

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Maximiliano Mendoza

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Juan Ramírez and Kimberly Arias
May 4, 2015

Transcription by Elliot Locke and Technitype Transcripts

Ramírez For the purpose of the video, can you say your full name?

[00:00:09]

Mendoza Maximiliano Mendoza is the name I was baptized, and the *gabachos* couldn't say "Maximiliano," so they would call me Max.

Ramírez When were you born?

[00:00:22]

Mendoza 1934, October the 12th.

Ramírez Where were you born?

[00:00:29]

Mendoza Bristol, Colorado.

Ramírez You're married, correct?

[00:00:35]

Mendoza Yes.

Ramírez Do you have any children?

[00:00:37]

Mendoza Yes.

Ramírez How many?

[00:00:39]

Mendoza I have two girls now, and I had three boys once upon a time. Two were killed, and the other one committed suicide. And it's stuff that, you know, that happens, but I know that they're in a better place.

Ramírez Can you tell us a little bit more about your daughters?

[00:01:01]

Mendoza Well, I have two daughters. One went to Sac State, she graduated and got a job with the Medical Center. She started there about eighteen, nineteen years old, and then she became a director. Then she was able to go all over the United States, and she retired.

Ramírez Did you have any input on why she became a director?

[00:01:35]

Mendoza Well, I think because she was bilingual, and the thing is that she conducted herself very good, and she was smart and she was beautiful.

Ramírez And now a little bit about your personal life. So you said you were born in Colorado, but were you also raised there?

[00:01:58]

Mendoza Well, we left during the Depression and we went to Wyoming, to Lovell, Wyoming. We were there—I'd say we got there about 1935, *por ay*, and we stayed there until 1939. That was around the time my dad died.

Ramírez How old were you?

[00:02:28]

Mendoza Well, I'd say I was about five years old, *y todavía me acuerdo*.

Ramírez Before your father died, what did he do for a living?

[00:02:40]

Mendoza Well, my dad came from San Pablo, Meoqui Chihuahua, and he worked in the mines over there, *las minas del cobre*, and when that revolution was getting ready to go, he left about 1908, 1907, and he came to the United States and he worked in the mines up until he married my mother, and he worked in the mines in Colorado.

Ramírez And did your mother work or was she a stay-at-home mom?

[00:03:16]

Mendoza Well, she was one of those women that had to stay home because there was a *lot* of work at home. Lot of people don't understand what a woman goes through. She had twelve kids, so, you know, there's a lot of work there, and then keeping us in line, *hijo*. [laughter] But she was good.

Ramírez How many brothers and how many sisters do you have?

[00:03:37]

Mendoza We came from a family of twelve. I was the youngest.

Ramírez And how many older brothers and—

[00:03:46]

Mendoza Well, there was seven boys and five girls. Let's see. Seven and then three, that's four. There were four older brothers and then there was three sisters, and then there was another two more brothers, and then two more sisters, and then me.

Ramírez How were your experiences shaped after the death of your father?

[00:04:24]

Mendoza Well, I couldn't understand it, because it's something that when you're an adolescent, I mean, you don't know what's going on, and when you experience death like that, I mean, it's very strange. And I remember when he died, I asked my mom what was wrong with him. He wasn't talking. Because back in them days, they'd bring the deceased home and that's where you'd do the *velorio* and the praying. And when he wouldn't respond, I didn't talk to him, because I felt what good would it do? So I asked my mom, I says, "What happened here?"

And she said, "Well, he died."

I said, "What is that?"

She said, "You remember those flowers I had outside last year?"

"Yeah."

"Remember they died? Those leaves that fall off the tree, they die too. That's where your dad died, too."

I never did like it. And when you're little like that, you want to beat *la muerte*, but you can't. But, anyway, he was a beautiful man. I want to make a trip to Chihuahua, where he was from, just to see if I have cousins and just salute them and hug them and love them, you know, because that was my *jefito*. I never had a chance to go to Mexico.

Ramírez How did that affect your growing up? How did the death of your father or just like your whole childhood, affect you growing up in your neighborhood?

[00:06:01]

Mendoza Well, after I started school, it's a lot different, because your mom always hugs you and kisses you and loves you and speaks to you in Spanish, but when I started school, it wasn't permitted. Those people still had those pioneer attitudes, and they used to have signs that would say "No Mexicans or dogs allowed." Even though I couldn't read, but my brothers would say, "Well, we can't go in there. *Ahi no se permite. Tienen ahi un letrero diciendo 'aqui no quieren perros o mexicanos.'*" And that was ugly, but, nevertheless, we made it because we were strong, and we're here and we're still marching.

