The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Mariahelena Jiménez-Romo

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Carlos John, Jimena Jiménez, Senon Valadez
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Transcription by Rohit Mokkarala and Technitype Transcripts

John Could you please for the camera state your full name and date of birth?

[00:00:10]

Jiménez-Romo Mariahelena Jiménez-Romo, born May 18th, 1953.

John Do you happen to be married?

[00:00:22]

Jiménez-Romo Yes, I'm married.

John Do you have any children?

[00:00:27]

Jiménez-Romo I have two daughters, age twenty-two and twenty-seven.

J. Jiménez Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:39]

Jiménez-Romo I was born and raised here in Sacramento.

J. Jiménez What did your parents do for a living?

[00:00:44]

Jiménez-Romo Initially, my parents were farmworkers; they worked the fields. My father's from Phoenix, Arizona, born in a small town, actually Johnson, which doesn't exist anymore, and my mother was from Kelly, New Mexico. They worked the fields, before World War II, up the Imperial Valley, and my mom had cousins here in Sacramento. She didn't have parents. Her mom died when she was three and her father died when she was sixteen, so she had her brothers. When they were going off to the war, they wanted her to stay in Sacramento with her extended family, so that's what they did before World War II. They were both farmworkers and worked the entire Valley.

After World War II, they stayed in Sacramento. They chose to stay here and they got married here in Sacramento in '41. My oldest brother is a war baby; he was born in '42 like a zillion others. After the war, my dad worked for a few government programs. There were government programs for work. But later, he ended up working as a warehouseman for U.S. Cold Storage, and my mother worked seasonal for Libby's Cannery, which is here in Sacramento.

J. Jiménez And how many siblings do you have?

[00:02:17]

Jiménez-Romo Four. My oldest brother, the one who was born in '42, and then a sister who was born in '46. I can't think of it. I always know the year they're born.

John Forty-eight?

[00:02:34]

Jiménez-Romo 1946, so she's sixty-nine. And another sister, who was born in '52, which she's just a year and nine months older than I am.

J. Jiménez Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood, growing up?

[00:02:53]

Jiménez-Romo Well, I was raised here in Sacramento, went to public schools here. I went to Hollywood Park Elementary School and McClatchy High School. I think we had a really good childhood, no issues with school. My parents were ones that, you know, you just did what they said. You didn't talk back, you didn't roll your eyes; you just did what they said. [laughs]

I didn't have any issues in high school. My parents, going through the Depression, because they were both born in 1919, they had some issues themselves in school, like getting punished for speaking Spanish and being called names for being Mexican, and especially working the fields. My mother was in Oklahoma, so they had to sit in the back of the school. So we did not grow up speaking Spanish. My parents spoke fluent Spanish. My grandmother from Phoenix doesn't speak any English, but because she was mistreated for speaking Spanish in school, she thought, "Oh, I don't want them to—."

John Experience it?

[00:04:14]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, which later I ended up—which is another story—I ended up going to language school in the eighties because I didn't like *not* speaking Spanish.

John So you were never really exposed to Spanish?

[00:04:27]

Jiménez-Romo Oh, yeah, they spoke Spanish all the time, but we responded in English, and I just wasn't confident enough, for the right tense, to speak back. But we knew what they were saying. It wasn't like when they were speaking in Spanish so we wouldn't understand. We understood.

I'm going off on tangents here. I made a point that both my daughters are bilingual, and we made a point that we spoke Spanish only at home before they went to kindergarten. Well, my parents didn't do that because their experiences were different. My brother, actually, the one who was born in '42, he spoke Spanish first, and he was punished in school for speaking Spanish. So how was my childhood? [laughs

But it was good. I mean, my mom was very proud of our heritage I mean, we had Mexican music in the house all the time, and all our cousins, all the weddings and everything in Phoenix and going to dances at the—I don't know if it exists anymore right here by the Southside Park, it was Mexican American Hall, a lot of weddings there. So our culture was very prevalent in our upbringing, but we didn't speak Spanish at home and the kids didn't.

