and him, you know used to work up and down the state. I remember him telling me you know, "I am in East LA" and it's 1969 or '70 and he would say, "there is like 4% Latinos and they're all janitors." That was it, like in East LA. Really? So, he would do a lot of the recruitment and efforts down there like he'd go to UCLA and kind of infiltrate the system in terms of recruiting people to come in at any level and then move through, and move through the system. So, I think it was those early champions, those early warriors, those early trail blazers that real people forget that you know, Oh, they just think you know, forgot affirmative action or I don't want to get it because affirmative action. And if it wasn't for them and that you got a movement, they wouldn't have the jobs they have today.

Senon: That's right!

Elizabeth: And I think that's forgotten.

Interviewer: Did your involvement of the Chicano Movement change you personally?

Elizabeth: Yeah. It didn't even seem like it changed me, it seems like that is what I always was. You know it's kinda of like with my grandma begin very involved in the *comité patriotico* [Patriotic Committee] there in Fresno and us, it's who we are– to me it was who I was always.

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My brother, my brother that is a pharmacist. I think he is getting it now that he is older, but you know, but yeah, it was always just who we were.

Senon: Who were to define you from the very beginning–

Elizabeth: Yeah, from the very beginning.

Senon: Role of women in the movimiento [movement]. What role do you believe Chicanas played in the movement?

Elizabeth: I think that we were, we did– I mean Dolores I just– admired her so much that she was right there– always with Cesar, right there with the meetings. I know a lot women got flacked for being involved, you know being out late at night, and being out all hours are leaving their kids and all of that. But it's kind of like you know the men did it. And if the women did it, I think they got a little bit of flack for it, but at the same time they were doing they were the trail blazers for us, and they did a lot of that work that needed to happen and it was kind of getting away from the old '50s models of you know, stay at home and the mothers stays at home. These women were out there, you know doing a lot of that– the work that still making the signs, they were doing the recruitment, they were answering the phones, they are doing just so many things along with that making decision you know and helping the men make decisions. So, I think that the women played a pretty good role. I think there was not enough women involved to tell you the truth, but I think they took different angles like me in terms of education and things like that.

Senon: Let see if we can go a little deeper into that as a young woman growing up in the home and the surroundings that you did you had a different orientation or you didn't have the doubts or the questions or the issues that held you back from assuming roles that were there, but other women that you encountered as you were going into college. How did you see them or how did they can you explore that how they saw themselves, the barriers the challenges that they had?

[00:18:09]

Elizabeth: That is an excellent question! And I was thinking about that as you were talking so many things banged around my head, but basically, I grew up as the oldest. So, I grew up cooking and cleaning. I could cook a whole dinner by the time I was in 4th and 5th grade. I mean, I know how to cook, I know how to clean, I know how to take care of a house, everything. My mother made me super responsible cuz she always worked. So what happened is that I would babysit kids. I would do all of this. So, I knew that domestic side and I was like this is not what I want to do. I already knew it. I want to go to school. I wanted to be on a plane. I wanted to travel. I wanted to do things and it was like, oh my God, and I would go, and I would actually see women who would be kids, girls would get pregnant and they would that be the end of their careers and I was like, "Oh my God. Oh no!" and I remember actually being a recruiter for EOPS at American River College to go to school and I would have to go into the neighborhood. So, I actually went into this *barrio* [neighborhood] in the middle of Del Paso, where it is now is a cornfield all around it and I had to actually talk to two young ladies that wanted to go to school so bad and their father was like, "No, she can't to go to school because if she goes she's going to be around men and she's going to be this and she's going to be that and he said, you're going to be responsible for her, if she goes." I was like and they go, "Say anything, say anything. We just want to go to school!" and I said, "Okay." And so, he said, I was responsible for them and one of them ended up pregnant. [laughs] Actually, she still works for our department now, which it all turned out good, but it was just I seen a lot of barriers where women could not be who they were and I remember my grandmother telling me at a very young age that I had a spirit to me and "Don't let them ever break your spirit." And I didn't understand that and I was *inquieta* (unable to be still) and I was kinda of precocious kind of thing. They always had to told me like that,

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but I was just really inquiring about the world and I think a lot of women even to this day they're afraid—to travel, they're afraid to go places or eat alone or do things like that. And I think a lot of that comes from our old school tradition, you know, and I think it is a barrier, but it's also part of the tradition, which is really important to protect your family, and protect your children. But I think I made a decision early on that children were never going to be in my life and I had already knew it wasn't going to happen and that's really rare to actually for a Chicana to grow up that kind of sturdy and say "nope it's not going to happen!" But being around all those little kids. I didn't have a childhood. So I think that was part of it, not having a true childhood, in that respect. Does that help or you need more?

