

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education

Oral History Project

Name of Interviewee: Mariana Castorena Rivera

Name of Interviewer: Kelly Martínez

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1 BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

2 [00:00:00]

3 Kelly: Kelly Martínez and I'm an undergraduate at UC Davis and research assistant for professor

4 Lorena Márquez. We will begin, please state your full name.

5 Mariana: It's Mariana Castorena Rivera.

6 Interviewer: And your date of birth?

7 Mariana: July 9th 1950.

8 Interviewer: Marital status?

9 Mariana: I'm married.

10 Kelly: And do you have any children?

11 Mariana: I have four children.

12 Kelly: Four?

13 Mariana: Uhum.

14 Kelly: Okay, we'll start with your early life, where were you born and raised?

15 Mariana: I was born and raised in Colusa, it's up North about 70 miles from Sacramento.

16 Kelly: What did your parents do for a living?

17 Mariana: My mom was a housekeeper. She cleaned house for rich white ladies, in our town.

18 Kelly: And your father?

19 Mariana: No father.

20 Kelly: How many brother and sisters did you have?

21 Mariana: There were seven of us all together.

22 Kelly: Nice big family.

23 Mariana: Yeah, there was a lot of us.

24 Kelly: Can you please describe your experiences as a child, and youth and family and
25 neighborhood?

26 Mariana: Okay, we lived at the east end of the town, [pause] and it always looked like a lake in
27 front of our house cuz the—the way the water ran in the town [laughs]. The way there was
28 always like a lake. It was mixed, Mexican. The next block was black, but our neighborhood was,
29 I'm trying to think there might have been a couple of white families across the street or behind us
30 on the other side of the alley, but a lot of mexicano [Mexican] families.

31 Kelly: So your neighborhood was predominately mexicano?

32 Mariana: Our block? [laughs] I mean the town was really small, there's only a couple thousand
33 people. So, [pause] we grew up, we were probably like maybe ten-percent of the school
34 population.

35 [00:02:00]

36 There were a lot of Chicanos/ mexicanos who lived there year-round. A lot of farm workers
37 came in and worked during the cultural seasons, but we were one of the first mexicano families
38 to move there. My grandmother and grandfather came in, I guess 1919. After the Mexican
39 Revolution, my grandfather worked for the railroad I think in Kansas City and somehow, he
40 ended up in Maxwell, a little town near, it's still in Colusa county. We even found the records of
41 his employment with Union Pacific. We found where it showed how much he earned per week
42 and then it showed... You can compare it to how much the white workers made; they made a lot
43 more than the mexicanos. We found that information, so all the stories that we learned as little
44 kids about our grandparents were *comprobado* [verified]. We got to see the proof of that, so it
45 was kinda neat.

46 Kelly: And were you a Fello or Felito/ Felita during the Mexican Education Project?

47 Mariana: No, I wasn't. All my friends were. I went to go for the interview, and then I went, "Oh
48 I don't speak Spanish good enough, I really can't do it." I pulled myself out, like a dummy, I
49 should have stayed in it [laughs].

50 Kelly: Did you take any courses in anthropology or the social sciences?

51 Mariana: Yeah, that's what I majored in.

52 I: How did they impact—

53 Mariana: One of the first anthropology classes I took was taught by Steve Arvizu. Steve was one
54 of the guys who was involved with the Mexican American project. It was like the first time I
55 ever got to learn about ourselves. It was really significant. Yeah, there were a couple of classes
56 that I took. They were taught off campus; they weren't even taught at the campus. They were
57 taught in community, but they were still university classes.

58 [00:04:00]

59 There was a place called St. Joseph School downtown, where they held the class. It was pretty
60 awesome. I loved that class, it was like the beginning. My brother was just a little bit older than
61 me, he brought me copies of, *El Grito* [the chant] or what was it called *El Grito*? Something
62 from Berkeley, they were these like journals of Chicano [inaudible] [00:4:27] and that was back
63 in 1969, 68.' I mean 68,' the summer of 68.' The summer of 68,' I started reading those and I
64 had only been in college one year. I had graduated high school when I was 16, so I was pretty
65 young doing all the stuff. So, I got to read those journals, and that was like, all about us. A lot of
66 critical analysis about the current sociological theories put out by Anglo professors at our schools
67 and it was the first time I ever heard anything different. That got me! I was hooked [laughs].

68 Kelly: So it was these journals that initiated this...

69 Mariana: I really feel like my brother talking to me, cuz he started to get involved before I did.
70 Then he brought me those journals, and that summer between my freshman and sophomore year
71 in college, was the beginning. Never stopped after that.

72 Kelly: How did your participation in the Mexican American Education Project influence your
73 career?

74 Mariana: I wasn't in the Mexican American Education Project.

75 Kelly: Okay, so your earliest memories of the Chicano movement, what are your earliest
76 memories or events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano [Chicano Movement]?

