

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Jaime Rubén Lemos

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Fernanda Torres and Cynthia Andrade
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Q Can you please state your full name, your date of birth, your marital status, and whether or not you have children?

[00:00:14]

Lemos My full name is Jaime Rubén Lemos. Date of birth is 10/24/77, and I'm married and I do have children. I have two stepdaughters and one daughter and three grandkids.

Q Now we're going to talk about your early life. Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:39]

Lemos I was born in Salinas, California, and raised between Salinas and Gonzalez. They're two *campesino* towns. Gonzalez is about fifteen minutes south of Salinas, but middle school, mostly Gonzalez and then the rest in Salinas.

Q What were your parents' occupation?

[00:00:58]

Lemos Both of my parents were *campesinos*. My dad picked lettuce and mostly strawberries all his life. My mom worked in a flower nursery.

Q Did you have any siblings?

[00:01:13]

Lemus I have one sibling, my sister Melissa, and then also I grew up with two other young men in the household, two who didn't have dads as part of their lives, so my dad kind of picked them up a little bit. So I kind of grew on and off with them too.

Q Can you describe any experiences that you encountered with your family or in your neighborhood?

[00:01:39]

Lemus Experiences as—

Q Do you have any stories about your childhood or with your family or around your neighborhood that are memorable to you?

[00:01:56]

Lemus Well, there are lots, but let's see. I think some of the more memorable times that I've had with the family has been mostly when I moved away to college. Growing up with my family, there was a lot of work. My mom and dad always worked, and there was always time for us, too, but it was always depending on how much time was available after work. Then Saturdays and Sundays, you did laundry and you bought the groceries, and then whatever time was left, that was for you and the family.

So one of the things that I do remember a lot with my dad during those free times and my family was always doing a lot of sports stuff, like soccer, a lot of soccer and stuff like that. But mostly with the family when we started doing a lot more things together, and even my mom as a participant, was through Danza Azteca. That

was mostly, I think, in around '92, '93, I was getting into a lot of trouble in high school, and, *danza* started coming around and different things happened in high school. I started becoming a little more active with MEChA and everything, and I started participating in these conferences. Then part of these MEChA conferences, there would be these Aztec dancers. One of them I remembered was Roberto Castro from Morgan Hill. We would always see these guys, you know, big feathers and everything, and I was always like “Wow! These guys are bad!”

Y next thing you know, there's a group starting in Salinas. This man named Clemente Luis started this group, and it was a breakoff of a group called White Hawk from Watsonville. He started this little satellite group, and my whole family joined. My mom was more of a supporter, my dad was there, my sister was there, and that's how I remember us growing up after that. Things changed after that, for the positive.

Q Thank you for sharing that with us. Were you a Fellow or a Felito, or were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:04:40]

Lemus No.

Q Did your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:05:04]

Lemus Yes and no. I think it's one of those things where you kind of stumble upon it, and as you participate in it, you learn more, and the more you learn, the more you appreciate it, and then the more you appreciate it, the more *ganas* you have and more willingness to learn more about it. Because I never really thought that I would

be a *danzante* or be an active member in the community. I don't think I really looked to that.

I think it was one of those things where it partially saved my life and a lot of other *danzantes'* life, like my *jefe*, a *maestro* of mine. And as we change because of that, as we go through these *danza* steps and as we're learning the *danza* steps, it's changing our lives and it's starting to open up our consciousness, and we're starting to learn more and appreciate more. Then we start learning more about the Movimiento, and as we learn more about the Movimiento, then it's more important to us. So then these steps and this passage in this journey is more important to us, and then we make more of an emphasis to teach it and to learn it at the same time.

So I think as we go into it, we grow and our consciousness grows of it and our knowledge of it grows. I think it's one of those journeys that we take and we're learning and we're giving back, and we're learning and we're giving back. But I don't think it was something that *le echamos ganas* because of it. I think we learned it on the way. We're still learning it on the way.

Q Was there, like, a cultural issue, per se racism or inequality, that you ever experienced in your life that might have affected your participation in any organizations or movement?

[00:07:20]

Lemus Yes. Even till today, we still struggle with these things. In the *danza*, the Danza Azteca, we have a lot of almost internal racism amongst the *danzantes* and amongst our indigenous peoples here in North America and then a part of Mexico as well, on the border region.

In the *danza* world, we have the *danzante* who became a *danzante* because they were part of this Chicano Movement. They were part of this, the Mechista, and were born here, like myself, born here in the United States and reconnecting to old Mexico and to our ancestors. And then you have the lineage of *danzantes* that came from Mexico, who grew up in it generationally, who their great-grandpas and great-tatas all have passed it down.

So when it comes here to the United States to California, there's almost like a little bit of a clash amongst some of that, of like "Well, *pues ustedes no son mexicanos. No son danzantes, asi de familia de raiz,*" you know. It's more of, "You guys learned this here after the fact."