Senon: I think that answers it, I think sometimes it's misunderstood. The behavior of a quiet submissive young woman of Mexican descent as somebody who has no dreams or who has no aspirations beyond the close world that she came from, but I have an idea that there is a lot more there, but the barriers are very severe and they're so ingrained that unless in the movement where there's a lot people and they're all encouraging you and they're inviting you and they're giving you things to do that all of us and you discover a new you–

Elizabeth: Absolutely.

Senon: And that new you once you discover it can never be contained, but I think women faced that. In my memory when I started teaching in '69 a lot of Chicanas were coming through very, very much the way that you described in a very controlled from a culture that confined them and defined them what their life was to be.

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And yet by the time four years had gone by they had changed and they were the most outspoken, the most aggressive, the most involved. Yeah, they did the kitchen things, but they were out there, and you know you couldn't stop them. We would go to a meeting of some kind and they would be very cruciferous, very vocal, very aggressive in their stands for Chicanos that profiled as being leaders here and there and *la raya* [the line] they would kind of like not be there, and they would be the women who would be arguing the issues further. So, I was just curious as how you saw what's going on.

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Elizabeth: Yeah absolutely, you're right. It's like they needed models– that was really difficult because they're far and few between in terms of the female role models that were moving towards. But a lot of Latinas a lot of Chicanas would kinda– they would kinda clomp on to me, you know and I said the *alcahueta* [go-between] [laugh] come on let's do this, let's explore.

Senon: The next question asks about what did you personally initiate or help initiate in the *movimiento* Chicano [Chicano Movement]?

Elizabeth: Yeah, I think some of my first was actually being really super involved at the MEChA at American River College, where we would have Cinco de Mayo weeks. Where actually, and I know they said that City College had it, but no AR did it, but I actually had, at American River College, had the first lowrider car show, and it was all part of a recruitment effort. They were Chicanos kids out there that never even been to a University or college or anything. So, it was like "Come on and let's go. Come over here!" and you can hit drive your cars up on that.

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You know up on the grass and stuff, and it was amazing. I think I remember we had like 55 cars and we have to stop. Lorenzo Patiño was actually one of the judges. So he's good friends with my father, the late Lorenzo Patiño, and it was actually one of the first Chicano judges. Anyways, he was one of the judges and my father and some other folks that he had been in the movement and it was just a wonderful event and after that [Sacramento] City [College] had it and then I had another one at Sac State, but I think just really and them just actually doing the cultural components and having people come to speak during the Cinco de Mayo weeks during the Mexican Independence weeks. But just kind of moving hat through and it was very– active for 3 years and then from there went to Sac State and that's at Sac State again recruiting Chicano students, recruiting students to come to college. So, I think that was a big part that I did there in terms of recruitment for the universities and for the colleges. My numbers were like outrageous compared to others. So, I was doing a lot of that kind of work then and then working for the Chicanito Science and working at the Washington Neighborhood Center, doing all of that all of that. And then also very involved in the community, what we would do at actually AR is I developed the kind of a multicultural even to this day I'm very multicultural very good friends with the African American caucus, with Asian caucus, with the now the Russian-Slavic caucus and just really being involved as a cultural in terms of kind of unity in terms of all and I thought that was really important too. So, now working at Sac State as a professor and all of that, it's been very interesting. Yeah, it was like almost I'm going to be really honest with you on this unbelievable I never, I remember the first time Isabel [Hernández-Serna] seen me we are both going to turn into a parking spot she looked and then that I had the university she was like "wow!" and so yeah cuz a little Chicanita that comes from Fresno.

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That you know that you said big voice, very confident never in a million years did I think that that would happen, but it did and then that's what's real important. I remember one time working for UC Davis and tears come to my eyes. I work for UC Davis for their extension for Health and Human Services and I remember teaching mental health and alcohol and drug and all these classes that I would teach and there was a Chicanita in Fresno and she goes "Come here. I want to talk to you." And I go, "What *mija* [sweety or endearing term, literally means my daughter]?" and she goes "I am going to ask you a question" and I go, "What?" And she goes, "How did you get so smart?" and I mean just tears came to my eyes and she said, "No really. How did you get so smart?" And I was like, "You are smart too *mija* [daughter] you know," I said, "Just sometimes you just have to find it within you." And I think that that was really, really just like man there is a lot of people that are oppressed. I never seen a Chicana teacher. I remember one kid came in one time I teach on the weekends and some Chicano kid came in with a black guy. I always teach Super Bowl Sundays for seven times. He came in with a black eye and like a cut or something like that, and he smelled like alcohol and this is an alcohol and drug class. So my dad and mom bought me this shirt look like Santana and it's a Vitrales de France, but you wouldn't know it looks like Santana so I had it on and suit kind of and I had it underneath. So, the kid came up and said, "I'm going to ask you a question." And I go, "What?" "Is the teacher cool?" And I said, "I don't know *mijo* [son] you looking at her and ask her." and he went "Ugh!" like [laugh] you know, just never expected it or walking into classes and going, "Are you really the teacher?" "Yeah," and that was like "Wow" and I thought "don't fight it just you know, you'll see and just and keep on going" like they, of course with Caucasian kids too you know they're looking at you and looking at you up and down and trying to size you up and different things like that so those were challenges.

