

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

María Guadalupe Carrillo De Portillo

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Yesi Avelar
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De Portillo *Hola.*

[00:00:10]

Avelar Hi. Thank you for being here. So just to begin, I'm going to ask you to please state your full name.

[00:00:17]

De Portillo My full name is María Guadalupe "Lupe" Carrillo De Portillo.

Avelar Can you also tell us your birthdate?

[00:00:24]

De Portillo My birthdate, July 1st, 1951.

Avelar And would you provide your marital status?

[00:00:31]

De Portillo I'm a widow, but I was married thirty-four and a half years to my husband Carlos.

Avelar And then do you have children?

[00:00:37]

De Portillo I have three beautiful children. I have Miguel, who is now forty, Teresa, who's now thirty-nine, and Lita, who is known Dolores Felicitas, and she is now thirty-three.

Avelar Okay, great. Thank you. So we're going to start off with early life. Where were you born and raised?

[00:01:00]

De Portillo I was born in Sacramento California, here, and I was raised here, and this is the only place I've ever lived.

Avelar What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:10]

De Portillo I did not live with my mom. My mom deported my dad [laughs], and he was in Mexico. I was raised by my grandmother, and she's the one who taught me everything I know.

Avelar How many brothers and sisters did you have?

[00:01:26]

De Portillo I was raised here with one sister, but down in Mexico I had nine brothers and sisters.

Avelar Could you describe your experiences as a child or a youth and in your family and in your neighborhood?

[00:01:40]

De Portillo In our neighborhood, we played and went to school with our neighborhood kids. I went to school at Donner. We walked. We didn't have a car. It was just my grandmother, my sister, and I, so none of us—she didn't know how to drive, so we'd walk everywhere or catch the bus wherever we wanted to go.

I went to school at Donner School until the boundaries changed, and then I went over to one year of parochial school at All Hallows, and then from there went over to junior high at Peter Lassen. From Peter Lassen, I went over to Johnson High School and graduated from there. I graduated at seventeen, so I ended up coming to City College after that midterm and continuing my education there.

Avelar So where you a Fellow or Felito during the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:02:28]

De Portillo Almost. No, I didn't. I went to sign up for the program, but at that time that's when my grandmother died, so I continued to work. I was offered a job through the Washington Neighborhood Council, and I accepted the job. I was going to school part-time, but I couldn't do it all, so I ended up quitting school and continued working, because at that time I was still putting my sister through school. She graduated through City College. I had put her through.

Avelar That's really great. What were your earliest memories of the events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:03:14]

De Portillo I got involved in high school. In high school, I was really involved with Mrs. Lucy Limas, because our high school did not have MAYA Club. Back then, we were MAYA. We didn't have MEChA yet. It was the Mexican American Youth Association. So we struggled to get the organization together there at Johnson High School, and then once we did it, we were able to set up the program. It lasted about two years, and then I graduated. Then it continued on through there throughout the years, and I don't know what it is now, but that's we organized, the MAYA Club.

Then the Cesar Chavez march came about '63, '65, and my grandma pushed all of us to go to the march and support Cesar Chavez. So we were very active with that. My grandma was very supportive.

Avelar How was that for you, the march?

[00:04:05]

De Portillo Oh, it was exciting back then. I mean, I think I was about thirteen. [laughs] So it was fun just to see everybody there. The priest at the church, Guadalupe Church, promoted and reinforced everybody to go and attend the march, so we all went and that was by bus. We caught the bus and went downtown. We all went.

Avelar That's really awesome. Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change your personality?

[00:04:37]

De Portillo No, I'm still me, myself, and I. [laughter]

Avelar Can you elaborate a little bit?

[00:04:44]

De Portillo I was involved. From high school, I got involved with the Washington Center and the Washington Council, and some of the youth there in the community elected me to sit on the board at the Washington Neighborhood Council, so I was a youth representative there as a youth coordinator and got involved there. That's where I got my experience, where I was offered the job at the Washington Council. I was a volunteer there for two years.