Arias Getting into the involvement, were you a Fellow or Felito? Were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:07:01]

Mendoza Yes, when the Movimiento started here in Sacramento, there was a political party called La Raza Unida Party, and it started in Crystal City, Texas. They must be half of the children, how they were being treated in schools, where about 75 percent of the *gente* were Latinos, but they had no position on the school boards, city council, the police department. So when they start treating their children, well, the people got together and that's when *el Partido de la Raza Unida* was born. And they brought it to California. Anyway, me and my *familia* and friends, we all got involved in it and we just loved it.

Ramírez What year did they bring it to you?

[00:08:03]

Mendoza Oh, I'd say about 19—I want to say at least 1969. Would you like to see a picture of it?

Ramírez Sure.

Arias Yeah, of course!

[00:08:19]

Mendoza Yeah! I brought this picture with me because it's so beautiful, and I wish it would come back again because we're needed here in this world and we got good ideas. So the other day I was going through some of my paperwork and I started realizing that there was more to it. I didn't really want to bring this stuff, but I brought it because I guess God told me to bring it. But this is us. Look at how beautiful it is. What does it say up there on the top?

Ramírez *"Hoy sera buen día."*

[00:09:09]

Mendoza And I got that out of the days when Pancho Villa and the Emiliano Zapata and all those guys, they had a little saying. "It used to be like this, but it's gone now." Here we call it "once upon a time." But this is us right here, and it was beautiful. These people are all grown and gone, and this is me right here.

Arias The top one?

[00:09:38]

Mendoza Mm-hmm. I became the secretary/treasurer of the Movimiento, and we had a lot of fun. I mean, I wish those days would come back. The only way they can come back is through you guys, because I'm *very* dissatisfied with how this government has been treating everybody that's poor, people of color.

Arias Would you say your participation in the Movement influenced your career and all that?

[00:10:13]

Mendoza Well, it motivated me. It just gave me that little more *gusto*, because this is the way we were brought up too. You know, my mother always used to tell us, “Don’t get into arguments. *Es mejor que haga un loco que dos.*” We could realize that, but as kids, it’s tough because sometimes you feel that they understand and that’s when sometimes we have to put up our dukes and take care of it. It was tough and it was ugly sometimes. We spoke Spanish. They’d grab us by the hair and take us to the bathroom and wash our mouth and then tell us, “Don’t speak this filthy language here. Speak American.” And we were just learning English because we were taught Spanish first at home.

Arias Did all your siblings not speak English?

[00:11:17]

Mendoza Well, my mother was an American, she was born here, and she came from French and Spanish, and her mother was full-blooded Indian, American Indian. She’d seen a lot *también*. She only went to the fourth grade. But my dad was the genius. He was the one that taught everybody how to read in Spanish and sing, because that’s the way they do it in Mexico, and, to me, those are so beautiful. All my sisters sung, and my brothers all learned how to play the guitar and the violin, the banjo, accordion, so we always had entertainment like on a Sunday.

Arias So moving on to the study of your background, did you go to school in Sac State?

[00:12:19]

Mendoza No, no, but I had friends that went there. Matter of fact, one of the professors that taught political science, his name was José Serna, Joe Serna, and he was raised in a little town called Lodi. That wasn't too far from where I was raised. We had the same concept of what life is, but, see, they were fortunate that they were able to further their education, where a lot of us, we stayed. It was tough.

What ruined my education was the fact that I was in the hospital so many times. Back then, they didn't have tutors. Then we lived out in the *campo*, so who would come out there? But it was hard, but I tried to learn. My major in school, I was good in math, and the teacher sometimes would get mad at me because I would do my problems in my head, and he wanted to see how I did it. Then I would do division, short division, and he didn't like that. He wanted me to express the whole long division, you know. But it came natural to me and I loved it. A lot of the times we'd go to the grocery store, my wife and I, and we'd buy groceries and I already knew how much everything was going to cost.

Arias Before they rang you up. [laughs]

[00:13:49]

Mendoza Only the taxes was on there, I couldn't include them yet, but I was close.

Arias You said your friends attended Sac State. Did they take any anthropology courses or anything? Did they ever talk about that?

[00:14:04]

Mendoza Well, I had—he was a professor. Let me see. Sam Rios. I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He was an anthropology professor. But not really. You

know, the only time I'd see them is when we'd have meetings or we'd get together, but other than that, I mean, I worked in construction.

Ramírez So you know how you said you weren't too involved. So just being aware of the cultural issues that were going on, did that influence your participation in this Movement?

[00:14:39]

Mendoza Oh, yeah, because you know what? Whatever it was to better our people, I was there. And when we say "people," that even includes all the people of color, because if we benefit, they benefit. So it was a Movimiento that had a lot of spirit and a big heart.

Arias Can you recall any activity or any participation that was part of the Movement? You said you were involved in it.