77 [00:06:00]

78 Mariana: Like I said it was the first time I ever, having any theory about us, learning about
79 ourselves and our history and our culture and it was the first time. So for me, some of the first
80 things I got involved in was I worked with the UFW, but it wasn't the UFW yet. It was called, U-
81 Farm, Farm Workers Organizing Committee, and I remember driving around the organizer. I was
82 her transportation. I drove her everywhere. I picketed every day at the Safeway out in
83 Carmichael, so I was called a communist all the time and lot of things. Just things people said to
84 you because they didn't want to listen to you. I would say, "could you please not buy grapes and
85 help the farmworkers?" And they would say, "You're a communist." So, the UFW stuff and
86 visiting, doing food drives, taking food to the farm workers in these long caravans of all of our
87 old Chicano cars. I think a lot of the guys had like Volkswagon busses and we all drove down to
88 central valley to Delano and would listen to Cesar talk or hear the Teatro Campesino perform, or
89 do the Chicano clap. All those things that we did kind of made you feel goosebumps. I think
90 what drew me in the most was the feeling of unity, of brotherhood or sisterhood, *carnalismo*
91 [brotherhood/sisterhood] between all of us. I think that was really key. So contradictory to that, I
92 was part of the Brown Berets. So I went to this really super non-violent stuff that really touched
93 my heart, to the willingness to use any means necessary to create change.

94 [00:08:02]

95 It was a dichotomy. It was real hard for me, I remember some of the Berets were, I don't know
96 who's place we were at, but they got my little non-violence books and they threw them against
97 the wall [laugh]. And said, "Screw non-violence," and I was like, "well, I always think we
98 should do things that way if we can." The student movement, I was part of the student
99 movement, I was at American River college. I was just talking to Pete about that right now, or
100 you know reminiscing about that. I started the first chapter, I don't remember if we called it
101 MAYA or MAYO? Mexican American Youth, something I can't remember what we called it.
102 But I went to the student activities office and I found all of the names of all the Raza students
103 that were like 39 and I got their phone numbers and I called each one of them and I organized the
104 first meeting. Then we became an organization at the campus, so I did that, and my brother was
105 at Sac State, and he was part of, I can't remember if it was MAYO or MAYA, it was pre-
106 MECHA. So it was whatever organization we had at Sac State. He was the vice president I
107 remember and I was doing the stuff at the community college. So we were both kind of doing
108 similar work. And he informed me quite a bit about what was going on, and then at that same
109 time it was Vietnam. It was the work against Vietnam. My last year of high school, I was pretty
110 anti-war already from like, when I was 13 so [laughs] I was doing that stuff at the same time. In
111 that time it was real difficult to understand what was the relationship between racism and gender,
112 inequality and imperialism. How do they fit? What's their relationship? How do they fit?

113 [00:10:00]

114 That was the question. It was really difficult to understand it and no one had any analysis of it.
115 No one could explain it, no one could tell you how they relate together. Like why were there so

116 many young Raza males in Vietnam? Why were they such a great number of the kids who died,
117 or the young people who died there? Thirty something percent of the dead, only five percent of
118 the population, whatever those numbers were. It was horrific. And so you want to understand
119 why was that, that way too.

120 Kelly: Have you heard of the civil rights movement at the time?

121 Mariana: Yes. I used to watch it on TV, it was, you saw black people being attacked by dogs, the
122 big hoses on them. Stuff that you might see as a news real, we saw on TV. It was awful, but I
123 don't think I understood it. That it was racism and that it was the same thing we were
124 confronting, I didn't understand what those things were. You just knew that you were treated
125 differently and it was based on your skin color.

126 Kelly: So it wasn't until you took the courses that you began?

127 Mariana: Yeah, and even our professors didn't have great analysis either. They didn't understand
128 it either. I mean they were trying. And it was better than what we got classes taught by Anglo
129 professors, it was better than that. They had some understanding, but it wasn't like all of a
130 sudden, we had super analysis and we could get it. Sometimes it was real nationalistic,
131 sometimes analysis was lacking. Maybe it didn't have an economic understanding, class
132 understating, of what was going on. We knew we were treated bad because we were poor,
133 because we were working people, and because we were brown.

