

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education  
Oral History Project

**Mary Baca Domínguez**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Miriam Dehaven  
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Transcription by Connor Murphy and Technitype Transcripts

**Dehaven** Please state your full name.

[00:00:11]

**Domínguez** My name is Mary Baca Domínguez.

**Dehaven** Please provide your birthdate.

[00:00:16]

**Domínguez** 08/15/58.

**Dehaven** Please provide your marital status.

[00:00:21]

**Domínguez** I am married to Leopoldo Domínguez. I have been married for twenty-eight years as of April the eighth.

**Dehaven** Do you have any children?

[00:00:29]

**Domínguez** Yes, I do. I have one daughter named Angelita Baca, and she has given me two grandchildren, a granddaughter named Angelita and a grandson named Anthony. They are both already graduated from Rio Americano.

**Dehaven** Thank you. Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:47]

**Domínguez** I was born in Los Angeles, California. Mother and Father would take us back and forth, Sacramento, Los Angeles. Mom's family lived here, Dad's family lived in Los Angeles, so we'd go back and forth.

**Dehaven** Thank you. What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:09]

**Domínguez** My mother was a housewife. My father was a contract worker, a construction worker back in the days. After a while, when we lived in Los Angeles, after coming back and forth, Mom decided that was no longer a place for us to be. It happened one day when my Dad's—they call her Watusi [phonetic], the other woman, decided to go to the hamburger stand where my older sisters were at and decided to show a little kid and said, "Here's your little brother."

They gave her the child back, Mother went, called her sister. Sister came up and put us all in very cold, cold night in November, I'm going to say October, November of '67 in the middle of the night, it was just a Rambler station wagon, and one of the side back windows were broken out. She put ten kids, which I have five brothers and I have four older sisters, and my sisters decide to bring their girlfriend along with her, and then we have my aunt, my aunt Margaret, and my mother, Jenny Baca Reals.

So we all get into this car in the wee hours of the night, and there she goes taking us out of there with the clothes on our back, little bit of pictures that she had,

and no water, no food, *no hay nada*, nothing. She just was escaping us from a very bad situation.

As we find out today, all of my cousins back in Los Angeles said we are the lucky ones that got away. We were the lucky ten. All my family had big families, everyone had ten, nine, eight, everybody.

So then we get into Sacramento. It's very cold, very cold. During that time, Mom and Dad were going back and forth. When we got back this time, nobody would let us in their homes. It was just closed doors everywhere, grandma, aunts, uncles.

Then, finally, one of my mom's brothers, who lived in West Sac, said, "Okay, we're going to open the door to you guys, but all we're going to do is we're going to take in the four little boys."

I will name my siblings. It's Betty, Lydia, Emma, Dilia, Ilias, Mary, Leonard, Sam, Tony, and Pete. At this time, Petey's just three, Tony's five, and it goes on and on. There's seven of us, one right after another.

So when we get over to Sacramento and they keep on shutting the doors, so then we're out for another cold night. It's freezing. Cops are knocking on the window, "You got to move, you got to move, you got to move." There's no help. At this time, Mom's not even in the Movement. Nobody knows about the family of ten that's displaced in the streets of Sacramento.

So, finally after a few, my uncle says, "Okay, you guys can all come in."

So my brother Ilias started doing the newspaper routes and he would go out and could do shoe shining and he'd bring in money, and the girls would go out and do whatever they can. Mom started working at the Woodlake Inn doing housecleaning

and stuff. Slowly, we got enough money where we got to move into a house, a two-bedroom house out off of Sacramento Boulevard at that time was Twenty-first Ave., and so we moved over there.

We started going to school at Fruitridge Elementary. During that time, there was six girls in one room, five boys in another, Mother lived in the front living room, and things were starting to look a little better.

While Mom was out looking for work, she met a gentleman; his name was Lee. He was thin, scary. We didn't know what to expect. She said, "He's going to be the guy that's going to be your Dad." I might have a little emotional during this.  
[cries]

So we all had to accept it. Lee comes in and things are not—we couldn't watch certain things on TV. He was a White man. Did I say that already? Anyhow, and so when he comes in, he says, "Okay, we're going to get a bigger home."

So during this time, the girls, Betty went to go look for work. She got a summer youth program. She got it at St. Joseph's Church that was right there on Eighth and E., and there they had the program which Henry López was already starting. He was the head of the Sacramento Concilio he had started. So then the girls started getting their summer youth program.

Then we started meeting the guys from downtown, the Twenty-first Street guys, Bee Ba [phonetic], Butchie [phonetic], Steve. There was so many. Dodie [phonetic], Andrew. And they took a liking to us, so they started coming over. My cousin Sam Reals, he was already in the Brown Berets at this time. So I'm going to say this is—we're going in '68.

