The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Juanishi Orozco

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Verónica García
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Transcription by Dylan Williams and Technitype Transcripts

García I'm going to ask you questions in regards to your identification. Please state your full name, please.

[00:00:10]

Orozco Juanishi Orozco.

García Please provide your birthdate.

[00:00:13]

Orozco My birthdate? February 18th, 1945.

García Please provide your marital status, please.

[00:00:21]

Orozco No marital status. Separated.

García Do you have children?

[00:00:29]

Orozco I have four.

García Interesting. Now I'm going to ask you in regards to your early life, okay?

[00:00:35]

Orozco Okay.

García Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:38]

Orozco I was born in Lincoln, California, north of Sacramento, north of Roseville. I was born there. My parents had migrated there from the Salinas Valley, but I only was there for two years. Then the family migrated to Rancho Cordova, so I grew up in Rancho Cordova when it was a ranch, prior to being what it is today. It used to be 1,000 acres of grapes, vineyards, orchards, dairies, tomato fields, hop fields, pear fields. It was very big agricultural area.

García What type of fields?

[00:01:17]

Orozco Oh, just about everything. I mean, there was grapes, tomatoes, hops, pears, dairies. I mean, you name it, there was everything there. It was a total ranch way of living until Aerojet General moved in, changed everything.

García How did he change that?

[00:01:40]

Orozco Well, in the late fifties, Aerojet General moved up from Los Angeles, up here by Folsom, and they were developing the Saturn V rocket engine for the moon landing, and they came up with a small core of engineers. They told the rancher they needed some houses for the engineers, so they took a couple of acres and built some houses. Then Aerojet General told the rancher, Roland Federspiel, who was the owner of the Rancho Cordova, told him that he was bringing 15,000 workers and he needed homes. So the rancher said, "Wipe it out." So they wiped out, over a period of

maybe ten years, all the orchards, all the fields, all the farm life, wiped it out, and it's Rancho Cordova today. Back then it was *Rancho* Cordova. So it changed my total reality from a farmworker way of life to suburbia.

García Interesting.

[00:02:48]

Orozco So I saw the total destruction of that way of life.

García That was in—

[00:02:53]

Orozco Late fifties, early sixties.

García What did your parents do for a living?

[00:03:02]

Orozco They worked on the ranch, so we were farmworkers. We weren't migrant farmworkers; we were the resident family on that ranch. So we worked all the fields. My father worked for the owner, Roland Federspiel, so as part of a farmworker family, you grow up working in the fields alongside your parents. Child labor laws and all that had no reality, so I was out there in the fields since my early childhood.

García As a child, you were able to work in the fields, despite your age?

[00:03:36]

Orozco I *had* to work in the fields, help supplement the family income. Yeah, like I say, back then, child labor laws were not enforced or in effect, whether it was on the books or not. As a way of life on a farm, working in the fields with a

farmworker family, either you participated or you had to participate to help the family income.

García How old did you work?

[00:04:05]

Orozco I worked from my earliest recollections as a young boy up to my eighteenth, nineteenth birthday, so pretty much my whole young youth was in the field. Bucking hay, working in the horse ranches, pear fields, every kind of vegetation, tomatoes, hops, pears, I worked all of that, all of that.

García Interesting. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Did they also work with you as well?

[00:04:41]

Orozco Yeah, yeah, the whole family. There was, I think, nine of us total in the family, brothers and sisters. My mother had been previously married to another man when she migrated from Mexico. She migrated to Fontana, married a man there, had three kids from him. I'm not sure the total story there, but she broke up from him, moved to Salinas Valley, where my grandfather, Domingo Vailla [phonetic], lived, and there in the Salinas Valley working in the fields, she met my father. Then they got together, started the Orozco family, then moved to Lincoln, where I was born, and then moved to Rancho Cordova.

García Please describe your experiences as a child and youth in your family and neighborhood.

[00:05:36]

Orozco The neighborhood was a ranch. Rancho, that was my neighborhood. There was no such thing as a suburbia, all that. Actually, at that time on that ranch, there was only five families, and we were one of the five families in that area. But we worked all those crops, so me and my brothers and sisters worked in those crops alongside my parents, since we were the resident farmworker family there.

This was also during the time of the Bracero Program, where they brought in a lot of the farmworkers up from Mexico. Well, my father made a deal with the *ranchero* to, you know, instead of dealing with the *coyote*, he would go to Mexico to his village in Zacatecas, bringing them in from his village up to work in our ranch in Rancho Cordova. So not only did I grow up alongside my immediate family, but I grew up alongside my father's village *compadres*, *familias*. So it was like living in Mexico. That was during the peak harvest season.