After the two years, I was offered the job. I'd continued on and we set up different meetings, different functions. We'd go all over. Then through the job, we started throughout the years the Breakfast for Niños Program. We got together through proposals that were written, the Cultural Affairs Committee started, and we were doing a lot of cultural activities from there.

We had the Breakfast for Niños, and Breakfast for Niños started because the school in the area, the kids weren't eating breakfast, so we'd go to the schools, especially Washington Elementary School, which was a school in the neighborhood. The kids weren't eating their breakfast. So we thought that they should have a healthy breakfast like home. The kids would order breakfast and get a second one, and they'd have to get a full tray of breakfast just because they want an extra piece of toast or they want another bowl of fruit, so they were getting their numbers because they were given a full tray the whole time instead of giving them extras of whatever they wanted.

So we ended up setting up a program through Sac State and the Ethnic Studies Program, and we set up the Breakfast for Niños at Los Rios, and then we'd go out there. We had students from the university who'd come out and do their hours, and we'd make breakfast for them, as far as pancakes, *arroz con leche*, scrambled eggs, toast, sausages, *chorizo con huevo*, what they'd be eating at home.

At the time, we had a lot of Vietnamese kids were coming into the neighborhood there at Los Rios, so a lot of them wouldn't even eat it. They were afraid to eat it, and they'd wait for the oldest one to taste it, and once they oldest one tasted it and he'd want more, then the other kids would come and have it. So that's how they expanded their taste buds.

Avelar It sounds like it was a really big community effort.

[00:07:01]

De Portillo Yeah. Monday through Friday, we'd go out and every morning we'd be out there by 6:00 a.m. getting everything set up, breaking all the eggs and getting the bacon going, getting the sausage going, whatever it is, what was on the menu for that day.

Avelar Must have been rewarding to see the benefit of such a program.

[00:07:14]

De Portillo Oh, yeah, yeah. And then through the Washington Council, we had youth activities. We had funding for the youth activities. We'd take them on different field trips during the summer. As youth coordinator, I coordinated trips for the summer activities. We'd go up to Placer and take the kids to what was Crazy Horse,

was a pond up there. They'd go swimming. We'd take kids all up there in the vans. We had access to the vans at the Washington Center, and we'd borrow their vans and we'd take the kids up and transport them.

We'd take the kids over to different museums through the week. We'd take them over to the Rainbo Factories and Bakery so they could see how the bread is being made. They'd get bread and samples. We did the same thing with Wonder Bread, take them over to Sutter's Fort, we'd take them to the zoo, different activities, because a lot of these kids had no transportation, their fathers were working all the time, and a majority of them were working in the fields, so these kids had nobody to take them to these adventures, so we'd take them. We'd take them out there and do different activities with them, which was great. It was enjoyable. Get tired by the end of the day, but it was great. [laughter]

Avelar Yeah, enjoy yourselves. What role do you believe the Chicanas played in the *Movimiento*?

[00:08:32]

De Portillo Oh, they had a big role. I mean, we were the ones who were in the background doing everything for everybody else. The RCAF hosted if Cesar Chavez was coming here in town. We'd be the ones out there cooking, my *comadre* Jenny, and we all prepared the food for all the marchers as they're coming through. It was a big support. All the mailers that we did through the Washington Council, anything needed mailed out, we handled everything there through the Washington Council.

Avelar Kept the machine running.

[00:08:59]

De Portillo Yeah. At the time, they were funded through Sacramento Area Economic Opportunity Council, which was known as AEOC, but we handled everything. We did everything there, and that's where we started to do our cultural affairs. That's the first time we set up an *altar* for Día de los Muertos was there at 14th and E. We had an *altar* for two years. After that, proposals were starting to get written up and set up, and then we started doing our activities.

Avelar Was that the first time, you said?

[00:09:26]

De Portillo Mm-hmm. We did it for about two years.

Avelar How was that for you?

[00:09:29]

De Portillo Fine. For me it was fine, because I had an *altar* at home anyway, so I just brought my stuff there and we set it up there. We did little Christmas shows and parties, and we'd serve *atoles*. People in the community would come and check the *altar* out. All the neighborhood people, as they walked by, they weren't sure if they were able to come in or not. We'd, "Come on in. Come on in." They'd come out and check out the *altar*.