And then some of the *danzantes* here say, "No, no, you guys have all of the old stuff. That stuff that doesn't work anymore. We're trying to make things better."

Also one of my *maestros*, Chuy Ortiz, I have to mention because he has been a person who transcended a lot of boundaries, racial boundaries, even amongst the Californian Indian people here, amongst Native American people. I mean, this was a man who taught us and always taught about we're all indigenous peoples. That's it. *Asi es*. And all of these ceremonies belong to the indigenous peoples. This man went to the Sun Dances in the South Dakotas, he went to the Sun Dances in Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. He was able to bring *danza* into a California Indian roundhouse and it was accepted. He was one of the only people who was able to do that, because amongst even the *Californios* here, the Californian Indian folk, there's a lot of animosity between Californian Indians and *mexicanos*, because of California for what it is and the Mexican Army and all this stuff. So he was able to go through all of those

things and always be very clear as to what his job was, and that's "Let's go through these ceremonies. Let's go through all these different peoples," because *somo los mismo*, all of us; didn't matter. And he was very successful at it.

Q Can you think back a little bit on one of your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:11:01]

Lemus I've got to say it was one of those MEChA conferences *con* hearing that drum, you know, Robert Castro. From that point on, it was meeting him, Robert Castro, Henry Dominguez, all these main pillars of the Chicano Movimiento who who just inspired me, basically, and that kind of fueled me, and said, "*Orale, orale, mijito.*" I would hear them say, "What are you going to do next? Where are you going to go from this point on? Remember your roots." So I think it was a part of all of them that have influenced me and everything that has happened.

In '95, I came up here to D-Q University, and that's where I met Chuy Ortiz and basically stuck to his side right there, and he took me under his wing. It was all always about *danza* and the Movimiento and dancing at protests and dancing at marches and dancing at special events, but dancing at ceremony too. It was always this balance of these political events, it was always about these ceremony events, both of these things.

Q Could you take a second to think about the term *Chicano* and tell me how did other Mexicans, Mexican Americans, or Latinos react to that term?

[00:12:53]

Lemus *Chicano*, huh? One of those words that has always flipflopped back and forth. It's funny, because I think in my generation you can easily ask, like, my dad or my grandparents, and *Chicano*'s one of those bad things. "No, no, no *Chicano!*" My dad would say, "*O pues es una de las cosas pochas. Es que eres mexicano*, but you're born here."

And then being a Mechista and all these different things, you learn that there's a connection to it, to the history, down to the Meshica people in Mexico. I think that's kind of where now I've come to terms with it and at peace, that as being Chicano, being it more of a Meshica term and saying, "Hey, these are all people of this region." *No nomas* Mexico City, the Meshica people or anything like that, but from this region.

I have *compadres* who are from El Salvador and everything like that, and they said, "*No pues Chicano Movement también.*" So even they don't even put it to one specific peoples or one location, but rather more of a region. So I think, "*Oh, orale.* That's cool with me *también.*"

Q How did other Latinos react to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:14:25]

Lemus Well, you know, growing up in Salinas, it was a little bit different. You have a lot of *campesino* families down there, and so the term *Chicano* is not one of the best terms down there. Even with trying to explain it as, "Hey, it's bigger than this. It's not just being a Mexican American. It's not just being a *pochito* here in the U.S or whatever. It's bigger than that." So in Salinas, I think even still today you don't really use that word in order to identify yourself if you're addressing the people

in Salinas. You'll still say, "*Nosotros los mexicanos*," or *la raza*. You'll use different terms.

It wasn't mostly until college, that's when mostly, like, Chicanos, "*Orale*, cool, we're all Chicanos!" It was more accepted.

Now I think there's a bigger movement now where we've gone past *Chicano* and I think now even the *danzantes* are starting to say, "Well, where are you from really?" "Oh I'm Totonaca." "I'm Tolteca." "I'm Purépecha." So now they're starting to identify more now with their own indigenous groups.

Q At the time that you started becoming involved in these different movements or protests, had you heard about the Civil Rights Movement?

[00:16:04]

Lemus Because I am younger than most of the people who this interview is for, yes, obviously, because in the eighties—I was telling Senon [Valadez] and Christina by email—in the eighties, I was around three years old so, the Civil Rights Movement is earlier than that.

I think one of the really awesome things that became of that was it started the movement for *raza* to start integrating from looking for their identity of who they are, and in like my *maestro's* case, Chuy, in opening the doors and allying with the Native American brothers and sisters here in California and throughout the Southwest and South Dakota, because during that time was also the large-A Movement, the American Indian Movement. So because of all the things happening with the A-Movement and the Chicano Movement, there was more of an acceptance amongst

each other and saying, “Hey, we’re both indigenous peoples. We’re both red peoples.”