134 [00:12:00]

135 Mariana: Then the guys didn't have understanding about questions of gender and equality.

136 Kelly: So did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano [Chicano Movement] change you
137 personally?

138 Mariana: Did it what?

139 Kelly: Did it change you personally?

140 Mariana: Absolutely, I'm still involved and I care about it.

141 It sort of touched your heart. It was part of who you were. I remember saying one time I felt like,
142 anytime I saw a brown person, I felt a solidarity with them. That *carnalismo*

143 [brotherhood/sisterhood] with them. That aspect of, that's my sister that's my brother. We're all

144 one. It touches you because you finally start to say, "Oh maybe I have something, I am going to

145 be part of what changes society." I know we were very idealistic and didn't understand things

146 because we thought we were going to change the world in 5 years or something [laughs]. I think

147 being part of the movement, I wanted to understand how were we were going to change society

148 and a lot of people would ask us because we would go, like at American River college we asked

149 for a recruitment program to get more Raza to go to American River College. We went to the

150 school board meeting, or the board of trustees meeting, and we took some of the Brown Berets.

151 So our little group sounded very nice. And the Berets sounded scary [laughs]. So they gave us

152 what we asked for, they even gave us twice as what we asked for because we sounded like

153 "nicey nice," and the other ones, they were afraid of them. But a lot of the times what they would

154 ask was "What is it that you guys really want? You want the whole Southwest back?"

155 [00:14:00]

156 Oh, maybe? [laughs] It absolutely touched me, touched my life and never went away. I wanted to
157 continue straggling. What I did is I left here and I moved to Mexico City, and I went with a
158 group of Chicanos down there and that's where I met my future husband. He was involved with
159 the movement in Mexico, so I moved to Mexico. You change, you know, it touched you, you
160 know. And then going to Mexico and seeing what was going on there. Then you really start
161 understanding it was about class, it wasn't just about race. And here when you're here, you kinda
162 get caught up in it's a question of race and racism and that's what we're confronting. But you go
163 to Mexico and there was still the aspect of if you're brown skin you're less than, or you're India,
164 or you're this or that you know. So it had that same feel, and I think in there, I told you I wanted
165 to understand things and I wanted to see what we were fighting for. With two other Chicanas, the
166 three of us applied to go to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade and that was like I guess 1970 we
167 applied. We went in the Spring of 71' and we were all students at Sac State, and we raised
168 money. We used to sell burritos and frijoles (beans), arroz (rice) and all that kind of stuff we
169 called them "Chicana delight burritos." All of the kids would come and buy them from us. And
170 that money we used to pay what it cost to go. And we went to Cuba for two months and cut sugar
171 cane for six weeks, and we came back all buff.

172 [00:16:00]

173 Mariana: Real dark from the sun and we got to see a different society and how society could be
174 different and there were brown people, lots of different colors. They were all shades and they had
175 education for everybody, and they had jobs for everybody and they had housing for everybody.
176 And you're going well wait a minute how can that little island, that poor little island, how do
177 they feed everybody, how do they educate everybody how do they do that? and how come we
178 can't do that? And so you want to know it was the movement and all of that movement that

179 touches you and makes you. It becomes you or you become it, I guess. I don't know if that
180 makes sense but that's, I don't even know if that makes sense to you but that's how...

181 Kelly: I know you mentioned the Brown Burets and the Venceremos...

182 Mariana: The Venceremos Brigade. Brigada Venceremos.

183 Kelly: What role did you believe that Chicanas played in the movimiento [movement] ?

184 Mariana: Well, I was one of those pain in the ass women [laughs] that a lot of guys complained
185 about, they used to say we were in a "white women's bag." But every conference we had, every
186 student conference, community conferences, everything. I was part of the women's, what do you
187 call it, what's that little word they use? I'm trying to think of the word. I can't think of it it's like
188 little section of the conference goes off and forms its own, it wasn't a committee they called it
189 some other term, I can't remember the word right now. We would form one of those for all the
190 women to come to because we always felt excluded from stuff.

191 [00:18:00]

192 Mariana: Within the Berets, there was a lot of us in the Berets but it was so sexist and so male
193 dominated. I remember organizing a play one time. Celia and I, Irma, and we got a bunch of the
194 Berets to help us too, the ones who a little bit more, kind of, understood it. It was at Sac state and
195 we made the guys wear little signs that some of them were women because we didn't have
196 enough women and we did this whole little *acto* [act]. It was about how maybe I'd have an idea
197 and I would want to present it and they wouldn't recognize me, they wouldn't let me talk, or if I
198 gave my idea they would go, "Oh no, no, not now," or they would put it down in some way. But
199 it was still a good idea. So I would go, "Oh, José don't you think this would be a really good

200 idea? You're so smart. I know you can bring up this idea." Just going to their ego, playing to
201 their ego and they go, [mumbles] and so they would present the idea and it would be accepted.
202 So that's what the *acto* [act] was about, it was about how we were trying to deal with it, to try
203 and educate them to see that we were their sisters, to walk beside them, not behind them. Lots of
204 the roles that we were given, we worked really hard at everything. A lot of the women were in
205 the background doing a lot of the work and the men were the big *chingones* [bad asses], they
206 were the ones who were in front of everything, but you ask any of the women, we were there, we
207 were present. We started as women got together in those small groups at those conferences and
208 discuss what was going on.