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And I know that it took a lot of inner strength and knowledge and professionalism to win them over, but it happens–and I think cuz they're shocked to see you. Yeah. So I think that was real, but when you go with your *gente* [people] that's the part that's really, really fun because they're able to see you. I cannot tell you how many Chicanos/Latinos that I have mentored and called and don't even recognize and they'll tell me…I have right now because I work for drug and alcohol. There's a lot of Chicanos that get out of the joint. So, these are guys that get out the done time. They've done serious time, so they know I teach the alcohol and drug class at the county, so they heard about me, they say, "Can I sit in your class? I am going to this recovery group." "Come on in." "I am sitting in the front, front seat." "I'm gonna save you a spot in the front, front seat." "Really?" "You don't have to pay or anything." I have guys right now they're getting of LCSWs, they're are getting BAs, they are getting a Masters, they're getting Associates. I have one kid right now working on his Doctorate and basically married a PhD, and I think that is the part that whole instilling that hope and that somebody there and these are people that call me like some of them will call me once a month, some of them will call me three times a month depending, but they always call me. And I think just having that person in the community that somebody knows, "Hey, she can listen to you she won't judge, she's a straight shooter, she'll tell you what you could do, you know or help you through, navigate through these systems." Cuz systems are not easy and they're really a lot of these systems are made to build barriers and to understand that you know, "*No te agüites* [don't worry] man and you're going to get this." They just look at me. You know, they'll have me. "Can you explain me the sentence to me?" you know and I'm like, "okay let's do it this way." "Oh yeah. I get it!" But you know those kinds of things that I think that our kids–our future really needs a lot of that kind of mentorship.

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Senon: Is Mi Casa still going on?

Elizabeth: The Mi Casa? you know what Mi Casa just got–terminated last year because of funding, but they're looking at trying to bring it back in another aspect, but yeah Paul–yeah, we work with them though with the Mexican American I think they call it something else… Alcohol Program. Yeah, that Cruz Reynoso started.

Senon: Yeah, I worked with them for many years back. Let's go back to the lowriders–Who are they? What is that about? What is going on that that made it such a big part of the movement, the Chicano Movement?

Elizabeth: First of all, it was a joke in our family that I was conceived in a lowrider [laughs]. In a 50 Chevy, so I always knew that as I was a kid that was just off the thing and it was something pretty interesting. Of course, cuz they are big cars my mom and dad hooked up or whatever, but anyway they're still together now you know 60 years later. But anyway, but really interesting is that it was all in Fresno. It was kind of my dad had a lowrider and it was just what it was, and I think a big part of it was going to East LA, but really understanding that the art the symbolism, the beauty of our culture, and being a little bit different and maybe a little bit prideful of who we were and I think that the cars all of that really people– were really unique in their art in there and their murals and how they did their cars and how they lowered them. Lifted them whatever and I think a big part of that was to give kids like something to aspire to and I think at that time and it is an artful-- form of course, it has a lot of negativity out there which I think that is really sad because the car is a really– it was an extension here in California.

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Especially, here in California, it was an extension of self. You know we were gonna get in our car. We were gonna get in our *ranfla* [car]. We're gonna get with you know the most beautiful the most beautiful *jaina* [woman] that was gonna be next to us, and we're gonna cruise and have a good time. Of course, there's a lot of *envidia* [envy], we have in our culture, which is too bad, but I think the artful part was something that really went to a whole other level. The Lowrider magazine really took off, um I was actually I worked with them and several cars shows, big super shows and things like that doing work, a lot younger doing work with them and I think it was a way for the community to come together and it was in the '70s and the '80s. It got really bad, I'm going to be real honest with you. It got bad when the drugs came in the '90s it started becoming more people were investing way a lot of money from cars and drugs and all that, but it's just like anything else. You know something can go a haywire. I still work with all the cars… I just bought Luis Váldez. We did a big car show for him, '40s and '50s and '60s. We had all the cars out there. He loved it, but I think that it is a very artful– project that people have and they're very prideful of and it is a Chicano–thing. That's basically what it is. I mean you can't really get away from that. I think it does give a lot of we do…There's people that think very negatively of it, but I always even my mom used to say, hay *esos pelados* [those guys] and it was like at the same time, it was like, "No it's not. These guys have good jobs, you know they have money to have that car different things like that." So always just looking at it as a positive way and I think that we did a lot of work with that.