So it was almost the beginning of this ally amongst both of those two nations, of the Chicano people and of the Native American people. So you started having these Chicanos now who were part of the Cesar Chavez marches, who were part of the grape boycotts and of the student walkouts, and were participating at the Sun Dance and were *danzantes* and were going through this spiritual movement and going through these different Native ceremonies. The reconnection with them was a lot deeper. It wasn’t about looking for our roots and our history, but it was also reconnecting spiritually *otra vez* from back all the way from our ancestors. So that was very important.

Even though the Civil Rights Movement had all kinds of different things and offered a lot of different things with a lot of different perspectives, the students’ higher education, the Ethnic Studies stuff, more Chicanos in universities, but for us, for *danzantes*, it opened this door for a new form of spirituality here in the U.S., new *pero* old because it was from our ancestors. *Era una mezcla*. It was the beginning of this *mezcla* of having this North American Native American Sun Dance and us participating in it now. So it was really beautiful.

Q Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change you personally?

[00:19:34]

Lemus Yes, it did, it did. It made me more aware and gave me pride and it made me realize that there was much more than just me, but this whole Movimiento, this whole purpose. Everything is much bigger.

As I think back these few weeks and of the questions and of the teachings from my *maestro*, he's passed on now, but it's changed us in a lot of ways and it's done a lot of things for a lot of people, and I think the greater cause or the purpose of it was to make change amongst a lot of the *raza* who has been looking for that self-identity, but then also looking to heal. As young Chicanos, I think we grow up with a lot of trauma in the *barrios*. We see a lot of violence. We grow up sometimes with no dads. We grow up with single moms, with alcoholism, drug addiction. So I think this Movimiento and the *danza* in the Movimiento provided a sanctuary for all of that and it provided medicine for it. It provided the ceremony for it.

All these years of our *maestro* participating in the Sun Dance was just so that he could heal. We participate in the Sun Dance and it's for the same purpose, so we could heal. We participate in *danza* for the same reason. There's this connection to the past, but it's also we could heal, so we could heal some of these traumatic events that have occurred in our past, and we try to make better with them. I think that there's no replacement for what's happened, but I think we can learn from it, and with the *danza* and with the different ceremonies we learn how to cope with it. We learn how to cope with it, we learn how to make change with it, and then we move forward. And I think that is what the purpose was for my *maestro*, for myself of the *danza* and in this Movement, is what can we provide to *la raza*, to our communities so that they

could be okay, so that they could be good. What is it that we can tell them and show them so that they can then take it, learn it, and then pass it on?

Q Was there a specific incident that you remember or event that you realized that your perspectives were different in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:22:53]

Lemus Yeah, I think so. A specific moment? I think it was when I had my daughter. When I had my daughter Metzly is when I had to tell my wife, I said, “Okay, so what are we doing with ourselves? What are we going to do with my daughter Metzly as she grows? Well, we’re not going to baptize her, because we’re not Catholics. We’re not practicing Catholics. So how are we going to show her all these things?”

So we said, “*La danza.*” So ever since she was little, she’s participated in *la danza*. I think at the time, things were changed in our family, as part of our family, kind of for her, but I think in the big picture, they didn’t change for her, but they changed for our community and how we’re going to grow our community and how we’re going to teach our community. Things became more of a family perspective, more of a community, of a *calpulli*, of a dance group perspective. That’s when things started to change. That’s when things started to matter, not necessarily about me so much, but more of what are we going to leave the people behind? Are we going to leave them behind dance steps and feathers, or are we going to leave them behind this philosophy in this great movement? The teachings, the oral traditions, the stories of the steps, that’s what we want to leave them behind, so that when my daughter and all the kids her age get to be my age or your age, they can then start passing them on.

That's when things started changing. Even I started changing; I wasn't as reckless anymore. [laughs]

Q What role do you believe Chicanas played in the Movimiento?

[00:25:24]

Lemus At the time, in that era, I think there was a conflict of the role of women. I saw my *maestro* kind of struggle with it a little bit, and those teachings were passed down to me, too, the ideas of that struggle. We believe and we know that a lot of these sacred ceremonies came to the women. The *chalupa* came to a woman from a woman, the Buffalo White Calf Woman. The peyote came to women.

So knowing all these things about how sacred women are, we still were at somewhat of a conflict with our behavior with women and how we treated women. We would have them pray over our food, we would have them bless the water, because we know that they were sacred and could bless those things and nourish us. We knew that they were sacred because they would give us our children, and we honored those things. The sweat lodge, the purification ceremonies, all to honor women.

