

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Manuel Florencio Ruedas

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by David Rasul
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Transcription by Alexandra Whittle and Technitype Transcripts

Rasul Can you please state your full name?

[00:00:09]

Ruedas Manuel Florencio Ruedas.

Rasul Florencio. I never knew that before. Is that from a *tío* or—

[00:00:15]

Ruedas I think it's from my mother's maiden name, Flores.

Rasul What's your birthdate, Manuel?

[00:00:22]

Ruedas I was born on December 15th, 1953.

Rasul And where were you born?

[00:00:27]

Ruedas I was born in Fairfield, California.

Rasul And your marital status?

[00:00:33]

Ruedas Married thirty-two years this summer.

Rasul By the way, you have a wonderful wife.

[00:00:40]

Ruedas *Gracias.*

Rasul Do you have children?

[00:00:43]

Ruedas Yes, our daughter Lorena is our oldest, and then Marcos Manuel is our youngest.

Rasul How old is Marcos?

[00:00:52]

Ruedas He's twenty-seven and Lorena's thirty.

Rasul Okey dokey. And you said you were born in Fairfield. Were you raised there also?

[00:01:01]

Ruedas I was actually raised in Elmira and then Vacaville.

Rasul What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:09]

Ruedas Well, my parents, my father, initially when he came from Mexico in 1948, worked in the fields picking cotton in Texas, and then he did that for about a year, and then they came to Winters and he was working in a farm. Then one of my uncles on my mother's side got him a job in the railroad, so he worked for Southern Pacific as one of the laborers in the crew.

Rasul Here in Sacramento?

[00:01:38]

Ruedas No, we started off in Tolenas, a little section, area near Fairfield, and then Elmira, so there was a *sección* there of several houses with Mexican workers. We lived there. We lived in two railroad cars put together, and we had an outhouse, so it was kind of *humilde* to begin with, but we were comfortable. [laughs]

Rasul Did your mother work also?

[00:02:08]

Ruedas She was mostly a homemaker, and then once we moved to Vacaville, she got involved with tomato harvesting with a tomato harvester, and so she would do that seasonally, and then she worked in an *empacadora de fruta* in Vacaville.

Rasul Getting back a little bit to your dad as a railroad worker, were there a lot of *mexicanos* there that were working in the railroad?

[00:02:34]

Ruedas Yeah, he worked the section from Elmira to, I think, Broderick, I think was kind of their coverage. It was fun growing up in that little town in Elmira, because we were very close. My father—that was before they had any machinery to do the heavy lifting, so it was all brute strength, and so he basically messed up his back and had to have operations, and that's when he left that job and became a custodian.

Rasul A custodian where?

[00:03:11]

Ruedas In Vacaville. He started off at the Nut Tree Restaurant and then he got a job at an elementary school, and that's where he retired from.

Rasul I remember my mom coming back getting me bread from the Nut Tree.

[00:03:25]

Ruedas Yeah, yeah.

Rasul The nut bread.

[00:03:26]

Ruedas Those little loafs, yeah.

Rasul A big treat. [laughter]

Rasul How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:03:32]

Ruedas I have five sisters, five older sisters, and three brothers, one older and two younger.

Rasul That's a big family.

[00:03:40]

Ruedas The four older sisters were born in Mexico, and then the next five of us were born here, so the family got kind of split where we were born.

Rasul Are some family members, your brothers and sisters, still living in Mexico?

[00:03:59]

Ruedas No, we all live between Vacaville and Sacramento. My father was the one that was there the longest in Mexico. When my mother passed in 1982, he went back to Mexico right away and found another wife, a wonderful woman that extended his life. When she passed at ninety—no, my father was ninety. She was seventy. We

had to bring my dad back. So he was there twenty-eight years with his second wife and now he's with us. He's ninety-five.

Rasul Oh, wow. You described a little bit about your childhood experience. Can you expand a little more about what it was growing up?