Senon: It's something that needs a lot more airing out, a lot of publicity, a lot more information for people to come to a better understanding what is involved and it's like you're saying it's more than a car.

[00:34:05]

There's an identity to that car, there's an identity to the person that is in that car, an identity to the person that decorates them, that fixes them, that keeps them moving, they're all older cars you know a mostly got them all slicked up and so there's something about the person, about the creativity of the person–

Elizabeth: Absolutely.

Senon: that needs to be kept in mind when a person judges–

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Senon: You know that this isn't just anybody and you're a lowrider. You have to have a level of creativity and the mindset that is clever enough, and mechanical enough, and technical enough and there you go. You got all the ingredients for high tech kind of you know endeavors, industries and whatever, so we got probably some of our– better technicians and scientists involved beginning as lowriders–

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Senon: They just get–to a certain point, and then the stigma holds them rather than because there's a lack of understanding as to what's involved, so I have a real strong interest in figuring out how to bring more people in that can talk about and bring that info that we need so that the next generation doesn't go through that judging again and putting down and you know but rather looks at them as here are young people and older people who have a background that we can tap on to for the next jump–

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Senon: The next stage, the next generation of people that we need in this society, you know they have something to contribute.

Elizabeth: Yeah. My brother still has his 54 Chevy. So yeah, they stole my 64 it was so sad, but they stole mine and he still has it cuz we had matching low riders and it was like we moved to the Orangevale and my mom was like, “I don’t know if you could drive these cars out here.” We’re like “Ahhh,” but good.

[00:36:11]

Senon: Did the Movimiento Chicano [Chicano Movement] raise your consciousness along social cultural and political lines? Those are the questions, but…

Elizabeth: Oh definitely, yeah but socially definitely in terms of the whole movement that was going on and understanding the– I mean, just really understanding RCAF and their creativity and everything they did here in Sacramento and affirmative action and definitely all of that it influenced my entire– the rest of my life. I'm trying to explain a Cubano [Cuban] what Chicanism [sic] is. Very interesting, I had a lot of fun time doing that. Yeah.

Senon: Yeah, so it seems like from what I'm understanding from the very beginning from the time that you were very small, you are already being made aware of the social ramifications and cultural political. So, you’ve had a good experience coming up–

Elizabeth: Yeah, very unique. I think it’s pretty unique.

Senon: How do you think the Chicano Movement impacted your career your selection of a career?

Elizabeth: Yeah, for a while there when I was doing all the lowrider car shows for free and doing all the stuff of running around the San Jose to LA, you know my mom was like, “Ahhh, you’re

wasting your time," but my dad was like "No, you're not, you know you're getting out there and you're learning." I learned how to organize, I learned how to fundraise, I learned how to do all kinds of different things. And I think that with all of with all that that movement and everything in mentoring and knowing people and networking, I mean I've been want to do a big show over here at Hughes Stadium. I already got it in mind that you know what I would like to do and honestly, I think that…ask me the question one more time, sorry. Yeah is that good? So basically.

[00:38:06:]

Senon: Yeah. That's what I'm trying to get is like how the movement affected your career? How you developed it? How it's gone because you've done so many things.

Elizabeth: I have done so many things and I think I mean I can't even tell you how many things I mean I could, but it's a lot but I'm basically just really 20 years have all been front line work. So basically, my career has all been front line where I worked in the Juvenile Hall in the--foster homes with all these Chicanito kids. I worked at Project Maestras as a bilingual teacher. I worked in recruiting for colleges and universities and then went to go work as a welfare worker. When I was welfare worker and then became a special skills worker in child protective services. You know all of it always working with Chicano/Latino people that were coming through the system in understanding it and actually now I've been in Sacramento County for 26 years. I've been involved in the Latino Caucus and to continue to start those Civil Rights questions and pushing that and getting more people a lot of these kids getting--them into a higher positions, so I've had a really I think a good vantage point to be able to do all that–work.