But our behavior was a little bit different. Our behavior was more—we were younger. In many ways you could say we were a little more handsome or felt we were a little more *caritas*, and so there was always women who would seek us to learn more about *danza* and different things. So the *danza* community, the Chicano community has always been full of very powerful, intelligent, strong Latinas, and so what is more appealing than a strong, powerful, independent Latina? So I think it was this conflict where we wanted to so much believe and appreciate the woman for her

sacred role, but at the same time didn't have men to teach us really how to behave appropriately. So I think there was a little bit of womanizing involved. There was a little bit of some of that, and I don't think it was necessarily done because *somos malos*, we want to spread our seed and all of that. I think it was just one of those things where as men, too, we suffered a little bit from that and we saw these strong, independent women, and we were like, man, we were attracted to that. We were. So it was easy to just kind of go into that.

So the role of the woman was very conflicting at the time, and still till today we still struggle with it, we do, and we try to make effort now to acknowledge our behavior. With the young men, I always try to tell the young men, "Hey, how is it that our great-grandparents and our great-grandparent or great-grandparents or grandpas, or dads, and us have not learned yet?" And yet we still continue to make these same mistakes. At some point we have to learn. So we try, we try.

Q What did you personally contribute or help contribute in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:29:35]

Lemus On this one I'm going to default to my *maestro* Chuy, because it's what he contributed to this movement that I believe I still want to contribute to this movement in going forward. I touched on it a little bit earlier about how he was able to walk into any circle, any indigenous circle. It could be a Lakota circle, could be a Navajo circle, Hopi circle, Zuni circle, a circle from Canada, California Indian circle, all these circles, different ceremonies, and integrate and bring and introduce *danza*. He's been one of the few people who have been able to do it. He's been one of the

few people who's been able to transcend all of those different boundaries of "Well, you know, you guys are Mexican, not Indian," you know, those different mentalities. "You guys are different. You guys aren't like us." He would just go through all those borders; it didn't matter with him. And not only was he able to do that, but he was embraced by it. They would invite him. They would always say, "Bring your *danza*, bring your feathers. Share with us."

Ever since then, ever since I met him in '95, he always talked about that. It's important, it's all the same thing, the condor and the eagle, the South and the North coming together, it's the same thing. He would say that. "The same thing, nephew. You just have to show them. That's it. Once they see it, they understand it." And they would. They would understand it, they would see it, and then they would open their doors and say, "*Orale*, come back. That was beautiful. Share it with us again."

Now that he's gone and I move forward now, I take that. That's one of the things that I valued mostly of him and love him for it so much, that he was able to do that. He was just like, "Don't worry about them. *Esque no saben*." But everybody else does. The other people will know. So now that's what we teach. Let's try to go to these things. Let's try to go to the Bear Dance, support the Bear Dance brothers, support the Sun Dance brothers, support all the different tribes so we can keep that door open. Now that he's opened it, let's keep it open and let's be respectful and mindful about it too.

Also, too, he didn't mix it; he never mixed the ceremonies. It was always about you go to the Bear Dance, and the Bear Dance occurs like the Bear Dance happens, how the Bear Dance people do it. You go to the Sun Dance and you follow

their rules. You go to the Shakehead dance and you go by those rules. And then when they open the doors for *danza*, we go and we share with them and we do our thing, and then we leave respectfully. He never mixed it. He never mixed any of those things. He always said it's important to keep those things as true as how they are. You just go and you visit and then you leave. You participate and then you leave. They share it with you like that. Don't try to take it with them. Don't try to integrate things in there. So that was always important, so that's how we want to move forward, is the same way teaching that and sharing that and bringing it into the different places like he did.

Q What were some of the organizations that you were involved in?

[00:33:35]

Lemus I was involved in MEChA, first MEChA and then LULAC also, League of United Latin American Citizens. I was also part of AIHEC, which is American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and then AISES, American Indian Science and Engineering Society.

Q What significance did the organizations or activities that were created play in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:34:07]

Lemus Well, MEChA has always played a big role in there, and LULAC *tambien despues*, also did too. *Pero* mostly from what I remember is of MEChA and the Movimiento Estudiantil mostly, organizing the students and helping out for the rallies and protests, the walkouts, all those for the things that we want and still

fighting today *aveces*, Ethnic Studies and all these different things. *Parece aque nunca se acaba la honda*. But that's mostly what I remember.

Q Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

[00:35:03]

Lemus Yes, it did. As a *danzante*, you get asked from the community, "Bring the *danza*, bring the *danza* to this event." I remember not too long ago we were at an event for the missing forty-three students. But it has always been intertwined with spirituality and politics, the *danza* has been. Sometimes we have *danza* at different marches and protests, and sometimes we just send the dancers there to support. Sometimes I think it can get a little bit funny with when you take the *danza*, because we want the *danza* to mean something. We want the *danza* to know that it's about prayer and it's about the spirituality portion of it. So when we have the *danza* like at a police-brutality issue, then we know that these things are important. We know that these things need prayers *también*. So with the feathers and the *copal* and everything, sometimes things get a little bit too mixed up, I think. So we try to be really careful with how we bring these political events. But the political issues and the struggles are always calling, always calling la *danza*, so we have to be real careful and we pick and choose, but we always try to support these events, whether in our *atuendo*, in our *regalia*, or *asi nomas* in person.