At the end of the *cosechas*, every year we'd pack up the station wagon, head south to Mexico, go to Zacatecas, where my father's ranch was at, where he lived, where he grew up in northern Zacatecas, and spend a good month there. That reality was like coming from this urban American society in the fifties, going back into his village, that was like stepping back a century because it was a *pueblo*, village, way of life, no electricity, no running water, none of the modern amenities that we are accustomed to. It was a rural way of living, living off the land. To me, it was very beautiful. I got to immerse myself into being in Mexico like in the 1800s, a *pueblo* way of living. It was beautiful. The men wore those big *sombreros* like you see in the movies, they really did, and they had the gun belts because everyone was packing. Even twelve-year-old kids were packing. [Spanish], they would say, payback for

family feuds and all that. Everybody was on horseback or on *burro*. We had the only vehicle in that area. So it was definitely stepping back in time and seeing how rural Mexico was.

Then after that, we would go to my mother's *pueblo* in Jalisco, which was more urbanized, a little bit more modern. It was a modern city in the contemporary fifties of Mexico. So the dichotomy between their two ways of reality and then living here in the United States on a ranch, going through the education and the school system here, it was a real cultural collision, the reality, the levels of reality that most of us experienced as farmworkers.

García You mentioned cultural collision. Can you emphasize more on that? [00:09:18]

Orozco Well, you know, growing up here and going through the educational system here, the American way of education, and then after every *cosecha*, which was in November, we would take three months off and go to Mexico, for, god, almost all my growing-up years, so I kind of almost simultaneously also grew up in Mexico. So we would go back for three months and then living that life, which was no reality to American modern society, it was two different cultures, two different worlds. Then trying to homogenize those into a worldview was a little difficult, because on the one hand, I was an American teenager here, going through school and football and baseball, you know, all the activities in school, then going to Mexico and then just dropping all that behind and immersing myself into be a *mexicano*, a *mexicano* with my roots in Mexico. And then meeting my ancestors, my *abuelos* and their way of

life, trying to bring that into one reality was a difficult task, an interesting task, but difficult.

García I'm going to ask you another question. Were you a Fellow or Felito during the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:11:09]

Orozco No, I was there during that time, but I wasn't in the project.

García I'm going to ask you another question about earliest memories of the Chicano Movement.

[00:11:19]

Orozco Oh, god. There's a lot. [laughs]

García What are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:11:32]

Orozco Well, this was around the time of the late sixties. After graduating from high school in late sixties, mid-sixties, I kicked around for a while, went to L.A., lived there for a couple years. My elder brothers came back here, enrolled here at City College in '65, 1965.

Then I got drafted into the army because of the Vietnam War, so I served two years in the army with an airborne division, the 101st Airborne Division, preparing to go to war in Vietnam, but I was released before my division was sent over.

Then when I got back here, I went to school at American River College, one of the minorities at that time on that campus, then late'69, transferred to Sac State. I had heard, prior to me going to Sac State, about these two crazy Chicano artists, José

Montoya and Esteban Villa, and I heard that they were at Sac State. So I thought, "Gee, man, this might be a great opportunity to find out what my Chicanoism is all about."

So I enrolled in Sac State, didn't meet them for the first semester. Second semester I was there, I met them at an exhibit of one of my other professors. I was in the gallery looking at some artwork, and then in walk José and Esteban and Richard Favela. There was only the four of us in the gallery. Nobody said anything, we were all just looking at the artwork, and I'm thinking, "Oh, my god, here's José and here's Villa." These are the forerunners of the Chicano Art Movement. I'm thinking, "Oh, my god, what am I going to do?"

Then they turned and left, and I go, "Oh, shit! I got to make a decision here. If I go with them, it's going to change my life totally. If I don't go with them—no, I better go with them."

So I followed them, been with them ever since, and that was my introduction into the Movimiento because José had been one of the organizers for the farmworkers at that time. So getting involved with him on an art level in the art department, he took us into the Movimiento, into the marches, the welgas, the boycotts, the strikes, you know, all of that.

So that immediate immersion into the Chicano Movement was getting involved directly with the United Farm Workers hierarchy. We became very close to Cesar Chavez and the Chavez family and Arturo Rodriguez, the current president of UFW, and Dolores Huerta and all the hierarchy of the UFW. We became very close

to them and got to the point where we were the farmworker organization here in Sacramento, the direct support group of the United Farm Workers.

