

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Lena Irene Del Campo

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Christy Kim
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Transcription by Aishwarya Kolli and Technitype Transcripts

Kim Please state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Del Campo Lena Irene L_____ Del Campo.

Kim Please provide your birthdate.

[00:00:16]

Del Campo 3/16/38.

Kim What's your marital status?

[00:00:21]

Del Campo I'm widowed.

Kim Did you have children?

[00:00:26]

Del Campo Yes, I have two sons.

Kim How old are they?

[00:00:29]

Del Campo They're both in their early fifties.

Kim Could you tell me about your early life? Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:42]

Del Campo I was born in Bakersfield, California, raised there. On my mother's side, I'm from an old California family. My grandfather and great-uncle were California *vaqueros*. They worked in all the big ranches in Kern County like the Tejon Ranch, Miller & Lux Land Company, as well as lots of little ranches.

On my father's side, his family came from Sonora, Mexico and through Arizona and settled in Bakersfield. My grandfather bought property there and the homestead is still there. We still have a relative that's living there on that site. We grew up on that site.

My parents went to school there in Bakersfield. They both went to eighth grade. My dad worked for the SP Railroad and lumber companies as a yard man and truck driver, and in his final years, he was a custodian at the Bakersfield Junior College and he retired from there.

My mother, she was a housewife until the time I was about in junior high, and she would work in the fields, and she worked as a motel maid and she ran an elevator and cleaned offices, so basically that's what she did.

I had seven brothers and one sister, so we had a large family. My family had hard times growing up, but we stayed in one place. At least we lived in one place, we didn't have to move around or go anyplace; we weren't migrant. We just were there on that homestead, and from there we all branched out.

Kim Did you have to work also in the fields?

[00:03:20]

Del Campo Yes, yes, I worked in the fields. My brother and I picked cotton and we picked potatoes. We didn't have to—well, we had to, but we didn't have to. We went with neighbors and friends because my mom and dad had their own different jobs. So we would go on Saturdays when we weren't in school. And I worked as a teenager powdering corn and I worked in the packing sheds and, yes, I did work in the fields.

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

[00:04:05]

Del Campo I was a Fellow, yes. When I came, I already had my BA and I had been teaching in the Lamont School District for nine years. I was an elementary schoolteacher, but I also got to teach in the junior high. I worked with Mini-Corps people, I helped train them in English as a Second Language, and I was setting up a bilingual program there, ESL and bilingual programs there, and that's one of the reasons I came to Sacramento was to find out more, get more of an education in that field.

Kim Where did you get your BA?

[00:04:57]

Del Campo I got my BA from the Fresno State Extension that was situated in Bakersfield, and after I got my AA, I wanted to continue going to school. The

teaching credential was available through Fresno State, so I attended there and I obtained my BA through them.

Kim What kind of subjects did you teach in school?

[00:05:27]

Del Campo I taught second grade and I taught first grade with mostly LEP students, because we were setting up a little bilingual program which, of course, included ESL. Then later on, I became a resource teacher and I would go into the elementary, primary classrooms and I would do pull-out ESL. Then I went to the intermediate grades and I did ESL and support for reading and math. Then in the summers, I worked with migrant students in trying to catch them up, and also took classes there during the summer with the school district.

Kim Was it hard working with the migrant students?

[00:06:34]

Del Campo I didn't consider it hard. I loved it. I had a lot of freedom to be very creative, and I did creative things with them so that they would like school and want to be in school and still learn. So I took them on field trips, we produced plays, we just did a lot of things to make it fun, to make learning fun. And since it was summer, too, we didn't want to overdo it with just nose to the grindstone, you know. We wanted to enjoy it, and I found that if I was enjoying it, they were enjoying it, or vice versa, they were enjoying it, I enjoyed it. [laughs]

Kim *Muy bien.* How did your participation in the Mexican American Education Program influence your thinking and involvement in the Chicano Movement?

[00:07:40]

Del Campo Well, I was already influenced in the sixties when I started teaching in my school district. There were all kinds of things going on, all kinds of upheaval, riots, legislation. My husband at the time was working for the Bakersfield Police Department. There were riots going on and there were demonstrations and all kinds of things going on throughout the nation, so a person was kind of caught up in things.