J. Jiménez I know that you mentioned Southside Park. Did you spend a lot of time around that area?

[00:05:51]

Jiménez-Romo No. The hall is actually over there, and it was called Mexican American Hall and it was always just events going on there, but, no, I didn't. [laughs]

John Next question. Were you a Fellow, Felito, or actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:06:17]

Jiménez-Romo No, I wasn't at all.

John Did you know of its missions and its purpose?

[00:06:23]

Jiménez-Romo No.

J. Jiménez Did your knowledge of culture issues influence your involvement to participate in the Chicano Movement?

[00:06:37]

Jiménez-Romo I don't know if it did. Before I started Sac State, I really wasn't aware of many issues, I wasn't involved in much. I was kind of in a little bubble. What I did in high school, I think someone came to our high school and asked for tutors at Washington Neighborhood Center, and that's where I did a lot of volunteer work. I mean, I would go every day after school and my dad would take me. I wasn't driving at the time.

And then from there, things that were happening at Washington—you know what Washington Neighborhood Center is? It's on Twelfth and D, and it's not the greatest area now, but in the sixties it was not a good area. There was gangs. The D Street gang was over there and a lot of other things. So it wasn't a great area. We're talking late sixties, because I graduated from high school in '71, so I was probably out there 1968, '69. But I was just kind of exposed to people that were doing things for the community then and just kind of like fell into it. Then when I ended up going to Sac State, the same, you know, just kind of everybody was involved, and it wasn't like recruitment or whatever, or like, "I got to get involved." It was just natural.

John What were some things that they kind of did in high school or in college for the Chicano Movement?

[00:08:13]

Jiménez-Romo Well, high school, not much, nothing. When I went to Sac State and with a lot of students there, it was where I felt like, "Oh, this is me. These people are like me." And I didn't feel on the outs in high school at all. I mean, I had friends that I had from seventh grade or some from kindergarten, because I went to the same school all along and they did, too, so I never felt on the outs. I had a good high school experience, but when I met people who were more involved, who came from the Valley, whose parents were also farmworkers, it was like, "These are just like me. I'm home," kind of like. But like I said, I didn't feel like I was on the outskirts of anything in high school. I got involved in everything. I wasn't like rah-rah or anything like that, but I stayed.

J. Jiménez So would you say that changed you personally after discovering other people were just like you?

[00:09:25]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, definitely.

J. Jiménez Can you elaborate a little?

[00:09:28]

Jiménez-Romo Well, I mean, I became more aware of what was going on, what the needs of the community were, and I think most importantly, what you can do or what can be accomplished when you're united, when you're a group rather than one person. That's how the Movement affected me, like we're all in this situation. It's

not a situation we all recognize needs, but one person isn't as effective as a hundred voices saying the same thing, or thousands.

John Would you consider yourself a member of the Chicano Movement?

[00:10:16]

Jiménez-Romo Yes.

John Could you tell me one of your earliest memories that really attracted you or really made you feel that you were a part of the Chicano Movement or that motivated you to join the Chicano Movement?

[00:10:32]

Jiménez-Romo Yes, that's the kind of thing that's like "I'm going to join." It's not like "Sign me up" kind of thing. It was stuff that needed to be done, stuff that was happening, it was just a natural part. Like when I was at Sac State, there were issues with the community with local propositions, 13 and 21. You get involved and to make signs.

I was there during the time when the Royal Chicano Air Force was pretty prevalent, and they were silk-screening posters, and were all just like the foot soldiers to help do all the silk-screening and to get the signs, drawing them all and to get them all out there and to nail them onto the stakes, and take them wherever we had to do. It was just like when you were on campus, like, "Oh, going to go over here to work on signs. Oh, tomorrow we're doing this," or whatever. So you just participated. You were there.

J. Jiménez Do you recall the first time you heard the term *Chicana* or *Chicano*? How did that make you feel?

[00:11:44]

Jiménez-Romo Well, I've always heard the term. My dad used the term, and when you're speaking, like, between ourselves, my dad, his friend, "*Oh, es un Chicano*," because that's a term of endearment. So I've always heard it. It's not a new word. And it was never derogatory, but it was just like in between *mexicanos* you'd say, "*Oh, sí, sí*." My dad was, "*Oh, sí, sí, es un Chicano*."

