The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Stan Padilla

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by David Rasul
October 15, 2015

Transcription by Technitype Transcripts

Rasul State your full name.

[00:00:09]

Padilla My name is Stan Padilla, or it was Stan "Pa-dill-uh" [English pronunciation] for a long time, or Estanislao Padilla is my other name.

Rasul Stan, what's your birthdate and your marital status?

[00:00:25]

Padilla It's August 25th, 1945, and I'm widowed.

Rasul And your wife, her name?

[00:00:33]

Padilla Rosalyn.

Rasul Do you have any children, Stan?

[00:00:37]

Padilla Yes, I have three children, three adult children.

Rasul What are their ages?

[00:00:41]

Padilla Fifty, forty-five, and forty. [laughs]

Rasul And then where were you raised, Stan?

[00:00:53]

Padilla Sacramento area, between here, the Southwest, southern Arizona, and here, but mainly outside of the city in Lincoln, Roseville, Citrus Heights, and the northern part of the Valley.

Rasul That's the main part, where you lived here in Sacramento.

[00:01:09]

Padilla Yeah, right. I had never lived in Sacramento.

Rasul Those surrounding areas, yeah, that's right.

[00:01:13]

Padilla Yeah.

Rasul And your parents, Stan, what did your parents do?

[00:01:16]

Padilla My dad worked for Interpace, which was known in Lincoln, California, the clay pits, was called Gladding, McBean Company. Then it became corporate, became Interpace, and now it's back to being Gladding, McBean again. And he worked at the clay fields. I mean, it was a community town in Lincoln. That's what you did, so that's what he did.

My mom was a housewife and activist, and that's what she did.

Rasul When you say clay pits, what is that?

[00:01:50]

Padilla Well, there they make sewer pipes for international use. They make sculptures. I was real excited when I was little, my dad used to take me. They would

have Italian sculptors there sculpting all of these things, because they did the buildings and the logos and all of that for all over the country, all over the world, you know. But Lincoln is the site of the oldest clay pit and the largest clay pit in the western hemisphere, and so that's why it's there.

So my dad was a machinist, mechanics, and so he invented things. He helped them. They'd say, "We want to do this," but no one would know how to do it, but he did it.

Rasul And you mentioned your mom was an activist.

[00:02:40]

Padilla Yeah, she was a *comadre*, always took in everybody, did washing, cleaning, took care of family. Didn't work outside the home until I think I was in high school, something like that, and then she went to work, but otherwise, she was just there for us to be a mom, wife, and so forth.

Rasul And what ethnicity were your parents?

[00:03:06]

Padilla My dad is Tohono O'Odham, Mexican American, and my mom is Yaqui and Mexican American.

Rasul And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

[00:03:19]

Padilla I have one brother, but we were raised on a ranch in like a commune, so I have cousins and associated *primo hermanos*, so there were a lot of us. There was usually about twenty of us as the pack growing up.

Rasul So can you describe your youth, like your neighborhood, your friends, what you guys did?

[00:03:46]

Padilla We were raised on the ranch out away from everything. We were self-sufficient, gardening, hunting, canning. My family, like my mom, they would do seasonal work in the dry yards, and I remember we used to come up. I worked in the dry yards in Woodland or in Brooks up there, apricots and stuff, so we would do that, and grew up around a lot of animals. We raised our own food and everything, just because we were different than everyone else, didn't have a lot of money, and preferred that way of life. My grandparents lived with us, or we lived with them. They just wanted to keep that way of life. That's really my beginnings.

I was shocked when the Chicano Movement came, because for us it was already there. [laughter] It was just a new way of discovering it, I guess. So it was a real happy childhood, really happy. We weren't rich, but we weren't poor, you know. We were, I would say, probably lower middle-class or middle—yeah, lower middle-class. Just had a lot of fun, a lot of family. That's all I knew was family, and only when I went to school did I meet other people, but other than that, we didn't have to deal with other people, there were so many of us.

Rasul I think that the, quote, "living off the land" shaped your perspective on life.

[00:05:18]

Padilla Oh, it was formidable in my life, because it meant not just living off the land, but self-sufficiency, taking care of my own self and the ones that I loved,

and it meant being a little bit smart about things, you know, having a lot of common sense, ranch things, because my family's not educated. I was the first one born in a hospital, I was the first one to go to school. They called me "baby Jesus" because I did all those first things, and all their hopes were pinned on me. And I'll get into it later, but when the Chicano Movement came, it was kind of a letdown for them, because I was to be on the trajectory, in their eyes, for somewhere, and they said, "No, you're going back to something that we're trying to get away—we're trying to move ahead here." So it was a conflict.

Rasul Do you have any early memories of your first introduction into formal education?

[00:06:16]

Padilla Oh, yeah. I got a Hopalong Cassidy lunchbox. [laughter] And I always wanted a thermos, because, well, the other kids, they had thermoses. We'd have to drink out of a jar wrapped in newspaper, something to keep it hot, insulated. Being in the country, the bus would come get us, and I remember the first day of school, I wanted to go, but I'd never been away from my family before. I'm going to kind of choke up, because then the bus came and I noticed the other people, they'd just go to the bus stop. With my family, there were about twenty-five people standing there, aunts and uncles and cousins and neighbors, all supporting me and kind of pushing me out because I didn't want to go. But I had that Hopalong Cassidy, you know, so I just pretended I was a cowboy and I was going to get on the bus.

