

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

David Rasul

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Nataly Figueroa and Jordon Nguyen
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Transcription by Marlyn Curiel and Technitype Transcripts

Nguyen Hello. Can you please state your full name, date of birth, and marital status, please?

[00:00:12]

Rasul My name is Davis Rasul, R-a-s-u-l. My marital status, married. It's my second marriage. I've been married as of—April 23rd was thirty-eight years with Melinda Fantana Rasul.

Nguyen And do you have any children, and, if so, how many?

[00:00:31]

Rasul Yes, we have three children. David, my oldest, is thirty-seven, then Marialena—we call her Nena, she's thirty-five, and then our baby, Vero, Veronica, she's thirty-two. And we have one granddaughter, Benicia Martinez.

Nguyen Can you state your date of birth?

[00:00:49]

Rasul My birth, 7/21/47, 1947.

Figueroa So where were you born and raised

[00:00:59]

Rasul I was born and raised here in Sacramento. I like to tell people that I was tortilla-bred and -fed here in Sacramento. My mom and dad moved here in approximately 1943 from Valle Imperial in Central California, and my brother and my sister—I have an older sister and an older brother; I’m the baby of the family—they were born in El Centro and in Los Angeles, and I was the one that was born here in Sacramento in 1947.

Figueroa What do your parents do for a living?

[00:01:31]

Rasul Both my parents are deceased. My daddy died in 1985 and my mom in 2009. Both my parents, they worked hard all their lives, but when they moved up here to Sacramento from Valle Imperial, from El Centro, they started working at Bercut Richards Cannery, and then my dad worked there full-time at Bercut Richards Cannery. He was an electrician, he was a plumber, he was a machinist, he was a carpenter there, he was a mechanic. He did everything at the cannery, and he learned everything from scratch. He just had a lot of energy.

My dad, that’s one thing I admired about my dad, that he didn’t let anything scare him, you know. He told me this one story one time that he was looking for a job when they were down in Valle Imperial. My mom and him got married. My dad was seventeen, my mom was fourteen. He went looking for a job on the farm, and the farmer says, “You know how to run that tractor over there?”

And my dad said, “Sure I do. No problem.”

So he said, “Okay, plow that field.”

So as soon as he left, my dad tells me that he got on the truck and started learning how to drive the tractor [laughter], because he really didn't know, but he had that enthusiasm and the *ganas* and wasn't afraid to try things. Again, a lot of *gente* like my dad just did things because they had to support the family.

So my dad worked there at the cannery. In 1985, he had a massive heart attack there at the cannery. He was driving a gitney. He was going to retire in about two more months. He was sixty-three and had a massive heart attack, and he passed away there at the cannery.

My mom worked at the cannery also, but for the women at the canneries, it was mainly seasonal. So my mom and my grandmother Tula—her name was Mary Ochoa, but everyone called her—her nickname was Tula—they would go around to different canneries, about five different canneries following the seasons. They would work behind Channel 10 on Broadway; they had a fish-packing cannery. So my mom and my grandmother worked there. Then they'd go over to Libby's, work in another part of the produce that was in season during that time. Then they'd go over to Del Monte, then they'd go over to Hunt's, and then they'd end up at Bercut Richards for the *tomate* season. They'd do all the tomato-picking season, would start around the end of August and last through the middle of November.

And at that time, all my *familia* from El Centro, I'd have about fifteen family members come up from El Centro to work in the *tomate* during that season. Where I grew up at, it's called Barrio Diamonds. It's Power Inn Road and Fruitridge. That's called Barrio Diamonds. They would all find little *casitas* around there that they'd rent for three or four months to stay up here, and for me that was the time of my life

because that's when all my *primos* came up, you know. I had my brothers and sister, but they were more inside people and I was more an outside person, so they always hung out together. They're only eleven months apart and I was like three years apart from them.

Figueroa How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:04:53]

Rasul Just one older sister. She's seventy-one now, going to be seventy-two. And then my brother is the middle child. He's—how old is he now? He's sixty-nine, I think. Seventy. I'm sorry. He's seventy, yeah. So I'm the baby of the family, as I said.

Figueroa So how would you describe your childhood?