But then it was adopted by the Movement, and my mom, who was more—I don't want to say proper, but more she didn't like how it was used and she didn't like that—how can I say? It just meant something else to her, how it was adopted, you know.

John Would you say it was just her that felt that way, or would you say that other people of your age—

[00:12:55]

Jiménez-Romo I think other in her generation gone through—yeah, didn't have that understanding, didn't see the—she's not—I mean, she's very proud of being Mexican American. We were not the family that was, like, trying to be assimilated and call themselves ourselves Jimenez instead of Jiménez. No, not like that. But she didn't like how the word *Chicano* was adopted for the Movement. I think she thought it was a little too—because what was on the TV at the time, it was when the Brown Berets would be more—and what was on the news was obviously things that was not a clear picture of what was going on. So, yeah, she didn't like it, but my dad never

had an issue. [laughs] She didn't like Spanglish. She didn't like anything like that. Like I was telling you, we spoke Spanish at home, but if you and my dad was more of before the war, he was more *pachuco* from the forties and he had spoke Spanglish. Oh, my mom was like, "Oh, you don't say words like that. That's not even Spanish." You don't say *lonche garaje* and words like that. You don't use them. But she was born here too. [laughs]

Anyway, what? I'm sorry.

John Had you heard of the Civil Rights Movement at that time?

[00:14:29]

Jiménez-Romo Yes, from what was on the news, yeah. I watched the news all the time when I was in—

J. Jiménez Would you consider yourself a Chicana?

[00:14:42]

Jiménez-Romo Chicana? Yes.

J. Jiménez What was the role of Chicanas during the Movement?

[00:14:51]

Jiménez-Romo I saw the question on there, and I actually didn't see the difference between roles of men and women during the Movement. You did what had to be done, regardless of what gender you were, in that women were involved and it showed that it was an issue for everybody. I thought about that. I didn't see a gender differentiation, so it wasn't an issue of Chicanas and Chicanos in the Movement. It was as a whole.

In fact, I remember being approached, because that was the beginning of the Women's Movement, and women on campus were approached to be involved in the Women's Movement, and myself and a couple others were like we as a Chicanos, as *mexicanos*, have issues we have to deal with. We can't cut ourselves off and deal with women's issues when we have issues as Chicanos to deal with, you know, because if you see yourself—I did—as a Chicano first and a woman second, it's just like we're not going to start working on the Women's Movement when we as *mexicanos* have issues that need attention. But within what we were doing at the time, I didn't see any differentiation between men and women. It was never like women do this and men do that, you know. We never thought, "We'll be cooking or make the food so you could go out." Nah. [laughs]

John Did your involvement in the Chicano Movement change you personally? Do you feel that it had an influence on you personally?

[00:16:48]

Jiménez-Romo Well, yeah, I think it made me more confident, more proud, more, like you say, aware of what could be accomplished as united as opposed to individualized. But I've always been real proud. I'm not in-your-face, like, "I'm Chicana, *¿Y que*?" you know, but just confident, I think, knowing what we can do, what power we have.

J. Jiménez Did you personally initiate anything during the Movement or help initiate?

[00:17:32]

Jiménez-Romo I think I just helped a lot. I didn't initiate anything. I was involved. I picketed Safeway every Saturday, and we were very proud of how many cars we would turn away. [laughs]

John You were in Safeway for what reason?

[00:17:54]

Jiménez-Romo For the support of the UFW, the grape boycott and iceberg lettuce. So we had quite a lot of information on what Safeway as a chain was doing, and if people didn't support the UFW, we would have material on other things they were doing, like putting red dye in the meat and a slew of other things, that if they didn't want to support the grape boycott, they were looking at this and going, "Oh, crap." So we went to different Safeways every Saturday.

And then, like, the door-to-door, like Get Out the Vote, and a lot of knocking on doors during the propositions, like I said, 13 and 21 at the time, and then getting people, regardless of how they're going, just get out and vote.

J. Jiménez What were some of the other organizations that you helped with?

[00:19:04]

Jiménez-Romo Well, aside from the UFW and on campus? MEChA and then I still continued at Washington. That's about it.

John Could you elaborate a little bit and tell us a little bit about your involvement in MEChA?