209 [00:20:03]

210 Mariana: We were all frustrated and it was real difficult, real difficult time. Did we play a role?
211 Absolutely. Were we important? Absolutely. Did we do all the background stuff? Absolutely.
212 Did we cook all the food, did we organize everything? Yeah, we did that stuff, it was just, and I
213 think it was that— that probably radicalized a lot more of the Chicanas. I used to go to the white
214 women's consciousness raising groups to kind of see how they did stuff. I remember I took two
215 women from the Mexican American Project from the Felitos program, from that program, with
216 me. I remember I was, did I take them or were they just there? I remember I told people about it.
217 Anyways they were there. These two women who were very mexicana, super mexicana, I was
218 Chicana you know, these young ladies were very Mexicans, real nice, every quiet but they were
219 listening to everything and opening their eyes. And I think, it was, we were ripe as a group, we
220 were ripe for our subgroup of that movement. We were really ripe for change and wanting to see
221 things different so that our participation would be recognized and fully used. So one thing that
222 happened is I left to Mexico. This is what I was going to say this earlier, I left to Mexico, we

223 were called Chicanas when I left. I was a Chicana; the movement was Chicano. I left for like 4
224 years. When I came back, that was when they started using the term “Hispanic” and I was like,
225 “What the hell is that?” And everybody was like, they all had jobs at different community-based
226 groups and things like that. That’s what I noticed you know coming from outside

227 [00:22:00]

228 Mariana: was that everybody kinda got positions and kinda got bought off and then we were
229 Hispanic and I was like damn I was only gone for like a year what happened [laughs] you know.
230 But that was my perspective, and I think it was similar in Mexico, when I went to Mexico it was
231 really sexist. Same thing, women did a lot of the work and it was the same. I was like oh my God
232 it’s the same here. I worked with other women and we studied the situation of women in Mexico,
233 we did a lot of analysis and research. So we could talk about *campesino* women [farm worker
234 women], what was their situation or women workers in the city, *parte de la clase obrera* [part of
235 the working class]. We did a lot of stuff, but I think it was really difficult and it was sad that the
236 movement here and there didn’t have the capacity to see us as their allies and not as an enemy
237 because wanted to see our Raza move forward it wasn’t about just women, it was all of them.
238 Then we have children and then we have boy children, [laughs] and then we want them to be
239 successful and have good lives, and not have to deal with racism and class bias and all of that.

240 Kelly: I know you mentioned the Brown Berets would you like to elaborate on that?

241 Mariana: Yeah, I joined that group, I went to the meetings. We met every Sunday. I think it was
242 Jorge Macías was the leader. I think Irma and I, Lucy Montoya.

243 [00:24:00]

244 Mariana: I'm trying to think, Irma and Lucy those are the only two who stick out in my head as
245 being part of it. We used to meet at one of the community centers down town. I was real young,
246 and I guess I had seen a movie at school and it talked about the Holocaust and what happened
247 with Germany, with the judíos [Jews], and how come German soldiers didn't show any
248 humanity, recognize. Why did they follow orders to massacre people? And so that kind of stuck
249 in my head, and so I'm at this meeting, George is talking about discipline, and how we need to
250 be disciplined, military disciplin, right. And how we have to follow orders and you can't
251 question anything. I was raising my hand [laughs] and I wanted to know what if I don't agree
252 with what you're saying. What if I think it's wrong? What if I have a question about it? I can't
253 say anything? And he was like really offended, I remember I felt he was really offended by what
254 I asked. I didn't do it to offend him, I wanted to understand. I was eighteen, I wanted to
255 understand. The next week he said he wasn't going to be the leader anymore. And I was like,
256 "Oh my God! Did I do that to him?" I hope that what I asked didn't push him to not do that
257 anymore. Because he was awesome he was smart, he read a lot, he taught us so much about
258 Chicano history, mexicano [Mexican] history. He did like a monthly article in our school
259 newspaper. Then we put them altogether in a booklet, and then we all studied that stuff so we
260 would know. *Quienes somos* [who we are].

261 [00:26:00]

262 Mariana: So in that group I was one of few women, the one thing that we did, I was asked to put
263 a *huelga* flag [UFW, farm workers movement flag], there were 9 huge sheets that were painted
264 with the big ol *huelga* eagle because Folsom prison, the prisoners were going to go on a strike.
265 And so it was Freddy and I we're given this *huelga* flag [farm workers movement flag containing
266 eagle], and we folded it all up and we went out to Folsom. We climbed down from this bridge it