Years later, I was working with La Casita, a senior nutrition program, and in the senior nutrition program we did the same thing. I would set up the *altar* there for them, and a lot of them were like—they hadn't seen it in a long time, and so every

year they looked forward to having the *altar* set up, and then they started bringing little pictures and stuff like that from family and loved ones.

Avelar Sounds like a good community strengthening activity for everyone involved.

[00:10:20]

De Portillo Yeah.

Avelar So what did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:10:30]

De Portillo What did I personally do? [laughs] Well, I was involved with my first job, like I said, I was at the Washington Council, and Rosemary threw me to the tigers. I was young. I didn't know what to do. She said, "We're going to have a function at Southside Park. Get the permits."

 And I'm like, "Where do I get permits at? What do I got to do?"

 "Check it out. You'll do it.

 So I had to go to the police department, I had to go here, and I learned what I had to do. And after that, we started doing and organizing, putting things together. We got security together. We did that for quite a while, many years. Even my daughter would go with me. The chief knew her already, every time she'd go with me to go get the permits and talk, and he had a gift for her all the time. I think it was Chief Kenny, to tell you the truth. I'm not sure. We were organizing that and we've been getting together organizing other functions at the park.

We started organizing Cinco de Mayo. We did the Dieciséis de Septiembre. We went on ahead and did the De Colores Aztec. Then we were doing Día de los Muertos at St. Mary's Cemetery. So we did quite a few. Some of the functions were held at the Zapata Park there in the community. The park wasn't big enough, so we had to move on to a bigger park. So we did a lot there.

Avelar What were some of the organizations you were involved in?

[00:12:02]

De Portillo Oh, through MEChA, MAYA, we did a lot of precinct-walking through, I guess MAPA, Mexican American Political Association. What else? Let's see. Well, whatever they needed help with, we were always there. Whether we were involved in it or not, we were always there. Joe said, when he was campaigning, we campaigned and help him out precinct-walking. Manuel Ferales, when he was going, we'd all campaign for him. Phil Isenberg, when he was running, we did help him out too. So we did quite a bit.

Avelar Thank you. Describe how the Movimiento Chicano impacted community life here in Sacramento or where you lived.

[00:12:48]

De Portillo Where I lived, by then I had already got married, moved out, and continued on being involved in all the organizations and my job. A lot of it, we went through the schools when I was involved also through—I didn't mention College Awareness Program here at City College. We were under Dean Mariano, and we had the College Awareness Program here, and we went out throughout all the high

schools and we recruited students. We went as far as Woodland, we went up to Placer, I believe we went out to the Elk Grove High School. Back then, there was only one high school then. We recruited a lot of students. We were involved with them, recruited them into the college.

Then from there, we all moved on either to other universities. We left City College and transferred on, but we've always been involved with the Cesar Chavez march, whatever we need to help recruiting students to school. Even to this day, I'm still recruiting students with whatever they need help with. I'll send them to who they need to speak to and get help for them.

Avelar So in terms of your perspective in the Chicano Movimiento, did your thoughts or understanding about the Movimiento Chicano change as you became more involved?

[00:14:17]

De Portillo Has my thoughts changed? No. I got, I'd say, more involved, more interested, yeah. No, they haven't changed. Spreading the word to the grandkids [laughs], getting them involved as well, letting them know what had happened in the past, what things were like. We want things better for their future as well.

Avelar Do you identify yourself as a Chicana?

[00:14:42]

De Portillo Yes.

Avelar Can you explain what your Chicana identity means to you?

[00:14:47]

De Portillo When you were younger and you go to Mexico, they don't know you as a Mexican American. They don't know you as *México mexicana americana*. You come over here and they don't accept you. So either way, you're not full American, you're not full *mexicana*. You're Chicana. You go on ahead and you do everything the best that you can for your people and move on, because you're not really accepted in both. They look at you and, "Oh, you're Mexican," and, "Oh, you're this." So I've always been Chicana, to this day.