Q How did these changes impact your personal relationships and your family, your peers, or significant others?

[00:37:17]

Lemus How did they impact them? This *Movimiento es una ofrenda*. I don't want to say that it's a sacrifice. I think a sacrifice is one of those things where you give up something for something. *Una ofrenda* is you give something of yourself, but it's a beautiful thing. You definitely offer your family, almost, and your life for this, because there's a lot of times when the whole *familia* can't be there. They just can't. Kids get sick, wives get sick, you get sick, whoever. *Pero la lucha continua*, and so you got to go. You got to go. Sometimes you have to travel. Sometimes a family has to stay behind. Sometimes there's school and work and everything else.

I think one of the things that we've all learned as *danzantes* and as hard members or activists in a community was we learned from my *maestro* Chuy where he offered up his family in turn to continue on with the struggle. He for many years was so devoted to the different ceremonies and the *danza* and everything, that the family just couldn't keep up anymore. So in his case, he went through one wife, two wives, and three, and finally he was with his third wife and things were going well, and even then at the end, it was a little too much for her too. The kids, too, kind of get raised a little bit without this figure, *porque* you're just so busy. Do you go to the marches, the protests, the rallies, the soccer games, the baseball games, the school meetings? You know what I mean? So *no hay tiempo* for all of it. So something has to be offered up.

So it's one of the things we've learned was *el balance*. We have to keep a balance somehow. For my *maestro*, it was at the very end, I think, when he realized *que el balance* was there, but was a little too late. Then he passed over not too long ago after that. *Pero*, but he learned. He tried and he tried and he said, "I got to be

there more for *la familia*.” And the next thing you know, “Hey, we need you for this, we need you for that!” And then *zas!* He’d go again. I think one of the things we mentioned when people say, “Man, he was down for his community, *pues, ese hombre*, he was down for his community,” he was really *de la raza* more so than his family.

Q Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano impact your career or your career choice?

[00:41:10]

Lemus This is where I also learned from my *maestro*. My *maestro*’s career was *danza* and his way of life. That was his career. It was funny, I was talking to a man earlier, one of his good friends, and at the time he was kind of bragging to my *maestro* Chuy and said, “Hey, I’m going to get my master’s from Sac State!” *Y el Chuy le dijo*, “Well, I got a master’s that’s from Sun Dance.” And they started kind of laughing back and forth.

When I think about it, I know that he was kind of like, “*Ah pues toma!*” But it really makes sense. He would always say, “I’ve learned at the University of Life *aquí*, the College of Life. That was really his career. That was his *honda*, his movement. That was what made him. That was what he did every day, day in, day out. But I also learned from that. He didn’t want that for me *también*, because he would always say, “*Héchale ganas, héchale ganas a la escuela*. You got to.”

So to this day, it hasn’t made an impact on my career yet. And luckily for me, I work for the government, so I’m able to have a lot of time off when I need to, so it doesn’t change too much there. But definitely what you see and what I bring and how

I teach our dance classes, and the philosophies that I teach, it does spill into my work. It does. I mean, it would be impossible for it not to. This is who I am. This is what I've been taught. Sometimes I have to be real careful with what I say at work sometimes. But I think between some of my really close people that I work with, they know what I do. They know that we lead a dance group. They know that we go to Sun Dance and that we're involved spiritually, and to them it's okay. We don't touch too much about all the details.

Q So looking back at your experience on the Movimiento Chicano, are there any issues that you believe were left unresolved?

[00:43:55]

Lemus The treatment of women, no? I mean, that one is just ongoing. I hope that someday we can really get our act together, and I think over time, hopefully we'll make a difference, it will change. I think men have a bigger part in making change in it with our behavior, and I think the women also have a part on them, too, as well. That, I think, is one of the bigger things. I think it's important that we respect the women as we do our men.

A lot of times in the ceremonies, even today, we have a lot of men spiritual leaders, but we don't have many women spiritual leaders. So why is that? What happened? I don't know. I don't know if it's an old traditional way or I don't know if it's just because the lack of women spiritual women leaders in this area. I don't know. But I think that that has a lot of work still *todavía*.

I think also the issue of continuing having the door open amongst all the different indigenous groups here in the U.S, in California and in Mexico, allowing it

so we can all share together so that there's no some of that internal racism of like, "Nah, well, he's a Mexican. He's not really Indian." I think there's still a little bit of work there *también*.

Q Referring back to what you were talking about, women, how do you think that can change?