So every time they came north, they would ask us to supply security for Cesar. So I got to be amongst one of his many bodyguards, personal bodyguards. The honor was to be next to him, not interacting with him. But back then, there were a lot of attempts on his life. So were told, "You got to take the bullet. Don't let him take it." So it was that kind of level of degree.

There was a lot of assassination attempts on his life, and one of the times there was one here in Davis that I was directly involved with, an assassination attempt on his life. So we had to really protect him. I mean, it got crazy. There was a park where Cesar was talking to about 300 farmworkers, and I was one of the three bodyguards with him on stage, directly behind him. There was a group behind us and then a perimeter. At some point, his secretary that was on stage with us leaned over to me and said, "As soon as he finishes his speech, he's going to want to jump into the crowd and shake hands with the crowd." And he said, "We can't let him do that. We got to get him to move on to his next talking gig."

And at that point. Cesar turns around and looked at us and says, "Oh, yeah? Watch this."

Then Richard Ibana [phonetic] said, "Okay, let's get ready. He's gonna move."

Soon as he did that, he jumped into the crowd, and we go, "Oh, damn! We got to go after him."

And at the instant of us almost jumping off the stage to follow him, behind us we heard this yell, “Rifle!” and we froze.

We went like, “What?” We looked at each other like, “Did you hear what I heard?”

Then in the next instant, we heard it, “Rifle!”

We dove into the crowd, pushed people aside, grabbed women, old women, threw them, grabbed babies, we just shoved people aside and we went right at him. He had his back to us, and the farmworkers in front of him noticed that were coming like this. We’re coming to get him because somebody had a rifle.

So Cesar at that point saw that there was some activity going on, so he turned around and he saw us coming at him like this, so his body went limp because he knew that we had to grab him. So he went limp, we grabbed him and said, “Sorry, Chief.” [laughs] So we kind of bundled him up.

By that time, the highway patrol and the sheriff’s department had opened a corridor to his vehicle, so we grabbed him and ran to his car and said, “Sorry, Chief,” and then we threw him in the car and they took off. The highway patrol and the sheriffs provided the security for him to get him out of Davis. Sure enough, there was a guy in this church that was behind us that had a steeple, that he was up there with a high-powered rifle and he was going to assassinate Cesar. The city police, Davis city police, chased him and caught him.

García Was the guy caught?

[00:18:30]

Orozco Yeah, he was caught. So security for Cesar became real. I mean it was real. There was attempts. We knew there was constant attempts on his life. So whoever was designated to be his bodyguard, that was the understanding, you better be ready to take a bullet because it could be coming at any minute. So it was my way of getting immersed into the Chicano Movement at that level, and that was one aspect.

But also at the same time, simultaneous to that, being at Sac State, I got involved in MEChA. MEChA was very alive and very, very pronounced, with several hundred members. In MEChA, they were very actively involved in the Movement, in the strikes and the boycotts, supporting the UFW, supporting Chicano Studies, Ethnic Studies and all that, all those activities.

Also because José was also part of the Sacramento Concilio, which was a counseling organization here in town, we got involved in the community activities on a local level. So my involvement in the Chicano Movement was multidimensional, everything from the artistic side to being a bodyguard for Cesar, but being involved also in the cultural activities of local Sacramento.

García Interesting.

[00:19:59]

Orozco Yeah, so it was deep, it was very deep. I just happened to be right at the—like Elvia [Ramirez] said in her interview, right at the center of the storm. It was incredible, incredible times.

García How did other Mexicans or Mexican Americans, Latinos react to the term *Chicano* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:20:29]

Orozco Well, like Elvia said in her interview, having worked or still working with United Farm Workers, you still deal with *mexicanos*, and *mexicanos* are very proud of their nationalistic reality. As we come in as Chicanos, they're going like, "What is that? What is Chicano?" So we had to, I guess, educate or cultivate, let them know it's more of a political, social attitude, because being the descendants of *mexicanos* that have migrated north here to the United States, being born and raised in this society, we were very marginalized. We weren't really an integral part of American society. And at the same time, we really weren't known as *mexicanos* because weren't really born in Mexico or raised in Mexico. In that sense, were caught in the middle. We were caught in the middle of two worlds and being told by both sides, "You don't belong to either one of us."

As a group consciousness during that time, the evolution of the Chicano philosophy emerged, that we adopted both sides but neither side, and took on our own reality and created our own reality and our own philosophy and our own political actions and artist movements and cultural movements and all that. So trying to merge that with *mexicanos* has always been a trick, because that resistance that being a Chicano is a negative thing for them. For us, it's a way of life. It's an attitude and a way of life.