Avelar To this day. So you would use the term *Chicana* to identify yourself?
[00:15:30]

De Portillo Mm-hmm.

Avelar What significance did the organizations you were involved in play in furthering the Movimiento Chicano?
[00:15:52]

De Portillo A lot of them were really active with the kids, the students. They're all into the Chicano Movement. We went to the Chicano Moratorium in L.A. We got more involved and more active, I think, after that Moratorium. A lot of them, as well, never saw themselves as Mexican Americans or Mexican Americans, and especially not Hispanics. "We're not born in Spain; we're not Hispanics." So we all got involved and became active in the Chicano Movement. That was it for us, especially fellow friends, they were all Chicanos.

Avelar Can you tell us about the events you participated in?
[00:16:37]

De Portillo Events I participated in. Well, as a minor, College Awareness; I was involved with the Mexican American Political; I was involved with La Raza Bookstore; I was involved with Día de los Muertos. I've been doing Día de los Muertos for forty years now at St. Mary's Cemetery. Involved with the MEChAs in the high schools, at Johnson High School and a couple other high schools. Helped out my daughter with her schools in Laguna, their fundraisers. Let's see what other organizations through. Well, besides the Washington Council and the Cultural Affairs Committee and the UFW, it keeps you busy. [laughs]

Avelar Can you tell us more about that?

[00:17:24]

De Portillo What's that, the UFW?

Avelar Yeah, the UFW.

[00:17:26]

De Portillo When they call, they need something, Juanito always gives me a call. "They need help. Their marchers are coming in town." If they need food, whatever, we'll get together and go cook. I'll be cooking for them.

I've prepared food at the Food Closet off of Broadway. We've gone there a couple of times to prepare food, and they've told us that "Whatever's there on the shelves is all yours on this side," or whatever. Then I have everything prepared, and next thing I knew, they need forty orders of vegetarian plates. "Oh, no! Okay." So there I am scooping up and getting together and have to have the separate plates vegetarian.

Other times when they're coming in—even after Cesar Chavez died, I still prepared food for them—Juanito just calls me and tells me, "I've got the kitchen for you. This is it. Serve over here."

And I said, "Okay." So I'll prepare everything for them, *fideo*, *frijoles*. She goes, "They want the *fideo*, they want the *calabasitas*."

I say, "Okay, whatever you want." And I'll prepare it for them. I'll get a crew of people to come help me and we'll do the food.

Avelar Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your social, cultural, political consciousness?

[00:18:31]

De Portillo Yeah, I think it's always been there, because I've always been involved, so I was aware of it, you know, so it's nothing new that I'd learned. I just learned as we were growing up and maturing through life. It was just part of life for us, even for my husband. Always he was involved with the union, several different unions with his job. So we've always been involved since before we were married.

Avelar Did your participation in the Movimiento Chicano change your behavior, values, or worldview?

[00:19:12]

De Portillo Did they change them? I don't know so much change them, because it's always been there for me. Those thoughts have always been at the beginning, and they've grown more and more through the years. The children, my kids were involved, and we always marched whatever picketing we needed to do. Picketing,

they were always involved. So that has always been there for us. It was nothing new that we went out and learned. It was there for us. Everybody around us, we were all doing the same thing, so we all worked together and supported each other.

Avelar Can you describe to us some of the impacts that your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano had in your personal life or career?

[00:19:59]

De Portillo In my personal life as a young person, we were always active, we were always involved. Whatever needed to be done was done. If I needed to take off and go babysit, let's say, for Josedna, I'd take off and babysit the kids while Joe had to take off and do what he needed to do. If they needed posters, they needed stuff done with the RCAF, I was always there. I was always there whatever they needed help with. As we worked there, that was our job. We worked there and we were paid there and we were involved. It didn't matter how many hours we were there. The kids were at the babysitter's, and if I had to leave the kids there longer, I'd do that or pick them up and take them with me. We'd go to different meetings, whatever I needed to do. My daughter still remembers having meetings at the Reno Club. She goes, "I remember you taking me. We took the baby in the stroller." Yeah, wherever we went, we had to go and have our meetings, and we were always involved.