267 was in the middle of the night, and we went way out there, and we were starting to put it up
268 when we heard the dogs coming. And a truck was coming, and we went, “Oh crap now we gotta
269 get outta here.” And so we left, and we ran, and we got under the bridge and we waited till our
270 pick-up, they came to pick us up a few hours later. We left it there though. And so I always
271 thought it never got put up. But somebody said that somebody else went back and finished
272 putting it out. It was 9 feet big, three across, really big, huge thing that they could see from the
273 prison it was going to be on the wall. On the mountain, on the hill there, they could see it from
274 the prison. They were going to wake up in the morning and see it, so that was like one of the like
275 crazy things. Since I did all that work with the UFW, with the farm workers, helping the farmer
276 workers and the grape boycott and all that. All the Berets started helping, picket Safeway, that
277 was part of the stuff that I did that I felt like I influenced the Berets to do that work. I introduced
278 them to the UFW organizer, and we used to picket right there on Fair Oaks Boulevard, and over
279 at the one on Del Paso.

280 [00:28:00]

281 Mariana: There was one over on El Camino and Del Paso in North Sac. We used to picket at
282 those stores, so that’s kind of why.

283 Kelly: If you don’t mind me asking, why were the prisoners at Folsom prison...

284 M: What were they striking about?

285 Kelly: What were they striking about?

286 M: I don’t know if I can remember. There was Rosalie, what was her husband’s name? Martin.

287 Rosalie and Martin. Rosalie, Martin was her husband, do you remember that? Okay so Martin I

288 think was one of the organizers of the strike if I remember. I don’t remember, all I remember is

289 doing stuff. We went out there and we picketed. I remember. That's when I first did something
290 with Celia, Celia Rodríguez. That was the first time we went out and there were a bunch of us
291 along the bridge and I remember Rubén Solorzano was there and he was from the Mexican
292 American Project too. And so Rubén and some of the other people, we all went down, there were
293 like eight of us, little crazies who came down off the bridge and got to the bottom and when we
294 got to the bottom. We looked up and all the police cars, all the cars were up there, all their guns
295 were pointed at us so went, "Oooh we should go back on the bridge!" So we went back. I
296 remember that. It had to be about conditions in the prison, it was something to do with the
297 prison. He was doing prisoner rights work and Rosalie was his wife and she was out of the prison
298 so she was helping organize for it and we supported her work.

299 Kelly: So you mentioned the Brown Berets were there any other organizations that you were
300 involved in?

301 Mariana: Well I was around when MECHA started.

302 [00:30:00]

303 Mariana: Later, it was later, it wasn't, that was Chicano movement early 70's. I did tons of
304 political work after that and was a part of different things. I did political organizing in Mexico
305 and we came back here, we were part of study groups and we did work with the cannery
306 workers, organizing cannery workers. We did work with the cannery workers. I don't know if we
307 had a name, but I know I did work with whatever group, I was part of the California Rural Legal
308 Assistance, I was on their board. I did work around immigrant rights, we were the Sacramento
309 Committee for New Immigration Policy. I worked with a bunch of lawyers and different people
310 and we'd go out and do workshops for farm workers about their rights. You know like, "Don't

311 give somebody 3,000 dollars because they say they're going to fix your papers because they're
312 not." We'd go one week and tell the people we'd be back the next week to do a workshop. We'd
313 have lots of people coming in to get educated. We created little rights cards to explain to people
314 what their rights were, in terms of answering questions, that kind of thing. There was a lot of
315 different work over the years. Like I said it touches you and there's no way you can stop. You try
316 to find work that compliments your beliefs and your beliefs of what you want to do with your life
317 and I look around and everybody I know from the Mexican American Project. All of those
318 people were about the same thing. I guess there might have been some people who did other
319 stuff, but most of us were about helping our Raza [race].

320 Kelly: Did the Movimiento Chicano [Chicano Movement] raise your consciousness along social,
321 cultural and political lines?

322 Mariana: Of course. That's what it was about. It gave us an understanding of our life here in the
323 U.S.

324 [00:32:00]

325 Mariana: You know you go to school here and if it's bad now. It was worse then. How come all
326 the cities in California are Spanish names? Vallejo, San Francisco, San Pablo. You start looking
327 at everything and you're wondering, then, they teach you history but without really teaching
328 about your people's role within it. I never knew California was Mexico. I never knew, you
329 weren't taught that. So it was like you're always learning about old white men, we never got to
330 learn about ourselves and so the movement and the learning that went along with it. That's what
331 gave us an understanding of our place within this society, within this one, who we were. We
332 were working people, we were exploited, we were taken advantage of, we're expendable. When

333 you start learning about, “Oh jee, they deported even the ones who were born here? Damn!”
334 [laughs] That kind of stuff, as you start learning all that, then you realize how expendable you
335 are. I thought within my family, all of my tíos [uncles] were in the navy, in the second World
336 War. You know what I mean, we were used, you know, when it was convenient. We were too far
337 from the border they couldn’t come to Colusa and get us or something [laughs]. The movement
338 yes, of course. The answer is yes of course.