[00:19:28]

Jiménez-Romo Sheesh. [laughs] We accomplished something quite remarkable. What year was that, '70? We were able to get president, vice president, and Senate chair Chicanos elected to office. Given the apathy, just show you that getting people organizing and voting, were able to get all—it was in the papers. It was in the papers. It hadn't been done at any college campus to have all three top positions be—you know. And then those three positions being all *mexicanos*, there was big changes in the school as far as activities and who was out of the school. So it was quite an accomplishment at the time. Of course, that's what you have. You have enough people, it shows you today the power of unity and voting. People can crap all they want, but if you don't vote, you don't have a say. [laughs]

John Did you guys at the Movimiento Chicano feel that it was a very big stepping-stone in you trying to send out the message, like getting three members? [00:21:09]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, yeah, for the college at the time, yeah. As far as the whole *movimiento*, no, because there was more than what's on campus, but it was a good training ground for a lot people to know what you can do and what power you have if you're organized.

J. Jiménez Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

[00:21:58]

Jiménez-Romo Yes, it did widen my eyes a little bit knowing from—I mean, obviously from your life is—you all can see how you were as children to then becoming aware once you get on school of other issues, wider issues. But, yeah, I

mean, just being exposed to other people, other situations, other people's experiences, what their life experience was, and especially getting more involved with the UFW. And my parents were farmworkers. My parents worked with the short hoes, you know. But I didn't know that. She told me later. [laughs] But the living conditions and stuff, so, yeah, it opened your eyes on what's going on.

John Would you say that your social and cultural political lines impacted your personal relationships with family and peers and significant others? [00:23:08]

Jiménez-Romo It made them aware of what my political lines, didn't affect it. I'm the youngest of the four, and I was the only one to go to a state college. My brother and one sister, they took some classes here in the sixties, but they didn't get a degree. They didn't go beyond, which is kind of like, "Ah, Elena, she's at Sac State and she's picketing." My brother-in-law—"Where's Elena?" "Oh, she's picketing." [laughs] But it wasn't a negative thing. It wasn't like, "Oh, well, there she is."

I mean, when I first registered to vote, they knew I registered as Raza Unida, and they were, like, making fun of me. "Why? You can't vote in the primaries." And that's the only reason why I changed, so I could vote in the primaries at the time. I think it's still—you only vote for your party in the primaries. So it was like, "Well, I've got to vote in the primaries." But it was kind of like, "Well, since you did, you registered as Raza Unida." [laughs]

But, no, even to this day, my brother is a Republican, and we don't talk about it. He knows I haven't changed and I'm not going to change him. Like you say, you

don't talk about certain things. It's like, "I ain't goin' there. It's not going to change anything." [laughs]

J. Jiménez Can you please describe some of the impacts that your involvement with the Chicano Movement had on your career?

[00:24:52]

Jiménez-Romo My career? Well, I think just the experience in, again, organizing, I wasn't organizing, but being organized and knowing the power of being united helped me. I mean, when I first started out, I was doing individual and family counseling, and I was working with kids who weren't going to school and doing all this dropping out, I mean, all this pre-delinquent stuff. And my awareness of importance of education, I would say, and why we need Chicanos in school helped me working with the kids. And later after that, I worked for the state. I don't know how that impacted that at all, aside from making me a more confident person.

J. Jiménez Do you primarily work with Chicano families?

[00:26:05]

Jiménez-Romo Not now, no. At the time I did. Early, my first job, that was probably '75 to '80, so only five, six years I worked.

John And now you work with all types of families?

[00:26:23]

Jiménez-Romo No, I don't. After that, I worked for the state, still in the Department of Social Services, but in a different capacity entirely. I worked for a licensing program, and I was there for thirty years and I retired in 2010. But, no, I mean, having a social work degree helped me get that job, the state job, but prior to

that when I was at the counseling center and working with families, I could say that, but not later, not for the state job.

J. Jiménez Would you say that there are still some issues left unresolved today?

[00:27:02]

Jiménez-Romo Oh, definitely. Work is never done. Issues are not gone. Everything is back again. I mean, yes, changes, strides were made, but you never rest on—no. I mean, is it still important to get the word out about education? Yes. Is it still important to get people out voting? Absolutely. I think that's the biggest thing, still making people aware of the issues affecting Chicanos, *mexicanos*. Still education, not only formal education, but educating people is always going to be an issue.