That first day was really traumatic. I got on the bus and they shut the doors, and I freaked out. I threw myself on the floor and cried, because I didn't really know

anybody, or they were different than I was anyway. I didn't think I was loved by others. But I adjusted, you know. That's part of that self-sufficiency or whatever. I just readjusted to what it is and began my journey, and I haven't stopped since, because like I say, I was the first one to be educated. I think my dad graduated from high school and he was the most educated. My mom went to like second or third grade or something like that. But they promoted education to us from day one. My dad had a saying, "Learn to use your mind so you don't have to use your back like I do." So that always stuck in my mind, you know, that I was going to develop my mind, develop my potentials, and develop resources to be able to chart my own destiny, my own course in life, and not be told what to do. I was rebellious as a kid. I still am, but I'm much more accommodating now. But I just wouldn't do things, I wouldn't talk to people, I wouldn't do what they told me to do.

That day we got to school, and there were three of us. At that time there were Romani people. I grew up with Romanis, gypsies, and there was one African American girl. The three of us, we jumped the fence and ran away. [laughter] They called the sheriff—or, no, truant officer at that time. Then I came back. That was probably early fifties when we were still sitting in the back of the classroom and stuff, which was fine with me. I still sit there. I prefer the back of the room. Anyway, I'm getting a little ahead of myself here.

Rasul Were you a Felito or were you aware of the Mexican American Education Project at Sac State?

[00:06:16]

Padilla I was aware of it, but, like I said, I didn't live in Sacramento. I didn't get education in Sacramento, but I was aware of it.

Rasul And in your awareness, did you know anybody that was in the program or what did you think about it?

[00:09:38]

Padilla Oh, yeah. No, I thought it was a great thing. I just didn't know—in those days, I didn't know how to join these things, because as Mexicans, we were kind of divided among those of us that had been living here—I've had family here in this Valley for 100 years, and then the nationals, who we called nationals, who would come in—and then how we were treated in town kind of like even by other Mexican American families, because they were in town, it was different. We were treated like hillbillies or something like that, because we'd all pile in the car and everything and go to town.

So I just didn't know how to get involved in those, and I've always had, I don't want to say an inferiority complex, but I didn't know if it applied to me or if I was good enough to do those things. Again, it's this institutionalization, you know. I was kind of afraid of institutions. I just didn't trust them. I still don't. But, again, I adjusted.

So I knew people, I began to hear about these things, and the Movement in that sense began to spread outside of the urban centers and start to reach around, especially with UFW, which was UFWOC in those days, just the committee. We began to see demonstrations and so forth then. So it all kind of led back to that, and again it led to my folks, "You're going to do that. You're going to be a professor.

You're going to go to school like that." So it's like I had a lot of respect for it. I just didn't know how to approach it.

Rasul Your knowledge of cultural anthropology or your own culture, how did that influence you? I have to go back to a statement you made before, that your parents expected you go to this way, but when the Chicano Movement—you went another way.

[00:11:44]

Padilla Yeah.

Rasul Was that your understanding of the cultural issues or not?

[00:11:50]

Padilla Oh, yeah. I just had to go. It was a revolution and I just had to go in the direction. It was like that was my destiny. I could feel it. It was like that's what I was made to do. That's what I was made to do. But because I was a good son, an obedient son, and a good citizen, you know, I was on that westward path, western path to, as we talked about, individualism, the development, and I was going somewhere. I didn't know where I was going, and it never had much meaning, but I was always told, "You have to do this for the benefit of all your family and your people."

Rasul So your involvement in the Chicano Movement, to be a part of that—

[00:12:41]

Padilla Again, it was always there.

Rasul —there was a conflict with your parents about that?

[00:12:43]

Padilla Oh, definitely, yeah. Of course, my family's a real cultural old family anyway, so we were always the center of all kinds of events anyway. The Chicano Movement, it just came different—I mean, it was on TV and it was more vocal—because we just kept everything quiet all the time because that was the best way to survive. But it was definitely a struggle. My grandparents didn't understand at all. Or just moving around and doing things, protesting, my grandma always used to say, "No, there must be something wrong with your heart, because you're not settled here. You're always in unrest. You're always fighting something and you're always having to travel and move around. Now, *mijo*, if you were calm or in your place, you would do what was done before. You would take care of what needs to be done and everything."

So then I had both of those inside of me from that time, obedience to an older way of life, but at the same time, a rebellious nature and an experimental nature to go out and try anything and taste the world, you know. They didn't understand that at all.

Chicano, we had heard of that word before. It was not popular. They didn't use it. Actually, my grandparents, they called themselves foreigners, not even Mexican, because in those days out there in the north lands, it was not only not popular, but it was dangerous to be like that. You worked and kept your head down, and you had other people buy your food for you. You didn't make waves in the little towns or anything. So for them, *Chicano* meant something different, you know. It was almost like the n-word, you know. They said, "We've worked so hard for dignity, and now look, you're doing all that crazy stuff that we tried to get away from," unrest and rebellion, because my grandparents came here, my mom's parents, they walked—

they're Yaqui, so they walked for amnesty here in the United States. So almost a little bit Republican, you know, in that sense that "You can make it, too, and we did it, we walked, we established a new way of life. You can do it too. Don't take the easy way. Don't expect people to give things to you. Don't ask for things that you don't deserve. You work hard." That work ethic, that's how we were raised. And I was totally different. Everybody was obedient. I was very respectful, but I had to do things.