[00:15:09]

Mendoza Well, there was a lot of *marchas* back then, and I remember one that came from Calexico and came all the way to the State Capitol, and these people walked it all the way. Well, of course, we had to welcome them, so we were all there, and it was big. I mean, there was a lot of people from all over Northern California and also Los Angeles had come in, and it was just a beautiful gathering of Latinos.

Arias You say the whole participation, it was an incredible movement. Do you say it changed you personally?

[00:15:51]

Mendoza Well, yeah, but it just kind of gave you more motivation. It made you realize there's more work to be done, *me entiendes*, which we could see, and

participation would help that element of things to get done. But there's a lot of times people are afraid to, oh, let me say bite the hand that feeds you, sort of say, and to me, those people benefited also, but I haven't seen any changes. I still see *el barrio bien cateado* and needs help, but it takes good people to make it better for all of us.

Arias You talked a lot about your mom. What role do you believe the Chicanas played in this Movement, the stay-at-home moms or the Chicanas involved in the marches too?

[00:16:46]

Mendoza Well, back then, they didn't have any kind of *movimiento* because their job was home, take care of the kids. They'd get sick, they had different *hierbas*, herbs, to cure us, but they were busy all the time. But she was a lady that knew how to make, let me say, candles, she knew how to sew. When you were sick, she knew how to get you out of that bed and running. I mean, to me, them women were miracle workers, and my *jefita* was one of them.

Ramírez Not just your *jefita*, but the other women that were in the marches, what role did they have?

[00:17:34]

Mendoza Well, you see, this has been a long time ago. See, back then, we didn't have none of this. This is way before the Second World War. So as far as *raza* coming together, we weren't there yet. But in a way of speaking, we were, because we still celebrated El Cinco de Mayo and the 16th of September. That was tradition. But as far as getting together and trying to make it better in politics, we weren't there yet.

Ramírez So Chicanas weren't really a big factor at the time?

[00:18:16]

Mendoza Well, *el Chicanoismo* didn't start until, let me say, the forties when the war started. And how that got started, I'm going to say it was Mexico when Mexico helped the United States in the war effort, and Mexico gave the United States a squadron, and those guys, those pilots, the whole squadron called themselves the Royal Chicano Air Force. Well, Canada had the same thing. They'd call themselves the Royal Canadian Air Force, and then, of course, they had the Royal Police Mounties.

Pero Chicanoismo started with La Pachucada, Tin Tan. I don't know if you guys have ever heard of him. It was just about the same time as Cantiflas. I don't know if you've heard of him. But *el Chicanoismo* really started in Mexico City, and that's where it started spreading into the United States. So, anyway, it's a beautiful history of how we all got together.

Arias You said you were secretary/treasurer of the Movement?

[00:19:34]

Mendoza Yes.

Arias Can you tell us more about your position and more of what you did?

[00:19:41]

Mendoza Well, we had a steering committee, and this steering committee—headquarters was mostly—well, everybody had some sort of say, and we took care of Northern California here in *Sacra*, and then, of course, it was brothers from Southern California. We'd try to have a big convention at least once a year where we could

exchange different ideas and sit and get to know each other. Whenever there was going to be some sort of a *movimiento*, we'd all get together and help each other.

You know, heck, I never knew what Stanford was. I had to go to Stanford. I don't know if you guys have ever heard of Jim Plunkett. He was a Heisman Trophy winner from Stanford football, and during that time, on his helmet he had "Chicano Power," and the coaches didn't like that. But he was dedicated, too, so, to me, you know, I respect that man, and I became an Oakland Raider because that's where he really found himself. And *el Chicano* is still here and it'll always be here.

Ramírez What other organizations were you involved in?

[00:21:01]

Mendoza Well, there was groups here in Sacramento that when they started, there was—we have a Washington Neighborhood Center, and, anyway, I met the director. Sometimes in the winter months when we weren't working, I'd go in there and find out what we could do. They needed a basketball court. So, anyway, I told him, I said, "Well, you know what? You've got a good organization here. Let's call these big contractors, these companies that sell concrete as a joint venture, and get them all to donate so many yards of concrete, and we'll build this thing." So we did. I'll never forget him. His name was Beligeri, and he had a brother-in-law that was part of the Mexican-American War veterans, so I got to meet him. And they gave me an award, a plaque. Anyway, just things that we had to do to help each other, so, to me, it was something good when you can help the less fortunate, and there was so many kids that didn't have no place to go, and being that it was a *barrio*, well, now you can play your basketball here.

Arias Were there a lot of those kind of—what were they exactly called?

[00:22:30]

Mendoza Well, here in Sacramento, a lot of these guys—this is a plaque that they gave me. [demonstrates] Then the rest of the time, I dedicated in helping make our community stronger, and they gave me this plaque from the county board of supervisors. [demonstrates]

Ramírez What was this one exactly for?