So Lee gets us and he moves us downtown now. So now the guys are excited because now we're downtown and where everybody's downtown. It's an exciting time. But Lee decides that he's going to start beating the brothers really bad. It started getting very bad. The guys even wanted to start beating him up because they took protective of their family of ten that was alone.

So girls go to Mom and tell him, but at this time the girls just got done buying us clothing for the summer, we were going to start school at Marshall, we were going to McKinley Park at Clunie Pool. The ladies there would let us in for free. We were the Baca kids. We would clean, we would serve, we would get people's towels, we would hang the bags, we would do everything just to get into the pool, and they just really liked us.

So at this time, then the girls tell mom, "Lee's beating the boys way too bad. We're going to have to either leave you, Mom, or you're going to have to leave him."

So then mom says, "Okay." She tells Lee, "You have to go."

Lee says, "I'm going to tell you now, I'm not leaving. If you feel I need to leave, then you better get your children. You better get out this night or else I'll kill you all."

So now here we go. Mom packs us all into the car. This time we only have a little red Corvette. Now, we're all on top of each other's laps. Because I was always the tallest, I always had two on my lap. [laughs] But it was okay; they were just my little brothers. So here we are piling in this car.

At this night, my Aunt Marie said we could go ahead and be at her house. So then we all travelled over there in the car. We're all scared. It's a very scary night, not knowing what's going to happen.

Mother goes back. The house is burnt down. [cries] He literally burnt the house down and *everything* we had. We were barely making it. It was just the beginning of our lives. But it was also good part. There's so much strongness that comes out of it, because when the house burned down, the Sacramento Red Cross knew there was this family of ten that was displaced.

So then the girls in the Movement went and talked to the guys and everything, so next thing you know, we're off leaving there, having to go live with family again. Myself, I had to go live with an aunt by myself. I was separated from the family, which was okay, because Mom had no choice but had to do what she had to do.

So we're all separated at this time, and then finally Red Cross tells Mother, "We found you a home. You're going to go live in the north area. It is on Leach [phonetic] Street." So we all get there. We're so excited. It had a big back patio area, the backyard was *humongous*. Everybody, the Brown Berets from downtown were coming into our home more often, they were dancing and they were playing football in the backyard. It was just *beautiful*.

It was the first time we ever had our own toothbrushes, our own blankets, our own pillows. My sisters had Stridex pads! You know how big that is for teenage girls. [laughs]. It was like, "Oh, my goodness!" We had two bathrooms, our very own towel, our very own sheets. It was just *amazing*.

Nothing happened to Lee, may I add. Nothing ever happened to this man that hurt us so bad, nothing. He was just gate-free. He just drove away like a mean guy in the night, you know?

So, anyhow, now we're here at Leach Street, they know about us, and Mom's starting to get a little bit more listening to what the girls are going to—and listening to the Movement that's going on. So she's going off talking. At this day, my brothers, we learned how to go to catechism. We knew Mrs. Dalarosa [phonetic] already because Mrs. Dalarosa was when we moved back and forth, so she knew of us already. So when we moved over on Leach Street, Mrs. Dalarosa started coming over, and she was like a healthcare aide nurse. She would teach girls more about hygiene, she would teach girls more about catechism, confirmation, teach you how to do your hair, tell you about things you should know, because she just wanted to be part of us, a beautiful lady. "Mom Dalarosa," that's what we called her always. So Mom Dalarosa was there, and she also was always bring us stuff.

It's Christmas '69, we have nothing. All of a sudden, "knock, knock, knock." Santa's at the door! We got things we *never* seen. [laughs] Again, Sacramento Red Cross coming through again and making sure we have things.

So now they are building this big housing project. During this time, they're building a housing project, families are getting displaced downtown from C Street and Seventh all the way to Thirteenth, because they are making Channel 3, they got the dairies, they got all this stuff. So they promised them all places. So lot of them end up coming our way.

So now they got this project that they tell my mother, “You get to stay at this beautiful place.” Two huge bathrooms, five bedrooms, upstairs, downstairs, you name it.

The day we moved in, there was probably thirty other families moving in at the same time with ten kids, eleven kids, eight kids, three bedrooms, four bedrooms, five bedrooms. We’re getting full. We were coming from the north area, we were coming from the south area, we were coming from downtown, we were coming from West Sacramento, were coming from North Highlands. We were coming from *everywhere*. We were Mexican, we were Black, we were Indian, we were Asian, we were White. We were the most beautiful group of people. What we learned that summer—I am eleven years old now—is that I see no colors, none. There was nothing. Parents came out and introduced one another, kids shared each other’s toys and clothes, girls whose skates were too big or too small for them would share them to the other.