John How would you describe how the Chicano Movement impacted your community, which was Sacramento?

[00:27:59]

Jiménez-Romo Well, a lot of people who were involved stayed in Sacramento and then worked in a lot of jobs that affected the community, like Joe Serna and Isabel and then even José Montoya having art in the community, his daughter working for Joe, state jobs. A lot of people like myself ended up going into a state job which is here in Sacramento. I mean, it's just like the veins just all went out, and people that had that base and had that awareness, whatever job you went, if it is directly affecting local politics or not, what your awareness is of you as a person affects the entire community. And then a lot of people still are involved with youth

groups, that I know still are involved with the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference and have been doing that for years. So, I mean, that's maybe because here in this community, because of this prevalence system of state jobs, here people rose up the ranks.

J. Jiménez Even though there's been many Chicano activists that have passed, could you identify someone who you think had a great impact on the Chicano Movement?

[00:29:47]

Jiménez-Romo So many. Ricardo Favela, José Montoya, Joe Serna, Isabel Serna, Armando Cid. Too many have gone.

John Could you elaborate on maybe one that maybe influenced you the most?

[00:30:17]

Jiménez-Romo The most? Probably Joe Serna, because I took—what was the name of the course I took from him? Neighborhood Politics. That's when we started doing door-to-door, Get Out the Vote.

J. Jiménez Can you talk about your experience knocking on doors?

John Did you guys target Chicano communities, like Chicano-based communities?

[00:30:54]

Jiménez-Romo Not entirely, no, because when we were doing Get Out the Vote—where were we? Yeah, I guess we did. I guess he did target that, because he knew what communities to send us to, and that was part of the class. Then we

continued to do that. It was around Tahoe Park area and Oak Park where were going, and some of Elmhurst, where I live now, and downtown. But not so much because the people were Spanish-speaking, but I don't know if there was evidence that there was low voter turnout in certain areas and that's the areas that were targeted.

But I learned a lot. I was surprised by a lot, seen a lot knocking on doors. One of the things that he even used to bring up later that cracked me up, because I knocked on a door and a man answered in the nude. [laughter] I didn't run away. I just looked him in the eye and said, "Don't forget to vote! Go vote!" Then I went out there like, "Oh, my god! I've got a nude guy!" [laughter]

John Were there negative experiences during those door-to-door knocks?

[00:32:30]

Jiménez-Romo That one. [laughter] I mean, yeah, you get yelled at. There were a couple people that yell at you and tell you—which is a lack of education, they'll tell you, "Go back to Mexico." It's like, "Okay," you know. I was born here. My parents were born here. We weren't *mexicanos* that—we didn't cross the border; the border crossed us. But, you know, you don't let that deter you.

John What do you see as some current and future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:33:14]

Jiménez-Romo Staying informed, staying aware of what the power is. I think that was shown in the last presidential election. Education is important, the

importance of education, the importance of still breaking cycles, but for now, I think personally that the biggest thing is understanding the power of voting.

John So it sounds like informing people of politics is something that you really enjoyed. Would you say that you can see yourself attacking those issues yourself, personally?

[00:34:12]

Jiménez-Romo Well, what I did, one of the things I did do was after I retired, I committed to the president's reelection campaign, because, that was on my own bucket list. I didn't want to watch the election on the couch. So I did a solid year, and I worked at building teams, neighborhood teams. The whole organization, organizing for America on the presidential campaign started way before, and building neighborhood teams and starting from the grassroots, so we can get our teams in calling and phone banking. I did that eight hours a day for a year.

What they did is that because California was pretty secure, we worked in getting the other states online. So were calling. Once we got our teams together, then were calling Colorado, we were calling all over, wherever they needed to focus all the calling and stuff. I mean, I loved it. And we knew we had the election way before, regardless of the polls, because we were calling Latinos and Hispanics in other states, and we were calling them. We knew how they were going to vote.

John What election was this?

[00:35:52]

Jiménez-Romo The president's reelection, this last one.