[00:23:01]

Mendoza That one there's for beautification, cleaning the streets, making it look better, you know, helping, whatever we could do to help the community. This is that Franklin Boulevard. I don't know if you guys are acquainted with Franklin Boulevard. This is before we had sidewalks in there, and it took time, but we got it together.

Ramírez These organizations helped Chicanos or poor neighborhoods, as you mentioned. What the goal of these organizations mainly?

[00:23:38]

Mendoza Well, this was run by the county, and, see, the county, it was an embarrassment to the county, really, because nothing was being done out here, so a group of us got together and we formed a committee, we had meetings, what we could do to make it better for all of us, you know streetlights, sidewalks, things that had public safety in view. So we were part of making that a reality, but there's still more to be done and I'm still fighting this thing because I feel that we've got to be heard, and a lot of us don't see what's going on there, because if you're born poor

and, let's say, if the toilet doesn't flush or the water leaks from the roof, I mean, that's the norm to a lot of people. They feel this is the way life is. Well, it isn't. I feel that everybody has to be accountable, everybody's got a responsibility, but a lot of times being poor and ignorant, sometimes they take advantage of the people.

Arias How did these changes impact your relationship with your family, your friends etc.? Did you guys get stronger together?

[00:24:56]

Mendoza Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, it makes you stronger because now you got some sort of view of the destination that you want to accomplish, and you meet a lot of people, too, a lot of important people, and then sometimes those important people are afraid, because nobody likes to be exposed. Especially if you're doing something for *el barrio*, lot of people feel like, "Why do you want to help them out for?" You know, it's an attitude like, "I got mine. To heck with you."

And then from there I started devoting my time into schools, and that's what I've been doing and I'm still doing it, because I feel like the schools need us to, because what we have to say to you guys, we'd like to say it to them too.

Arias Can you tell us more about that? What do you do with the schools?

[00:25:59]

Mendoza Well, here's some of my awards. I got this one, I got this one, then I got this one. These awards, sometimes they surprise you because you don't think they're going to acknowledge it, but there's somebody there on your side. So this is what I do. I'm eighty-one years old, and I still go to the school board meetings and people that know me still call me Mr. Mendoza.

Arias Did you do certain projects with these schools, like, let's say, gathering more books for the students?

[00:26:35]

Mendoza Well, I'm not into that. What I'm into is more public safety. Let's clean the place up, because a lot of these schools, you'd be surprised, especially the schools in *el barrio*, they're dirty. And then, of course, the people that are responsible, they don't want to clean it up. And then the ones that they have to do the cleanup, they only have one or two and they can't do it, so they laugh about that. So it's hard for a person to work under those conditions, because we expect more, and when we don't see more, we feel like, "Hey, what's going on here?"

But anyway, it's something that you guys are going to be inheriting. You guys are going to see this, too, and you guys have to change it, because this doesn't change just overnight. This takes years and years, but once you guys get acquainted and all the students that are in school get acquainted, then it makes it easier, because now we're aware of it. You'd be surprised how many people are not aware of this, and then you'd be surprised of some that are, but it seems that it's impossible to do it because we're all afraid sort of say. But we have to get the people that say, "Okay, I defend this country, I fought in the wars, I'm going to defend that here at home." We have to have that attitude for our kids, and all it boils down is respect. You respect me, *órale*, let's do it together. And that's something that sometimes we have to present ourselves, introduce ourselves.

Ramírez So that involvement really got you together with your family?

[00:28:29]

Mendoza Oh, yeah, all my *carnales*, all my brothers and sisters that were young enough and energized enough to get this going, yeah, we got all involved. It's all *gente*. You know you've heard—they say it now, “bro.” Back then, it was “brother,” *carnal*, and it's always been that. And to me, anytime that you can do something to help somebody, that's in the Bible, that's your brother. And, to me, that's beautiful when we can share some of the good thoughts with other people, you know?

Arias Yeah, right. Looking back at your experiences throughout the Movement, would you say there's any issues that are still unresolved?

[00:29:17]

Mendoza Well, yes, it is, because we've come a long way and some of our leaders that are there now, they're contented, but it's so sad. Like right here in Sacramento, to me it'd be so easy because this is the State Capitol. See, what they have to do is put on their tennis shoes and come into the *barrios* so that they can see it themselves, but if they're collecting a check and not doing anything, I mean, what's the matter? But we have to have some sort of communication with them *también*. At least once or twice a year, we can go see you guys and see “What is your *résumé*? What have you done for us?” Because over here we need a little bit more help. Keep them also knowing that you're not here to just to be here; you're here for us. And that's what I'm looking at. Maybe it's still young, but with your smile, you could be a good politician, and if somebody would tell you, “Hey, I need you out here in *el barrio*. Check it out for me,” would you come out? That's your duty. See, that's what's going on here in Sacramento. Nobody cares. But, to me, this is supposed to be

a model city for the whole state of California because this is where the laws are made. And it's pretty silent and it shouldn't be.