[00:05:17]

Rasul You know, my mom was really tight with us. She didn't let us go out in the neighborhood too much, but my brother and sister was easy because, like I said, they were indoor people. Once I hit the outside as soon as the sun came out, I mean, I was gone. I was everywhere, you know, playing in the neighborhood, because early on in Sacramento where I lived, there was a lot of open fields, and the neighborhood was right next—we have Max Baer Park area, where it's considered my area of Barrio Diamonds, and then next door to that is Elder Creek area.

For Elder Creek area, there's a lot of airmen, African American airmen that were in the war, and when then came back, instead of going to McClellan or Mather, they wouldn't let them on post because they were Black. They were discriminating against them. So they went to Glen Elder, close where I lived, and they established

their houses there. So where I grew up at, it was mainly a Black and Chicano neighborhood.

I went to Earl Warren, which is a local elementary school there for my—it's called kindergarten, right? My mom firmly believed in education, and she didn't want to happen what happened to her. She grew up in El Paso, Texas, and just an example is when she would speak Spanish in the classroom, during recess she would have to stand in a circle as punishment while all the other kids played.

My mom was deeply devoted to our education, so she started sending us to Catholic school. So both my brother, my sister, myself, we went to All Hallows Elementary School, Catholic school. Then all three of us went on to—Bishop Armstrong was the Catholic school here, the only Catholic school here in Sacramento. My sister went there and so did my brother. When I started going there, Christian Brothers bought it out from the diocese and it became Christian Brothers. So we all went to what's called Bishop Armstrong, Christian Brothers, so I went to school there.

And, again, that's the thing about my mother, her devotion to us, she made us go there and it was expensive, but the way she solved the problem is that I became a janitor while I was going to school. I cleaned two rooms in the morning, the gym and the locker room in the morning, washed dishes at lunchtime, and then cleaned four rooms at night, and I did that for four years. So once again, my mother, again, thought very highly of education.

Growing up, my dad and mom would get off the—specifically my dad, because he worked year-round—would get off work at 4:30 on a Friday and we'd all

pack up and we'd go up to Yuba City. That's where all my cousins lived and his brother and sisters, so we'd all go to Yuba City. So we'd be up there from Friday, from 6:00 till about Sunday night about 8:00, and then we'd drive home. So that's one of the things in my childhood that I remember and that I relish, going up there with my *primos*.

I didn't mention it, but my ethnicity, I'm Mexican, Punjabi, and Irish. My grandfather came from the Punjab in 1906, and at that time with the Alien Exclusion Act, they only allowed males to come over for cheap labor, not females. So when the Punjabis came to California, they married women who were closer to their culture and they married *mexicana* women. So there's about 300 families, 320 families in California that are Mexican and Punjabi. My last name, Rasul, which is spelled R-a-s-u-l, is a Punjabi name. So it was fun going up there in Yuba City. We'd speak in Spanish, English, and Urdu, a language that was kind of fun, having that whole experience like that. Now there's, I think, something like 20,000 East Indians up in Yuba City. Outside of India and Pakistan, it has the largest population of Pakistanis and Indians in the whole world, other than being in India itself. So we had that rich culture of having *frijoles* and tortillas with curry chicken, curry lamb, you know, roti, which is an Indian bread. So it was fun.

And then my mom, her dad died when she was like a year old, and he was half Irish. His name was Richard Kelly. My mom's maiden name is Mary Gloria Kelly, so she was Mexican and Irish.

So, growing up, I learned a lot from my mom and dad about work.

Nguyen Can I ask whether you were a Fellow or Felito and were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:10:21]

Rasul I was not a Felito or Fellow. When I came back from Vietnam and came back to Sacramento in about 1971, I started working in the community. I wasn't a Felito, but my brother Ishmael Rasul, he—when I went to Vietnam, I enlisted and they sent me to Vietnam. My brother got drafted and got sent to [unclear], Italy in the Italian Alps for eighteen months. So I said, “What's up with this? He got a good deal here.”

So he came back, he finished his teaching credential and he was teaching, and then he became one. I think it was the second or third group. He became a Felito in the Mexican American Education Project. My brother was very devoted to his profession, very devoted to the kids. He eventually became a principal. He was the principal of Maple School, principal of Newcomers School, where all the kids from different countries came in, and he was the principal of that school. I remember going to his Christmas presentation and having twenty-three languages up there spoken as part of the presentation. He was very proud of that. In fact, my brother spoke about seven languages.