I remember my sister Dee and I got a pair of skates, and she was the left skate and I was the right skate, and down Hacienda you had these big old sidewalks, but along those sidewalks were apartment, apartment, apartment, apartment, apartment, right? We just go [demonstrates]. Boy, if there was a little competition in that in the Olympics, we would have won back then. [laughs]

So then when we get into the Haciendas, it’s like unbelievable. Lois is the lady running the office. Mr. Hector Portello, he is the guy who’s running inside the office; he’s the manager. We got Steve Stanley, he’s the maintenance guy, looked like our father, so we clinged to him like, “Dad!”



“I’m not your Dad!”

“Can I call you Dad?”

“Sure! Go ahead!”

And during this time we have a brother, his name’s Leonard, and Leonard is the only one that he had epilepsy. When he was little, Dad was driving and he fell out, hit his head, and end up being epilepsy, so during this time when he would have outbursts, which was hard on all of us, he would be stronger than five, six men, and Steve could come in and he could calm Leonard with no problem. He was like an angel, and Leonard would say, “Okay.” But, boy, it was hard, it was hard. But those were good times. It made you stronger. Didn’t make you weak; made you stronger.

So then now Mom’s starting to go and meet people, and now she’s met—and I remember the first night that I saw Senon Valadez, Rosemary Rasul, Ishmael Rasul, and Manuela Serna, and they’re into our kitchen. Mom has us going—we’re in the living room, and they’re all talking, and they’re talking about the Movement, and look at all these kids. This is what I felt, is my point of view, I’m just a little girl listening, and Mom starts talking about [Black] Panthers used to feed the kids breakfast so they could have the energy to keep on going in the daytime. Later, I saw stories more about it. And then they said, “Yeah!”

So the next thing you know, they started thinking of how we’re going to do this. Mom at the time knew a guy that had a store. It’s called George Bill’s [phonetic]. I might be wrong, but I’m not sure. George Bill’s. And George Bill, Mom went to ask about getting food, and they would pay them back or however that went. But anyhow, later, years later, George Bill end up having a big store on Alhambra and

F Street, right there. And his store got bigger, and I would go with Mom to go get the groceries and then she would write him off a check, and they together expanded and made people's lives better. He was a beautiful man, just kindhearted.

So then as they went on, the breakfast program started getting—and us kids, it was our first year, too, of starting to go to school. Everybody's getting ready, getting their new clothes together, getting everything ready for our first day. We're all getting shipped off to schools farther out of the neighborhood, so we're getting on buses to go to Northwood Elementary School, the teenagers are getting bused over to Rio, was still in the neighborhood, and the high school students were getting bused off to Grant High.

So now we're all the first day of the breakfast program, beside ourselves. Yes, I worked very hard. I had to cut, I had to cook, I had to shop, I had to clean. [laughs] But I was the youngest out of the five girls. Mom relied on me a lot, which was good. I loved that part about it.

During the time—and I'd say this was '69—the Girl Scouts came in, taught us Girl Scout. All of us girls knew drill from our different schools and different neighborhoods, so we would just get lined up. Everyone'd say, "Okay! Let's get lined up!" And then I'd teach our step, they'd teach their step, another girl would teach their step, and then we'd all get together, and it was just very fun watching.

I remember a girl named Darlene Bean. She was a Black girl that weared this long black wig, and being kids that we are, I asked her, I said, "Darlene?"

She says, "Yes."

I say, "Why do you wear your hair like that?"

She says, “Because my hair’s so short.”

I says, “So what’s wrong with that?”

She says, “Well, I don’t know.”

I said, “Well, take that off and let’s see.” There was about like four other girls around us. And she took it off. We said, “You are so *pretty* without that! What are you doing?” [laughs]

Next thing you know, she just weared her hair the way it was, put little bows and stuff in it. And that’s the kind of kids we were.

When we started school and we got onto the buses, when that part started—well, let me go back, because during the first summer, Uncle Sam Reals, he was already into—he worked at McClellan Air Force Base, so he got to—I don’t know how he worked it, but the big blue buses would come and get us kids and take us over to McClellan Air Force Base. We’d all get on those buses. They’d say, “Lunch!” and we were jumpin’. [laughs]

It was all us kids, and then we’d get on the buses and we’d go off over to McClellan, and they would just go ahead and let us have free-for-all of the gym, have food, teach us how to climb the ropes, and everything. So they acknowledged how many children were coming off of those buses. Guess what we got after that? They came in the Haciendas and just like if it was out in Vietnam, they clamped together [demonstrates] a swimming pool for us, and we kids were swimming, and it was *amazing!*

Then they realized a lot of us did not know how to swim, so then the big blue bus decided to drive us out to the local swimming hole, which was Johnson

Elementary School, had a pool. The pool still exists to this day. It's off at El Camino. Anyhow, they taught us all how to swim, how to float, how to do everything, so all us kids could be safe when we swam. It was so scary. I cried the whole time, "I don't want to do it!"