Senon: So, looking at all those areas of work and experiences must have shown you areas that still need a lot of work that a lot of issues that are not resolved that need resolution. What would some of those be?

Elizabeth: I think a big part of some of that would be the identity of what is a Chicano of what is a Latino. I have kids that come into my classes that tell me things like, “It's not a good time to be a Mexican.” And I go, “When is it a good time, you know?” [laugh], I just flip it, has it ever been a good time, you know.

[00:40:06]

And so those kinds of things that I think the cultural identity now with all the technology and Facebook and all that is that people don't really-- want to identify. It's that shame and that hatred has come back to such a– God like a horrific point where I'm just like man, I can't even believe some of the some of the things. I go into the Central Valley and I remember right this one man his name was José Hernández and he's like, ”I'm Josie Hernandez [in an Anglicized the voice] and don't you forget it!” and I'm like okay, you know “Josie Hernandez,” but it's still that constant self-hatred that constant identity crisis that they have that people have the stigma with being quote Mexican or Latino and really negative about it, still calling theirselves [sic] Spanish and my family has been to Spain I don't know how many times. So, I'm like what part of Spain are they from you know [laugh] Fresno and Madera and Coalinga are not a part of Spain [laugh], so it's like really interesting. So just real–I think a lot of the self-identity is just real, real negative. I think also, too, the kids there not a lot of places that people can go as a group right away at work. If you're at your job and you hang around with three Latinos. Oh, we're gang--, “Oh there comes trouble!” If there's three Latinos that are hanging around at one time, so all that racial profiling is horrible. It's horrible at work so there's Mexican people at work that don't even

talk to me unless they see me outside and then they act like you're my best friend. But at work they act like they don't know me. There's a lot of-- self-hatred, shame. Whatever I can't identify with her they said, "You'll never really get high up, in work because you act too Latina and you need to straighten your hair and you need to not wear your big earrings and you need to …" and it's like I just look at. I'm like, "It's not going to happen [laugh] I'll get it my way."

[00:42:05]

So, I think there's a lot of– that. I think with jobs education, we're 1.9% with a PhD. I mean we're less than 1% as a professor, if you look nationally as a professor at a university, so when students do come in and say, "Are you really the teacher?" They really mean it cuz they haven't seen them. You know that is the bottom line and when I tell them that they just look at me. "Oh, that cannot be." It is like it is, tell me other Chicanas professors you have over here.

Senon: Sac State has lost a lot.

Elizabeth: We have and they're not rehiring them. Nope, they're not. Yup.

Senon: I have an idea that the connection with the community got lost–sometime way back.

Elizabeth: It did, it got lost.

Senon: Therefore the reconfirmation, the reaffirmation, the feedback that you need it's not there. So, when you're in trouble up there, you have no support–

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Senon: You have no community. Nobody else knows about you and if you go down there trying to elicit support, they don't know you. I mean what's…you're not gonna get it and I think that the Chicano Movement when we were actively–

Elizabeth: and Strong.

Senon: doing things we had that connection with community and who we were up there was one and the closer you came and making it a reality the better the experience was if you did it by yourself, it's not a good–thing

Elizabeth: And you still can't. I mean I just like you, said that community connection. We're in Fresno and we moved to Sacramento. We already knew about the Montoya's. I mean my brother played in in the band and in the Casindo [Trio Casindio, Royal Chicano Air Force]--band, we knew Richard Montoya and all of that. I mean it was just an automatic connection.

[00:44:06]

And we just happen to live in the same neighborhood. We went to the same high school and that's that connection. Always you grow up with families you grow up in terms of the second, third generation and then not only that they're there for your work or for your job or anything. Now, you're up there. You got a problem, good luck buddy. Good luck because no one's gonna have your back on that one.

Senon: Oscar Salinas and some of the other poets that came out of Fresno. Are they still around?

Elizabeth: Oscar Salinas, um who's the other one?

Senon: Oscar Salinas, yeah I forget…

Elizabeth: That one artist that's my dad's friend that when all the original lowrider, one of the original ones that started the lowrider movement not Louie the Foot. Oh God, I forget his name. It'll come to me, but he's awesome. If you could ever talk to him. He's in Fresno. He's a professor, art professor. What is his name? Everybody whenever I talk to people [indistinct]

Senon: If you ever think his name, or, not ever, but– when you think of his name.

Elizabeth: I will think of his name. I'll let you know–

Senon: Give a call and let me know–

Elizabeth: He's an artist. He used to paint and spray all the cars back in the day and stuff. My dad told how he used to do that, but he's an artist now, everybody knows him at Fresno State. He is a professor.