Ramírez What do you think are the major issues that you feel like are unresolved?

[00:30:57]

Mendoza Well, one of the biggest issues is economics. To eliminate poverty, we have to have some sort of economics to help resources, and there's a lot in our *barrio*. I mean, if they would do the job, then people would be working.

The other thing, too, that I feel is that there's a lot of young kids that sometimes they don't want to go out and play some hoops, they want to go take their car, take their girlfriend for a drive, buy a hamburger or a taco. That costs us money. I think that this government is intelligent enough to say, "Okay, you guys, you guys want to work? This is what we're going to do. We're going to give you guys also jobs." Because when you got money in your pocket, you're happy. When you ain't got no *feria* in your pocket, well, it's not working, you see. "Well, I can't make it."

And those are the things I'm seeing that—they talk about child labor. Well, they're the ones that introduced it, because every one of us, when we were kids, were out there in the *campo* picking tomatoes, *ciruela*, *chabacano*, *lo que sea*, but they were hush because *el rancho* was making the money, and he was in violation even back then, but nobody would expose him. Those are things that never will diminish. They'll always be here. They break the law more than anybody does.

And then the other thing I don't like is when they start saying the gangbangers and all this bull. To me, that's an insult, because every good parent that has kids, you

know, they're not going to tell them, "*Dale ganas*. Get out there and gangbang."

Heck no. You have an argument with your parents.

The other day I met with one of the directors from the Department of Transportation from the county, and I was taking him around my *barrio* so he could see the necessity of them taking part in making it better. There was two Black guys, and they were just standing there on the corner when we came to a stop, and he seen them, and right away he said—he was profiling. That's how these guys are taught. And he said, "Hey, look. That's part of a gang."

I took it in pretty smooth and I says, "Well, could be, but they don't have a hoodie on." And I showed him up right there with a simple *pablarita*, you know. But these people got to understand that when you see somebody and you're profiling already, that's wrong. If you don't even know him, how can you accuse him? And that's what's happening today here in America with all the *chismes* all over the United States. I mean, it's ugly. And it's good, because you know what? They're going to have to correct this. But can you imagine? He's the director and already he's already profiling the people, *la gente*, just because they weren't White. I don't know if this helps in your—

Arias No, no, it definitely does.

[00:34:02]

Mendoza But that's what I see, that's what I feel, and it hurts me a lot because they don't think of us very much. And then when you have *familia* that just come back from the war, and what did they go over to defend *that*, to defend all the ugly profiling, the minimum wage that they pay our people? My mother would call them

sin verguensas. But it's funny how they exploit us, but you know what? We want that little *feria* because it takes two now to make the payment on the house and put some food on the table and send the kids to the school. And it's tough. And I admire you guys because I know you guys are not rich, but your parents were your backbone. And keep doing what you're doing.

Arias Are you still involved, or has that whole experience influenced what you do now?

[00:35:07]

Mendoza Well, you know, it's hard to go back to that, because sometimes people are comfortable where they're at, but once you get involved, it'll always stay in you forever. And the ones you meet, there's a lot of them that have died, have gone home, but that concept is still there. That dream of someday being respected as a human being, we're waiting for that day. Some of us might never see it, but I'm hoping you guys get a chance to see it and my grandchildren get to see it, because you know what? Those are things that's needed. And this is the richest country in the world. I used to salute the flag when it said "liberty and justice for all." I stop right there, because that's very crucial. When they say "justice for all," show me. You understand what I'm saying? And that's how I look at it.

It takes a person with a lot of strength to accept that and keep marching. To me, to see all these Black people taking it in the chin and keeping their chin up, can you imagine how hard it is for them? And the thing that I've learned over the years is that every African American, especially the boxers, as soon as they finish that fight as a winner, they always thank God. I've never seen an Anglo Saxon say that. And to

me, that's strength. That's power. Just imagine if they would never thank God in the open. It'd be worse, because they people have been put—Hitler was bad. This is bad too. But that's the way I look at it, and maybe I'm anti-American, but *así es*.

Arias How would you describe how the Movement impacted Sacramento or where you are right now?

[00:37:20]

Mendoza You know, when the Movimiento started, we didn't have any representation as far as people in the legislature and the assembly. We didn't have none of that. We had very few, but they were very, very silent. After that, they started opening the door, and slowly, because the ones that went to college, graduated with a degree, especially political science, the door was open for them, but that's the door I want to see can we come in and see what you guys have been doing? Because I feel that we have to be inquisitive, because they haven't done enough.