"If you don't do it—." This is what I heard from my siblings forever, "If you don't do it, I'm going to tell Mom. You're going to get in trouble." Mom was—yep, that's all I had to hear. I was good to go. "Okay, I could do it! I could do it!" [laughs] Nobody wanted the wrath of Jenny on them. [laughs]

So then we got the swimming pools coming in, we got the Girl Scouts coming in, we got YMCA came in and took all the boys, taught them how to do bikes. Andy Apol [phonetic] was one of the people that brought in the YMCA. It was so many people. We had Madeline, the nurse that came in and made sure that we had our shots, we had Señora Juerta Vivian [phonetic], who was part of the Movement and had just come in and just talk, and she was so beautiful, but cooked a lot and helped Mama out.

But the most beautiful angel that came in our life at this time was Rosemary Rasul. Rosemary Rasul, we owe her, the Baca family. My mother could not thank her enough for what she did. So when she took a walk in our house—I mean, we had a beautiful apartment, no doubt, but we didn't have no beds, we didn't have nice furniture. Next, you know, Rosemary was bringing in beds, she brought in the sheet, the linen, she brought in stuff for us that she said, "Oh, it was old. Mom was just going to get rid of it. Oh, this was just there. We could give it to you." She did *so* much.

They started taking us—now we're out of the summer school, everybody's on the bus, us girls are singing in the background, singing songs, everyone's having fun, and now they decide they're going to take a bunch of kids to the snow. Are they kidding or what? [laughs] We were the lucky ones. At least I can say I was, because my girls were freezing. I myself, Rosemary bought me some snow boots, my first pair of snow boots. Just anything she could do for us. My sister started having children, and she was there for every moment of every part of that part. Rosemary was just *beautiful*.

Okay, the summer youth programs, they came in that summer. We had kids from the neighborhood coming in. What did they do? They were supposed to take care of us. They served us lunch. And Mom was such a lenient boss and so was Lois, that were all in the house watching the first and second year of *All My Children*. [laughs] They'd say, "Okay! Okay! I know we got to get back to work!"

So as the few years go by and we're there, oh, maybe a year go by, and they're bringing in Sac State students. Senon Valadez is already a teacher there. So they're bring in students, the students are coming in, and they're amazing. Again, we got these beautiful students that their parents are paying for their education and they're coming to serve us kids, talk to us kids, ask us, "How're you doing today? Would you like to go to my house this weekend? We have a swimming pool. Would you like to come swim?" Just amazing, the way the people were just so kind to us. The students, to this day I keep contact with some of the students because they remember the little big smile Mary. [laughs] So I've been blessed in that way.

Then now we got Mr. [José] Montoya's art program going to come. This is the next year. Mr. Montoya is going to teach us all art. So now we got Mr. Montoya's students coming in and they are just awesome, and we are starting to learn things. A couple of students took some of us girls to Mothers and Daughters Night. My mom was way busy. She was really into the Movement now. They're doing things, they're doing dances, benefits, they are doing *fiestas*, they are learning Aztec dancing, they are bringing things in from Mexico to teach us kids. *Piñatas* are being made to the biggest and the fullest. Things are just beautiful going on at this time, and Montoya is really teaching us how to do *piñatas*, how to do fun things.

I remember it was during that time we were all crazy about Mr. Montoya. I mean, forget about it. So we go to this wedding, it's Lupi and S \_\_\_\_\_'s wedding, and we get to meet Mr. Montoya's sons for the first time, not bad-looking boys.

So the next art class, I tell all my girlfriends about the wedding, and all the kids from so many of us, and they're like, "No kidding! I can't wait. When I see Mr. Montoya, I'm going to tell him!"

They said, "All right."

So I had a group around me, and I go and I say, "Ooh wee, Mr. Montoya, you got some fine-looking sons!"

He said, "Ooh, Mary, you better leave my boys alone." [laughs] That was just such great memories of just being this young girl, getting to know all the beautiful people.

Like I said, we had the drill team and all that, so now during this time we see Mom, she's on the phone, she's talking like a little schoolgirl, you know? We're like,

“Okay, what’s up with Mom? Why is she so happy now?” She’s yelling less. And there she goes, and I look at one of my sisters, because there’s only two of us girls and five boys left. The other ones are gone. And then I said, “Dee, I bet you Mom’s got a boyfriend!” I says, “Mom’s got a boyfriend!” I said, “Yeah, check it out. Look at her!”

So she gets off the phone. I said [in singsong], “Mom’s got a boyfriend!”

She goes, “Yes, and his name’s Angelo Alvarez.”