As far as my job, the later jobs that I had, those were different now. They were more into childcare education, so I wasn't involved with that as much at work with them. And then later on, I got hired through the county, and what I did was onsite. It had nothing to do with my job.

I was always involved with the Hispanic community where they needed translators, and I would translate for them and involved and made sure that the kids had a chance to go to school. A lot of them couldn't go to college. Today now we have the DREAM Act. I was involved with the DREAM Act working with that through the church. That's another organization I'm involved with today is ACT, Area Congregations Together, and we've worked a lot under Immigration and continue to work on that to this day.

Avelar That's really important work. Thank you for working on that. Looking back at your experience in the Movimiento Chicano, are there any personal or political issues that were left unsolved, you think?

[00:22:11]

De Portillo Oh, there's always things left behind. The immigration, to this day nothing's settled. And the farmworkers, we're still battling. That's not settled. Nothing's confined. People are still dying from the chemical sprays. Girls are still dying, young girls, from rape. Girls are dying from exhaustion. So, no. Airplanes are still spraying chemicals on the people in the fields. So, no. It's ongoing still.

Avelar Next generation, right, to take on; us. What do you see as future challenges in the Chicano community?

[00:22:56]

De Portillo Oh, well, the immigration. Immigration right now, people don't have a chance of raising the money, the funds. All the time they want to charge people more to get immigrated, which is ridiculous. A couple years back, it was \$1,000 per person.

Now it's like \$3,000, \$5,000 a person, and it's ridiculous. It's going up and up, the inflation. I don't know if they're trying to be together with the inflation or what, but that's the number one, immigration. People wait for years and years to get immigrated, and it's ridiculous.

The challenge also, the farmworkers. It's not justice for them. It's not fair. They're the ones who supply the food, they're the ones who pick up the food and pick up everything and it's available for us to buy because of them.

A couple of years ago, there was somebody who spoke up and said that—what was it? I can't remember who said it, but not even Blacks would take the job. But it's not them; it's Whites or anybody. I mean, jobs have been offered in the fields when they stopped immigrants to work in the fields, non-immigrants, not legal immigrants, and nobody else would come to the jobs. The farmworkers had to speak up and say, "We need these workers. We need to have the Mexican workers out here," because nobody else wants to go work in those fields. And they need to have a good wage for themselves and a place to go to the bathroom, a place to live out there that's decent, and they don't have that, you know.

Right here on the river, there was a couple of years ago that one of the farmers had offered jobs for people and they were going to pay them like \$200, \$300 or something like that, and there was free housing and all this, but they were shacks. There weren't even beds in there. So these people ended up turning around and went back to Mexico. They said they didn't want to work. They weren't being paid, they didn't have the right housing. So the legal had to get in there and help out with that.

So that's ridiculous to see that happening today still. It's like *The Grapes of Wrath* starting all over. There's never an end to that.

Avelar Do you see yourself maybe becoming involved in meeting these challenges?

[00:25:15]

De Portillo I keep on working with them. I keep on working, whatever I can do with them, yeah.

Avelar So do you think that women played a vital role in the Chicano Movement?

[00:25:28]

De Portillo Yes. You've got Dolores Huerta, who stepped up. You have other women in there that stepped up to bat, other women through the schools, education. Yes, definitely.

Avelar Can you maybe elaborate a little more about that?

[00:25:45]

De Portillo Well, you have more female teachers today, Chicanas, who are now not only just teachers, but they're up in administrative, principals and all who have moved up, you know, and through them, they celebrate Cesar Chavez at the schools. They have the knowledge of what it is, who he was, and they're brought the books into the school for the kids to see and read and hear.

You have, like I said, Dolores Huerta, who has always been there, but you have other females who have been involved through different parts of the nation, who

have been involved with the organization, who've been up to help out with everything through New Mexico. So a lot of women have come up and a lot of the women improve their lives by getting their full education.