[00:04:43]

Ruedas It was both fun and a little bit challenging. We lived, like I said, in a really modest railroad community. At first we had to share—well, we had an outhouse, and then when we moved to another bungalow, we shared a bathroom with several other families, and a shower. So that was a move up. [laughter] We have fond memories of that because it was a small rural town. My father would take us out and do harvesting during the summer, so as soon as school was out, we would go out and pick the orchards. We had an old '48 Ford pickup, so threw all of us in the back and we would just go down the *surcos* and harvest as a family. My father would knock the trees, the fruit, and we would pick it. That would be money to buy our school clothes. So it really taught us a valuable lesson in work and labor and what's valuable working together as a collective. So those are early lessons that you never lose and you always cherish for the rest of your life.

Rasul Any school memories you have of your early education?

[00:06:03]

Ruedas Yeah, it's interesting, because, as you know, kindergarten is not mandated in California, so where we started, there was no kindergarten, so we had to start cold turkey first grade, which was kind of a shock. And then we were used to

running around with no shoes, you know, and all of a sudden, we have to wear shoes to go to school. [laughs] So that was kind of an adjustment.

But we had a two-room schoolhouse. It was first grade through, like, fourth in one room, and then fifth through eight in the other room, and then the high-schoolers had to be bused to Vacaville. So, yeah, like rural Americana, old-school.

Rasul Were you a Fellow, Felito, or were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project? If not, were you aware of the project and its mission?

[00:06:56]

Ruedas I wasn't a Fellow, but I was aware, and when I started my teaching career in 1977, a lot of my *colegas* were alumni from that project and I was very fortunate to collaborate with them. Some of them became my mentors. My first teaching job was a result of one of my *colegas* moving up to a higher position and opening up a teaching job in Broderick, and it was in a bilingual program, thanks to the early bilingual education laws that were back in the late seventies.

Rasul Could you maybe describe or did you see any of the effects of the Mexican American Project, what their theory was all about?

[00:07:54]

Ruedas Well, I saw a lot of my colleagues that were in key positions in the Sacramento area, the Chicano artists at Sac State, people involved in bilingual education. Those were people that came out of that project, and they would talk about it and how it was kind of a *colectiva*. It was like a cohort that pulled them together, and that concept has kind of followed me throughout my career, where I've worked

with programs that are cohort-natured. Currently I coordinate the Puente Program, and it's creating *familias*, you know, where you get the support and the mentoring to hopefully be more effective in your career, your profession. So I think that's the legacy. Then when I went through the administrative credential program at Sac State, there was that same element. It was a grant-funded bilingual program that I think was a follow-up from that original Mexican American Project.

Rasul I'm going to drop down to question number six here. Did your study of cultural anthropology or your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:09:29]

Ruedas Yes, very much so. When I transferred from Solano Community College to UC Davis, I became a double major in history and Chicano Studies, and I had some of the best faculty members in both Chicano history and other subjects there. Adela Sosa Rivel was my Chicano political science instructor, Roberto Juarez, Chicano history. They had a big impact in how I thought about the community and the Movement and my commitment. It's affected me throughout my career and it was just a really great experience to have that type of faculty support and mentoring.

Rasul This is kind of like the same question. It says please explain the perspective that influenced your understanding and participation in the Chicano Movement. Kind of the same thing, but do you want to maybe expand a little bit more?

[00:10:38]

Ruedas Sure. At UC Davis, primarily at UC Davis, I got involved with both MEChA and another organization called Amigos Anonymous, and we would go out to the rural communities like Winters and we would tutor migrant families at their homes. So I would go out to Winters. There was a farmhouse in the middle of an orchard, and me and another student would go there once a week and tutor these young kids, which was really a great experience because it was kind of a prep for my teaching career. When I finished my degree, I went on for a single-subject credential and taught junior high school bilingual programs. So all of these things came together, the Chicano Studies major, the history, the community service working with these organizations on campus.

Rasul You kind of answered this, but what are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:11:45]

Ruedas Well, I think one of them was my mother, because my mother was a very strong-willed person, she had a very outgoing personality. She endured a lot of hardships, having nine children and crossing the Rio Grande holding her kids on her shoulders, literally crossing the river. And then living in poverty, they were able to feed us and clothe us and do all those good things. But in spite of only having a third-grade education, she had this keen sense of what it was to be Mexican American.