339 Kelly: I know you spoke a little bit about it, but did it impact your personal relationships with
340 family, peers, and significant others?

341 Mariana: My mom taught me one thing because I was with always, “Mi Raza primero [my race
342 first], Viva la Raza [long live my race].” You know all that stuff.

343 [00:34:00]

344 Mariana: I was always doing that, and my mom was like, “Ay miija.” And she say, “Don’t you
345 know there’s mexicanos [Mexicans] who like screw over our people too.” Don’t you
346 know...who was that family? There was a family here in Sacramento that were money lenders
347 and she told me this story about how this one guy who was a money lender, lent money to my
348 sisters father. And how he ended up charging him like 500% interest or something, something
349 crazy. And you know like she goes, “Yeah there’s racism, yeah—yeah, all that, but not all white
350 people are bad and not all Mexican people are good.” She used to try to tell me that and I didn’t
351 get it, but when I went to Mexico to live then I understood, what she was talking about.
352 Sometimes it takes a long time to understand. My tíos [uncles] they were kinda upset with me
353 because I was a communist [laughs] and they were so kinda gun ho U.S. But they loved me and
354 the person that they turned to when they needed help in their own lives, was me. I was the bad

355 one politically right, but they loved me and they still accepted me, and I think I got the respect
356 from them eventually. And my mom in her own way, when the FBI would come to my house in
357 Colusa, and bother my mom because they couldn't find me, they would come to the house. Cuz I
358 went to Cuba right, big deal. You know cuz you couldn't go to Cuba. No travel to Cuba. So
359 because I went, they kept on coming, and they would go to my mom's work place, you know and
360 all that. I remember one time she told me, "Oh that guy came again, the same guy from the FBI,
361 the same one came."

362 [00:36:00]

363 Mariana: I said, "And?" I go, "What did he ask?" And she goes, "Well I don't know what he was
364 asking, what you did over there or whatever. But I just told them about all of the stuff that you
365 said. About how they all have a right to education, they had housing, they all had work, they had
366 three weeks of vacation a year, paid, they had [laughs] child care, everything that you told me
367 about I told em'. So that's why she went, she wanted to see." So after that my mom, I think she
368 just was kinda progressive in her own way. When we were at the university my brother and I
369 would come home with books. I remember coming home with Soul on Ice by Eldridge Cleaver.
370 She grabbed it from me on Friday and on Sunday morning she finished it she said, "Oooh you
371 want to talk about it?" [laughs] That's how my mom was. Our house was full of books and I
372 think, Javier, my brother Javier, we were so close. We were so about the movement. We spent all
373 our time together discussing what was going on in this country, in that country. What's going on
374 in Africa and South Africa, or what's going on in Palestine, what's going on here? You know it's
375 like, it was like having the most incredible discussions, incredible learning, and it was your
376 brother or your sister who was doing it with you, so I had that. The younger brothers and sisters,
377 my sister became super *agavachada* [white washed] [laughs], my youngest brother ended up

378 dying in a car accident. But I remember when he was twelve, we went to go eat Chinese food
379 one night. He said Mari can you explain why you're against the war in Vietnam, cuz I want to
380 understand [voice trembles] why you do that stuff. [pause]

381 [00:38:02]

382 Mariana: [breath trembles] I had to answer his questions you know cuz, so to me he wanted to
383 understand and he wanted to support our positions. And so if other people said things about us he
384 could defend us, and he could understand it. When we finished eating dinner, he felt okay about,
385 why we were doing what we were doing. I think you know, [pause] you want to make things
386 better for your people, and I think the movement gave us that. It gave us the opportunity to fight
387 back, to earn respect for yourself, to feel good about yourself, as a Raza [race], but as a mujer
388 Chicana. It felt good to know who you are, and it was hard to come back and to see that kind of
389 lost. You ask any of us, are we Chicanos? Yeah. But a lot of the times the younger people don't
390 understand, "Why would you call yourself? You're a mexicana?" Well not really, I grew up here,
391 my mom grew up here, we had a different experience, I didn't speak Spanish. I speak Spanish
392 now, I went to Mexico, I learned. I don't think I ever would have really learned Spanish here, I
393 would have always been a *pocha* [not a fluent Spanish speaker] you know, just not know.

394 Kelly: Describe some of the impacts that your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano [Chicano
395 Movement] had on your career.

396 Mariana: My career? Well, I'll tell you kinda what happened. I came back from Mexico and I
397 was looking for a job. And all the jobs that were run by those kids I went to school with years
398 before, nobody would hire me. They said well you're a communist, your political beliefs are to
399 the left of us. No. I felt really discriminated against. Um.