Rasul Amongst your friends, the term *Chicano,* how did they take that term? [00:15:46]

Padilla It took a while to get used to it, because they used to say—and this is other Mexican American people—"We thought you were Mexican. [laughter] We didn't know you were Chicano." Gradually, in time people get used to it. But that was the time I took my name back. It was that Malcolm X time when I decided "Stan 'Pa-dill-uh' [English pronunciation] is my slave name, you know. [laughter] I'm going to claim this name back."

So it was about that time, and at that time I just didn't care. But there was definitely a cultural backlash, in a sense, but again, I had already been out in civil rights way early, way, way early sixties, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Black Panther Party. I went anywhere where I got that feeling that revolution was happening, I went with them, you know, American Indian Movement, that was a little bit later on in time, but all of those things. And we didn't have a place. Chicanos at that time, you say *Chicano*, what box do you check? "Uh, we don't have one yet." [laughter] We didn't do it. Then within my lifetime, we had all these

boxes to check, and it was always different. Then it became *Hispanic*, the box became *Hispanic* and all of that.

So I felt comfortable with *Chicano*. It was like the missing link for me, because I had been to the motherland already when I was little, but I didn't feel a connection to Mexico or anything, and I didn't feel an affinity for America, for United States either. We were living in an isolated world, really, of our own making, just to survive. So then I go, "I'm Chicano. That's who I am. I feel comfortable with that, and from this point forth, that's what my kids will be." And then we changed from then. Then I went through—I'd go back home, my hair started to get longer, I started getting tattoos and stuff. [laughter] You know, they'd say, "Oh, you're not good enough for us. Oh, here he comes. Here comes the Chicano. He's not good enough. He's not good enough to be a Mexican anymore," that kind of thing. So it was tough. It was real tough.

Then on the other side, because I grew up around a lot of white people, they were really hard on us, and that meant something else. That meant like you were a communist or something, I don't know, but the fear of change. They said, "Well, you come from a real nice little family. What happened to you? What happened?" It was that idea, too, that the turnaround that I made, it was so radical, it was hard for people to comprehend, especially where we came from, it was more conservative. In urban centers, things move quicker, but out there, it would move slow. There was a lot of gossip about me, all of that. Was I communist? Was I gay? Was I—you know, all these things. "Long hair, you must be gay. What's happening to you?" You know, all of that kind of stuff.

It was like immunity. It built a strength in me that could never be turned around, a new identity. The forming of a new man is how I saw it, because then I was really studying the Mexican mural masters and I watched what they came through, and their work was the transformation of man from what we were to what we could be and what we chose to be. It was the first time I started reading José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cosmica*, looking at ourselves internationally and not provincially, like I came from. It was just you put your head down, looked at the dirt. Then when I got out of there, I could look up and see the whole world and say, "No, the other world sees me this way. That's who I am." And that's what *Chicano* meant to me. *Mexican American*, yeah, yeah, yeah, but *Chicano*, I could enter the world on my own terms. Before, all the connotations—and I had a bad connotation, you know, of *Mexican* and *Mexican American* because of the way we were treated, and I believed the trauma of all that. Then I said, "No, I can do this, and I am this. And—boom!—here I go. Just watch me." And then I left that world behind.

Rasul I know you're a renowned artist. I'm going a little bit off this question here, but when did it begin and how did it influence your art, your new thought, your new philosophy, your new spirit?

[00:20:52]

Padilla Well, that's the thing, that I've always been an artist since a baby. They said I used to even draw pictures with the milk or my spilled water or something like that. Then I had a very unique experience in the cornfields at age five, just before I went to school. I fell in there and I drowned, and I had near-death experiences. They say I almost died. Anyway, it's a long story. I didn't die, and I got these visions. It

was like I saw how precious life was, how short it was, and I woke up. I snapped into a kind of new awareness. I said, "I've got to get to what I've got to get to and know it," and that's what the art was. The art was the vehicle for the path for me to go out into the world. That's what I was to do.

I did art since the very beginning, drawing in the dirt, the cornfields, making mud sculptures, all that. Then I went to drawing on butcher paper. Every Friday we'd go to town and get things. I got the butcher paper. So, butcher paper and a No. 2 pencil were my first art—well, mud and sticks first, and then those. Then gradually I learned how to be an artist in that sense, and I went for formal training. But again, it's always been two-tracked, that I was getting formal training, but I was rebelling against it at the same time, because I had this underlying, I'll just say, spirituality that was growing and it was getting bigger, and it wasn't on the outside of me yet, but then it kept getting bigger and bigger on the inside, till finally it just burst out.