Ramírez So you haven't really seen major changes since—

[00:38:09]

Mendoza Not really, not really, because, you know, if you work hard, that's a satisfaction there, but if you see other people working hard and it gets worse and they haven't accomplished because, you know, if you're not working, it's hard to raise a family. And then when they blame us for the drugs and all that, well, you know what? I look at it this way. If it wouldn't be for Hollywood, we wouldn't have this drug problem. Hollywood buys a lot of drugs. The government knows it. And then all of a sudden, they legalize it, just like over there in Colorado it's going to be legal, well, heck you can smoke it anywhere. When we were kids, I mean, if they caught you

with a joint, you had to go do some time. But, see, now it's convenience. And it's the same thing with liquor, but liquor had a tax on it. And that's what this country's all about, taxation, but they don't give us no representation. And they legalize anything. And that's why we got so many penitentiaries today is because it's been an industry, and the people is the crop.

Ramírez When you were in the Chicano Movement, did you guys see that as a big issue?

[00:39:44]

Mendoza Oh, yeah, because we all knew that as kids from the time we started school, the police didn't respect us, called us "spicks." I don't know if they still use that word. It was very hurtful, you know, and, to me you know, I'd rather stay away from them. I'd see them, I'd cross the street. And again, that goes for my mother used to say *es major haga un loco que dos*. Get the heck away from them people. And that's what kept us away from getting in trouble.

But I defended myself even in school. Sometimes those principals would try to put the blame on you, and you had to defend yourself. I remember the day they started a little club there, and this one kid came up to me. He says, "Why don't you join our club." It had to do with public speaking.

Well, I didn't know what it was, public speaking, back in them days, you know. But I said, "Nah, I don't want to be in there with you bunch of sissies." So it never became a reality, but I was always one that would always speak out. In other words, *yo no me dejaba*.

I remember one time I was going to—well, let me say high school. I only went to the tenth grade. It was raining, and I was on the football team. I could throw a football fifty yards, no problem, but I couldn't run. So that day it was raining, and the guy that was the center, him and I started boxing, and we busted the fire alarm. It must have been, oh, at least 2,000 kids there. So all of them come out, and raining.

So the principal, he wanted to know who it did. So one of the other kids pointed at me. I was involved, and then Pat was a blonde kid, and back in them days, they used to wear these ducktails. Their hair was combed and they'd make it like a ducktail. You ever seen a duck?

Well, so, anyway, the principal said, "Five minutes, I want you in my office." So he beat me. So I was sitting outside the door listening to the whole conversation, and, yeah, he got on him and told him, he says: "If you do this again, you're outta here!"

So when I went in there, he threw the book at me, but then I told him—I confronted him. I said, "I overheard everything you said. It takes two people to dance, it takes two people to box, and you're going to say that I'm the cause of it?"

From that day on, every time he'd see me in the hallways, he'd address me as Mr. Mendoza. I was sixteen, going on seventeen, and I kept that tradition for even now. People that know me and know my heart, they still call me Mr. Mendoza. But I earned that from that time *porque no me dejaba*.

Arias Going back to the Movement, you said you met a lot of famous people and a lot of activists. Would you say there's a certain individual that caught your eye, like that individual made a huge impact?

[00:43:18]

Mendoza Well, you know, there was so many. Well, my best impact of all of them was Anthony Quinn and Gilbert Roland. Those were my two favorites, and the reason why they were my favorites was because they were born in Chihuahua, where my dad was from. So I took that with me all my life.

So back in, oh, I'm going to say the beginning of the seventies, we tried to form a *concilio*. At that time, Anthony Quinn was at COP. Back then, it was COP. Now it's University of the Pacific. We had a meeting with some of the guys that were trying to form the *concilio* and I went to that meeting. We were looking for people to help us to get a good fundraiser. So I mentioned it to one of my friends, I said, "You know, Gilbert Roland and Anthony Quinn, both of them are *Chihuahuenses, de Chihuahua*. And right now, Anthony Quinn is in Stockton. If somebody could go over there and see if he could help us do a benefit, that would help."

So, man, he said, yes, he would come. And we had it right there at the Memorial Auditorium, and there was a lot of important people. But it's so beautiful, that a lot of times we feel that these elite don't want nothing to do with us, but they do. And, to me, it was beautiful to meet him. He was a big, tall man, and I'm going to say he's part half Irish and Indian. But he did come and we did have this *concilio* here, and those are beautiful things when they can come help the people.

Ramírez Looking back at your awards, can you show us a little bit more and explain little bit more in depth of what they were?

[00:45:23]

Mendoza Well, this one here was given to me because where I lived, they had this ugly-looking chain-link fence. And I started looking at other neighborhoods, how beautiful the entrance into the school. So I went to the principal and I told him, I said, “You know, this place should be cleaned up.”