Then a lot of the people I knew were involved in organizations, Mexican American organizations, to help the minority population. I had a brother that came home from Vietnam and he started going back to school. He went to San Jose State, and he'd come back to town telling us about the things that were going on in San Jose, the Chicano Movement and things.

So I got the opportunity to come up to Sacramento State with this project. I applied and I was accepted, so I already had a feeling for the Chicano Movement when I got here, but my perspective was broadened when I got here because there were so many people from all over California here going through the project, and I got to hear about their experiences, their ideas, their goals, their activities, plus the people in Sacramento were very active and there were a lot of organizations. Besides, this is the capital, so there was always something going on. So it really opened my

eyes to a lot of things, educational opportunities. Everything was just kind of opened up.

Kim Could you elaborate on how you were first influenced by the Chicano Movement?

[00:10:07]

Del Campo How I was first influenced?

Kim Yeah, or your earliest memories of it.

[00:10:10]

Del Campo Well, yes, in Bakersfield, yes. I worked in the fields in Delano with an uncle. I don't know if they—they were tipping grapes. We were doing something to the grapes in the fields. On a Saturday we met back to get our paychecks, and I saw these men on horses running as we were driving up, and then I saw this big green truck parked there next to where they were paying people. A lot of the people were picking up their paychecks and they'd put them in the green truck. They were the illegal workers. It was the Immigration people that were taking people just as they were picking up their checks. And as we drove up, we saw people running and being chased by people on horseback. It was a very traumatic experience to see that, so that was one of the things that I got to see about injustices firsthand.

Then in the Lamont School District where I taught, most of the children were migrant, and they started school speaking only English. The families were very poor. This other teacher and I, every morning we would take food. It was before breakfast programs and all those kinds of things. So we would provide breakfast for them every

day. She and I would bring something and we'd provide breakfast for them every morning in our two classes. The rest of the kids, who knows how they did.

But the activism of people that I knew in the community, we were involved in giving out scholarships, talking to the politicians, local politicians. A friend of ours was a Hispanic fellow, was elected to the Assembly here in Sacramento. So those are some of the things that I recall about my influences.

Kim What are some programs or groups you were involved in? Where you involved in any?

[00:13:01]

Del Campo Yes, I was involved with the Association of Mexican American Educators during the times that I worked from the seventies through the eighties. I was secretary, vice president, and president. I started a newsletter that we sent out to all the members monthly. I was a member of the CAFE, California Association of Bilingual Educators. I was a member of NEA, National Educators Association. I was involved with a supervisory group of principals in Sacramento city. That's all that comes to mind right now.

Kim So how did your participation in the Chicano Movement influence your career?

[00:14:21]

Del Campo Well, once I was hired as principal, I was hired because I was bilingual. I had a background in bilingual education. In my first job with the Valley Intercultural Program, I helped give workshops to teachers and aides, and I had an

understanding as to the things they were going through and the children that they were serving in the communities, that they were serving, so I had a better understanding and I could help with their curricular needs. Not only that, we gave in-services to other districts. The Valley Intercultural Program served lots of little towns that surrounded Sacramento, and so at their in-services, it wasn't just for the bilingual people; it was also for the non-bilingual people. It was to inform them about the needs of the limited English speakers culturally as well as language-wise. So we presented information to those groups as to the needs of the students and the communities that they came from. Also as a principal, I had a feeling for what the parents of the limited English speakers, what they needed, wanted, what it took to bring them into participating in schools. So, anyway, those are some of the things.

Kim So as principal, did you set up any programs for the students?

[00:16:43]

Del Campo Yes. I was first hired at Joseph Bonnheim Elementary for two years, and there was a 2284 Program that the prior principal had applied for and gotten funding for, but then she left. So I was there, so I set up a little bilingual program in the primary grades at that school.

Then after two years, I was hired for the new Washington Elementary School. The old Washington Elementary been knocked down; the new one was rebuilt. There were lots of limited English speakers in that community, so the teachers and I opened up that course in the district, opened up that school, and we set up a bilingual program there. Associated with that program, we had Migrant Ed involved.