Because, like, yourself and others didn't know me then. I was very quiet, very shy, very introverted. I didn't talk. I didn't do any of that. So to show what I did or talk about myself was completely foreign, but there reached a point where I was either going to naturally let it come out and share it with people or I was going to explode, and I thought it was better just to let it come out. [laughter] And it just so happened that it was at the time of the cultural revolution when all the pieces all fit together. The spirituality was the integrating factor that allowed me to do all the diverse things I do, but yet they were all integrated. It was one thing. It looked like I was doing this, I was going to school and I was a parent and helping my parents, because we ran the Mexican Baseball Leagues, the Mexican dances, all the church

activities, you know. We were always there. But again, that was just sort of happening to me. Then when this new rising spirit came up, which was always there, but I just allowed it to—it caught fire.

In fact, it was when I first heard Cesar [Chavez] talk, it was like he said something, I forget the quote, but "It only takes a spark to make a wildfire." And it was just like I lit up, and I was like I just went on fire. The creativity started going. I go, talking to myself, "I don't care where you come from, what you did, how shy you are or how underprivileged you think you are. You get out there and you be a role model and you do it out in public. Live a public life." So then that's when it happened, you know, and then all the while I was disciplining my craft, which is—I don't know if I was doing great art, but I was doing great life. I was living.

Then eventually it kind of focused itself and I put all the pieces together and lined them all up, and then—boom!—it just kept opening doorways. And since that time, I've never asked for an art show or anything. I just do what I do, and somehow—it's like "Build it and they will come." Just do it and then it appears. So I still approach it that way, and part of that spirituality is humility, you know, not to get big-headed, because the art I was dedicated to doing and am doing is for the good of community building and for the betterment of the human condition, not to enhance my life, because I'm a working-class artist, I come from a working-class family, and that's how I approach things. You just get up and work, you know. I don't like attention drawn to myself, any of that kind of stuff. It's the work, not me.

I'm getting off track here.

Rasul No, no.

[00:26:11]

Padilla Okay, good. It's important, though.

Rasul I just want to say I've seen and I have the art, and it's amazing.

[laughter]

Padilla I'm still trying. It was the development of the craft, and that's what my family—all my family are artists. They're craftspeople. They say I'm the only artist because I see things in my mind, but everybody does something, lots of things, because we had to out of necessity and then, you know, doing things. But it was putting these spiritual ideas, like putting spirit into matter, again, lit it on fire.

Rasul And you've kind of alluded to it, and you mentioned about Cesar Chavez, his quote. What other things and events attracted you to the Chicano Movement, as you recall it?

[00:26:57]

Padilla Art. I think the thing that most got me was there were like-minded people. Again, I felt like I was an island. I had all these ideas, and I thought, "Okay, I'm either a genius or I'm psychotic," you know, because I would have these ideas and tell people, and there was no clue about that. But then in the Chicano Movement, people had the same ideas that I did, and they were coming up simultaneously. I felt, "Oh, I'm right on track. I'm okay." Again, we were raised—how you say—with a little bit of an inferiority complex, that we weren't as good as everyone else, so there was always that. I mean, I still struggle today with that.

Rasul You've spoken about it personally changed you.

[00:27:57]

Padilla Absolutely.

Rasul Not only the Chicano Movement, but also the Civil Rights Movement.

[00:28:02]

Padilla Yeah.

Rasul Can you talk about the Civil Rights Movement and how that connected to the Chicano Movement and how you saw that?

[00:28:06]

Padilla I mean, I was really involved in, at first, militancy, because I thought that's what you did, you know, how to do things, but then I had this thing in the back of my mind, with my parents, that if you get an education, people will listen to you, you know. You don't have to throw or hurt people or break things down to make change. If you do it in the right way, it will just occur. So that's what I began doing, honing my craft again, learning how to speak. I did all kinds of things. I took public speaking, Dale Carnegie "How To Speak" class or whatever, self-betterment classes, anything I could that were far afield of any of my friends. In fact, I didn't talk about a lot of that stuff because where I felt deficiencies, I went and got it. I did that. And to me, that was *Chicanismo* because it was kind of a blending of everything, taking the best of everything, the best of all worlds, and as was mentioned earlier, bringing these worlds together, not separating them.

Then, of course, UFWOC was really important to me.

Rasul UFWOC?

[00:29:25]

Padilla UFWOC, United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, at that time because I'm old. [laughter] I started way back then before there was all that stuff, and we saw in the fields, because with us in that area, there were hops. A lot of it was hops, and most people didn't even go near that. That was *really* hard work, itchy work.

Then education became really important. Then Ethnic Studies. I, of course, went to school without that. There wasn't any of that there, and that's what I became a part of. Then I said, well, everything I didn't have for the next generation, it's like with your kids, you want to give them all the things you didn't have, you want to give them. So that's when I went out and said, "Okay, you know what?" I was on the fast track to becoming a famous artist, and then that's not what I wanted to do, my heart, but that's just what was happening to me. So I stopped all that, and I said, "I want to give this creativity with all my efforts toward this new Movement, this new way of life, that, yes, it will help Chicanos and, yes, it will help everybody, and to help everybody, just being a contributing member of society," and you do that through education. We step out of the recesses of unknowingness and ignorance and do things, you know. Because it was hard.