He went to the Felitos program. You could see in his heart how, when I'd go to his classroom, he had me play Santa Claus at different times throughout the year, and how the kids would gather around him, you know, and he knew all their names. He was like a Pied Piper, you know. You could see this love and this affection that they both had for each other.

I think the Felitos program, I mean, sometimes you get into a program like this, you're already geared toward that type of attitude and behavior and philosophy, but then when you get into a program like the Felitos, then it just enhances it even more, you know. You get even more ideas, because you're willing to learn and want to learn of what to do and how to teach the children. And my brother just totally engulfed that whole aspect of it.

Have you guys ever heard of Paulo Freire?

Figueroa No.

[00:12:29]

Rasul: You've got to read it. He was a South American educator and he wrote a book called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. So, again, he was an educator. One year he came to Sac State and was doing a presentation to the Sac State students who were going to be in the teaching profession, and a couple of the teachers says, "You've got to go see this person. You have to go see this person teach."

So they all drove down there. I wasn't involved in it, but the story goes that they all went down there to watch someone teach the classes, you know. He was teaching in that *oro del barrio*, which, again, has a philosophy that students come with capital. A lot of people teach that students don't have capital at all, their cultural negative experiences, but what Paulo Freire teaches that you have *oro del barrio* you have gold, what you've been teaching, and we have to use that for teaching methods. So anyway, they watched him teach and all this other stuff, and it was my brother, it was my brother that was teaching second grade. I have a book at home called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, one of his main books, and it's signed by Paulo Freire,

and it says that you—I don't remember the exact words—that “You are a prime example of my teachings.”

So my brother was well loved. He had a traumatic brain injury about four years ago. He fell, hit the concrete. He was in the hospital for 225 days. He would be a person that would be wonderful to be interviewed, but he's only got like 75 percent of his cognitive brain back, you know. He's getting back his sarcasm, which he had a great sarcastic humor and cynical humor, but he's not there yet. But he would have been a wonderful person to interview. He was a big influence. [cries]

A lot of people—for example, when I was fifty, I became a counselor at Sacramento City College and I would get students in, and they'd look at me, “Oh, you're Mr. Rasul?”

“Yeah.”

They'd go, “Oh, no, you're not.

I go, “I'm his brother.”

And parents would come with their kids when I was at City College as a counselor, and the students' parents would just rave about him, how great he was as a teacher. So I know he did great work.

So I wasn't part of Felitos, but I knew a lot of people who were in the Felitos program because I worked as a community worker, community service worker in Alkali in the different neighborhoods, and I came in contact with a lot of the people that went through the Fellows program. Again, they heavily influenced me of their feelings for children, the feelings for the community, what needed to be done as far as making sure that we receive our rights. So I received a lot of their philosophy. So,

again, I wasn't part of the Fellows program, but I think I received many of the benefits by just in contact with people who went through the program.

Nguyen Can you answer how it affected your career and/or life work?

[00:15:32]

Rasul It pretty much gave me guidance through the people who were part of that, with Senon Valadez [phonetic], Sam Rios [phonetic]. José Montoya was a Fellow, Esteban Villa, different people that I came in contact, because I'd be working in the community. Eventually I ended up working with elementary schools. They influenced me, their thought, their acceptance of me as trying to be a resource to them and me using them as resources.

I think we had kind of like a—it was a brotherhood/sisterhood thing during that time, where we all felt like we were marching [laughs] to the same beat. Some of us had different ideas how to do that march, but our goals were the same, and I think that Felitos program kind of washed out into the community and became—it was like a continuity going from the college over to community. So, yes, I think I was heavily influenced.

Figueroa Did your study of cultural anthropology or your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:16:50]

Rasul Yes, it did. Yes, part of that thinking, again, pride in my culture and my history, I started reading all these different codices, you know. Sagun [phonetic] was a priest, I think from Spain, and he started writing about the different cultural patterns and cultural activities that were going on and what their meanings were.