So, yeah, that's a touchy area because it's still going on. It hasn't stopped. It's still a situation that's happening. What the *mexicano* families are barely maybe catching on to is they raised their children here in the United States, they're becoming more Americanized, and since they're going into this educational system in this

country, they're starting to see another way of life, and maybe the Chicano Movement has something to offer them, an identity to offer them, because as they grow and mature in this society, marry in this society, and then their offsprings are going to become American citizens, they're going to go through the same changes that we went through in the early Chicano Movement, so that evolution is going to be continued. So, yeah, it's going to be interesting how that plays out.

García Interesting. Had you heard of the Civil Rights Movement at that time? [00:23:57]

Orozco That's an interesting question, because in the late sixties, early seventies in the United States, there were so many things going on counterrevolutionary, I guess you could say, because it was the Vietnam War, the Anti-War Movement was very strong and very powerful at that time, Martin Luther King, Jr. was doing the civil rights things in the South, in Selma, Alabama, and all that. You had in the North Malcolm X that was doing that whole thing. You had the Black Panthers in the Bay Area doing their thing. You has SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, the Chicago riots, the Berkeley riots, the free-speech riots, Cesar Chavez with the Farm Worker Movement, all happening, all of this happening simultaneously across the country in the late sixties and seventies.

So in a sense, the United States was going through a cultural revolution of its own, and that was raising the consciousness level of students, families, because if you remember back at those times, there was the situation with Kent State, where the killings took place, where the National Guard killed students for demonstrating against the war at Kent State. So, oh, yeah, there was a lot of violence going on at that

time. Here in Berkeley in the riots, they were stopping the trains that were taking the recruits to the ships to ship them to Vietnam to the war. People were laying across the tracks to stop the trains, and some were being run over by trains, they were being killed by trains. And then some of the marches and demonstrations in Berkeley against war, the National Guard also shot into the demonstrators. So there was a very violent cultural revolution going on at that time here in the United States that kind of brought all those conscious levels and all those political activities and movements kind of together, not as a united group, but as a consciousness, that raised a consciousness and gave more depth and meaning to not only to all of that, but also to the Chicano Movement.

García Interesting. Now I'm going to ask you questions regarding the Chicano and Chicana Movement, Chicano as a perspective. Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change you personally?

[00:26:55]

Orozco Oh, of course it did, totally. It evolved me into the person I am today. I mean, I always had that consciousness that there's something else about us as a *raza*. Sure, I grew up here in this country, in this society, and went through school and all that, went to college and did all those things that you should do and you're expected to do, but going through high school, I was a minority. There was only about three or four of us that were *mexicanos* or Mexicans Americans or whatever, and there was only two Blacks at that campus. So were a very small minority. So that always internalized for me, like, "Where do I fit?" And when I encountered the Chicano Movement, I go, "Yeah, this is it. This is where I belong. This is home for me. This is

reality. This is who I am and why I am." And doing the things that we were doing through the Art Movement and the Culture Movement and all that was absolutely correct and what I wanted to devote my life's energies to. So it was very important for me to come up with a consciousness, I guess that you could say, in that reality.

I helped form, along with José and Esteban and Ricardo, form the Royal Chicano Air Force, and in that, we also formed the Centro de Artistas Chicanos that Elvia was talking about. I was very instrumental in all of that. I was very instrumental in doing a lot of the big murals here in town. That's my main artistic form. I'm a muralist. I paint monumental murals, I paint monumental murals in San Diego and Chicano Park and Los Angeles. I paint murals here in Sacramento. I work with the California Arts Council and the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, working in the schools as a visiting artist for twenty-five years, working with MEChA high school students developing murals in their school. I go to Oregon. I'm doing murals up in Oregon right now. I'm constantly involved in doing murals as a profession. It's my profession. That's what I am.

I'm known mostly as a muralist, although within the context of the Royal American Chicano Air Force and the Centro, I'm also a silk-screen printer, I'm an art teacher, I'm a painter, I'm an arts educator. I'm involved with United Farm Workers Movement, I'm involved with political activities here in town. There's so many different levels of activity that I'm involved with over the time and continues to be, because I think it's very important that the Chicano Movement keeps growing and evolving to some level, I'm not even sure what, but I think it's very important to stay involved, stay committed and keep doing the things that we were doing, because I'm

assuming it was all correct. We did it for all the right reasons. We're doing it for all the right reasons.

I hope that answered your question. I'm not even sure if that was your question.

García It did.

[00:30:33]

Orozco Oh, okay.

García What role do you believe that Chicanas played in the Movimiento ?