My mother was actually born here in Colusa in 1920, and then in 1931, during the Depression, their family went back to the village in Mexico. They never admitted it, but most likely it was a repatriation. That's my feeling, because my grandfather worked downtown at the Southern Pacific Railroad yard and he had a decent job, and

my assumption is that if you had a decent job and you were Mexican, you were probably the first to be to be “repatriated”—euphemism. [laughter]

So they went back to the village and they endured a lot of hardship there because it was a really isolated little village in the mountains of Zacatecas. My mother had to adjust from living in downtown Sacramento to living in this little village with no amenities at all. That’s where she met my father, and they started a family and came over here.

But she always instilled in us this pride of being Mexican, being Mexican American. She never held back on that. She always said that we have a lot to be proud of, of our culture, the music. My mother and father would sing. They sang all of the old *corridos*, and that was kind of our entertainment. Growing up in Elmira, we didn’t have a whole lot, so my dad would pull out the guitar at night and my parents would sing these old *corridos* and ballads. So that was a very fond memory and kind of instilled the music value in me and my brother.

Rasul Again to that point, because I know—to get off the subject a little bit—you’re a musician.

[00:14:16]

Ruedas Mm-hmm.

Rasul And I’ve always known you as a musician. In fact, you’re probably one of the better drummers in Sacramento.

[00:14:22]

Ruedas Nah, nah. [laughs]

Rasul I know some people, they say you're probably one of the better drummers. But your family is involved in music a lot.

[00:14:29]

Ruedas Yes, it's a family tradition. My father has a wonderful voice. I mean, he's ninety-five, and that's one thing that hasn't failed him. Even though other parts of his body are giving out, his voice is really strong. When he whistles, it pierces your ears. [laughter] My mom and my dad would sing together.

Unfortunately, my mom passed early, you know. She passed at sixty-two. But by then, my brother and I had picked up the music, and in the early seventies we formed a *conjunto*, and the *conjunto norteño*, we named it Los Laguneros because my father and mother are from this village called Laguna Grande, Zacatecas, and so this *conjunto norteño* was my father on guitar and vocals, my brother on bass guitar, me in drums and my *cuñado*—rest in peace—Fernando Martinez played the accordion.

We played at *charreadas* in Dixon, we played at different events in the early seventies. So my *cuñado* Fernando is the one that introduced the accordion into our family, and now that's passed on to my son and daughter, so they each play the accordion. When we have gatherings, we play those instruments, so it's fun.

Rasul And Marcos, too, is part of a mariachi group, isn't he?

[00:15:56]

Ruedas Yeah. Of course, he majored in ethnomusicology at UCLA, so he plays a bunch of instruments, mariachi instruments, accordion, and, of course, modern. So he's the one that's carried the music further in the family tradition.

Rasul But you're still playing too?

[00:16:16]

Ruedas Yeah, yeah, I still play with a group in town, an eleven-piece group, and then my daughter, she jams with us with the family gatherings and stuff.

Rasul And you mentioned a little bit while you were talking about your family, they'd sing songs for you guys in the *campo* as entertainment for each other.

[00:16:41]

Ruedas Uh-huh.

Rasul What do you think the *música mexicana* does for our communities' spirit?

[00:16:49]

Ruedas It's powerful.

Rasul The "*Yo Soy Chicano Tengo Amor*," "The picket fence, the pickin's fine," how that has influenced, what does that give to our community?

[00:16:59]

Ruedas I think it's a powerful part of our culture, and it goes back to hundreds and hundreds of years. What I thought was really cool was when my son was at UCLA, he applied for this special program where you could create a curriculum for a class and teach the class as an undergrad, and so he got selected and he taught a class on the Mexican *corrido*. So that was really cool to see him do the research and then teach the class and actually be able to perform some of the old *corridos*. Those are *corridos* that my father learned from his father and just brought it up to the current generations. My father's village in Mexico saw the Revolution and the Cristero Rebellion, and my father lived through that. He has memory of those things, and it's

really cool to hear him still sing the songs about events that he witnessed over ninety years ago. So that's kind of cool.