“Angelo Alvarez?” Yup, we’d seen him around. He’s with the RCAF. Then he started the La Raza Drug Effort. So Dad, Angelo, he allows us all to call him Dad. He’s a single man, no children, never married. He finds us and he just finds us amazing and fun. [laughs]

So he opens up this Drug Effort and tells Mom, “We’re moving out of the Haciendas.”

“We’re moving out of the Haciendas?”

“Yep, it’s time for the Bacas to let another family come in, because we’re moving on down the road.” It was okay with Mary. [laughs]

So we got a little place just up the street, it was off of El Camino, nice little four-bedroom house.

Then I decided, “Okay, I’m going to start Los Niños Sisters Drill Team.” So my sister Dee at this time lived in Zapata Park. That’s a housing project that’s right there downtown on Eighth and D. So she’s living there, so she gets all the little girls from Zapata Park, they’re going to Washington Elementary School or they’re from Sutter. I get the girls from North Sacramento, which are going to Smythe and Rio

Tierra, and I'm just taking these girls straight down El Camino, drill teaming them up the street and around the corner and coming back. Dee's teaching them in the park, because in Zapata Park there was a big area that she could teach her girls.

So now Mom sees what's going on and we're serious, so now Senon, he is, like, way cool with this, way cool with this. It's just so fun. So now he is our driver. [laughs] He's taking us girls everywhere; they got the big van. So we start off with just our regular clothes, and I had this vision that I wanted the Aztec eagle on the front of the shirt, and I only wanted it in green and brown, the green on the top, the brown on the bottom, and I wanted Los Niños Sisters on the bottom.

So next thing you know, I tell Angelo, and that was no problem. We were over at the RCAF, the artists were there waiting on us young kids to come in, and we started silk-screening our shirts, we're silk-screening our posters. But the thing was, they made us do all that work by ourselves. [laughs] But that was okay. We did it!

So now we're starting to do dances. I can't believe this. I'm just beside myself. I go and tell Angelo I want to do this dance, okay. During this time, Angel Rodriguez—he's a beautiful deejay—I tell him, "Could you be my deejay guest?" I start asking bands. I got three bands to play for me for free this night. I have a deejay, so now I decided I want to bring in Maya Queens. So I get Maya Queens from Norte del Rio High School and I get Maya Queens from Sac High, from Norte and Rio and Sac High and Sutter. We bring all these girls together, we got this big dance, and all the girls look beautiful. We crown some. I didn't know what I was doing. This was just all coming up in my mind as we were going.



But before this, Alvia takes me to go get the liquor license. Mind you, I'm seventeen, and they give me an ABC liquor license for the day. [laughs] I guess I'm the youngest liquor license to be held back then. So I got kegs of beers that I got, and were making money.

Sad thing was, we were young. The adults were having as much as fun as were. So, long story short, we get robbed. All our money was stolen, purses sitting inside the men's bathroom in the toilet. It's okay, it was okay, because we still got our overalls, because that was my next idea for the drill team. We needed overalls and t-shirts and we needed tap-dancing shoes so they could hear us a little louder.

So now it's coming that they asked us to be in a Bicentennial Parade. It's 1975. We're going to be in the Bicentennial, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1975. And us girls get ready, Senon is driving us all, we're doing our thing, we're all in our overalls, we're all ready, our hairs are done.

Over and over, I'm yelling and telling the girls, "You cannot look at the judges! You will not look at those judges! That is the most important thing!" Now, I didn't tell you the ages of my girls, but they start from the age of two, three, to fourteen. So we got babies, and, yes, those mamas were happy when Mary was controlling their babies and they got—but it was okay. So those babies, they got—oh, man, it was unbelievable. We get out of that car, we get lined up, we get into the parade, and the next thing you know, my girls, we come and we just do this flag salute.

I want to get up and show you how we did it. Is that okay? Can I do that? Would that be too hard? I mean, I really want to show this because it's what made our girls.

So we had to stand in line, and I would say, "Attention. Attention. At ease, at ease. Attention." [demonstrates] Then I said, "Flag salute, flag salute, hit it! Hit it! Hit it! To the wings, hit it! Hit it! Straighten out!" Then we'd get it.

Right when we did that, the judges were beside themselves. The little girls just did it in profile, I mean all of us. When they went down, they went down—boom!—they came up, they came up so straight, so then we go down. And the girls are hot, we're tired. I don't know why it happened to be such a hot day on December the sixth or fifth.

So we get back to our area, to the van where Senon's at, and Senon says, "What do you want to do?" Because we know that the judges are going to judge us. "Do you want to stay and wait for the trophy?"

I look at all the girls, and I said, "No." And I'm just a kid. I said, "No, I think they're tired. They've had enough. The babies look like they're tired now." So we give them all water and we get ready and we leave.

So the next day, I'm going to school and the girl says, "Hey."