There were other people that wrote different things. One was the *Thought and Culture of the Aztecs*. I forgot who wrote that book. I started reading those books and I started finding more out about the *flor y canto* of our culture, the spirit, spiritual part.

I had a Dr. N_____. Solis I was in a mental health program. I was the supervisor of the program, then I eventually became the director, and Dr. N_____ Solis was considered [Spanish], “a wise man,” in Mexico. His family have been [Spanish] for a couple generations. I started learning from him in different aspects, and from him, because in the Mental Health Unit I was in, we were [unclear] people one-on-one in counseling sessions. Then we started talking about how can we affect more than just one-on-one? How can we affect the whole community?

One of the things we thought about doing was doing traditional ceremonies, traditional *fiestas*, and the first one we did here in Sacramento was called Día de los Muertos. So back in 1974, I believe Lupe Portillo and some other people started an *altar* in the Washington Neighborhood Center, and then that following year when Dr. Solis gave us the idea, we kind of enhanced all that, and not only do we have an altar overseeing Mary’s Cemetery, we also had a precession from Hiram Johnson down 65th over to the cemetery.

So that’s part of that whole thing that started with the cultural aspects of our community, but that’s just a simple form of starting a precession with [unclear], but in between then, we decided, well, we have go to the elementary schools, through breakfast with *los niños*, Washington Neighborhood Council and other organizations. We had a core of maybe eight or nine people that we would go to the elementary schools and talk about Día delos Muertos, what it meant, and then we would do

mascaras with the children. We'd get surgical gauze, put Vaseline on their faces so it wouldn't stick to their faces, and then put the masks on, and then they'd take off the mask. And during our teachings with them, we'd tell them, "Now it's your job to paint the mask in relation to your spirit, what your spirit feels." So the mask is kind of—it's called *mascara*, right? It's "more face," right? So it gives you more spirit and more face of how you feel and part of our culture. So they would design it, whatever they wanted.

So it was great things like that. That was just one aspect of Día de los Muertos fiesta, the [unclear] *fiesta*, the *maiz*, etc., things like that, so we were doing *fiestas* according to what nature has as far as fall, summer, spring, and winter.

Nguyen Can you tell us about the earliest events that attracted you to the Chicano Movement?

[00:20:18]

Rasul Going to Catholic school, okay [laughs], and being maybe one of five Chicanos in my class out of 140, they were all mainly White students, because, again, it costs money to go there. So it seemed like having that experience, I would be kind of isolated in a way from my culture, right? But I had the strength of my great-grandmother Franziska [phonetic]. She came over to United States in 1896 from Michoacán to El Paso, and she was the driving force for our whole family. So I remember growing up, that whatever she said went. She was my great-grandmother.

Then I had my grandmother Tula, then my mother, and it was always—they talk about how *macho* our families are, but to me, my family was more matriarchal. You know, *la mujer* was it, you know. [laughs] My dad was a strong person, but he

was strong for the family. He wasn't the guy that you see getting out *borracho* and all this other stuff like. He was very strong.

So I think that influence, that power of our family when I was going to Christian Brothers, it didn't hinder my love for my culture, and it came through, I think, when I was in Vietnam. I remember a conversation. We had an 80-acre compound that we had to guard up at I Corps, which was just 20 miles from the DMZ, and I remember there was this guy, and I remember his last name, Galván, he was from Texas. I can't remember the whole conversation, but it got around to it where somehow he questioned my *mexicanismo*, right? And then he started talking about the Spanish, how great they were, things like that, and then I just kind of jumped out at him. [laughs] "What's the matter with you, man?" I started talking about how proud I was of my family and my culture, Again, it was in me you know.

Dr. Solis told us one time, he says, "You know, it's not lost. A lot of that, your subconscious, love of your culture, your *familia*, your attitude, even your Spanish language, it's back here in your subconscious, and all it needs is a gate to open up and it comes out. It's naturally within us." And I always remember Solis saying that and reflecting back on what my experiences were.

So I think when I came back from Vietnam and feeling a little lost, I was lost [cries], because, again, I never said I went to Vietnam for the longest time. We weren't treated exactly very, very well as veterans coming back from Vietnam because, again, it was an unpopular war. I remember, oh, getting out of the Army and I was eight months without a job. After a while, things like that kind of wear on you, right?