John So you see yourself being involved in—

[00:35:59]

Jiménez-Romo Well, I have time now, yeah, and I probably will. I don't know if I'll be that involved in this campaign, because it was a lot of time. I mean, I retired and I was there all day until late at night, working out of the campaign office. But It was important, and I didn't want to just—like in 2008, I watched the election from home, and said, "I'm not doing that in 2012." [laughs]

John That's great. Well, thank you for coming.

[00:36:38]

Jiménez-Romo Oh, that's it?

John Yeah, that's it. Thank you for taking your time out of your day.

[00:36:44]

Jiménez-Romo You're welcome, you're welcome.

John It was a pleasure.

[00:36:47]

Jiménez-Romo Thank you.

Valadez Is there anything else that you would like to share that you were thinking about as you were going through the interview? Were you a part of CAFE when you were working for the state?

[00:37:08]

Jiménez-Romo Oh, yes, yes, yes. Oh, my god, in the early years, yes, oh, my god, yes, early years.

Valadez What was CAFE about? Maybe that would be something to elaborate. How did that start?

[00:37:22]

Jiménez-Romo I don't know how it started, but what I know that the members in CAFE were doing was like if other state employees needed help in interviewing skills so they could promote, they would do mock interviews and just networking and mentoring and other type of things so other *mexicanos* could be comfortable with interviewing and promoting.

Valadez From Sac State, did you stay in contact with Christina Cervantes? You know who she is?

[00:38:05]

Jiménez-Romo Yes, I do know who she is.

John Did you have interactions with her along the way?

[00:38:09]

Jiménez-Romo No, no. I did see her later because we worked for the same department.

Valadez But with Mora, Christina Mora?

[00:38:20]

Jiménez-Romo Not through work, no. I did leave for ten years. I was out of Sacramento, because I lived in San Francisco all the eighties. When I started with the state job, I was in San Francisco. I left and I was first working for Family Service Agency of San Francisco, which was a social worker's dream, because it's one of the oldest social work agencies on the West Coast.

Valadez So you graduated with a social work degree?

[00:38:53]

Jiménez-Romo Yes.

Valadez Was Casavantes there?

[00:38:57]

Jiménez-Romo Mm-hmm.

Valadez Was he one of your profs?

[00:39:00]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah.

Valadez Why don't you go back and kind of reconnect with Casavantes, one of those faculty that ended up fighting his legal battle with the department and ended up losing his life as a consequence. He was targeted by the social work department. They didn't want him doing any kind of instruction that was outside of what was strictly aligned. And Casavantes, he wanted to open it up and do some other kinds of things that would make consciousness for Chicanos a promise inherent in doing social work within the Mexican communities. Anyway, he took his case with us, he brought it to us Chicano faculty, and the Chicano faculty tried to give him some support, but then after a while, he kind of wanted to do it on his own.

He got an attorney and he took the department to court and the court ruled against him. He didn't have enough evidence or whatever. He died of a heart attack. He was really heartbroken, because he always believed in the Ph.D. He always thought that the Ph.D. was the badge of honor, and that everything you said, people would obey or listen to and follow.

[00:40:32]

Jiménez-Romo Wow. I didn't know that.

Valadez So can you record a little bit more? We'll add it to involvement or somewhere in there where it might fit. Just go back to your college years, the people you spent with, the issues that were maybe talked about, or was it a relevant experience in social work. Then go on from there, but something about what you did in your work, how you got involved in the different communities, whether here in Sacramento or in San Francisco. Take one. [laughter]

[00:41:20]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, I'm trying to think.

Valadez No pressure. [laughter]

[00:41:23]

Jiménez-Romo That's sad to hear that he had a—I hate to say that I didn't have any issues with courses I was taking. I later found that there was issues, because I did work for La Familia Counseling Center when I first got out of school, and dealing with *mexicanos*, *familias*, kids and stuff, and, and, yeah, some of the techniques and issues that I learned in class, which I didn't challenge at the time because I was just absorbing and thinking, "This is what you do," you know, you had to fine-tune, you had to change, you had to do things to deal with the Chicanitos that were dealing with, the family structures that were there, and for some of these kids, their lack of.