Avelar How do you think their involvement was perceived and accepted in the Chicano Movement?

[00:26:42]

De Portillo Well, as far as them getting their degrees is an example for the new students coming through to see "If she could do it, I can do it too." And that's what we want them, pull them up, pull them up there and get them to get their education. That's important.

Avelar I agree. Great. We've reached actually the end of the list of questions, but is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about your involvement in your Chicano Movement or your experience in the Chicano Movement?

[00:27:20]

De Portillo Well, I tell you one thing, I remember the experience and I'm glad I had the experience when we were in the Chicano Moratorium in L.A., because that was a lifetime experience. We went down there as a group from the Washington Center. We had a caravan of us.

Avelar When was that?

[00:27:39]

De Portillo It was about 1970, and it was a caravan. We all end up spending the night in Filipino Hall. Of course, José Montoya had the great idea of driving through

McDonald's and order like fifty breakfast burritos. [laughter] I don't think the burritos were up; it was the breakfasts that were out. They'd say, "No, you have to come in." So we all had to go inside.

We drove through to L.A., we went down to the Moratorium, we had a march. I remember the bride, wedding couple that had gone through. They just got married that day as we were going through the procession, the march, the Moratorium, and they joined us, they joined the march, and we all went through and we got over to—I believe it was Belvedere Park. and we were all there.

Everybody was celebrating, having a good time and everything till the cops came in. We were back there in the back. They were arm-locked, armed, and started teasing the people. They were teasing the people back there. I was in the back back there, and they started coming up and teasing people. People were getting mad, and they started picking up cans and throwing at people, so people got them and threw them back at them. Then they started coming at us. So that was a lifetime experience, you know.

I never thought my grandma would let me go. I asked her, and she said yes, and I was like, "All right!"

"But you have to take your sister."

I said, "Okay." So, yeah, we both went, and I took my cousin, who was thirteen. It was a great time. It was a wonderful time. It was an experience, and it was a time that we had to run for our lives too.

And then all the events that we've had throughout the years at Southside Park, all our cultural events that we had, and we went on ahead. El Centro Mexicano was here, but the Centro Mexicano was getting smaller and smaller, wasn't as many people, and there was a *tardeada* every Sunday there in the afternoon that was located right there on Fifth and W, and eventually it faded out. They ended up selling it. It's now a Korean church. They had the statue, Soldado Mexicano, which Las Madres Mexicanas raised money to have that statue built, and so instead of destroying it, they ended up moving it to the Capitol, and now I know the VAs are getting together. The Mexican American VAs are supposed to get together and working on that to make a better shrine or [unclear] right there. But that was something as little kids we were always involved.

I remember the old deejays that we had, Alex Vasquez and Max Leyva. We only two radio stations, Spanish-speaking stations, and it was only like for two hours a day, so you had to listen to it from 3:00 to 5:00 or wait till Sunday, and Sunday it was on like 5:00 a.m., 6:00 a.m., till about 10:00 a.m.

Then all the functions. We had a show. El Teatro Frio was downtown on J street, Fifth and J. Then we had Teatro Centro, which was on Franklin Boulevard, was called Barrio Alegre, and that was involved there in the Franklin area in Fruitridge. They had the *discoteca*. That was another area for the Hispanic group to go. There wasn't very much here. Then eventually they opened a *teatro* over in Del Paso, and that was another thing which helped the people in that area. But little by

little, the city went growing and growing, and now, of course, Franklin's all Hispanic pretty much.

The Southside Park was always a big function that people looked forward because that's across the street from Guadalupe Church, and after church, they all go over there. Fiesta de Colores when we'd have our *ceremonias*, same thing, everybody will come over. Even the bishop, Bishop Gallegos, came to visit us at the *ceremonia* and participated with us at the *ceremonias*. So we've done a lot there with community. I'm trying to think what else real quick here. But we've been involved in a lot, definitely.

Unidentified What do you think Día de los Muertos means to the community?