I was in third grade and I had to go with my grandparents. They didn't read or write or anything, so I was writing checks and talking for them at the grocery store. People were laughing at them, making fun of them, and I saw all that stuff, and I would turn it around. I wouldn't let them know that people were making fun of them or saying their money's not good or it's dirty or something. I just did all that. So

that's the role I've kind of always played in my life, being a bridge between any world I could, you know, to make the betterment for everybody, let it come about.

Rasul How did you perceive the role of the Chicana in the Movement, the woman, the female in the Movement?

[00:31:39]

Padilla Well, it was really important to me, because that's who really—before even we say "Chicana," the *comadres*, our mothers, our aunties, our grandmas, and all of that, I mean, it was really a matriarchical upbringing that I had. Really we belonged in a matriarchical—it's really a matriarchical culture, but they didn't think about it. They just did—it was a matter of survival, and I come from *really* tough people, you know, *really* strong women and so forth, because they had to do, not because they were just naturally looking to be liberated. They didn't even know about that. But they did what needed to be done.

So I was real excited when our sisters and cousins and daughters started getting this new awareness, too, and they balanced between what was at home and the new world. Like my mom used to always laugh and say, "Oh, yeah, these new feminists or these new Chicanas, they're power-fisting and all of that," she goes, "but who'd cooking? Who's going to feed all these people? Who's watching these people? Who's watching the kids and everything?" So, again, they didn't quite understand this new awareness.

So with the Chicana, it just became so—I was in love with the whole idea, because I had never seen that kind of independence before. I come from real strong women, but they listen to their men, you know, and vice versa, those men didn't do

anything without the sort of okay of the women. My mom always used to say, "Mm-hmm, I have the kitchen, I cook. I can control anything he does just through his belly." [laughter]

So that became really important to me and it was a learning lesson, because I'm going to say it right here for the camera, I'm a recovering chauvinist, you know, and that's how it was, even my mom, my aunties, my grandma, my wife, till I had daughters, and then it all changed, and that was during that time, too, like, "Oh, no, I'm going to work for equality for women," and just kept expanding, Earth, for the environment. To, to me, Chicano Movement is not a noun, but it's more like a verb. It's like real movement, you know. It was the movement of it all and where it led to, like I say, not just civil rights, human rights, but there was rights for the Earth, rights for women. The right to be rural, that was really a tough one. Most people didn't realize that, you know, because even in the Movement we were made fun of, because we didn't have the lingo, you know. We weren't cool. We weren't sharp, you know, a little big pigeon-toed, a little bit different, but proud of it.

Rasul Absolutely, yes. Stan, what did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Chicano Movement?

[00:35:13]

Padilla I think I first woke up in 1963, and at that time I started moving around traveling, because I was restless, and I was traveling all over the cities looking, going to Denver. I heard something was going on in Denver; I did that. My whole thing at that time—and I'm going about it, but this is how I did it—then I started going to all the elders, any elder. I didn't care what color, whatever, people

who had experience on the Earth. That's when I went back to Yaqui land and did all that, and went all over the country doing those things. So in the midst of all that, as far as I know—and there were more—I was one of the first Chicanos out there, out of city, putting our place, saying, "No, we belong on this council," or, "We belong in this pueblo. We have a place. We're coming. We are somebody."

I traveled with the White Roots of Peace of Iroquois Nation for a long time, I worked with the Hopis for a long time, all the while being an outsider, too, but it was bringing that Chicano awareness, building the bridges that now I see, building the bridges for ceremonies and so forth that were laughed at. I would say, "Oh, it's a full moon. We should pay attention." Everybody started howling like wolves and dancing around like wild Indians and stuff. Then now to how it is, it's just like, wow, it's just all over and growing. I'm not saying I did that. That was an awareness at that time. But I definitely was a catalyst and an enzyme, because in my activism, I did it. I didn't talk about it. As you know, I'm not a great intellectual. I don't write a bunch of books or anything. I do it. I put my life on the line, my family on the line, my resources on the line for what I believe in. So that was about that time, '63, '65, I was like nineteen, something.

Then I went to the city and was seeing other Chicanos. They didn't quite say that yet, but they were there. And what's his name? I used to hang out in that group with the Brown Buffalo, Oscar, and those guys, which was an amalgam of Allen Ginsberg, kind of Beatnik-y, art-y, Hunter Thompson crazy. Then it turned hippie, and then that's when I started pulling back from all that, because that was not a direction I was going in.

Then I was in the Bay Area at that time, and then I began to work with more groups, but as you know, I'm not really a group member. I'm not a card-carrying anything. I just pretty much do my own thing, work with everybody that I can, but I'm not one to stick around long. I'm moving all the time and changing and growing.

Rasul From an overall perspective, the organizations—and you mentioned a few of them and I'd like you to mention a few more—what impact did those organizations have on the Chicano Movement?

[00:38:43]

Padilla Oh, incredible. Like UWF, for me it was dignity, racial relations, because I also have family that are Filipino, so community, so brought it together with the love of the Earth, the dignity of the farmworker, the dignity of our peoples, and so that, to me, it gave meaning and purpose to the Chicano Movement. RCAF, because it integrated all kinds of things. Multidimensional, multimedia is always what I've been attracted to, trying to find the right vehicle to express my life, which is all mixed up. I'm a cultural blend, racial blend, you know, a *mezcla* of becoming all the time.