[00:30:41]

Orozco Chicanas? Very important role. In our group, the Royal Chicano Air Force, we're criticized for being womanizers or anti—just not allowing women into the group. In reality, it's the total opposite of that. Because as Elvia was saying in her interview, we were part of also the Breakfast for Niños Program, the Washington Cultural Center. That was run by women, and we as a group cooperated with them, where they were so instrumental in working with us and supporting us, that we couldn't have accomplished a third of what we have accomplished without the support and the efforts of the women in the Movimiento, not only as directors of programs or counselors of programs or also artists or whatever, you know. We could not have accomplished the majority of what we did as a group if it had not been for the direct support of women, very strong women, very powerful women.

My ex has moved on to be the CEO of MALDEF in Los Angeles, and, like Elvia, her career has taken her places. Without the direct support of people like Rosemary Rasul, we couldn't have supported our cultural art centers without their

direct support. We couldn't have done it. So, yeah, it takes the union of the two, the union of opposites. Our philosophy called *inlakesh tu es mi otro yo*, "I am your other you. Without you, I can't do it." There's a mural in San Diego at Chicano Park, "Women hold up half the sky." I think that says it all. Yeah, without the women, we couldn't do it. You just can't do it. I can't see how you can.

García Now I'm going to ask you questions in regards to your role and contributions to the Movimiento Chicano. What did you personally initiate or help initiate in this Movimiento Chicano?

[00:33:18]

Orozco Well, there was quite a few things that I directly did. As a member of the Royal Chicano Air Force, the Centro de Artistas Chicanos, I went into the schools teaching *barrio* art to the MEChA groups throughout Northern California, so many high schools, I can't even name them all.

García Just in Northern California?

[00:33:48]

Orozco At that period of time, yeah, because it was within my regional grasp. So I would go into the high schools, work with the MEChA students developing mural and silk-screen programs, drawing and painting and doing that, and then the other involvements with the [unclear] and all that other stuff.

But the other thing that I was also directly involved with, all of that was happening simultaneously, all those different activities in very, very fluid times, there was lot of activities, there was a lot of things going on, but there was something missing within the cultural context of the group. At that time, there was a Sacramento

Concilio that had a counseling program, and there was a visiting counselor, Dr. Arnoldo Solis, and he was working with the counselors in that program, which were David Rasul, Tera Romo, José Telementes, Sid Nau, a few other people, Eva Rangel and Gloria Rangel, and we started meeting and discussing that "There's something missing within the context of all this Movimiento. There's something that we're not doing, that we're not paying attention to, and we need to." We were trying to figure out what it was.

Dr. Sam Rios came in from the cultural anthropology section, so on a regular meeting we created this thing called the Cultural Affairs Committee, and in creating the Cultural Affairs Committee, we realized we haven't been doing ceremony and we lack ceremony in our way of living and the way were doing things. Although we were doing the Día de Los Muertos kind of thing, you know, it wasn't a formal activity. It was just like okay, you know, November comes around, Día de Los Muertos. You do that, you know, you do your *altaras* and all that.

So as a result of meeting with the Cultural Affairs Committee, Gina Montoya and a few other people, Elvia, we concluded that we needed to create Chicano *ceremonia*, not *mexicano ceremonia*, but Chicano *ceremonia*, because we're Chicanos *here*. We're here, this is our land, this is our reality, but we needed to go deeper within ourselves and create ceremony.

So we created four ceremonies that follow the solar system, the equinoxes and the solstices, the spring equinox, the summer solstice, the fall equinox, and the winter solstice. We concluded that in order to begin the life cycle in a ceremonial way, the spring equinox is life coming forth, all forms of life, humanity, animal, plant,

spiritual, whatever level you want to go on to. We created a ceremony to celebrate the beginning of life, life energy. Then that evolved into the summer solstice, which was the coming of age, and we converted that into like the Quiñceanera, the coming-out of a young girl. There is a pre-Columbian philosophy, Shilonen, which means tender young ear of corn, which is a young girl coming into her being, into herself. So we created a ceremony around that.

Then in the fall, Día de los Muertos. So we formalized a ceremony, like Elvia described when she was part of that ceremony. We did processions in the cemetery, a procession in the cemetery going to the four stations, four cardinal stations, and doing ceremony and then culminating that at an altar. Within the cemetery, there's an altar there. We would invite a Catholic priest to do Mass of the Dead, and we've been doing this for thirty some-odd years. So we'd have a Mass of the Dead, and this is late in the afternoon as the sun's starting to set.