[00:32:10]

De Portillo Well, we have Día de los Muertos, which was one that came out of the Cultural Affairs Committee that we put together the events. The Cultural Affairs Committee, I think the first two were done over at the Washington Center. The first two were done there, and then we ended up expanding it over to St. Mary's Cemetery, and we started that out with a procession from Johnson High School going through the neighborhood up down—I believe that was 66th Street going up to St. Mary's Cemetery.

As we went through the first couple of years through the neighborhood, the people were getting mad, the residents, and they said, "Get this witchcraft out of here. Stop this! What are you guys doing?"

We had a casket that was built. David made the casket, and they carried it and they'd carry somebody. Somebody would volunteer to lay in the casket and they'd carry it through the cemetery. We had the devil and the angel, and they'd dance around, the devil trying to get in, but the devil can't get into the cemetery. They have the procession there. Mrs. Cobb was involved and Dr. Solis at the beginning. So everybody from the community, all the youth were involved in carrying the *coronas* with *las ofrendas*, and those *ofrendas* were used throughout the years over and over and repaired and fixed up and touched.

As we go into the cemetery, then as we go in, we have an acknowledgement of the four directions, so north, the south, east and the west. Of course, the north is of the elders, the west is direction of the women, south is direction of the children, and east is the men. So as you enter, right there at the entrance to the left is the burial plot for the babies of the innocent. So they would always do a recognition there for the innocent and leave a *corona* there for them.

Then they processed through with prayers and singing hymns and through the procession and they would move on to the west with the women, and right there they would leave a *corona* for that direction, as well as somebody would speak recognizing those who have passed on. Then we would move on to the south through the children, and again somebody would speak there.

Then later, we would do that for a couple years, several years, and then later we ended up going to the further back to do the VA plot back there and we'd visit the

VA over there as well and leave a *corona* there, and then process back and come back to the east where the *altar* is, Mary's *altar* there.

Then we'd have a big *altar* there set up, and that's where we'd do all our *ceremonia*. The *danzantes* would be in the middle of the circle there, and they'd do the *ceremonia* after we had the Mass. A priest would come out and do Mass for us, and then we have *pan*. *Pan* would be donated from Esperanza, and we'd have the bread and the strip of *pan Mexicano* after Mass. The priest blessed the bread, and then we'd also have a *corona* in front of the *altar* of *Los Antepasados*, and so people had the opportunity to mention at that time their loved ones who have passed on, and they'll come up and put a little flower on the *corona*. Then from there, we move on to the indigenous ceremony, the Azteca dancers.

Then after that, it's the clean-up time and put everything away for the following year. But we've been doing that for forty years.

Avelar It still goes on every year?

[00:35:52]

De Portillo Yeah. My girls crack up and call me the "gatekeeper" because I have *all* these pictures of people, but, truthfully, I don't know them all. Some I recognize. But I save all those pictures, because people leave me their picture, because they said when they die, who's going to put their families pictures up there? I get elders, and so we take the pictures and I put them up every year. Some need frames, some don't have frames, so I buy frames for those pictures and clean them up.

And in all those years, it has never rained. Just once it rained, and that was one day that we just had to scramble through and take *all* the pictures down. The director of the cemetery, Monty, came over and helped us grab everything and he took us to the side, the back, where we had cover and we set everything up over there. So they're all pretty cooperative there at the cemetery as well. They're all cooperative and helped us out. Even the general public, they'll come out and give me their numbers and, "Hey, when you're getting ready to do it, give me a number to call. Give me a call." And they'll come out and help out. And they have. A lot of people have come out and help out, bring flowers and items, yes. So it's a good *ceremonia*.

We've had the bishop out there. Bishop Gallegos, in the past, had come out. We've had different priests from up north by Chico and that area. Priests have come out to do the Mass here as well, different priests here in town. There's been a couple of times the priest didn't show up due to emergencies or whatever. I think it was three times. So when that happened, I just had done a rosary, we did a rosary, got everybody together and we did a rosary. So people were happy with that. Sometimes you've got to compromise and do what we can. But, yeah, out of all those years, we've only had three, so not bad, and one rain [laughs], so that's not too bad.