Different organizations, I was in the Bay Area at that time, so there were a lot of Marxists, Leninist Movements, [unclear] Ramos [phonetic] and B_____, Black Panther Party, you know, and all of that, working with all that, but again, I was so focused on this *Chicanismo*, to bring dignity and respect to it, that I kept doing that. So all of those groups, I think, helped bring clarity and focus to the Chicano Movement, because there were more radical movements before this. There always have been.

So, to me, I used a lot of them as models for this, and it was definitely a multicultural model, because then I went out into teaching, because then I said, "What do I do with this? I can stay out on the street, I can do all this stuff, but I'd better institute this so it'll live longer than I do." Then I started going around helping to establish Ethnic Studies Programs throughout community colleges and all over. They used to call us at that time "outside agitators." You either educated or you bombed or you blew something up, which I went through that phase, the Third World strikes at San Francisco State and Los Siete in San Francisco, and grassroots movements, so all of these, I think, kind of came in. Then we made it our own. Instead of saying, "Yeah, I take this and I can learn from Breakfast for Niños Programs." I worked in Black Panther Breakfast for Community, I think they called it, whatever, and then when I come back here to Sacramento, then there was Breakfast for Niños, kind of that same kind of model. But we made it our own.

That's the key to me, is having the pride, the pride of heritage and the pride of knowledge that we come from somewhere, we are a lineage, we're not just starting up. We're a reawakening of a *long* line. And that's when I began expressing the ceremonies, and I said, well, the ceremonies are the link between what has been and what can be in the future, but it has to go through a crucible or a form, a challis. We have to hold it some way or else it's just going to flow. Because I'm old enough, I've seen all kinds of groups come and go and come and go. Then a lot of times nothing was left over. It went and they had the best of intentions, worked hard, and then it was gone. I wanted to have the destiny of making something last outside. That's why I started making marks. I was a tattooist at that time, trying to get through grad school,

too, and was the same thing. “No, we’re going to put marks on you. There’s no turning back. You tattoo your forehead, you ain’t gonna work for Bank of America anymore.” [laughter] It was that turning point, you know. But I did it through education.

Rasul It’s October we’re doing this interview, and you mentioned ceremonies. In fact, you were at my wedding ceremony with Dr. Solis. We have the Día de los Muertos coming up. So the significance of ceremonies, can you relate that to Día de los Muertos? I know there are other ceremonies we have, Fiesta de Maíz, all that, but how about the—

[00:43:16]

Padilla But Muertos was really the first. Again, it’s a recognition of lineage and heritage and continuity, and today it’s the sustainable culture. We can sustain our culture. How? Well, things come and go, economics come and go and all that, but these principles, recognizing respect for ancestors and everything, was so important because it gives us something to sustain us, and I think that’s what was important. And now look. Here in the city you can’t even get to all the ceremonies, you know. [laughter] I can’t keep track of them anymore.

In fact, I started one this year in Auburn, and that’s with youth, hip hop community. Because they have experienced so much death and tragedy, they don’t know what to do with it. So I said, “This is how in our culture that we do it.”

They go, “Can you help us?” So that’s what we’re doing. So it still continues on and on.

But I think it's important, because what I heard early in my life is you can do whatever you want, but if you don't have your whole heart and soul and spirit in it, with meaning and purpose, that's like fast food, may be good, may be spicy, may be great today, but where's it going to be down the road? And mine was to establish it. So I think that's really, if I look back, besides my painting and my art, the ceremonies were my destiny and gift to who we are, and I worked hard, we worked hard with Dr. Solis. You know we were laughed at for decades, and now it's just like I can't even pronounce everybody's kids' names because they have all these Aztec or Nawat names, you know. It was just like a wildfire. People were hungry. It was just time, that's all.

Rasul Absolutely, yes.

[00:45:25]

Padilla And to me, *Chicanismo*, my destiny and all what we're talking about is just being at the right place at the right time, and not burning out, but keeping the creative fire, but not burning out.

Rasul In relationship to burning out, [unclear] there, always took time, a lot of time with a lot of our heart and soul into it. How did that affect your personal relationships?

[00:45:52]

Padilla It was tough, because when I changed my name, when I wasn't "Pa-dill-uh" [English pronunciation] anymore, people couldn't pronounce it, so there became a little distancing from non-Mexican people or whatever. Personally, it brought everything together. I found a family that was deeper, an extended family. I

remember back in the day, there was a saying that said "*Mole* is thicker than blood," that when you got the culture, you may be of the same blood, but it's not as strong as you have the *cultura* to share, and that's what found then a family. I had a family that was bigger than me. I wasn't necessarily related to everybody, but somehow yes.

This also mirrored or reflected the whole migration of our family northward here, and the Yaquis especially, because we were so brutalized during the early 1900s, that it was just unbelievable, and that everybody just split any way they could to get out of the oppression and the hurt and the death. So what happened is everybody scattered, and then when they started coming back, communities were rebuilt. Like ours up there in Lincoln, it was just rebuilt, but we didn't really know each other, kind of. What do you say? We had to rely on our culture. Like for example, from both my mom and dad's *pueblos*, they had an arranged marriage from the old days, so when they came out here, at those days they did it through baseball. We played baseball on the baseball teams. Then the two families found again, met, remembered what happened or what it was, and—boom!—then it started again, then began these communities again or even *barrios*. A *barrio* is a place where you congregate, but you're not necessarily related to everyone.