But that was something that was after school that was an issue that working at that program hands-on teaches you, rather than what you learn in the classroom. You know, you don't learn how to deal with families face-to-face in the way we did. I think it was more traditional office setting, people coming in, and that didn't work for the families that we dealt with. For the *mexicanos*, the families aren't going to go to

your office downtown to talk about their family. You go to them. We went out to their homes and we met with them there, we saw their living situations and we met with the kids there, not your traditional "Sound good," hang up a shingle and have your family come for their 5:00 o'clock appointment. That doesn't work. That doesn't work for these families. But we had to learn that there.

I didn't know if that was how he was talking about opening it up and deal with other cultures. In fact, how to deal with, regardless of if it was a Mexican family or African American family, I don't recall that even being offered as variances in how to deal with families and how to deal with their issues, which is kind of one set rule. But you take the classes. Then comes the real world and you deal with the families that you have.

John Do you think Sac State was supportive of the Chicano Movement when you went to school there?

[00:44:30]

Jiménez-Romo Did they support the Chicano Movement?

John The teachers, the professors.

[00:44:42]

Jiménez-Romo Well, the professors that I knew were all involved in the Chicano Movement themselves.

John Were they very pro-Chicano?

[00:44:57]

Jiménez-Romo No, I wouldn't say anybody was pro-Chicano. As far as the positions I was telling you about, you know, you can't argue with the numbers of

people voting. There wasn't opposition, but there wasn't like "Oh, support, let's just get 'em all in here." I don't know. It wasn't contrary, you know. It wasn't like a resistance, like "You can't do this. You can't organize, you can't meet, you can't do anything like that."

I don't know how helpful that is. [laughs] Is that what you're talking about? I don't know what you meant about during the college years.

Valadez That's okay, just something about your jobs, what jobs you did.

[00:45:56]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, we covered that a little bit, jobs. I'd say I started working for the state in late '79 when I was in San Francisco.

John So you worked for the state in San Francisco, not in Sacramento?

[00:46:14]

Jiménez-Romo Well, when I was there. Then I transferred back here.

John So you lived how many years in San Francisco?

[00:46:24]

Jiménez-Romo Ten years, from '79 to '89, and then I transferred back over here.

John Was your family still here or did they go with you?

[00:46:33]

Jiménez-Romo No. I moved down there when I was twenty-six. It was far enough away, but not too far away. [laughs]

J. Jiménez Was that a hard transition for you?

[00:46:47]

Jiménez-Romo No, no. No, it was fun. Actually, I bought a home here. I was single, I was twenty-five, and I bought a home by myself in ’78, and I bought a house for $36,000. I was at the Counseling Center and I was making $1,300 a month, and I qualified for a loan for $36,000. I thought this was like “Woohoo!” you know.

Then, of course, personal issues, wrong guy, wrong city, got to go to San Francisco, left. When you get a new job in new city, it really help forget things. So I had just bought this house, and my parents had the home. I was the youngest, right? And they had this house, four bedrooms, and they liked my little house, so I deeded it over to my mom after I had it for two years—well, not even two years. So I deeded it over them, and they moved into that little house with two bedrooms one bath. She goes, “Oh, I like this little house.” And there they were with no kids. A couple of us did. A couple of other Chicanos had done, our mid-twenties, and we bought houses. Can’t buy a house for $36,000 now, that’s for sure.

Anyway, so I lived there for ten years and then moved. That was one of the reasons I moved back to Sacramento, because I was already like, “Oh, my god. I don’t have a house.” And you can’t buy a house in San Francisco—well, not in my salary at the time. So that’s why I moved back.

John So in your time in San Francisco, how was the Chicano Movement there? Was it different from here in Sacramento?

[00:48:44]

Jiménez-Romo Yes. Well, when I was here, it was a Chicano Movement. Everybody that was here that looked like us, we were Chicanos. When I moved to San Francisco, it was like, "Oh, what are you?"

And I was like, "What do you mean, what are you? Look at me. Duh!"

No, it was, "Are you Nicaraguan, Colombian, Salvadoran?" [laughs]

So there wasn't a Chicano. I mean, sure, in the Bay Area there was—you know what I'm saying? But there were so many more Latinos over there.

John So you would say San Francisco was more exposed to different cultures?