Rasul We've been going back and forth between *Mexican American* and *Chicano*. How did your community, your *colegas*, your family accept the term or use the term *Chicano*?

[00:18:26]

Ruedas You know, my family didn't have any major issues with it. My mother always called herself Mexican American because I think she just wasn't familiar with the term *Chicano*. Our generation picked up the term *Chicano*, you know, being part of the Movement and knowing both the cultural and political aspects of that definition, and so for us it's a sense of pride in having a mixed identity or dual identity. I think that it's wonderful to have been raised here, but still being able to be part of Mexico, even though I never went to Mexico till I was twenty-one years old. That was the first time I went. Then after that, I went every year because I just loved the culture and everything and, of course, visiting *familia*. So that's what we just did this last couple of weeks, just got back from a nice tour doing that.

Rasul I know you worked in Davis, worked in education for a long time. How do you think the establishment, your colleagues who were not Chicano or Mexican American, accept the term *Chicano* or think about the term *Chicano*?

[00:19:46]

Ruedas Yeah, I think for them it's more a sense of confusion, because there's all the terms out there and they don't know what to call us or refer to us as. So I think they're always asking, "How do you call yourself or what do you prefer?" And I'm

fine with explaining. Some people get really upset if they call you Hispanic or something that you don't want to be called. But, to me, it's just a matter of what your preference is. I have friends, Latinos that call themselves Hispanic or other terms, and they still have that pride and identity in who they are. So I think the terminology doesn't always define who the person is; the nomenclature, I should say.

Rasul Before getting involved with the Chicano Movement, had you heard about civil rights in general?

[00:20:46]

Ruedas Not a whole lot, no. My earliest involvement, when we lived in Vacaville, we moved from Elmira to Vacaville in the early sixties, and we lived, of course—what's funny, starting with Elmira, for being such a small town, it fit the stereotype of the divided America, because the railroad tracks ran through Elmira, and on our side of the tracks was the railroad section houses where the *mexicanos* lived, the only bar in town, and the dump. [laughter] And then on the other side of the track was the post office, the general store, the only gas pump, and, of course, where most of the other people lived So that divided—that historic division was there in this tiny little enclave.

Then when we moved to Vacaville, we also lived in the poorer part of town, an older part of town in the center of town. Most of the people were starting to move out into the new suburbs. Just one block away from us, they tore down an old bottling plant and built a brand-new Safeway, and so that was about the time that the Movimiento was going on with the farmworkers, and so we supported the boycott.

We would march around the Safeway. [laughs] Those are some early experiences that I had with the Movimiento.

Rasul With Martin Luther King and his push and all of that, did you get involved with that also?

[00:22:24]

Ruedas No, no, we didn't get a strong exposure to that in our small community. When I grew up in Vacaville, it was nothing like the size now. It was like, I think, 25,000 people.

Rasul Now there's 30,000, huh? No. [laughs]

[00:22:42]

Ruedas It's closer to 100,000. [laughter] But, yeah, it was different. And there were very few Mexican families in Vacaville at that time. Now it's a very different picture, yeah.

Rasul You've kind of alluded to it already, but did the Movimiento Chicano change you personally?

[00:22:58]

Ruedas Yes, because I think it strengthened my commitment in my career towards teaching, counseling, and volunteerism, putting in a lot of hours with different projects. Even going back to 1982, when I was part of the committee that first started the statewide Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project, and we put in hundreds of volunteer hours with that, and I think that comes out of the Movimiento. You have this vision or this sense that you need to go beyond your career and your family and do something extra for your community, because you see what exists

around you, you know, the disparities, and you know a lot of work has to be done. So I think that collective spirit is what the Movimiento put in a lot of us old-timers. [laughter] Hopefully, we can pass that on. That's the struggle. But, yeah, it really affected my career, my work ethic, and all those things.

Rasul What role do you believe that Chicanas played in the Movimiento?
[00:24:20]

Ruedas A powerful role. My mother is a good example, because she's very strong-willed, "*No se dejaba*," you know, if she was confronted with an injustice. And we saw a lot of examples of this when she worked in the fields. The *migra* would come and take a lot of her friends, and so she would run interference with them. She would run the other way or she would hide them in the bathroom or do something to help them. So, to me, that's kind of that sense of you're going to stand your ground and you're going to protect your *gente* when there's some kind of injustice.