And I can still remember one of the persons that helped me out so much. Her name was Rosie Joguín [phonetic]. She worked for—we used to call it the unemployment office, actually the employment office. [laughs] I remember her, one of the persons that never lost faith in me. She'd call me every week. When I first ran into her, she knew I was kind of semi-depressed you know, because I couldn't find a job, and she really helped me a lot, and I'll never forget her you know, Rosie Joguín, besides the support of my mom and dad, but that was a big thing.

I got off on that. What was the question again? I missed it. [laughs]

Nguyen It was about your earliest memories of the events that attracted you to the Chicano Movement, but you sufficiently answered it. How did you feel and your community feel about the term *Chicano*?

[00:25:06]

Rasul It was delicate sometimes. After I got out of the Army, I stayed back East for about four years. I was a Blacksmith back there. Then my sister kept on saying, "Come on home, David. Come on home. We need you over here in the Chicano Movement. We need you to help us out."

So I finally came home, and I got a job through New Careers, through Concilio. I started working for the Human Rights Commission, and through New Careers I worked four hours at work, then went to school for four hours and they paid me for eight hours. Good deal, huh? [laughs] Everyone was using the term *Chicano* there, and I adopted that and I felt that I was Chicano.

But then we were serving the *gente*. What I was doing, I was a community worker. I ran into *gente*, older people who didn't like the word *Chicano*. They said,

“*Que es tanto la palabra Chicano? Que sucio,*” they would say, and they wanted to be called *mexicanos*. A few of them said *Mexican American*. Most of them said *mexicanos*. So it’s a term that you use who you were talking to when you use the term and when you didn’t use the term. So it wasn’t across the board that everyone accepted it.

I found out all these other things by reading about the Chicano Movements in different areas. Like, for example in New Mexico, they call *manitos*, some people like to be called *cholos*, some *pochos*. In Colorado, they like to be called *Hispanos*, things like that. So, again, it all depends what area you’re in, but I think more widely accepted is the term *Chicano*.

[00:27:08]

Figueroa Did your involvement in the Chicano Movement really change you as a person?

[00:26:59]

Rasul Oh, most definitely so, yeah, because it made me have a different eye [laughs], you know, made me have a different view of looking at things, not as a cynical eye, but a critical eye. Again, one of the things we’ve learned by reading and looking at different issues that were going on in the Chicano Movement at the time and talking to my mentors, one of them being my sister Rosemary, who is very heavily involved in all the activity here in Sacramento, Manuela Serna [phonetic], my *comadre*, another one person, the RCF, the Royal Chicano Air Force, other professors, it made me look at things differently. It made me understand how important my family was, how important our community is.

Again, like I said earlier, sometimes people are naturally drawn to certain programs, right, because their personality is that way anyway. So my personality fit well with what we were doing there in the community. I wasn't always an academic person, but I was always a community person. I always wanted to take action and do something instead of talking a lot, what my parents did. My parents took action. They didn't talk a lot about things. But I think listening to all these activities and being willing to take part in things, and things could be a *fiesta*, could be a conference, could be a national conference, state conference, it could be a new training, you know. Being willing to do that influenced me and my thoughts and how I dealt with my relationships with people.

Nguyen So what role do you think Chicanos played in the Movement, if at all?
[00:28:48]

Rasul Well, I don't think the Movement would have happened if it hadn't been for Chicanos, people who had that willingness to take action when there was an injustice, and, of course, a lot of us followed Cesar Chavez as a role model. Just last week, April 23rd, I went down to La Paz, which is the headquarters for UFW. The U.S. Navy was honoring Cesar Chavez for his service. A lot of people don't know that he was a veteran, a Navy veteran. He was in just after the war from 1946 to 1948.

Again, the term *Chicano*, again, people had different definitions, but I think it's looking at community, looking at social justice, it's a different eye, you know, because when I became dean of counseling over at Sacramento City College, Rhonda Rios Kravitz [phonetic], a close friend of mine, she was the dean of the library and I was the dean of counseling, and so we had these [unclear] called SLT meetings,

Senior Leadership Team, which included all the deans, all the managers, the president of the college, the vice president of instruction, the vice president of student services, and I think if Rhonda and I hadn't been there in the closed room, a lot of things wouldn't have happened for Chicano students, okay?