Well, okay, a week later, we get the phone call. We have won first place in the Bicentennial Parade. The girls were all there, we're jumping up and down, little girls, everybody's just jumping. We give the call to Zapata Park because we're the girls in the north area, Zapata Park's jumping up, everybody's just like, "We won! We won! We did this! We can do this!"

So about three nights later, well, during this time, the girls are starting to be on *Image*, we're starting to be on *Progresso*, we're starting to be on *De Colores*. These are all the different stations that we're on. *De Colores* was on NBC, Channel 3, *Progresso* was on Channel 10, and *Image* was on Fox 40. So we would go ahead, girls would do all kinds of shows, Senon would drive us all to our performances.

We never forget the time we saw Betty Vasquez, and she was our weather lady for many years. All the girls saw her. They were so excited! "Hello! Hello!" She got out of that bathroom so fast. [laughs] "Oh, no! I try to forget this part of my life." [laughs] It was kind of funny. We said, "Whoa!" I said, "It's okay, girls. What you do is never be like that, okay? That's what we learned today. We don't act like that. We respect everybody when you say a good hello."

So then we did carwashes. The Reno Club would always let us use the carwash. So we were, "Carwash!" So we could take the girls to do another dance or we could buy their—some girls didn't have outfits. We did everything to make the money. We collected newspapers. Everything was to buy the girls.

Alkali Flats, there was a gentleman, I don't know his name, but he decided to take three of the girls into his—I don't know how to say it, but he dressed three girls. He just picked three. We picked three out of random, and then they went ahead and it was just beautiful.

Now we're here, we're performing at Sac State. Daniel Valdez is getting down, and as soon as he's done, me and my girls go up, and we just get down, and Danny is just like, "Oh, my goodness!" If you don't know who Danny Valdez is, he's a movie producer, musician, *La Bamba* and other movies.

Then we leave there, and a couple weeks later, now we're performing in front of Cesar Chavez's mother, a beautiful lady. We just do our job really well. She's very impressed with us, another good day we have.

Girls are performing everywhere. We're performing in the night for concerts, we're performing in the day. Again, Senon's taking us everywhere. [laughs] "Driver! We got to go again!" But those were such beautiful good times.

During this time, now it's starting to slow down and I'm starting to go to work more for the summer youth and now I'm starting to get a little older, so the Niños Sisters are starting to depart. But as I was getting ready for today, I got a lot of the young girls say, "Go get 'em, Mary! You go, *mujer!* Show them how you taught us respect and love, show them how you made us strong women today, Mary." So that's what I did. [laughs] It was fun.

And I was *not* nice at times, you know. There was this one young girl—I don't know why I did it, sorry to this day, but she was a little Anglo girl, because there was all nationalities there, but at this time in the Movement, I felt that she could go ahead and dance in any performance and anywhere, and my girls, this was the only chance that they would get, you know, so I did not allow her to be on the drill team. I felt bad for that. To this day, she says, "Hi, Mary."

I says, "Hi, sweetie. Okay, I'm sorry again! If I could do it all over, you'd be in the lead." [laughs]

She says, "Okay, I love you, Mary."

"I love you too." That was just so fun.

So now I'm leaving, but I'm still in the Movement. I'm still with my mother. Now I'm starting to do more of the background cooking, so now they're doing more *fiestas*, Fiesta de Maiz, Fiesta de Día de las Madres, Fiesta de Día de Los Muertos, Christmas. They're doing a lot.

And I'm the daughter that has a lot of her girlfriends and we're at my Mom's house, because now Angelo has got us a home and decided to buy us a home off of Mindale [phonetic]. Then they go to get a new pair of shoes, they said, left on the bus, came back with a beautiful Rambler station wagon for us all. Angelo, thank you, because Mr. Alvarez, when he came to us after Rosemary, the beautiful lady, and everybody else, here comes another beautiful man.

So we get the house around the corner, and my drill team's still going strong at that time, so, like I said, now we're slowly ending that, and now I'm in the Mindale house, I'm doing more of the cooking and I'm starting to do a little bit more of the *Image* show. I'm starting to do my own shows by myself. I did a slide presentation and did a lot with my drill team and teaching women how to dance.

I started this summer now, we're going and they decided that we're going to take a media class over at Sac State College. Okay, I'm tenth grade. I'm told I'm going to Sac State College now. [laughs] Now I'm off to Sac State College to learn. The teacher is named Mr. Lubeck [phonetic]. Little did I know that fifteen years later, I'll be cleaning his wife's home, but it's okay. [laughs] Mr. Lubeck's up in the front and he's telling us all about media and how to do radio and television.

At this time it's Jamaco [phonetic]? What's his name, Senon, the guy that did the movies? Jamaco? Okay. Anyhow, I want to say Jamaco and it was Max and it was

another guy. So they're starting to do movies for the Army of Engineers and more people are calling up the Concilio and stuff, wanting to get young people to do acting. So now here I am, I'm working for the [United] Farm Workers building and I got to do a few little acting gigs now, along with going okay—no, sorry about that.