So that was my biggest example in my mother, a very strong person, and she was kind of one of those matriarchs that people would come to her for advice, not just family members, neighbors, friends. She was kind of one of those bastions of strength and wisdom, that wisdom that comes not from formal education, but from life. So she was my strong example in the Movimiento because, yeah, she kind of epitomized a lot of what we saw in other people, like Dolores Huerta and other Latinas who really pushed for the struggle.

Rasul And in the organizations that you're involved with and the different issues, you saw the efforts of Chicanos in those areas also?
[00:25:56]

Ruedas Yeah, yeah. The female leadership and role is very strong. One example is Maria Vazquez Chidez. She was our primary leader in starting the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project, and she was a very strong person. She's still involved. She's now, I think, a principal or superintendent in Southern California. Yeah, she gave us some really strong leadership skills in those early years.

Rasul What you said about your mother, "*No se dejaba*," I remember my mother also saying, "*No te dejes*." That was her leadership.

[00:26:39]

Ruedas Yeah. I think part of that is that protective mother instinct that you protect your fold and you don't let injustices come in and overwhelm your compound, so to speak, and sometimes the women are stronger than the men in that sense.

Rasul I know we're very humble at times, but I want to know what did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:27:18]

Ruedas Well, I think my contribution was as an educator working with students, helping them. Starting in community college, I was involved with some student leadership and some volunteerism in the community college. Then when I got to UC Davis, I got more involved with tutoring and helping students, mentoring them. Then later on in graduate school, I think that expanded more with the nonprofit organizations that I got involved in. I think those are the areas where I made bigger contributions.

Currently, we have the Steps to College event at the *consulado*, which is a collaboration of a bunch of groups, nonprofits and others, and I think that's a good

current example of the Movimiento continuing, because we're providing opportunities for students that need scholarships, that need to get their DACA, their different status arrangements so that they can stay here and go on and reach their goals. So I think those are some of the things, kind of the pathway it's taken me on.

Rasul Can you name any specific organizations along the way, their name and a little bit of what their efforts were?

[00:29:02]

Ruedas Sure. I was vice president of the local chapter of CABE, California Association of Bilingual Educators, and I was involved with some really good people. That was when I was in my early teaching career. I've also been, of course, with MESA and Puente as educational organizations.

With nonprofits, I'm a member of Cien Amigos right now, which gives out quite a few scholarships for Latino students. Let's see. I've got to get my memory shaking here. [laughter] Let's see. Besides CABE, well, of course, the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project that's been ongoing. I'm trying to think of some other things. There's been so many organizations.

Rasul We'll get you some more.

[00:30:01]

Ruedas Yeah, good. You can shake the—

Rasul Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

[00:30:08]

Ruedas Definitely, because not only are you involved with students that are involved in the Movimiento, but you're involved with faculty, and so your recognition and your vision gets expanded to see that not only the little microcosm that you're involved in in this community is part of this Movimiento, but it goes beyond. You learn about what's going on in Texas and Colorado, New Mexico, and that strengthens your commitment to working with the community, because you know that even though your efforts are local and they're one small part, it goes beyond that. The collective efforts of everybody combines, and that's what moves that ship [laughs], because that ship needs to steer this way.

So I think that's what being part of the Movimiento is, your collective sense of where you belong in this Movimiento, and I think that's important because we live in a country that prides itself and values on individualism and not so much on the collective, and, unfortunately, we see the ugly part of individualism with Donald Trump [laughter], like the so-called self-made man. But I think that raising this collective spirit, this collective mindset is valuable because our community is growing, it's large, and a lot of the issues that were the motivators of us back forty years ago haven't changed much, you know, if you look at the disparities and the problems. We've made an impact in some areas, but in others, there hasn't been a lot of change. So we need to try to instill this into the next generation so that they have that same sense of commitment, of vision, of purpose.