That was exciting for me in the Chicano Movement, to meet people from all parts of Mexico, who had heritages in all parts of Mexico, because I had only primarily been around people from Sonora. That's a unique culture. We're not flashy or any of that, or urban. So it was like, wow, I learned all these things, learned new words. I'd go home, "I heard this new word today! It's *raspa*."

They they'd say, "Yeah, we heard that one time. That's what they say in the city." Great. But things I didn't know, and I was learning all kinds of customs. Día de los Muertos, we never had that, because we were centered around the church. It was All Soul's Day, you know. But we still did our thing, but we didn't know that it was Chicano. We didn't know it was culture. We did it to survive, you know, and that's what you just did.

Rasul Stan, overall with the Chicano Movement, with our ceremonies, with our songs, our events, how do you think, in your perspective, not you as an individual, but how do you think it impacted the Chicano community?

[00:49:20]

Padilla Oh, I think it's just huge, myself. I'm a little bit biased, but it was just huge because it brought a depth that wasn't there. It's like a houseplant. I felt like we or I was a houseplant, but with those ceremonies, the songs and everything, was take it out of there and plant it directly in the Earth again, and that things could flourish. And now I saw these relationships building, institutions building around it, Temazcales, C_____, all these traditional forms. It changed the way of life and gave, number one, I think the most important, people authenticity to their own indigenous nature, because we weren't that before. We weren't allowed to be, because what it was, we were conditioned, we were trained out of it, and we know politically that was expedient to do that. I remember people, they wouldn't accept it. "I'm not an Indian." Go look in the mirror, fool. [laughter] And, besides, you don't have to be that. Then it would be like, "Well, I'm not accepted by them." Well, you don't have to be. Recognize your own nature. That's how you are now.

Before, remember we were laughed at? Now we're studied and duplicated or copied. So it opened a new door to an old way of life to be renewed, but identity. I heard "Chicana indigenous woman." Somebody said that, and I went, that would have *never* happened a few years back, say, "I'm Mexican," or whatever, you know, but it just clarified and brought to awareness, the Movement did, because to me, the Movement was like a whirlwind. It would just catch fire and things would just happen, you know. What would happen here would go somewhere else, and it would just go. That proved, to me, that we were all related and that we're probably in some senses the largest tribe in the United States, certainly in the West. We just got waylaid, mixed up, sent different ways, just like the Yaquis. We were right on the border, but the Spanish came through, the Mexicans came through, the French came through, the multinational corporations came through in terms of the revolution, because they were all sponsoring every group, Carnegies, Rockefellers, anything, for the Yaqui Valley, which is the third most fertile valley in the entire world and is now the heart and breadbasket of Mexico, like the Punjab is for India. It is. But you had to clear the people out first to get it.

My grandma, my great-grandma was a seamstress for Pancho Villa. That's what they did, made uniforms and stuff, and traveling with him on the trains and everything. But then soon as we were run over by the revolutionaries, too, who had political ideas, didn't really care about us, then we migrated north, because there was no life. It killed the basic old way of life. So we came up here to find amnesty, liberty, and start again. Then, to me, I was to find *Chicanismo*, my own personal destiny. That's how I found it.

Rasul What issues do you think were left unresolved during the Chicano Movement? Did we get everything?

[00:53:45]

Padilla No, I don't think so. There's still—well, to me, I think I mentioned it at ceremonies, too, is more institutions, I'll say root institutions, indigenous institutions, where we can pass on this knowledge. What's being done here is incredible, because that's what's being done, this collecting of all of this, because if it didn't, comes a strong wind, it would all be out there again, you know. So have a place to contain the knowledge and the information, I think we quite didn't do that fully yet, or maybe that's what's happening now, because [unclear] circumstances, the chaos has all kind of calmed down now, so what is it that we do? What's left? Take those things and put them for the future generations so that we leave a legacy. The legacy part, I guess, is what we still have to do, and, of course, human rights, civil rights, rights of Earth.

Again, I was out front early on that and just got bashed because of it. It's like, "Oh, that's white liberalism." You go, "Fool, if you don't have an Earth to live on, you can't even make revolution. You can't do anything. You're polluted. You're dying right here." So that's a common denominator to us all, you know. Now the awareness of young kids, your kids, my kids, I mean, I didn't know the word *ecology* or *sustainability* or *natural* or *organic*, but that's part of their lingo. So I think that's still one of the major things, is our responsibility to our basic—the right of the living creation, you know.