We're back at Sac State. I'm learning how to do videos and television and deejaying and all that, and listening to this teacher, because were the chosen. Then then we started getting our own group together, we started talking more, and that's how we did *Image*, and that's how I became involved with that.

So when I was in that class, I remember being one night over at the Palm Grove because they were doing a benefit dance, and at this time Jamaco was going to go ahead and do a video for the Army of Engineers over in Red Bluff, so I was asked to "Get a bikini and get camping gear and get ready to go tomorrow, because you got to go tomorrow." And being that I was a chosen, that was okay.

So next thing you know, we get up, we go out there to Red Bluff and we are doing a picture, a video of what you do in this beautiful national park. So now I am skiing. Never did it, took forever, but I did it. [laughs] I had to gut a fish because I had to be the one. I did it. [laughs] I did all that. They say to this day, it's still playing over there. I'm not sure. I never went back to go see the video. But it was just one of those pictures that when you go into those big parks and they got these big TV screens, and they talk about how you could swim, how you could do this, I was that girl doing all those things. That was real fun.

So then now I'm called, "Mary, you have to go do a movie, okay?" So now I'm along the American River going into this mansion. I am told that it's a Mexican

movie. I am to go ahead and dive in the swimming pool. Thank goodness for the big blue bus that came and taught us how to swim. [laughs] I now got movie roles to swim. So I jump in the pool and I start swimming, and I hear, “Cut! Okay, you in the polka dot bikini, you can’t do that!”

“Well, what did I do?” I looked up, and the guy that was the main character was totally soaking wet and water was coming. I kind of overweted him. [laughs] I’m like, “Okay! Sorry!” And there I was again. I was to go in, just go so far and then come up and go sit down. So I did that.

Then after that, then it was, “Okay, Mary, now you got to go and take a video for Governor Brown. He’s going for governor. It’s the beginning, and you have to go and talk on behalf of the children.”

“Okay, what do I say?”

“Well, I don’t know. What do you think we need in California?”

I said, “Better books? Books with more of us? I don’t know.”

So they said, “Okay, that sounds good. You use that.”

So then I was on a commercial with Governor Brown. My mother Jenny, my little brother, and Rosemary Rasul, were all in this one together. Now I’m moving down along. [laughs] I was just so blessed, I was one of the young’uns that was very, very blessed.

So now we’re doing more of getting the programs together and making more food and watching the *piñatas* get hit, so now I’m at the age where I’m looking at the guys now. Now I’m at, “Okay, now these RCAF guys are looking cute.” Well, Freddy’s Band started, and there was one guy, his name was Ricardo Carillo. They

called him “Dickie,” or, actually, they called him “the Bug.” Freddy’s Band named everyone some kind of pet name or something. There was the Flea, there was the Fish, there was the Bug, the Eel. Everybody had a name.

So then I end up getting pregnant, and when I got pregnant, I decided to walk away from everything. I decided that this was my time for Mary. I was a single parent; the gentleman didn’t stay with me. That was okay, but it made me stronger. So I end up having this little girl, and I move into a housing project which was Seavey Circle, my first one. When I moved there, I started working with the kids, doing drill team, stuff like that.

But I had a bad feeling one night. I knew it was not going to be a good night for me. I had had these premonitions that something bad was going to happen to my daughter and I. So I went to my *compadre* Chuy Ortiz, which is a very known Aztec dancer, and I said, “Chuy, I feel something bad’s going to happen.” He did prayers, and him and I did a good ritual. He made bead bracelets for my daughter and I, and he put them on and he says, “We just pray.”

Well, my intuitions came true, because this night—well, two days prior to that, I told my family members how I felt, so they gave me this rifle. Now, Seavey Circle, you had your upstairs, downstairs. Your upstairs was your two bedroom, your downstairs was your living room and your kitchen and your stuff. Okay. So he gives me this rifle, the brother-in-law does, and he just cocks it, no bullets no nothing. He just says, “Mary, if something happens, all you do is cock this rifle like this. You do this to it, and then you will go ahead and scare them off.”



So the night happened. I heard—because they had the pull-up windows, the crank windows, and then the pull-down shades, and I heard the shade coming down. He had already cranked the window, came on in, everything, and closed it. He was at the last part of closing the curtain when I yelled, “Who’s down there?” He didn’t answer. I said, “Who is down there?” No answer. So I said, “Fine. I got a gun. I will shoot you!”

I cocked that rifle to its finest, and next thing you know, he’s screaming, “It’s me, it’s me Mary!” Of course.

Well, my family, they didn’t take that too kindly, so he got a little bit of a lickin’.