Prior to that, we would do workshops in schools where we would make *mascaras* with the kids and the adults. So everybody came with their *mascaras* and their paraphernalia and their costumes and all that, but it was very real because every year that we did this, someone within the group or the group family passed away, so brought it into a real focus. We're celebrating our ancestors and our recent departed family, friends, or members, so it became very real. But at the end of the Mass, then we had the *Azteca* ceremony at dusk and by candlelight. It's just profound.

Then the winter one, Tonantzin, Virgen de Guadalupe, her birth on December 12th, we would do a ceremony at the church, at the Virgen de Guadalupe across from Southside Park, so that we would directly impact within the *mexicano* society, take

the Chicano reality, Chicano ceremony into the church, the *mexicano* church, so that we would hopefully bring the two consciousness together.

The spring and summer ceremonies were always conducted in Southside Park, where there's an outdoor amphitheater, where we painted murals. So it was also a center of the *barrio* at the point, the Southside Park *barrio*, and there's something special about that park. There's also a little lake there, and as were developing the ceremonies there, we understood that that lake wasn't manfed; it was fed by the American River coming under the city of Sacramento, filling up that pond at Southside Park. It drains into the Sacramento River that goes into the ocean. So we concluded that, okay, so the cycle of life is the winter rainwaters coming in, feeding this little lake, and then that evaporates back into the ocean. The cycle of life brings it back to the mountains as snow, the meltoff comes running back in. So we're just taking this to a whole 'nother level.

We concluded this is somewhat like the *cenotes* in Chichen Itza or the Mayan or pre-Columbian world, the *cenotes*. So we decided that we needed to incorporate that little lake into our ceremonies. So at the beginning of our ceremonies, we would do a procession around that little lake, honoring that body of water, bringing that energy back into the circle of the ceremony, and then conducting the ceremony.

So I was directly involved in all of that. In fact, me and Gina, my ex, we were in charge of making sure that the ceremonies took place, that it had a structure, and that we would bring in all the different Aztec participants from across the state. We had *Aztecas* from San Diego and Los Angeles, La Flora Atzlán [phonetic], the

women's Aztec group, San Juan Bautista, San Francisco. They just came from all over, incredible ceremonies that continue to this day.

García Oh, I was just going to ask that.

[00:42:30]

Orozco But they have transformed because we were doing them and we did it more our Chicano way, where as we come into the circle, we create a big circle for the ceremony, I mean fairly big, huge, hundreds of performers within the group, and we created this arch that you had to come into this circle. But the ceremony evolved where at each cardinal point, the east, the south, the west, and the north, we would do a ceremony and give like a teaching at each stage.

The east was for the warrior man or woman or whatever, and that energy, the early sun energy. In the south, we created an altar for the children, for the youth, for the kids, the innocence of the world. In the west was the station of the women and the women's energy and life-giving energy, all that meaning. So that was the women's point in the ceremony. Then it would evolve to the north, where the elders. José became one of the elders and Señora Cobb, another respected elder in our society, were our elders and they would give teaching from their perspective from the past, *ancianos*.

Then we'd bring back that energy all back into the center and then go into the *danza*, *Azteca danza*. At that point, one of the other collaborators at that point, "Chuy" Ortiz, who had recently passed away, was in charge of that, of the *Aztecas danzas* ceremony, to bring a conclusion to all of that.

So it's been going on for, god, thirty years, something I was directly involved with and in charge of for duration, and at some point I passed it on because it takes a lot of energy. [laughs] There's a price to be paid for being that involved, so had to let it go and pass it on to the next group to take it over. It's still going on.

García Interesting. What were some of the organizations you were involved in?

[00:45:05]

Orozco I'm still a member of the Royal Chicano Air Force and the Centro de Artistas de Chicanos, Sacramento Concilio at that time, MEChA at Sac State. I also was involved as a member of Board of Directors of La Raza Galeria Posada for, god, about ten years, maybe, maybe a little more than ten years. I was also involved with being a board member for the Center for Contemporary Art, a cross-cultural arts center. I was also a program director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission, and just a few other activities, but mostly confined myself to those types of activities, because you don't want to spread yourself so thin that you snap. The burnout rate is incredible because it was so intense. In the late sixties, seventies, eighties, it was so intense that you were constantly into some activity daily. Something was going on daily cross-country.

The other thing I was involved with the RCAF and the Centro, we started getting into demand by universities and cultural communities across the country, where they would ask us to take our activities to their areas, do cultural arts performances, art classes, workshops and all that. We spent eighteen to twenty years

on the road going cross-country to universities, community centers, Chicago, Milwaukee, Oshkosh, Seattle, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, you name it.