400 [00:40:00]

401 Mariana: My personal experience was like that and no one would hire my husband. He was an
402 intellectual and smart and could've gone to the university and there was a Chicano at UC Davis
403 who told him no. No, you can't really be in our PhD program or our Master's program, we don't
404 want you. I felt *rechazo* [rejected] because of my political beliefs because I was to the left of a
405 lot of the people that stayed here. You know I went to Mexico and learned a lot more stuff, read.
406 Politically, I developed when I was in Mexico. All those answers I was seeking about the
407 economic base of how all those things are tied together. I learned that when I went away. So
408 when I came back, it was really hard to be *rechezado* by the same people who—who I'd been
409 standing beside fighting for our rights. I went to work for a women's organization. I did work for
410 women and I was really good at it and informed all my practice. I worked really hard, and then I
411 did some legal work for the elderly and did organizing with it you know [laughs] it was kind of
412 neat. I was working as a paralegal and I got a lot of, it was kind of neat because they would let
413 me do like the political organizing. The same techniques we used in the movement, I got to use
414 there in that work. Then because I was kind of an expert women in this area of non-traditional
415 jobs, I ended up working for the state and I created a program for women to go from office jobs
416 into higher paying crafts jobs. We created all kinds of manners and policies and things so that
417 women could do that, and then somebody said, "Hey you want to do this stuff about, getting
418 minority kids to go into engineering?"

419 [00:42:00]

420 Mariana: I said it's the same as getting a woman to become a plumber. Yeah, I can do that
421 [laughs]. Same task of convincing kids that they could- the same way you could convince

422 women they could do anything, was the same thing you convince our raza [race], black kids, and
423 Native American kids that they could become engineers. So that was my career for like 25 years
424 doing that. And I feel like, I ended being, I think, an exemplary employee because I cared about
425 our kids. And I remember telling the associate dean, the reason I did such a good job was
426 because of my political beliefs because I believed in our kids and I would do anything for them.
427 So go ahead and exploit me I didn't care. I wanted to do it. So yeah, it absolutely played a role in
428 what I ended up doing with my life.

429 Kelly: Looking back at your experience in the movimiento Chicano [Chicano Movement], are
430 there any issues that were left unresolved?

431 Mariana: Oh God. [sighs] I think the gender stuff was something that didn't get resolved. I mean
432 eventually, none these guys could get away with [laughs] none of the stuff that they used to do. I
433 think everybody moved forward, I don't know that it was unresolved, and it took a long time.
434 And I think the stuff about being kind of like anti-communist was something that was really hard
435 and it wasn't like, you know, I was the same Mariana. I was still committed to seeing things
436 change. But people were afraid, you know. I could describe, you could describe like a new
437 society. What would you want in new society, and people would say they want things fair, and
438 this and that. "Well me too, that's what I want too!" So, it wasn't anything bad, it was just people
439 were scared. We were subjected to so much propaganda in this country.

440 [00:44:00]

441 Mariana: That it was really hard to stand up, and say, I want to see socialism in this country or
442 something. Maybe that's why I did work with the Zapatistas all this time, you know we formed
443 the Zapatistas Solidarity Coalition and we went to Chiapas [state in Mexico] and we did a lot of

444 fundraising for schools, and health clinics and all the “gooder stuff,” all nice stuff. But the reason
445 that I really liked the Zapatistas was because I felt like it was super democratic, and I really liked
446 democracy [laughs]. It’s like if you were in a circle and everybody in that circle has a place and
447 each place is equal, each voice is equal. Children had a voice, women had a voice, elders had a
448 voice. That made sense to me. They didn’t fight back against the government, they came out and
449 attacked the government on January 1st of 1994. They had to have permission from the people
450 that they represented before they went and took an act, did an act, right. So like nine months
451 before they said, “Whenever you’re ready, you go ahead we agree, it’s cool, go ahead. Now’s the
452 time, whenever you’re ready.” And they didn’t do it till January first. That’s pretty powerful
453 stuff, it was very democratic. All those things, it made sense to me. To me it was like a better
454 movement than I’d seen. I studied all the Latin American Gorilla movements. I studied all kinds
455 of stuff about movements and social change. That was kind of my area what I loved studying.

456 [00:46:00]

457 Mariana: That movement spoke to me. There were women in leadership, and the most oppressed
458 group of women in the country, and they were not only standing beside the *compañeros*
459 [companions/partners], they were the *capitanas* [captains] and the majors and stuff too. So, I
460 went wow, I couldn’t believe that, I was so excited, and it just made sense to me. They don’t call
461 themselves communists, they don’t use any of those terms. Still there fighting for autonomy, for
462 change, for significant change in their lives, in all the different ways, in an all aspects, socially,
463 culturally, economically. Anyway, that makes sense. So I spent the last twenty years doing that
464 work too. It made sense.