So, back then, we had a school board member by the name of Manny Hernandez, and this was his area, so I took this issue to him and I told him, I said, “Man, this looks like third world. It’s nasty, ugly, and dirty, no sidewalk.” So this award was given to me for that.

Now, I brought this here because this is part of the bulletin that the principal put in here, and then my wife worked at the school, so this is a little bit on that project that they did. If you want to read it, go ahead.

Ramírez “Thanks to the efforts of Mrs. Mary Mendoza’s husband, Max Mendoza, the City of Sacramento’s planning to landscape and build a decorative wrought-iron fence at the Ventura Street entrance to our school. The project will take place within the next few months. Some of our students may be asked to help plant some shrubs and trees. Attached is a drawing of the beautification project.”

[00:46:53]

Mendoza So that was my—but I had another one before that. I had a clipping on that one. We called it the Fiesta de las Patrias, and that was a festival we had and we raised a lot of money. Back then, I knew a lot of friends that were going to Sac State, there were professors and art people. They had MEChA going. Man, we did a beautiful show for them. We had Mexican dancers, the food. The community, the Mexican business community donated all kinds of stuff to help us out, and that was a

success. That was my first beginning, and then everything came natural. You do one, you got to do another one and another one. So that never got a citation. I got some recognition through the newspaper.

This one here was for the beautification. This one here was a cleanup. This little school in *el barrio* was so dirty, *hijo*. This was one here was given to me because when I seen this little school and I go around the area and I seen it all nasty and dirty, I didn't know who owned the property. Some would say it was the city, and some would say it was Parks and Recreation. So, finally, I hooked up with a Hindu that was the superintendent, and I asked him, "Who owns this? They say that you guys are responsible."

So he didn't know, because he's just a worker, too, so he would clean it for me. And then later he told me, said, "Well, this belongs to the Department of Transportation."

So, finally, one time I went downtown and I found out that it was the Department of Transportation, but this property was given to the school, but the school couldn't build anything like a dwelling or a structure. They could make a parking lot if they wanted to, but it's a poor neighborhood, and when poor neighborhoods come into existence, people don't want to do a damn thing. But this is what mothers told me. "We'd like to have a parking lot here because there's no parking for the people," okay?

So, anyway, they gave me this one. And then this one, too, is for that same project, but this was later, because it was dirty, so we all got together. Diana Rodriguez, she's one of the board members, she got some of her friends and we

cleaned it up again, and then we had people from La Familia here in Sacramento, it's an organization to help the poor and people that need help, and they had people to come out there too.

But this is what I like to do, is expose them, to let them to know stop lying, because if you own the property, you got to be accountable. Now, there's one guy there on that team, I want to say he's the superintendent, he's over all this. His name is Jim Dobson [phonetic]. I'd like to get that man fired, because you know what? If we had a better person, we would clean it up. And you know who I would suggest? A *mexicano*, because that's all we do is clean yards and know how to do gardening work. We don't need these guys that just sit around and collect big money and don't do nothing for us. So that's what I'm striving for. I want to get him so bad, I can taste it. [laughter]

So that's about it, and I'm still chuggin'. I'm going to be eighty-two years old, and the only thing that keeps me down a little bit, I have a sciatic nerve and the doctors tell me that I need two knee replacements. *Pero my corazon* is still there. It takes me a little longer to get there, but I'll get there.

Ramírez You said that there are still a lot of poor neighborhoods and there's still a lot of these challenges that we need to face. Do you see yourself being involved with these new challenges?

[00:51:24]

Mendoza Oh, yeah! Matter of fact, I'm not giving up! Matter of fact, I came here early this morning just to find the location, because I don't like to be late, and then I started walking around this perimeter here and I started seeing here that they needed

some help on the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act], because a lot of us, you know, a curb is hard for us to get over, right? And they ought to make it better because it would also help people on wheelchairs, because they got parking, but they ain't got enough.

So, anyway, they told me that they were going to have a meeting here with the state. The state of California ADA was coming, and I want to talk to them, too, because I've been complaining with the city. The city is slick. The city has people that say, "Okay, you're going to be the coordinator," but they don't do *nothin'*. And that's something that I've been finding out, so sometimes I have to do my own legwork, because you know what? These people are professional liars. And I want to take it all the way to the state and expose it.

Because when this ADA came into existence, I found out about it because my brother was riding a bicycle, and where we lived, we didn't even have bike lanes, but he was going facing traffic because it's safer, and a car hit him and Highway Patrol wanted to give him citation. And when I found out about it, I said, "How can you give a citation if you don't even have a doggone public safety with a bike lane here? How can you get yourself—?" They dropped all that, and that's when I started realizing that there was a lot to be done in the neighborhood.