We were thrown out of Las Vegas. That was an interesting situation. We were doing these high school workshops, the five high schools that were brought in by the MEChA group from University of Las Vegas in Nevada to come in and do these performance workshops. José was a poet, so he would read his poetry. We had our own traveling band. We had the RCAF Band. We had a band with dancers and performers and hectors. We brought our own hectors. Then me, Louis, and Rudy and Favela would do the art workshops. So were doing this in Las Vegas, because in the high schools there were a lot of Chicanada, a lot of *raza* students, so were starting to lay down the UFW, Cesar Chavez. "You guys got to boycott, you got to strike, you got to do this."

So as we're going to high school to high school doing this, the reception was getting a little chilly at each subsequent school, and we couldn't figure out why. Then one of the MEChA university students who was taking us around was saying, "Well, you got to remember the white kids in the audiences are the sons and daughters of the ranchers." We didn't know that. We weren't conscious of that or aware of that. So we're laying down this propaganda, and they were just like, "We don't want to hear this shit. We don't want our *americano* kids to hear this." So at each school it just got chillier and chillier.

Finally, we had one last school to go to, so we took a break, a smoke break, beer break, our normal level of activity. So we go up to the last school, and to our amazement and surprise, they were out there on the sidewalk waiting for us, the

whole school. As we get there, they're cheering, they're applauding. We go, "Oh, wow! This is really cool!"

So we had five bands that were our bombers. Because we're the Royal Chicano Air Force, we're an Air Force, we had to have planes and bombers, pursuit, you know. We had all the paraphernalia. We wore kind of the military uniform. We had stars. Each one of us could be a general or a colonel or a captain or whatever, and daily you would get court-martialed and reduced in rank, so you had to work your way back up. So it was very interesting.

So we're jumping out to this reception, "This is great!" We felt like stars, like visiting Hollywood-type stars, you know. And as we're starting to engage them, behind us there was about four police squad cars, and they come in with their sirens blaring. [demonstrates] We're going, "What the hell is this?"

They jump out and they go [demonstrates] with their shotgun, and they go, "Hit the deck." And they had pumped their shotgun. They say, "Hit the deck."

And we're like, "Whoa! We know the drill. So we spread-eagle on the sidewalk, on the pavement, except for José. José says, "Bullshit! What the hell is this?" He started yelling.

We're all saying, "José, those guns are cocked, man, and their trigger fingers are itchy, you know, they're shaking."

And he's going like, "Nah, this is bullshit. Who the hell do you think we are and what do you think we're doing here?"

They go, "We know who you are. Get down on the ground."

"No!" And he wouldn't. He kept arguing with them.

We're just going like, "José, they're going to shoot us here, man. They're going to blast us."

But he kept arguing with him. Finally, he said, "Who in the hell do you think we are?"

"We know who you are. You're the Symbionese Liberation Army and you're here to blow up the powerlines in downtown Las Vegas."

He's like, "Aw, bullshit. You guys are so fucked up." Excuse me. "You guys are so screwed. We have nothing to do with that." He tried to convince them who we are and our group.

The principal came over. "Yeah, they're a visiting art group."

And they kind of bought it, but then they told us, "You have to get out of the state. You have to leave the state now."

We go, "Go? We'll take off." We jump into our vans and we're starting to head out, but the MEChA group, the MEChA representatives from university, as we're riding out said, "You can't leave." Their parents were performing a barbecue for us back at the ranch and everything was getting prepared. They had beer for us, they had barbecue for us, they had all that.

José says, "Well, we can't disrespect that. We gotta go and partake."

So we did. They lived on this big ranch, huge ranch, and there was a lot of horses. So went there. They were barbecuing, we were having our beers, smoking our *motas* and all that. There was a corral next to us and we saw these horses out in this corral. All of us had worked around horses at one time, all of us. I had worked at

horse stables, José had, and all that. So we asked the *señor*, the farmworker there, "Can we ride the horses?

The guy said, "Yeah, yeah. The owner's not here. He's out of the country, so he won't even know. Go ahead." So we have this documented. We have it documented.

So we jumped on the horses bareback, Ramon Ontiveros, Juanita Polenos' husband, we're all riding horses, you know, and bareback. We go like, "Wow! This is really cool." It was a great time.

So after we rode them, having ridden horses previously in our lives, we knew then you have to walk them to cool them down because they were sweaty from all the riding. So we knew how to do that, so we walked them and cooled them down and took them to their paddocks. So as we're taking them to the paddocks in their stalls, each one had a pool in their paddock area. We're going like, "What kind of horses are these?" They got their own private pool. Each horse had its own private pool. We're going like, "What kind of horses are these?''