So it's our energy and our enthusiasm, our commitment to look at things from a Chicano point of view that other people there aren't looking at that point of view, you know, and they don't realize what they're doing, what they're saying, and what direction they're taking a program in. So it was fortunate that we were there to say, "Hey, wait a minute. That's going to adversely affect the Chicano students. In fact, not only Chicano students, but also the Black students and the Asian students and even White students, going to adversely affect them. Have you guys thought about that?" So it helped us, and that's only one area.

I was also on the board of Christian Brothers, the school that I love to death. I was on the board six years, but, again, I was the only Chicano, I was the only person of color on the board, and so when things came up and I said things, I said, "Hey, that's not right. You can't do that," etc., things like that. So it's important that that we were in the board meetings, in those meetings where decisions were being made.

I know a lot of people kind of avoid—"Oh, I don't want to be a manager. I don't want to do that." But if we don't step up in being there, then we won't be in those closed doors and being able to influence those decisions. So I think Chicanos—and I'm just one example. There's many Chicanos in many areas that made a difference just because they were there at the board meeting, where people couldn't say racist or inaccurate statements about who they're serving. And who are

they serving? Us, right? So it was important that the Chicano Movement had people who were willing to step up the plate and be critical of issues.

Figueroa What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movement Chicano?

[00:32:09]

Rasul Well, I mentioned earlier about Día de los Muertos. I think we were one of the first ones. Tere Romo [phonetic] and myself and Armando Cid [phonetic] and Rosemary, my sister, would kind of influence the first Día de los Muertos.

And I want to say something about my sister. My sister Rosemary, when I first came back, I mentioned earlier she kept calling me to come back. She was the director of the Washington Council. She tells me that she started off, she was working at Macy's, she was on her way to being a buyer for Macy's. They sent her to New York and all this other stuff. Then the spirit of the Chicano Movement struck her heart [laughs], and she quit there. She said, "What am I doing here? My talents and my passion is for the Chicano Movement." She became a secretary there at Washington Neighborhood Council and eventually became the director when I came back home from back East. Through the Washington Neighbor Council, we started a lot of activities, made connections with the professors of Sac State and started the breakfast for *niños*, her and Jenny Baca [phonetic] and some other people that started it, but I have to say that my sister was the driving force behind a lot of these issues.

She was a great writer. She wrote a lot of grants. She knew how to deal with the county and city administration to help promote more programs and get more funding. She eventually became the director of Concilio, which was a major player in

this whole Chicano Movement during the seventies and the eighties. So she was a heavy influence on me as far as initiating things. I'd come up with an idea or say something, she'd go, "Yeah, Dave, let's do this." And she was always supportive of things that we did.

So I'm proud to say that I was part of the Cultural Affairs Committee, which initiated a lot of the *fiestas*, not just Cinco de Mayo and 16th September, but also these other ones that I talked about in between. Also, they were ready to go speak to the city council whenever something happened. People like Martha Pineda Bustamante [phonetic], she was a very heavy influence in the community also, and I loved her because being able to—"Esos cabrones!" She always talked like that very gruff voice, but she had a heart of gold, as did my sister and my friend, my *comadre* Manuela Serna. They all had heart of gold, but they fought like tigers when it came to defending the community.

So I guess what I initiated is, I didn't initiate a lot; I was part of a lot. I don't want to say that it was me, me, me that did it. If it hadn't been for a lot of other people, none of us would have been doing anything, but we all had the same spirit, the same *ganas* to do things.

Nguyen So did your Movement raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

[00:35:24]

Rasul Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, you can't have one without the other. I always say I'm not a politician. I hate being in politics, right? But you can't get away from it. You can't get away from politics. Politics involve, maybe even within our

own group, understanding someone else's point of view, even if it might be different than yours. You still have to be political about it and be able to do what a lot of politicians don't do, is collaborate, be collaborative, be cooperative to come up with—just like the projects that we're in right now, you can't say this is a history of what happened between 1965 and 1980. It's a history that's a combination of all of our interviews of what happened during that period of time. Everyone had a different point of view, everyone had a different philosophy. Their eyes see differently than the next person's. But it all came together to the ultimate goal of social justice.