[00:49:19]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, yeah. In the Mission District. Actually, my field area, because I was in the field doing inspections of daycare facilities and group homes, and I had the Mission District because I ended up speaking Spanish by that time. Anyway, that's another story. So, yeah, I was exposed to other cultures and stuff, but some of the issues there—but there were still a lot of Chicanos over there, but, I mean, it's not exclusively like in Sacramento.

John So you'd say people in San Francisco were a little more tolerant or a lot tolerant?

[00:49:54]

Jiménez-Romo Oh, yeah, more tolerant, oh, yeah, more accepting just in general of other lifestyles, of everybody, different cultures. I moved there in '79. It was pre-AIDS, so it was a very active gay community at the time. Well, as you know,

it still is very accepting, and as far as other cultures, it's embraced instead of—you know.

J. Jiménez I know you mentioned that you didn't learn Spanish until the eighties. How was your experience not knowing much Spanish before?

[00:50:37]

Jiménez-Romo Well, when I started Sac State, that was the kind of the thing, is I met people from the Valley and they were fully bilingual, and I just *hated* that I was—but I didn't have the money until later, so in '83 I took a leave of absence and I went to language school in Cuernavaca for seven weeks. I needed the confidence to conjugate verbs and to know I was going to the right tense. It kind of clicked after that. Personally, I felt like I needed to go.

J. Jiménez So it was a personal choice.

[00:51:24]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, yeah. I didn't feel like, "Oh, you don't speak Spanish." In fact, I started Sac State when I was eighteen, and I was kind of quiet, and they thought, "Oh, she doesn't speak English." [laughter] "You're too small, too little. You don't speak English!"

John So your confidence really built during college?

[00:51:51]

Jiménez-Romo I think so.

John Like your sophomore, junior year, when you were actually more involved in the Chicano Movement?

[00:51:56]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah, I think so. I mean, just being more involved in doing things and feeling more comfortable and more at home and, like I said, meeting people that I felt like I was home, you know, and just getting more involved. I wasn't ever in a shell in high school. I went to McClatchy, and it's very balanced. In fact, people used to tell me, "Oh, you went to school with a lot of Asians."

And I said, "No, just the right amount." Because that's the neighborhood I grew up in. But it was pretty evenly split between Asians and African Americans and Mexicans and Caucasians. It was a lot. It wasn't heavy on one side or another. So I felt included.

But it just was a different sensation when I got more involved in doing things with the community. I was fortunate enough to be able to be involved in going to Cesar Chavez's compound in La Paz, and we walked there, and we also marched in Lodi in a march against Gallo Wineries in Lodi, which was one of the largest wineries in that area.

John How old were you during that march?

[00:53:27]

Jiménez-Romo Probably nineteen, your age.

John So right around your college years.

[00:53:34]

Jiménez-Romo Yeah. We marched in Lodi. Then, like I said, when went to La Paz, we stayed there for a couple of days, which was an old TV facility, which his headquarters were there. But, yeah, it's just a different feeling. I know people from

high school, they don't think I'm different, they think I'm the same, but I was just more involved in things I wasn't involved in.

I changed my name back to my name on my birth certificate. I'm named after my aunt who passed away, which is Mariahelena, but I was at that era where the nurses anglicized it, so they put on my birth certificate "Mary Helen." It happened to my brother. He was supposed to be named after my uncle Raúl, and they put "Roy" on his birth certificate.

So, anyway, I went through school when I first started as Mary Helen, and all the teachers, that's what my name was, Mary Helen. When I was little, I didn't even know Mariahelena, which is Nena, and my last name was Jiménez, but I get to school and they were calling me Mary Helen Jimenez, and I didn't know who the hell they were talking to [laughter] because I'd never heard Mary Helen or Jimenez. "Who's Jimenez?"

So my mom—I was known as Nena and she'd introduce me. They knew I was named after my *tía*, my dad's sister who passed away. So I changed my name legally to Mariahelena, because that was supposed to be my name. And then later when I'd see people from high school, they would go, "Oh! Now you're Mariahelena, now you're Jiménez." [laughs] It's like all of a sudden they thought I was like trying to be somebody else. No! [laughs]

J. Jiménez Thank you for your time.

[00:55:36]

Jiménez-Romo You're welcome.

[End of interview]