[00:45:51]

Lemus Dialogue. We need to have a lot of discussion about it. I think most of us understand how we treat women. I just don't believe that we understand why we treat them the way we do. And I think until we understand why, I think that's when we really can start addressing how come we do it that way. A false sense of ego? It could be just not being sure with ourselves. This whole thing of how even we raise our children, no? We have little boys—I mean, I was raised this way. You guys, I'm sure, have seen it. Even from our parents, "*Pues cuantas novias tienes, mijo? Orale, mi chignon.*" They're funny, *pero a la misma vez*, that's where it starts, right there. The bigger you are, the badder you are. The more chicks you have, the better you are. So we have to change those things, we do. And it comes down generationally. My grandpa taught it to my dad, my dad taught it to me, and then I find myself saying it sometimes, too, all these little things, even, "Don't cry. Only girls cry. Don't cry. You're crying like a sissy!" Things like that. So until we start changing that behavior, I think then maybe we can start heading into a different direction.

Q Can you describe how the Movimiento Chicano impacted community life here in Sacramento or even where you lived in Salinas?

[00:48:06]

Lemus I'll talk a little bit about Salinas first and then here in Sacramento. In Salinas, it gave a handful of people a lot of hope in Salinas. Salinas is one of those places where it's very violent. You have a lot of gang warfare in Salinas even till today. So this Movimiento was able to pull some of those gang members out of that whole violent atmosphere and give them some pride, give them some hope. That's what happened to me.

I was able to get away from that because of the Movimiento. What actually happened was that *una maestra*, an English teacher from England, started giving me these Mexican American history books. She said, "Look! These are your peoples." So I started reading it and I embraced it. And it did that for a lot of people. It did. It just kept on with that moment with groups of people, the Mechistas, the people from LULAC.

Next thing you know, a group called Barrio Sonidos became about in the Santa Cruz area, second-chance programs. So then you started having these programs and groups that started kind of pulling the *barrio* kids from the gangs and to doing positive things in the neighborhood. Well, those groups and those organizations are struggling right now, I mean, just barely *apenas*, by threads. And so the Movement in Salinas is slowly dwindling away. It's a scary place.

Here in Sacramento, things are different. This is the capital. We're surrounded by the mountains, we're surround by Californian Indian tribes, we're surrounded by Danza Azteca everywhere here. And the Movimiento here is different, so things have evolved here differently. We've had different *maestros of danza* from Mexico come here and teach here, and we have tons of *danzantes*. We have like probably nine to

ten different Aztec dance groups here in Sacramento alone. You can choose which one you want to go to, depending on which one you see fit. So the Movement here has evolved. The Movement here has changed a little bit. We have lots of *danzantes* now, a lot of them which focus on *danza*, some of them focus on history, some of them focus on the philosophy, so depending on what you want is what you can search out for.

Q Earlier before, I believe you mentioned that you teach *danza*. Do you teach in Salinas?

[00:51:30]

Lemus No, I teach here in Sacramento. There's a group here. We call it the Calmecca [phonetic], Casa de Raizes. Funny, for many years there was a lot of people around my age who said, "*Pues que hondas, Jaime? When are you going to start your group?*" *Y esto y el otro.*

And I would always say, "Well, when my *tío* Chuy die and when my dad die, then I'll start the group." Because, I mean, these are, to me, two big *jefes*, and I didn't want to have to be in their shadows. So my *tío* did die. Chuy died, and it's been over a year. So at the time of his passing, all kinds of things happened. It was like the death of a great-grandpa, all these things come out of the closet *y todas esas cosas*, right?

So then shortly after, then I decided to start the group after that. My dad hasn't died yet, so I decided, I said, "Before he dies, I'll go ahead and start this *pa que si el me de sus regañones*, and I could teach it the way that they want me to." So now it's been about *yo creo desde* November of this past year that I've started.

Q Do you think you've personally impacted anyone in your community?

[00:53:13]

Lemus I'm at a conflict right now, because my ceremony self says, "No, be humble," and then my reality self-perspective says, "Well, yeah!" *Pero* whether I would want to admit it or not, yeah, I believe I have.

Just last week we had a men's circle, we had a sweat lodge, and this man asked—he was scared. He found out he had cancer. So he called me and he said, "I need you. Can you get some of the men together?"

So I did like how my *tío* would. Chuy would be like, "Well, yeah, let's get the men together. Let's take care of this." No questions asked. So we did; we put the ceremony together for him and we prayed over him. So he had surgery this morning, and everything went well. He let me know and he was very appreciative and everything like that.

So to think that I don't touch people would be silly, I think. And that's just something, just kind of what happened today. But I hope that I'm able to offer just a little bit of what all these great *maestros*, even Senon [Valadez], who was my *maestro* at D-Q, was able to touch my life. If I was able to even just give a little bit back to the community, I think I would be all right.