Nguyen Did these changes affect your relationships with your family or your peers or anything like that?

[00:36:41]

Rasul Well, sometimes I look at back and I say to myself—I just recently retired about a year and a half ago. I was the dean of counseling and I was working twelve hours a day for four years while I was the dean. But then when I was a counselor, when I switched careers when I was fifty, I only had to work seven and a half hours, but I worked ten hours, eleven hours. When I was working for Sacramento Housing, I was only required to work forty hours, but I'd work sixty hours, you know. [laughs] And then when I was a community worker, I was just tirelessly working all the time.

So I tried to take my family wherever I went. Like, I'd have a work project, I was trying paint houses of the elderly on a Saturday when I was a planner for the City of Sacramento for the low-income area. I'd take my kids out there to paint with us. My wife would go along, too. My wife has been always supportive. So, you know,

working ten hours a day, eight hours a day, eleven hours a day, it's bound to affect your kids, right? I thought I worked hard, but then I'd come home, I'd be with the family a lot also, include them with everything. So it definitely affected.

Figueroa Being that you were so involved with the Chicano Movement, how would you say that affected your personal career?

[00:38:06]

Rasul Well, I think the jobs I went after and got were kind of like a continuation of what I was doing, what my personal feelings were about community. I started off as an assistant with Sacramento Fair Housing Discrimination, was the name. I started with that, and that was kind of a continuation of trying to help people.

Then I started working for the Mental Health Unit over there with—I was talking about Concilio, and that just bloomed into what I really wanted to do. That program got cut off. Then I started working for a program called Talent Search, where I'd got out to the high schools and work with kids who a lot of the counselors gave up on, who said, "You're not going to do anything. Might as well get a job being a gardener after you get out of high school." I started going, through Talent Search, going to them and encouraging them to go to college.

So being a community social worker and going back to school and getting my master's, working for Sacramento Housing as a planner, being a counselor and all that kind of led my passion. The jobs were part of who I was, so it was a natural fit. It was a natural fit.

Nguyen Can you talk about how the Chicano Movement impacted your community or wherever you were living?

[00:39:50]

Rasul Well, the thing I mentioned earlier about Dr. Solis, how he said we needed to reach out more for mental health, instead of just one-on-one, we need to do more activities for the community, I think that was a big influence, that through cultural events, *fiestas*, through working with Royal Chicano Air Force doing their cultural events, doing their art, again, art reflects the community in that aspect. So I think, yes, most definitely I think it upraised the spirit of the community. The *fiestas* just weren't going out to a park and looking at a band, you know, like Cinco de Mayo and 16th Septiembre. I think they always had other agencies, social work agencies that were trying to help the community. They were able to give their information to the community, so I think that is a very important part of those events, that the community benefited by getting more information about services. So it's always about giving our *gente* the chance to be knowledgeable of things, be respected for who they are, take pride in who we are as a community.

I was really happy I worked for a little bit—I don't know if you guys know about Eric Guerra. He was a Sac State graduate. He came the chair of a Neighborhood Association, and on April 7th, he got elected as a city councilman. So the population we have of over like 28 percent of the population being Chicano/Latino here in Sacramento, we had no one representing us on the city council. So he's the first one since Joe Serna passed away that represents us on city council, so he just got elected. So that's very important that we have leadership in that high area for us to see, for our students to see, our kids, our family, for us to see, "Oh, yeah, we have a representative there." Before, we weren't, and it's kind of sad to see that, that no

one's there for us. There are many leaders in different aspects in the community, but also we need to see people influential in other areas like that too.

Figueroa Being that there were many Movimiento Chicano activists that passed on, who would you identify as someone who had an impact on the *Movimiento*?

[00:42:34]

Rasul My *comadre* Manuela Cerda, she was very strong woman. She started Sac State with the MEChA over there, fighting for issues. She was influential in hiring a couple of the artists like Esteban Villa when he was there protesting why wasn't he being hired along with Martha Bustamante, one of the very important women who passed away. She was a community activist. Manuela went on to be—I think her last title was she was director of affirmative action for the county of Sacramento, and she was very influential in writing job descriptions, writing all that employment thing with affirmative action thing, even though affirmative action went under a different name. She was very influential in doing that, too, very influential in presenting it to city council. I can remember her.