Senon: It was Oscar Salinas that was a poet and he came up and he did a lot poetry readings over here with Olivia Castellano.

Elizabeth: Oh yeah.

Senon: The *Escritores del Quinto Sol* [Writers of the Fifth Sun], or something like that–

Elizabeth: Yeah, *Quinto Sol* [Fifth Sun].

Senon: *Escritores* [writers] that they used to have the big *talleres* [workshops]. Listen, there would be an exchange of poets open down the San Joaquin Valley, but especially in Modesto and Fresno they used to come up. I got a call from one of them some time back saying he was interested in what we're doing and if they could participate and I said, yeah, we're right now focused here in Sacramento.

[00:46:08]

But I'd like to see how we can identify and invite people to come out and so we'll see how that develops.

Senon: That one man he'd be really interesting. He's the artist. Yeah, he's real. My dad said, he was the one that they used to chop the tops up off of the cars and all that yeah--, he used to tell me how they used to lower him with bricks [laugh]. They know all that [indistinctive] yeah they know all that great stuff so okay.

Senon: Community life here in Sacramento changed because of the Chicano Movement tell me about that. What is your perception?

Elizabeth: Very active in the community in the ‘70s and ‘80s here with the marches and with just really doing the big community events for-- education, I think you mean changing in terms of that it's gone down since the 2000s yeah, you know everything now you need permits. There's a lot of barriers you know you need permits. You can’t people used to cruise her way to William Land Park you can't do that anymore, you know they took it away. So, it just seemed like anytime that Latinos/Chicanos we're gonna congregate. There was always an issue, so it seemed like a lot. You know the racial profiling the police would come out different. I remember Sam Ortega trying to make a club over here on top of the Caballo Blanco [restaurant on Franklin Blvd. in Sacramento] and you know; it was a place of meeting. It wasn’t just only a club. The Chicanos would know after meeting, you’d have a meeting there, and I remember him having to use plastic cups you know he’d have to buy plastic throw-away cups. So there was always something that whenever we were trying to get together that the police would be out in like triple and quadruple force and people wouldn't wanna go and I don't know you know part of it is fear, hatred, discrimination, the other part could be that they were-- not people that were communicating or people that really understood us. We've always been always heard as “here comes trouble.”

[00:48:05]

You know whenever we do something in the community, “here comes trouble.” Even the lowriders now, they tell me, “Oh we go out and we do events but we can't call it lowrider. We gotta call it ‘50s car show or ‘60s car show, but all our lowriders are gonna go, but we can't say that now.” Because the people even though they're all lowriders, they can't say that. Those kinds of things that just kind of I don't know if you wanna call it, white wash or just when you get something and you just bleach it out [laugh] or whatever you wanna call it, but it's a constant–

with everything that we're doing now, you know we're calling each other “HISpanic” you know what, I love George Lopez for saying. Yep, it’s “HISpanic” [laugh] cuz there’s a whole bunch of what’s coming down here. I love George for saying that, but it is so true. So, I think that the community has changed. There’s a lot more need and you know there’s some multicultural events and different things. But I mean just like we don't have no more Latinos Festival that’s done. We used to have the Latino Social Network– gone about 8 years ago. We used to have Latino Behavioral Health where we would have education and conferences that was always in LA gone. That was gone cuz nobody else wanted to take be the organizer of it anymore for that one, so those kinds of things that is just you know, we're all just mainstream is false. We’re not mainstream.

Senon: Right. There needs to be that leadership well after we get done, I have another question for you. Many people in the movement have passed away. Unfortunately, when we started this we found out we had 99 of the activists we could easily identify from the Sacramento area had already passed this was in 2013 so in 2014 came more people got sick and the Alzheimer's, the dementia, whatever, heart attack, whatever.

[00:50:04]

In 2015 and you know the same thing it’s a lot of people are going so the need to record the histories and to get that like archived. So that, at least there's a place where people can go and get that information and discover what actually took place from the people who did it, you know like people that try to write about something that they heard…

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Senon: But who were the people that you will keep always in mind or who you believe played a big role in this?

Elizabeth: In the movement was José Montoya, Luis Váldez, César Chávez, my father for introducing me to it, my grandmother for introducing me to it, to the movement. I think also like Corky Gonzales when I went, we went down for the Chicano Movement. The moratorium for the 10 year just Dolores Huerta. I mean all the RCAF here from Sacramento, Cruz Reynoso–that was judge still talk to him just had him do a big conference the other day. Also, Lorenzo Patiño I mean we're just all like we'd loved him. Unfortunately, he passed very young of leukemia, you know the kids, the Chicano kids that were out there, the Brown Berets there's still one or two left that I know are still out there and actually I'm trying to think and some of the professors you know some of the-- professors at Sac State, you know Esteban Villa and all that was there and so Jose and Sam Ríos. They played a big– role. I had Andy also Rendón also, so I had him, he was pretty cool, pretty awesome. But just really there was a lot of people out there that were in the movement, of course, César and all of them. So yeah, I think they played a big– role.