Q Have you ever thought of taking your group back to your hometown?

[00:55:17]

Lemus To Salinas?

Q Yeah, since you said you felt that Salinas is kind of losing their touch with the Movimiento.

[00:55:29]

Lemus You know what? I've never thought about it, but that might be a good idea. The group is very young. The group is very young. There's no *atuendo* yet, there's no regalia or *trajes* yet. I've started going back all the way to the basics, the *pasos primero*, what do they mean. So we're very young. We're not anywhere near presentation status or anything like that. There is a group down in Castroville from one of my old *maestros*, [unclear] Miranda, and he's in Castroville, but not in Salinas, which is very different. But I might have to take you up on that.

Q Many Movimiento Chicano activists have passed on, as you have said. Can you identify any individual or individuals that you feel had an impact on the Chicano Movement?

[00:56:25]

Lemus Yeah, there was a few. I'm going to have to say again Chuy Ortiz. My *danza* philosophy, the way that I walk in life, is a lot because of what he taught me, even through his mistakes, is very valuable to me because from that I learned a lot. So he's definitely one of the people who is in our altar and many people's altars. You have the *Virgen* and then you have Chuy. [laughter] But *pero este*, yeah, he's one of them.

I was also thinking about that. Cesar Chavez, I think, too, is someone that he always looked up to. And as I thought about it, I said, well, that makes sense, because Cesar Chavez was someone who was very selfless. He did everything for *la causa*, first and foremost. Even *familia* was almost secondary. And when I think about Chuy, it's very much how he lived his life, a life full of fasting, selflessness. In a way when it came to the ceremony, they both offered up their families quite a bit. So I think in a

way I'm like, it's no wonder it makes sense that he always thought about Cesar Chavez in that way. So when I started thinking about that, I said, "Oh, yeah, they're very alike."

Henry Dominguez, but he hasn't passed on, so good thing. [laughter] A lot of my mentors are still alive. Phil Goldfarb [phonetic], Sr., he's passed on. He was also another man who kind of wasn't much for labels and race. He was a Jewish man and he was *always* down for the Movimiento, always, always. We miss Phil Goldfarb.

Q You told us a little bit about what Chuy taught you. Is there something specific that he taught you that is memorable or that you continue to apply to your daily life?

[00:59:21]

Lemus Yes. The biggest thing I learned from him was what he didn't learn quite fully himself, and I think that was balance. He taught me in ceremony about *disciplina* always. He would always say, "*Disciplina*, nephew. Always discipline." He would say, "Self-sacrifice your body. It's just your body. It's okay. You can go days without food and water. Don't worry about it. You're going to be fine. Faith, always have faith. Don't doubt. *Marca tus pasos*," he would say, all these things here and there.

But towards the end when he was getting ready to cross over, he would talk to me about how he loved very much how I lived my life, and it was very baffling to me, it was very confusing to me, because here was this person who I loved and admired as a teacher was telling me that he admired something about me and *my* life, and so I didn't understand it. I was like, "What? What are you talking about? You're the *jefe*,

you're the one where the doors open for when you go to any ceremony." I was like, "What are you talking about?"

And he would say, "I love how you are with your family, because I never got that." When he was younger and his kids were young, he was able to do a little bit of that, but as he became more involved with ceremony and *danza* and everything, it just demanded more of him, so he offered up his family for it. So he would always say, "Balance, that's one thing we have to learn. That's what ceremony's about: balance. Your family, your family's sacred, ceremonies are sacred. Not one is more than the other, so remember that."

So I think that's the biggest that I'll always remember about him. I guess it was his lesson of himself, you know, that he never really got there. *Ya mero, ya mero*, but he didn't get there just yet. And it is; it's a struggle. I see it. We see it every day in our family, we do, but we try to remember that. "All right. Let's take the kids to Disneyland, and on the way back we could stop at a [Spanish] somewhere." It's always balance. Let's do this and let's do that, always. Let's nurture the family academically, let's nurture the family with social events, and let's foster our family spiritually *tambien*. It's got to be about balance.

Q Have you found it?

[01:03:02]

Lemus I struggle with it, I do. It's one of those things that's in my prayers every day. Lucky for me, I married a woman who keeps me balanced. She makes sure I'm balanced. [laughter] She makes sure. She says, "Okay, okay, that's enough. Go back." But it's good, it really is good because she's there with me at ceremony, but

then we can go and have our little date, and that's important, too, because the relationship, a marriage is a sacred ceremony too. So as much time and dedication that we spend with our other ceremonies is how much we have to spend with those ceremonies too. The relationship with our children *tambien*, those are all sacred ceremonies. So we just have to look at them like that so that we can spend the same amount of effort and time with those things.