In addition to that, it was a sister school to Theodore Judah across town. They were two sister schools. I had the K-through-2 students, and Theodore Judah had the third-grade through sixth-grade students, so I had to coordinate with that principal to carry on our programs. But we had a bilingual program there. We set up a situation whereby new teachers and student teachers could come into a nurturing, welcoming program that would help them address their particular needs, because their needs are a little bit different than the needs of the regular school program. In addition to that, we had a daycare center next door that we had to coordinate with, and a preschool onsite that we had to coordinate with. So we had a lot going on.

Kim Did your study of cultural anthropology influence your involvement and participation in the Chicano Movement?

[00:19:16]

Del Campo Yes, it did. I had never taken an anthropology class in working for my BA, so it was it was fascinating to see how biased people are just living within their own culture, and how biased you can approach other cultures just because of how you've grown up and how your upbringing colors everything that you see and interpret. So I think it kind of sensitized me a little bit so that I could be receptive not just to the Hispanic groups, but to the other groups that we had, because at Washington we also had children from the Hindu group and we had a few Asian, a few Native American, and a few Black students.

But as I progressed, I moved to different schools. In '84, '85, I went back to Bonheim, the school where I first started, and at that time there was an influx into

Sacramento of Asian groups. We had Vietnamese, we had Hmong, we had Mien coming into the district, and we had Russian coming in. So we had so many groups coming into Sacramento. So I think that the anthropology courses that I took at CHUS kind of helped me. I think I was always kind of attuned a little bit, but I think it gave me a little bit more to work with.

Kim Had you heard any other Civil Rights Movement before Chicano?

[00:21:42]

Del Campo Had I heard of it?

Kim Yes, heard.

[00:21:47]

Del Campo Yes. Yes, that all started in the sixties, so I was very aware of all that, yes. In fact, our two schools being paired, the Theodore Judah and the Washington, part of the reason for the pairing was to integrate the Hispanic population with the non-Hispanic population across town, so part of the pairing of the two schools was an attempt at integration, which had to do with civil rights. We had people from the federal government coming to check up on the program to see how it was going, to see how was working. So, yes, that directly affected us.

Kim You said there was many different cultural students in your school, right? How did that change your program? Did it have an effect? You said there was a bilingual program.

[00:23:04]

Del Campo Yes. Well, we tried to meet the needs of the English-language students. We didn't have a bilingual program for everybody. There weren't a lot in the other ethnic groups, a lot of students, but there were enough so that some of them needed English as Second Language, and that's all we could provide at that time, and cultural activities.

Kim Since then, did it expand more?

[00:23:42]

Del Campo Did the program expand more? No, no, it didn't. What we did is we refined it, because at the beginning we jumped right in. We had training as we went along. We perfected our textbooks and our materials as we went along, we ordered better materials, we tested materials to see which ones would work best. So we refined the program, but we didn't expand it.

Kim Did your involvement in the Chicano Movement change your personality?

[00:24:29]

Del Campo My personality?

Kim Mm-hmm.

[00:24:32]

Del Campo I think it did. I think it made me a little more forceful, a little more aggressive, because as a student and young adult, I was very, very introverted. I didn't speak if I didn't have to. [laughs] So, yes, I came out of my shell more. Especially as a principal, you have to go in front of the parents for PTA meetings and

for everything, in front of the staff, in front of everybody. And organizations, you have to make presentations. As a resource teacher, too, you have to go in front of groups for training. I even made presentations by myself to school groups, not my schools, but this is before I became a principal.

When you said something about expanding, yes, at Oak Ridge when I was assigned principal there, we had a large Hispanic population, a large Mien population, and a large Hmong population, so we expanded. We had a bilingual program for the Spanish. For the Hmong and Mien, we had strands and we provided ESL and we provided teacher aides in the classrooms of those strands to help with interpreting the content that they were being taught and to communicate with parents and to communicate between the teacher and the children. So we did expand.

We had workshops for the parents, and we had days where the parents would come and they would cook food, and we had workshops on those days, and we'd have performers and we would have speakers from Davis and different places who were experts in their cultures. So we did a lot in Oak Ridge with expanding the program.