The *ranchero* goes, "These are prized Arabian horses. These are multimillion-dollar horses that you're riding."

We're going like, "Okay." And we're looking around. It's a *big* ranch, I mean *huge*, beautiful ranch. And we're going like, "Who's the owner?" This was the late eighties, I think, somewhere in the late eighties, something like that.

And the guy says, "Well, this is Wayne Newton's ranch."

"Wayne Newton? Where's he at?"

"Oh, he's in Sicily visiting his Italian friends." This was at the time when Wayne Newton was kind of involved with the mafia.

We're going like, "Ah, it's time to go." [laughs] So we jumped into our vans and got the hell out of there, man.

What was the question? [laughs]

García What were some of the organizations you were involved in? You actually did answer it.

[00:54:48]

Orozco All the above. [laughs]

García What significance did the activities or organizations created play in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:54:55]

Orozco Fundamental. Without the involvement of all these organizations and groups that I mentioned, without them, the *movimiento* here, especially in Sacramento, would not have survived, would not have evolved, because the funding, whether it was federal, state, or city, county, the funding to keep those organizations alive and growing, it would have died. It totally would have died or manifested in such a way that maybe not the level today. But it would have passed into the books, you know.

García Now I'm going to ask you about changes in your thinking and actions as a consequence of your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano. Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

Please describe how this took place. How did these changes impact your personal relationships with family, peers, and significant others?

[00:56:04]

Orozco Absolutely, absolutely. I wouldn't be the person I am today if it hadn't been for the Chicano Movement, even though as a young boy, a young adult, I always knew that I needed to find my personal niche in life and fulfill my reality. I'm an artist above all. Above anything else, I'm an artist. I've always been an artist. I began drawing as a young boy, copying my brothers, older brothers as they were drawing. So I dedicated my life to being an artist and I studied all the artforms. I studied all the masters. I studied Michelangelo, I studied the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco, and modern Art Movements, the Impressionists and all that.

My way of life, my life's energy is being an artist, but at that same time, I'm not an artist hidden away in my studio creating whatever it is for whatever reason. No, I'm an artist in the community, for the community, by the community, and I give all my energy to that. Whether I make a living on that or not is not important. What's important is that I devote my life energy and my artistic energy and talents to better our situation as a culture and as a *raza* and raise the consciousness of our community to where that we're very much an integral part of this society, this world.

We have a lot to offer. You know, going back, my research takes us back into the pre-Columbian times. I research all of that, bring all the energy forward. I'm of a conscious level that the mural activities I'm involved with, I view them as modern-day codices. The Pre-Columbians had their codices, served their time to educate that society. In the mural activities that I'm directly involved with, that's how I view my

mural work. I go throughout the country doing murals. I'm involved in doing a very big mural project up in Oregon right now, where I'm doing an entire exterior part of a building several hundred feet long. I view that work as modern-day codices.

So my reality as a Chicano in the Chicano Movement, all my energy is to that end, to make sure that it continues, whether it evolves into something that I can't foresee, but at least I'm giving my energy so that that can evolve to the next level of reality. And it's your guys' responsibility, you the next generation, to pick that up. What are *you* going to do with it? We got it to this point. We brought it from early sixties to today. Now we give it to you. Where are you taking it? We brought the Chicano Movement to this point, which was very radical for its time. It's still very radical. I mean, we've been thrown out of the best universities in the country. But now in reality what is happening, the major museums are coming to recognize the importance of the Movimiento, especially the artistic Movimiento, and they're coming to us now and archiving our work. "Oh, yeah, you guys did something. There's some importance to what you did. You just weren't some cultural arts and crafts groups that you were doing curiosities. You guys did something."

We created a Movement. We created a Movement and fed the Movement and kept it alive with our life and energy. In the Centro, in our collective Center of the *Artistas*, we were working seven days a week, we were producing daily, nonstop. We continue to do that to transform our energies, the group's energies. The artists are still involved. We're involved with United Farm Workers. So we're doing all those activities, we're involved in a lot of political activities in town, cultural activities,

with the cross-cultural activities, with other art groups. And then statewide, nationally, we do quite a bit of travelling and lecturing.

So my personal energy is to continue that and hopefully that it's passed on and some other young artists or philosophers or doctors or lawyers pick that up, and politicians. That's a whole 'nother discussion. Let's not open that book right now. [demonstrates] But, anyway, my thing is to give. I'm here to give, and that's what I've been doing for the past, god, forty, forty some-odd years, is giving to the Chicano community.

García All right. Our interview has been taken.

[01:01:45]

Orozco Cool. Thank you.

[End of interview]