And you guys would be surprised, sometimes you can live in a neighborhood and you won't see this until you walk it. I used to go in my car, and I couldn't see it because you're paying attention to traffic, okay? And then I'd get on my bicycle, I could see a little bit better, but then when I walked it, there it was. You stumble on it.

So that's what I still want to do, I want to make sure that they can realize that it's a *barrio*, but you know what? "You guys have been lying to us."

This is what I got this morning, see. This is the California Department of Insurances. And it was just lucky that I went over there, because I had a complaint, even here at this campus. So when I went over there, the lady told me that they were having a meeting with one of the directors or coordinators today here. But I had this *asunto* with Mr. Senon [Valadez], and I said, "Well, which one should I go to?" And that's why I was about four or five minutes late, because I walked all the way over there to find out if them people had gotten here, because I want to talk to them too.

No, I don't give up. I don't give up. Because here's another thing, too, that God is with me and I have that power. Sometimes I get a little fed up, but He's the one that gives me that strength to continue.

Now, this is one of the issues that I'm seeing, and to me that's a violation. This guy here is on the sidewalk, but that's the only safe place he can be. So when they say access, we should all have access. And this 47th Avenue, there's a lot of traffic. It's near a light rail, where a lot of people have to catch the light rail. And when they have a little bitty sidewalk—and I call this a tightrope. This is a four-foot sidewalk. Can you see how pitiful that is? Poor design. The engineers that engineered that and they accepted it, they should all get fired. If I was in charge, I'd be firing these people.

Now this is the way it looks. Now, you tell me if a person in a wheelchair, I mean, they can't get there. So these are my complaints, and I need a lot of people to help, because, you know, the more the merrier. I'd like to see a rally right there at the

State Capitol where Jerry Brown can realize, okay we don't like that backseat no more.

And here's another picture of it, and this one here was taken, let me say, 2000, the year 2000. And this one here, the contractor was named Renew a Line. That was the name of the contractor and they were from Redding, California. And this was the county of transportation and the resident engineer, his name was Bob Ireland. So all this stuff helps, because if you got documentation and they're paying money to get these jobs done, there's no argument, because you got 'em right there. But I need that little door to open a little bit more, because I want to let these people know that you can't do that.

Now, here's another picture that I feel that should be—this guy is going down the street there because he's on one of those electric wheelchairs, and he's got to be out in the road because there's no room for him on the sidewalk. And then on the opposite side, it shows him on the sidewalk. Now, you get two wheelchairs like that going the opposite direction, I mean, somebody's got to stop. But you can't get off because it's one of those vertical curbs, monolithic curbs. A lot of times what ADA does is put a ramp, cut that curb and let somebody get off. But all they have to do here was widen that sidewalk. But that's another fight that I'm doing.

And I do all of this by myself because it's boring. A lot of people don't like it. My wife doesn't like it.

And then this is the light rail. There's a light rail right there where this 47th Avenue goes. And this one here, I want to say, is in compliance. This sidewalk here is 5'6". This one over here is 4', and this is a main artery, *entiendes?* And then his one

here, we took the picture of these kids, and they were coming down 47th Avenue, and you can—well, I don't have that one picture, but they were coming down. You know how African Americans, they play and give you them finger signs. Anyway, I took a picture of them way out there on the four-foot, and there was two walking out there in the street and the other two on top of the sidewalk because they were all walking together. But I have that picture too. But this goes to show you how things are in poor neighborhoods.

Ramírez Are there any other comments that you have, final?

[00:58:57]

Mendoza Well, my final comments is it's going to take a long time, and I think that the best way to stop all of this is when they have the next war, which I'm against, for all *raza* people, all people of color saying, "We're not going, because you ain't done your job here. What are we fighting for?" Let's be like Muhammad Ali. "Them people ain't never done nothin' to me. The only ones that have ever done anything to me is *you*." And to me, that's beautiful when a man can tell it like it is. And we got to get that attitude, too, in good faith, *con buenas palabras*, and all we're looking for is respect. You respect me, I got to respect you, too, sister or brother, and that's the way I look at the world. We only live one time, and let's live it good.

You guys got a lot of work to do, a *lot* of work, but it's going to be easier for your children and their children, because this is not just going to happen overnight. This is going to take maybe another 150 years, but we got to get there. And that's what I live for. Once I die and gone, at least knowing that somebody is going to make it better for the next generation so God can bless us all. But that's my vision.

Arias Thank you for coming out and answering our questions.

[01:00:35]

Mendoza Well, I hope this will help you guys, because you know what? Not too many people do this. And I do it because I love my *Sacra*, I love my *barrio*, and I love my *gente*. And you know what? We have a foresight that's unbelievable. Where we've been, we don't want people to go through it, but if they do, make the best of it.

[End of interview]