So I had to get out of that project. So then we moved downtown, and the next thing you know, Seavey Circle—I mean, they know of my dismay. So I get to go into Zapata Park now, which was a good thing because now the Movement is really going and now I’m in Zapata Park. So I start the Zapata Homies. I start my own boys’ club there, because I’ve already done with the girls and a lot of the girls had made it, so let me see what I could do for the boys. So this is our slogan: “We are the Zapata Homies. Don’t you want to know me? We could be friendly, but just don’t offend me.” Me and all these little boys put this little song together.

We did carwashes, we did bake sales. We didn’t get the power that I had back in the day, because that was starting to back off to where I couldn’t get the big dances and stuff like that, but I did get to take them to Disneyland, I took them to Knott’s Berry Farm. I had my own football league for one year. I didn’t know nothing about

football. But inside this bag I have an award thanking me for the football team that I had. [laughs] So I brought that to show.

You know, to this day, all the boys have done something great. A few of them went and got in trouble, apologized, kept in touch. I said, “You know, everything is what you make it in life, you know? Everything. When you fall, you get up. When your knees are scraped, you put medicine on them and keep on going. Just got to keep on going.”

So my little girl, nothing ever happened to us. God was so good, took care of us, and now today, grandkids, beautiful husband, beautiful life. Mother had passed. Mom passed on August the eighth, 2006.

Before she passed, her last employment was Shriners Hospital. She worked for the burn victims. She was a translator. Because what had happened, [unclear] people might have thought was such a great idea, but what actually happened is that it made it easier for the electricity to be aboveground. In our country, we have it all underground. So what’s happening even to this day, abundance of children are coming into here because that big company that has just been built, these little kids normally play go and they get burnt so bad. So then the next thing you know, my mom’s there to comfort them. They have bags of blankets. Mom goes into the cupboard, she gets some blankets. The *abuelitas* are coming in, they’re crocheting. Mom is just buying bags at the secondhand stores. She’s going anywhere she could find—what is it? Knitting. What is it called? The material that they use, the string, what is it?

**Dehaven**      Yarn.

[00:53:46]

**Domínguez** The yarn. Yeah, she's getting yarn everywhere donated to her, and the *abuelitas* that are waiting or the moms and dads that are waiting for their children, they're just getting down. Next thing you know, hats are being made, scarves are being made, blankets are being made, kids are being covered with this. That's what my Mom's doing now. She's getting kids. Then some kids want her to go into the surgery room with them. Mother is now into the surgery rooms with the burn victims until they go to sleep. They need Señora Baca right there by their side. At times Mother would say, "You know, today one of the little kids said, '*Abuelita*, you no speaky Spanish right, *abuelita*.'" [laughs]

She'd say, "Me do my best. I'm doing my best!" [laughs] She spoke Spanglish which she was taught just growing up in California. It was their own talk, what she taught herself.

So in programs before that, after she was all out of the Movement and it started going down, then she was taking care of children, the daycare center over at Dos Rios, and just doing a lot. Such a beautiful, powerful woman who taught ten kids how to be beautiful humans would be so proud of us today. Sad that our baby brother Pete is doing life in prison, but statistics say it would've happened for where our life has been. So he's okay, because sometimes you don't know how to evolve out of a big group setting, and when it starts dissipating, dissipating, and dissipating, some people don't know how to take it.

So I learned that. I learned so much of how to be a great grandmother, raise your grandchildren when your kids can't do it, but don't keep them. Give them back.

Don't be the kind of grandparent that, "Oh, I did all of this for them." No. Mother says they're not yours, they're theirs. You are a grandparent to help, to be there, to comfort, to guide. If they need you, that's what you're there for. So I raised my grandkids.

One day when my mom was getting very ill and I took care of her during that time, a father says, "Mary, child support's costs me a lot."

I say, "Yeah, you know what you could do?"

He says, "What?"

"Keep your kids."

"You give me my kids?"

"What are you talking about? They're not mine. I come for their guidance until they were able to be in your care." That's another thing that I learned. So many grandparents want to hold their kids as weapons. They're not weapons. They're not yours. Your kids are the ones that are asking for help. So I've learned that in my life.

I learned that you give. I learned that when you give, you shouldn't talk about it, because who knows? God knows when you give. There's so many things that He knows what I do. My grandkids give, my daughter gives, we all give.

So my daughter is a very hard worker. Her name is Angelita Baca, and she is over at Rivercats, my grandson works for Safeway, my granddaughter is a college student, my husband worked thirty-five years for NorCal Beverage, and all I can say is that I've been so very blessed, and I thank *everybody* that has made this girl come from falling all the time and being hurt and not being safe to be the safest person today. And that's my story.

**Dehaven** Thank you so much! Thank you so much for sharing.

[00:58:00]

**Domínguez** How did I do, Senon?

[End of interview]