We couldn't provide bilingual, because at that time, the Hmong and the Mien, there was no written language that was available to us or people who could read it or write it, that we hired, our TAs. They could speak it, but they couldn't read it or write it. But we provided the most that we could for them, and we had bicultural activities to make them feel comfortable and to have their parents feel comfortable in school and to feel like they were a part of it. It was wonderful, because at assemblies, the

parents would use it like a gathering time and a visiting time, and we'd have to ask them to "Be quiet now, because the program's going to start." [laughs] They were having so much fun just visiting and seeing each other.

Kim What did you personally initiate or help initiate the Chicano Movement?

[00:28:09]

Del Campo Well, when I first came to Sacramento, I picketed at Safeway with people from the Royal Chicano Air Force. I picketed with them. And what else? I did something else. Oh, I marched. I joined marches, marched to the Capitol. The union, Dolores Huerta came once, and then they marched to the Capitol, so I drove my car downtown and I joined them. So those were two things I did personally.

Kim Were you part of the Royal Chicano Air Force?

[00:28:54]

Del Campo No, I was not, no, but they were very active when we opened Washington School. The whole community was behind that school. They had lobbied for that school to be rebuilt, and a lot of community people were involved and wanted to be sure that school got off to a good start. I have a poster that I brought with me. The Royal Chicano Air Force made a poster. They made posters for lots of events that took place in Sacramento, and so they made a poster specifically for the opening of Washington School, and I still have it. I brought it with me.

Kim Must have been exciting.

[00:29:37]

Del Campo Yes, it was.

Kim What significance did the activities or organizations that you previously mentioned play in the Chicano Movement?

[00:29:50]

Del Campo Would you repeat that, please?

Kim You mentioned the bilingual program before. What significance did they provide for the Chicano Movement?

[00:30:06]

Del Campo Well, the Association of Mexican American Educators was influential because we interviewed people who were running for the school board with other local organizations; we interviewed new superintendents when they were hired; we wrote letters to the legislature regarding some of their decisions; we lobbied for people who were running for the school board and donated to their campaign; we disseminated information that was pertinent to the Hispanic teachers and administrators; we gave out scholarships; we provided workshops for staying in school, for organizations. We were, of course, connected to the state AMAE and other AMAE organizations. I don't know if I'm answering your question or not.

[laughs]

Kim That's fine. Did the Chicano Movement raise your consciousness around social, cultural, political lines?

[00:31:50]

Del Campo Definitely, definitely. It started in Bakersfield in the sixties that I began to get that awareness in it, and it continued as I took courses here at Sac State, history courses and did readings on my own, and, of course, followed the Cesar Chavez Movement.

My father-in-law was a crew pusher for one of the big farms in Kern County, so he worked with the migrant workers and field workers, so we got that aspect of—and then in Bakersfield there were the organizations that different family members were involved with. Then later on from San Jose, my brothers, I had four brothers attending that university, and so they marched with Cesar Chavez. They were doing all kinds of—they were involved with the GI Forum and LULAC and different organizations in San Jose. There were all promoting minority interests.

Then here, I got my opportunities to be involved with organizations and groups that were promoting the same kinds of things. But in the schools, we had to promote a philosophy of inclusion, because you had to make everybody in the school, the whole school community, feel that they were included, to feel that they were a part. You couldn't be saying "Chicano Power" and this and that and just focus on one area. You had to focus on all the groups, the whole community, and try to keep everybody involved and try to keep everybody included and feel that they were all a part. You couldn't be doing any separate kinds of things. You had to be making everybody appreciate the benefits of diversity and the activities that went on about diversity.

Kim How did these changes impact your personal relationship with your family, peers, and significant others?

[00:34:45]

Del Campo Well, one thing, it took me away from my family a lot, my two sons, but, luckily, my husband would take it up the slack like with their sports and things like that, because I was away from home a lot and I put in lots of long hours in my work, lots of twelve-hour days. And then my husband worked, too, and he was involved in things, and I had two sons, so he was able to pick up the slack a lot when I wasn't around.

My family, we had a lot to talk about when we'd get together, because everybody was involved in different things, but we were all kind of focused in the same direction. We moved to Sacramento from Bakersfield, and we thought we were going to go back, and we didn't go back, so it affected my parents and my in-laws, my husband's parents. Our families, they wanted us to go back. They didn't think we were going to stay in this area. We didn't either, but we did. And my sons, I uprooted them from their school and I brought them up here, and it was a difficult transition, so it affected them.