[00:52:04]

Senon: How about community people?

Elizabeth: Community people well like the community person like I know the whole...

Senon: Like El Concilio the Washington Neighborhood Center.

Elizabeth: Oh okay there was, yeah the Washington Neighborhood Center– and also the Concilio here. They have a Concilio in Galt. They had the like the MAAP [Mexican American Alcohol Program] which is Mexican American drug program was real big that we still utilize now. All the MEChA's. The MEChA's were just like to me they were the hub. We all used to have the UC Davis, Sac State we would actually do events together all of us Sac State, UC Davis, AR, and [Sacramento] City. So, we would do big events together that was also really cool where we would actually have meetings together. The presidents that– the board people would

do that, so I think those were all real– important even though the food places we used to have you know like Southside Park. We used to have events at Southside Park. Those they're far and few between. I mean they have metal detectors and all kinds of stuff out there now; you know those kinds of things were much more. Miller Park, there was Miller Park they used to have things in the community there. We had a lot of stuff at Land Park until you know Anne Rubin [former Sacramento mayor] came in decided that was an extension of her front yard and so all those kind of stuff [laugh] were you know decimated, and they were strategically decimated cuz we've seen that happen with the lowriders and with the folks we already knew, you know this isn't gonna happen anymore. We would do the big events at the community for Festival Latino in Old Sac and then one little-- *pleito* [fight] happened and then that was it. We were done, but then they still have the Asian Pacific thing there. They still have all the other ones, but all the time when there's Latinos was always an issue with us, you know.

[00:54:00]

Senon: Yeah. What do you think are some of the current or future challenges for the Chicano community?

Elizabeth: The future challenges is education is actually upward mobility I think that's huge in terms of and really staying with identity because once you make it, I have a master's degree, once you make it's like you've arrived and you don't have to be like that anymore and it's like the sense of like, "Well, you don't have to do that stuff anymore because you've made it now." And it's like, "Do what? This is part of me." "You don't have to act like you're so Mexican or so Latino." I said, "How do you act like you're so Mexican or so Latino? It's who I am!" And so I think that's always gonna be an issue here of the shame of our past ancestors that came here of you know, our family that maybe crossed the borders through however they did to desert through–

rivers through *ríos* to get here for the future and that is gone now within one generation. And I think that is a huge issue too. We all want to make it with our technology and the iPhones and then we're done now. It's dye hair blond and you know and put blue contacts on, literally or psychologically and we're cool and let's not act like too Mexican, let' not act like we're Chicano. You don't even use that … "You would use that word Chicano? What's wrong with you? What is that?" When I travel to the Caribe travel a lot to Puerto Rico, Cuba, Santo Domingo I explain that to them, they are like "Yeah, I kind of heard of that right, lowrider yeah great!" They kinda understand that, but they really don't understand it unless you were here in California, you don't get it, the fight– the *lucha* [struggle] the *movimiento* [movement] and all of that. It's in your *sangre* [blood]. It's in your blood, man. It's what you do cuz you do the right thing for your *gente* [people] and I think that whole thing is really lost. The camaraderie like you said, is really-- lost.

[00:56:03]

Senon: That's the last of the question is there anything else that you would like to share to leave behind as your thoughts your ideas about you know what happened to you as you were growing up becoming part of the consciousness of the Chicano movement and then the trajectory of jobs and experiences and contacts, and obviously you have a more of an education that a lot of people have had already with PhD's that has to do with our community and with the Chicano experiences. Is there anything that you want to add?

Elizabeth: Yeah, I think we need a museum, I honestly do I think we need in California, we need to Chicano museum man. I mean cuz-- I'm gonna pass– I can't tell you how much artwork I have in my house. I mean tons of artwork, I have a lot of originals of José, you know I mean I'm just saying just even the archive, but I think that we do need a library to archive this

actual structure. That's you know something like Smithsonian or something that can't be touched. You know that we can't go through this board and they buy it up and lose the house and all of that. But we need something really solid because I know when I pass I wanna give that to somebody who's gonna do something with it. You know I have some of the original *huelga* [strike] posters that-- you know people tell me "they're worth this and that." No, they're priceless, you know they're not worth a dollar amount. They're priceless, but I think something to build an educational center would be really–great thing. I really do think that where people could come in and understand that and see that and reenact the whole and actually not reenact but reinstate the word Chicano because it's-- lost.