465 Kelly: With the Zapatistas?

466 Mariana: Yeah, we formed a group here, and we did a lot of work going back and forth. I tried to
467 apply those principles to our life and our practice, makes sense. There's a concept called, *mandar*
468 *obedeciendo*, governed by obeying, you obey the people that you're a part of. It'd be pretty cool
469 if we could do that here [laughs].

470 Kelly: Describe how the Movimiento Chicano impacted life here in Sacramento or where you
471 lived.

472 Mariana: How did it? Well, I'll try and think of a few. Like the one at American River college.
473 They ended up being people who recruited kids to come to the university or the community
474 college who were Chicano, Black, Native, Asian, whatever. They started a program to do that,
475 that was one of the things we fought for. We got it.

476 [00:48:00]

477 Mariana: Here at Sac State we got the childcare center, we got Chicano studies, we got EOP. We
478 fought for everything, anything that was there, we got these guys hired, we got Senon hired. All
479 those people who were hired back then was because we fought, it wasn't like, it was something
480 that we fought for. You go to school now, it was already done. You didn't get to participate in
481 those kind of struggles for change, you know. You still have stuff to struggle about, but it wasn't
482 the establishment of that. What we have now is all the Chicano professors who are hired, what
483 did they say, is there a 25% percent, 15% of the professors that we had just had 7 years ago, 8
484 years ago, and that we only have a few. We have two or three or four and there used to be fifteen.
485 I don't know it's just, wrong you know. I think we fought for housing up in Arbuckle, Colusa
486 county. The mexicanos were living at this camp, it was a former German prison camp and it was
487 nasty and there were open sewers near it. It was called the Alexander camp, and I was working

488 for migrant education, and I ended up during a survey, I went door to door to every apartment in
489 the place. And I found out only the white families were on AFDC. None of the mexicano
490 families who were eligible were receiving that or, food stamps or anything, they got no benefits.
491 But the white poor people did at that place. They were going to kick em' all out of their housing
492 in December and it was cold. There was no place to move to, there was no other housing in the
493 county, and we fought, and we organized and we identified really neat people who lived at the
494 camp to be the leaders. We went to board of supervisor meetings, county of the board of
495 supervisors meetings.

496 [00:50:00]

497 Mariana: We did protests, we got media there, we did all kinds of stuff. You drive up highway
498 five and you see all the housing to the left, there's houses there, and there's apartments there
499 with child care centers, with the playground and all that stuff. That's stuff that we fought for and
500 got. I mean it was like everywhere. That was where we started the movement right away, the
501 housing people came in and calmed it down by giving us the housing. But at least you got it.
502 Schools, we got people hired, we had bilingual ed (education) programs. A lot of stuff we fought
503 for was won. One of the big things I think is the most significant is that we fought because there
504 was hardly any Raza [race] at the state capital, right. I think there was one maybe. There was
505 Willy Brown, or maybe one Mexican, I can't remember who it was. Now it's really changed, we
506 thought that was gonna be significant. If we just got Chicanos in power. Remember we got Joe
507 Serna, it didn't change you know. We wanted to change you know, we wanted to believe that if
508 we, all those things we were fighting for were gonna make a difference, but it wasn't systemic
509 change, it was just the face of the person who was in power. But it wasn't systemic, it didn't
510 change anything significantly. So there's some. We finally got the Dream Act for the kids, we

511 finally got some financial aid for em.' We got one thing here in California because we got so
512 many Raza [race] over there, but is it gonna be significant enough? I don't know.

513 Kelly: To wrap it up here what do you see as a current or future challenge for the Chicano
514 community and do you see yourself staying involved?

515 Mariana: I think it's trying to empower all of us to see if we can change things you know.
516 Corporations are running things and its scary. What happened with education? Where they raised
517 the fees

518 [00:52:00]

519 Mariana: to where, it was crazy. Every year, every six months, they were raising the fees, and
520 doing all that. It was like who's the education for? When I went to school it didn't cost anything.
521 When they went to school, it didn't cost as much. You went school almost free. Sixty-dollars a
522 semester. Sixty-dollars. I remember when I started working I used to lend kids money to pay
523 their tuition. A couple hundred bucks, you could help somebody. How would you pull out 4,000
524 dollars out of your pocket right now? You can't do that. Those are biggies, education, healthcare,
525 and fighting back against the corporations. Fracking, all the different issues, environmental
526 issues. Are people have no access to good water in some of the communities. Down in Salinas,
527 awful stuff. Pesticide use. There's so many things, no matter where you look, we still have issues
528 to deal with.

529 Kelly: Do you see yourself staying involved in meeting these challenges?

530 Mariana: Well hasta *morir* [until I die] I think [laughs]. That's kinda what our lived are about is
531 being useful to the community in any way we can.

532 Kelly: Thank you.

533 Mariana: Okay.

534 *****

535 [00:53:20] END OF TRANSCRIPT