And peers, there were lots of people that were thinking along the same lines of rights for minorities and promoting legislation and opportunities, so with peers, they were kind of along on the same wavelength.

Kim Is there any significant reason why you decided to stay in this area?

[00:36:47]

Del Campo Well, I wanted to get my administrative credential. In my old district, they called me a team leader instead of giving me an official name, because they said I didn't have an administrative credential. So I wanted to get an administrative credential, but that was going to take me another year. So I asked my district—they had given me a leave of absence for one year, so I asked my school district to give me another year. They said, no, they couldn't do that.

So then I said, "Okay, then I'm handing in my resignation. I'm going to stay up here and get my master's."

In the meantime, so then I got a job up here and then we decided to stay. My husband also was working up here, so that was another factor.

Kim Describe how the Chicano Movement impacted community life here in Sacramento.

[00:37:55]

Del Campo Well, all the activities everybody was involved in were on TV, on the radio, and visible. When they had marches to the Capitol and picketing Safeway, there were a lot of things that were visible, and there were a lot of things, all the different people doing things on committees not only at their school sites or in their communities and in organizations, but at the State Capitol they were involved on committees. I was on a few committees with the State Department of Education, and so were a lot of other people, state and national committees. With Oak Ridge Elementary School, I was involved with the Business Roundtable because they gave

us a Pacific Trellis grant at our school at Oak Ridge for site-based decision-making and restructuring. So things were just happening all over the place, not just in schools.

Kim How about in Bakersfield? Was it Bakersfield?

[00:39:26]

Del Campo Bakersfield.

Kim How did the Chicano Movement affect Bakersfield?

[00:39:30]

Del Campo Well, there were clubs and organizations that were active. My sister and her husband belonged to several clubs and organizations. At the university, they were hiring more minority teachers. Chicano Studies was being offered in schools. There were grants, there were loans that were available to students, student loans available. There were all kinds of things beginning to happen. A lot of the veterans were coming back from Vietnam and going back to school on the GI Bill. There was recruiting going on at the state universities. They'd go out to towns, in Bakersfield. My brothers from San Jose were on recruiting teams, and they would go to Bakersfield and recruit people and bring them to San Jose State. [laughs] So that was going on all over at all the universities. So, again, Bakersfield was affected by the same things that were going on throughout California and maybe other parts of the nation.

Kim What do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:40:53]

Del Campo Well, I think that people always have to be alert and aware and be willing to speak out and become a part of things and not let everybody else do it or think that someone else is going to take care of things. People have to speak up and do their part, even if it's a little part, to do something that will help.

Kim If you were to give any advices to young students who wanted to be more involved, what kind of advices would you give?

[00:41:46]

Del Campo Well, I like that there's an emphasis now on students going out and volunteering in the community, and I would say keep doing that, because the more you volunteer, the more contacts you make, the more you see what's out there. So I would say volunteer, be involved, and get to know the world, get to know what's available in your community and, if possible, outside of your community.

Kim In the Chicano Movement, what roles did the Chicanas play?

[00:42:33]

Del Campo As far as I'm concerned, they played a very vital role. They were there all along. Sometimes they were pushed to the side because the men who had never had opportunities and had the limelight, all of a sudden were having that, and they didn't necessarily want to share with the females, but they couldn't have done it without them, because they were there marching along with—Dolores Huerta was a good example—they were all marching with the men. They were providing the infrastructure for the men to be able to do what they were doing, because they were tending to the home, they were seeing that the children were in school, they were

proving food and all things that you have to have, basic needs. They were providing all that, as well as being involved in organizations, as well as being vocal and carrying their share of the load. So they were critical to the Movement.

Kim Is there any final comments you would like to make?

[00:43:53]

Del Campo Well, I just think that it's wonderful that the things that people did are not being lost, that they're being sent to the archives so that people can look back and see what was going on, rather than say, "Well, there wasn't much going on, you know. Now it's all up to us." But history is a series of stepping-stones; one thing is built on what's gone before. So I'm glad that that's been documented and I'm very grateful to the people that are putting in all the time and effort to do it.

Kim Thank you for your time and participation.

[00:44:48]

Del Campo Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Kim It's been my pleasure too. I learned a lot.

[End of interview]