Avelar Thank you for sharing that.

Unidentified Anything else you want to add?

[00:38:05]

De Portillo Not at the moment. I can't think of anything right now.

Avelar Anything that you would tell maybe people of our generation? Maybe suggestions of how to keep the *Movimiento* going or maybe anything that we could do to improve? I don't know. Anything, because I feel like we can learn a lot from—
[00:38:29]

De Portillo I know we just did a *marcha* in Bakersfield with McCartney again, and the last march we did last summer, we left from Sacramento to him, to Bakersfield, to let him know how important immigration is. He doesn't want to cooperate, he doesn't want to vote for it. This last march they just did, he felt that all the marchers that were there and last summer were people from out of town. He'd felt that Bakersfield doesn't care, that all the farmworkers in Bakersfield don't care, they don't care about the immigration. And that's not true. We need everybody's support, everybody's support to show this man and other politicians that this immigration thing is very important, because these people are working for peanuts. They're working for peanuts out there. They have no health benefits. They have nothing there to support their kids, and many of them are struggling to put their children through college to get a good education. They don't want their kids growing up and living the kind of life that they've had, the same. They don't want them to follow their parents' footsteps. Their parents want their kids to have a better life for themselves.

That's something that we can all we need to get together and show those politicians that it's very important that this immigration gets resolved, that the farmworkers' issues, the chemicals they use and everything, that all has to be resolved. I personally had an uncle who was killed opening a can of chemical, and

what he was thinking of that day he didn't put on his mask or anything that day and he opened the can, he died right there. Within twenty minutes, he was dead, and the only reason we knew is because he didn't show up home for lunch. And he had been doing that for years, and it was a careless thing, but there went his life. But there's other people that need to get educated as well. Those chemicals, they think it's not going to hurt them. It does happen.

So we need to put a lot of changes into the fields and we need to let everybody know what they can do. It doesn't matter just *mexicanos*, Black, White as well; everybody. There's a lot of Filipinos out there working as well. But that's something we all need to do you know. It's really, really important.

Avelar Thank you.

Unidentified Are there other women in the council?

[00:40:52]

De Portillo Yeah, definitely, like Rosemary Rasul [phonetic]. We had at the Washington Council Vivian Huerta, we had my *comadre* Jenny, Jenny Vaca, Rosemary, Manuela. Martha Bustamante was always involved there. These were strong women. Back then, I was just like twenty years old, and these were the women that I looked up to. So, Martha, Manuela, and Jenny are now gone. [cries]

But we need to teach the young people of the struggles that everybody went through. Jenny was a strong woman. She had, what, nine, ten, kids and she was still always out there working out, and she was showing her kids, showing them what they need to do. To this day, the kids will come out and support whatever we need in our

organizations, marching or whatever we need. But, yeah, these are the women that I looked up to personally, that made me who I am, besides my grandma, you know.

And then, of course, other people came along too. We had Chilo Montoya, Elvia Nava, Terre Romo, everybody that was involved definitely with the bookstore. So we had a lot of women back there, as well. Whenever they needed cooking, we'd go out and cook at the Washington Center, prepare food there in whatever kitchens we could get into. There was time for the community. We'd have to go get fish for the community donated from [unclear]. My *comadre* Rosemary and I would go get the fish load it up in the van and have live fish ready. We were laughing, "This fish is going to be an article tomorrow in the *Sacramento Union* and the *Bee*, that we were attacked by these salmon," because they were still alive jumping in the van, you know. So that was an experience. When she went out there in her heels and expect them to load the fish, we found out *we* had to load up the fish, so there we were loading up the slimy fish, about so big [demonstrates], that's all, about so round. [laughs]

But, no, we were always involved. Jenny, we'd be out there buying all the foods and the items for the Breakfast for Niños Program, she was one of the ones right there in the morning bright and early. We were all cooking the food, preparing everything. So, yeah, that was definitely a lifetime experience. That's it.

Avelar Thank you.

Unidentified Very good. Thank you.

[End of interview]