I don't know if I'm being clear about all that, but I'm just rolling it around, all the things I see. I mean, we have Chicano establishment in every field, in the art field, we can name all them and on Facebook I found they're at the Met and they're all in these museums and all this stuff, and I don't know if that's where—well, I know that's not where I was—I mean, I was heading that way because I was in the current, but then it's like that's not the point of what I was heading for. So to reconnect, continue to connect to roots movements, impulses, and youth, that's why I'm working with youth. In fact, I shouldn't say this on TV or on this, but I don't even like to be around old people because it's a lot of old ideas, you know, and—you have to excuse me, camera—sometimes the old Movement people, they are boring, you know. Just a little tiny ponytail, you know, just screaming for help, an inner cry for help. Move on. Let's just—to me. I don't hold on to any iconographic images or symbols and all that stuff. You know what I mean? Stereotypes. Because we could stereotype our own self. That's why in art, I love art because I can be outrageous in a very nice way. You know what I mean?

Rasul Yes.

[00:57:31]

Padilla But always pushing for self-awareness, and maybe that's an area we need to develop more as a culture, more self-awareness, more philosophical, more spiritual awareness, the awareness of what we're doing here, big questions, because we have so much talent, so much things. I meet people all the time, "Well, I'm a scientist, but I'm a Chicano scientist," or "I'm a this kind of scientist." But let's just be scientists and make our contributions that comes through us, but we don't label it,

you know, because that's the future. I mean, the Earth is in peril and we're over here playing with these kind of little—that's why I'm critical or discerning about even the ceremonies. Don't get too involved with all the glitter and mayhem and feathers and stuff, you know. Those are only outward expressions. There's a saying that says "Medication is what heals the outside of us, but medication or prayer is what heals the inside of us." And maybe that's an area we need to really—Chicano spirituality, deeper, and not old Indian ideas, because there's a stereotype of that. I've been around a little bit and see all these people, and I'm going, "Wonderful, brother. I appreciate it. You're playing Indian. You're playing. What I'm talking about is serious as a heart attack. It's like be real about it, be in your own community and do it." So, yeah, searching deeper, further into the frontiers of human existence and human destiny, what we're to do. I know I'm rambling, but—

Rasul Time has passed, and you mentioned earlier that we've lost maybe 100 people that were activists during that time period, '65 to '80. Can you recall anyone here in Sacramento that has passed away, and recall their contribution and their spirit? [00:59:48]

Rasul There's two. I mean, there's many. Everyone has a contribution. But José Montoya was very pivotal to the Movement and my awareness. While I was not a student of his, we met as mature adults. His open-mindedness to things other than what were obvious, I mean, he'd studied and looked at all kinds of things, things that people are not even aware of. We spent a lot of time in spiritual study together and things we don't talk about and people don't know about. Very pivotal, because he would go out and do it, and that's what was so important. He'd take these fine

subtleties, like gradations of color in his paintings, and he'd put them out there, where many of the rest of us would not do that. That was not our role.

The other was Jennie Baca, very pivotal to me because a woman who gave, who did, who was just real, just real to the time and the moment. I never even heard her call herself a Chicana or anything like that. She was too busy making sandwiches and organizing things, keeping the family together and calling everybody *mijo* and *mija*. You know what I mean? So she had that family feeling.

So both of them really, to me, because they were kind of parental or like *tío* and *tía* of the Movement, he being more spectacular in his presentations to the world, and hers being so humble and most people don't even know her or would—you know what I mean, but did so much for everybody, you know.

Then with José [Montoya] and our work together, then I did what little I could to help encourage this indigenous culture within his philosophies. We could do something lasting. And I guess that's a theme throughout, what I'm hearing myself say, something that is lasting, it outlasts, our archives, that somewhere the trails are marked. We don't have to keep reinventing the wheel, which I see happen so often.

Anyway, so thank you for the opportunity. Is there other questions?

Rasul One more question I have is, what do you see, looking forward, as far as what the needs are of the Chicano Movement or humanity, as you want to put it, what do you see looking forward?

[01:02:42]

Padilla Well, the Movement's always there, right? Again, movement is the verb. Keeping that alive to let people know that it's not a thing that we did, but it's a

way of life, and especially if the kids keep it descending. That's why I think education is so important. I still see a college left undone, that's to be done, somewhere where we can speak for ourselves, because even now, like we're doing this, and like you, I've been studied by all kinds of people and everything. I never see the results. I've been photographed by thousands of people. I never see those photographs. What happens? They just go out there. Why are we doing this? To me, it's time to come home, claim our birthright in this continent, and make ourselves more visible, but be contemporary. Again, a lot of people wake up and they go back to the 1800s or they go back to the motherland. No, you wake up and you're now.

I'm going to end with this little saying. How do you make dreams come true? You have to wake up, or else it remains a dream. And you talk about it and you see people that just get high and they talk these pipe dreams. Then comes the next day, they do the same thing over and over again. One day you have to just wake up, which means transform your ordinary life and make it extraordinary. To me, the greatest sadness I have is that all this is just taken for granted, you know, just like, "Oh, that's what they did and that's what they did," but not realizing that it was part of cultural transformation of many groups and many people, but it's a human experience.

Rasul Stan, I want to thank you for the interview, and I want to tell you that what struck me personally is the spirit of dignity. It's what I got most from you. [01:05:11]

Padilla Exactly. I call it a kind of cleanliness of soul. You know what I mean? Where you don't have all these impure or whatever influences. We can speak for our self and the dignity of our heritage. And that's the future. So thank you.

Rasul Thank you, Stan. Thank you.

[End of interview]