Heather Fargo was the mayor at the time, and I remember before Heather Fargo became the mayor, she was also on city council, and I can remember Heather Fargo actually said something wrong, and Manuela came over and said, “How *dare* you say that about our community?” She was able to have her voice spoken, and criticized her for being like that. I mean, not a lot of people liked to do that, but she had no worries, no problem at all doing that. Manuela was a very strong person. She helped me. I was doing the Cinco de Mayo and 16th Septiembre for close to twenty-eight years, and I did it for different organizations. For the last eight years, Manuela

came in and we would always fight tooth and nail to have something different done with the city police to make sure that security was there. They first didn't want us to do anything with the *fiesta*. They wanted us to ban it, not have it at all, etc. Manuela was always there at the forefront being influential with the chief of police, with the mayor, with the city councilmen. She was always active with them. She was a very political person.

I was her partner in crime, but I wasn't that political like she was. So she'd come in and raised holy hell when things weren't happening right, and they'd go, "Okay, okay, Manuela." And then they said, "Can we talk to David now?" Because I was Mr. Nice Guy, you know. I wasn't as forceful as she was, so to speak. So, again, she's one of them.

Martha Bustamante is another person who was very influential. José Montoya, he's since passed away. He was a great artist here in Sacramento, a poet known nationally. But Manuela was the one I would probably focus on.

Nguyen So what do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community? [00:45:33]

Rasul I think not letting the banner go down, keeping it up, because around the corner another issue comes out, you know. Right now it's undocumented students right, the Dreamers, how powerful that is for our community to make sure that they're protected, they're able to get their education, our *gente* who are undocumented to get health services. I mean, it's very crucial for that—what is it—11 million undocumented people in the United States that need those services. So, a continuation

of that, and I see that “Health For All,” everybody’s wearing those tee-shirts and making sure that we have a healthy community and services.

I just mentioned Eric Guerra. We need more people like him in our politics. I mean, it’s a shame sometimes when I see things, that you have Black and Asian participation, but no Chicano/Latino. Right now I think Sac Unified School District has this Men of Color program, but there’s no Chicanos there. I have this friend, Rachel Campos [phonetic], she got invited to that Men of Color from Sac City Unified, and there was no Chicanos at all, no Chicano males in Men of Color. And those services are only geared towards African American students.

So, again, I think our challenge is to make sure that we’re part of everything, be there to give our input about what our community needs, be able to be forthright and not be shy about stating those issues, you know, put your hand up and have your voice be heard for our community. So I think the challenges continues, again, from education to criminal justice, you know, to art history, culture, everything. We need to be there. It’s a challenge.

Nguyen Where do you see yourself in these challenges? Do you feel like you’d be involved in them?

[00:47:49]

Rasul You know, I just retired. I’ll be sixty-eight in July, and I’m still being part of things. I’m still volunteering. I did three workshops for the Chicano students at McClatchy High School last month, and I’m still involved with—I’m part of the Cesar Chavez chapter of the American GI Forum. We’re trying to help veterans also.

So, little different things like that. I don't want to be in charge of anything, but I'm there to help.

I'm constantly asking young people, while I run into them—either they're baggers at a grocery store, they're waiters someplace, or they're doing something—I'll ask them, "Are you going to school?" is my first question to them.

They say "Oh, no, I'm not going."

I'll say, "Why aren't you going?" You've got to hold the opportunity for them, you know, at least start talking. They say they really want to go to school. Then I'm encouraging them. So I give them my number and I give them the same of Juan Chico [phonetic] over at Sacramento City College or Mr. Galván, who used to work at UC Davis. I have all these contacts I still have, so I'm always giving out names for them to follow up as resources. So I think my role is just keep on pushing wherever I see, plus myself, you know.

Nguyen So I think that's all the questions we have for you today. Thank you for your participation.

[00:49:13]

Rasul Oh, it's been my pleasure. Thank you very much for interviewing me.

Appreciate it.

[End of interview]