[00:57:58]

Senon: Richard Soto was interviewed last year here, and he's in Stockton you know Richard Sotio?

Elizabeth: I'd have to see.

Senon: His face was made famous when the Moratorium took place and he was one of those that was with another Chicano and when–

Elizabeth: When the bomb when he went in there with Corky–

Senon: And the young man died in his arms and he had been a medic as a Vet, so a returning soldier and he became part of the movement and he was in our classes in the early years, but when he went to the Moratorium, the cops that were coming at him, he says told him to drop the kid and to get back and so he was holding him and he just like stayed frozen. He couldn't drop him and a photographer went by and took a picture of him. It shows him standing over…

Elizabeth: Oh, that one.

Senon: That's Richard Soto. He had a pretty illustrious career and retired, and he says he's got a million books and posters.

Elizabeth: That's what I have all. Oh my, I know.

Senon: He's really interested in developing a museum of some sort where these things could be archived–

Elizabeth: Exactly.

Senon: and put on exhibit you and get lectures and speakers and people so he's thinking about like exactly like how you're going–

Elizabeth: And I love to that the whole speaker and all of that cuz somebody actually I work with most of my friends are artists—and musicians.

[00:59:59]

And that's my friends cuz I have to have out. And they say, "You know what Liz, you should just rent like a little house downtown and just do your lectures and show your artwork and have it there." Because I mean I have lots of stuff and just I remember the first time when I went to Tenochtitlan and I went and I got off the airport. I just get chills now because I've never been there, and I had all those *tilinches, como dice mi mamá* [souvenirs or knickknacks like my mom says]. I had all that stuff in my house already and I didn't even understand the impact, but nothing I just always liked it. I just remember I go to Chicago to museum I'd collect this. I'd collect that. I mean the Aztec calendars the Mayan calendar. All the different you know *Chicanada?* When they would go up there, they would you know stab the heart. I have like all that I've never been to Mexico and I had all in my house, the colors that all of that and I went and seen it all and I mean just tears came in my eyes. This is me. It's unbelievable, you know and how they got transferred so far to here.

Senon: When we get done this next year--, I wanna have a reunion, we gonna figure out some way to have a reunion of all the people that we've interviewed and have them talk a little bit, but it's mainly for networking because I think that we need to network. All of us that are now done, not done, but retired from the principal job that we had, but now comes the big word now comes the time to consolidate to bring things together to create something that will be here forever and we have to think of in terms of the new energies that are around, the new people that are around who have that image already, that dream already. The dream already who can take it and build on it because everybody I mean all these people that we've interviewed have tons and tons of footage, photographs, posters…

[01:02:08]

Elizabeth: Exactly. Art.

Senon: regalia. The information is there and there's no reason why we cannot have except for the fact that our vision sometimes catches up. When we're getting tired, when we're retiring, and when we're getting sick. A lot of people that have come through to be interviewed are at the end of their road. You know they don't see it anymore. They can't do it anymore. Their health isn't gonna help them, but yet they have so much to give so we gotta tap on that.

Elizabeth: I definitely do--, I totally believe that I was even thinking too cuz I'm gonna retire from the county probably in a year. So, I still will be pretty young and I'm gonna go to Sac State full-time. They already told me whenever you want to come over here full-time even if it's half-time, I don't care it doesn't matter, but what I wanted– to do was actually I wanted to-- get all the Latino/Chicano professors together and start with the alumni and start there because it's like I go "where do they meet? When do they.." you know "We kinda don't meet." "What are you talking about?" All of us that are there and even bring in the older alumni would be great. You know

because Sac State is a great place to have things and you know that Multicultural Center, you know I wanna use that place up and those kinds of things that were not utilizing. We're actually not utilizing our resources. It's cuz everybody's kinda out there and we are getting older. You're absolutely right, we are getting older. So, it's harder for people to get around, but yeah definitely I would love to talk to him. That'd be fun.

Interviewer: I'm so glad that you're here–

Elizabeth: Thank you!

Senon: participated in our interview series and I think what you have shared with us and what comes ahead for you, um will be always a blessing.

Elizabeth: Oh yeah.

Senon: I always have needed that strong energy from Chicanas and we've always got them, but they're all there with you. I am so glad.

Elizabeth: [laugh] Thank you.

[1:04:04]

END OF TRANSCRIPT