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

[01:04:14]

Lemus I think staying focused with, well, in our case, with *la danza* and with the ceremony. I think it's really easy as we become more academic, as we become more green, that we start integrating some of these aspects into the old ways, the old traditions, and then things start to change.

One of our elders named Tyler, I talked to him one time and I said, "Tyler, tell me about tradition. I don't understand why tradition changes and how come and the value of it, and I can't believe that people want to change these traditions."

So this is this older man, very traditional, an old AIMster, you know, and he said, "Well, tradition, Jaime, is like the river and it has to flow and be continuous, and things change and turns and winds, and at some point, some of the water in that river, when it becomes stale, it stops flowing. That water turns stale. That's what will happen with tradition if it doesn't evolve and continue to change. It'll become stale."

So it was very baffling to me, because here was this hardcore traditional man who was telling me that tradition changes and evolves, so the more I looked at it, the

more it made sense to me. Of course it does. Here we are, Chicanos, *raza*, in California, participating in California Indian gatherings, sweat lodge in the old Lakota way, as opposed to the *adobe*, the Meshcal [phonetic] way from Mexico. We've adopted and evolved into this new way, and we go forward with it. [Spanish]. We come from [Spanish], and then we move forward to different medicines here, bitterroot, [Spanish], all these different—sweetgrass, you know, and we start implementing those medicines.

I think as we move forward, I think one of the things that we really need to be careful is how much do we integrate, how much do we add to it, and then at what point is it not the old way anymore. I think that there's a fine balance with that. I don't know what the answer to that is. All I know is I teach the steps with how they taught them to me, and I teach them to my daughter this way and I teach them to all the dance members this way, and I'm hoping that when I die, they will teach those steps and that philosophy the way that I taught it to them.

But then I've also taught them new dances I've learned, so I teach those, too, but I also say, "This step, this *danza* comes from this group, and I learned it ten years ago," however many years ago, so that they know where it came from. So at least I try to tell them where the origin was to it, but at some point I think, like anything, there are always new *danzas* that are coming around, there's always new songs that are given to people, so things will always constantly change.

My fear, though, is that we lose the basics, the basic fundamentals. They've always said it's very easy, ceremony's very easy, they've said to me. Chuy always said to me, "It's about *la medicina*, the prayer, and the instruments, and that's it. Then

we as human beings add all this other stuff to it.” So we remember those three things, I think it’ll be okay. So I think that moving forward, I think it’ll be okay, remembering those three things. For the most part, we don’t forget those three things.

Q Do you see yourself as staying involved in meeting these challenges?

[01:09:24]

Lemus Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I’m still young. I’m still going to be around.

[Spanish] You know, I’m starting to understand now—sometimes I get into these arguments, like with my dad or with Chuy or some of the other elders, and they would say, “Ah, there you go. Why are you trying to change things?”

I’d be like, “No, no, no. It’s for the betterment of the group.”

And I think as I get older and everything like that, I’m going to be doing the same thing. “Why are you guys trying to change everything?”

And there’s going to be some young person, or my daughter, saying, “No, no, no, Dad. It’s for the betterment of the people.”

So I think I’ll be around for all that. I’m definitely that young. I hope to be around for a lot of years. But I don’t know all the answers either, and I don’t think that our *maestros* did either. I think that they’ve had to learn and we’ve had to learn, and I think we’re still going to continue to learn. I think that as people grow in the *danza* and ceremony, I think they’re going to know new perspectives and learn in different ways, and I think that’s valuable. It’d be silly for me to say, “*Que no*, this is the only way,” because it doesn’t really work like that, I don’t think.

Q Do you think in the near future you’ll become more involved in the community or you’ll stay equally as involved as you are right now?

[01:10:57]

Lemus Better look at my wife right now. [laughter] I've been told it's going to be more, and I can see the natural flow of things and I can see how that's going to change.

Q I have one more question for you that I hope you don't mind me asking.

[01:11:24]

Lemus No, not at all.

Q: It's going back a little bit. You were talking about how Salinas is violent. Is it still violent today?

[01:11:33]

Lemus Yes.

Q Do you think per se if you were to take *danza*, once it's ready for a performance or something, back to Salinas, do you think it might have an impact on the violence there or, like, change the amount of violence that is encountered or seen?

[01:11:51]

Lemus I think Salinas has to address it in a lot of different ways. There's not too many different groups that are around anymore that kind of give the kids hope as much anymore as there used to be. I think a dance group would help. I think when the dance group was there in Salinas, it was a really strong group, had like thirty to forty people when it was big, and then I don't know what happened to it. It just slowly dwindled off. I think the kids all get married, have kids, go to college. You know, they go on with life. But I think a *danza* group could offer some hope. It can't be the

only thing, though. I think there's a lot of things with Salinas, but it might help, but

I'm not starting it over there. [laughter]

[End of interview]