Rasul And what you're talking about, that commitment of purpose, you mentioned when you get the commitment, you put more time. I mean, regardless, you don't care whether you're being paid or not. You just bring time into it.

[00:32:38]

Ruedas Right.

Rasul But that also stretches relationships.

[00:32:40]

Ruedas Mm-hmm.

Rasul So has that affected you personally with your relationship with your peers, with your *familia*?

[00:32:49]

Ruedas Yeah, it's something that we need to really balance. Because when I met my wife in '79, we dated for four years and we married in '83. Of course, we both were involved in the initiation of the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project in '82, and so from '82 to '92, for ten years were heavily involved. Then our children were born in the mid to late eighties, and we had to make that shift. We had to pull back to a certain degree from the commitment, because we had another commitment now in raising these children. So you have to make those adjustments. You have to pull back a little bit and put your efforts in other areas. Otherwise, those relationships can really suffer. We saw that with colleagues. We saw people that dedicated so much of their time to the effort, that their marriage would fail or their health would fail, and that's really sad. So finding that balance is critical.

Rasul Yes, and then also to add the other part of it, with your peers, they're looking at the social, political and attitude and self. How did you react with them? Was there any strain on that part of the relationship with them?

[00:34:25]

Ruedas Not so much. I mean, I think that the important thing is supporting each other as peers, as colleagues, and if a peer or colleague is going through something in their life, whether it's their health or emotional state, I think that being there, it's kind of like being part of *familia*, you know, you want to support them in whatever way you can as *familia*. So I think that just being there and being ready to help them, it's no different than helping *compadres* or distant relatives, you know. You're part of this collective, so to speak, and you want to be there to support in any way you can.

Rasul You've kind of answered this, but please describe some of the impacts that your involvement with Movimiento Chicano had on your career.

[00:35:25]

Ruedas Well, I feel that being part of different programs, especially equity programs, I think that's been a big part. As a bilingual educator starting in 1977 teaching in Broderick, I think that had a big impact on me and also on the community, because you see some of your students graduating and going on and assuming positions of leadership locally and beyond that. So some of the things that I pride myself in are having been part of the educator community, starting off as a junior high teacher and then going into college outreach.

I worked at Sac State and UC Davis in outreach, and I think that's really valuable because then you're exposing opportunities and resources to families and community members that don't even know about them. Especially if they're undocumented, a lot of them think that they can't participate in higher education. So when you're able to get out there and inform them, yes, there are these programs and

resources and then you can help walk them through the process and connect them to those resources, I think that's really valuable.

I think that's part of what the Movimiento taught us, is that you bring in people and you educate them and you get them connected to these resources so that they can become empowered and they have that vision and that sense of purpose. So it expands tenfold, so to speak. So being involved in bilingual education and being involved with CABE, in an outreach with equity programs like EOP&S and EAOP UC, and then at the college I was fortunate to be part of the first community college in the state that started the MESA Program, the community college MESA. We had the prototype back in 1989, and then since then its expanded. Then we started a Puente Program modeled after Sac City when you were the Puente coordinator. That was fortunate that were able to follow your footsteps and start a program. So it's all interconnected. That's the cool thing.

Rasul And that interconnection, I do have to say that I want to thank you for being my mentor when I came into education. You were my mentor.

[00:38:24]

Ruedas It goes both ways. It does, because I'd known about you from when you were involved with the City of Sacramento, with all your involvement with Southside Park and the events and everything, because that was all major events that supported the *comunidad*. So then to be able to work with you as a colleague first at ARC and then Sac City, I think that was kind of cool. Because you hear about somebody, you know about them, what they're doing, and then later on you get to work directly with them, that's a nice part of the whole thing.

Rasul Unfortunately, we've seen a lot of things happen and a lot of things not happen. So what do you think was left undone as far as the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:39:13]

Ruedas Well, I think what's left undone is we need to expand Ethnic Studies. I mean, we see the results of that vacuum where there is no Ethnic Studies. We see things like these relationships between police and law enforcement in certain communities, misunderstandings, miscommunications, mistrust of the community in law enforcement. We see things like what Donald Trump is saying, and people buying into that because they have no sense of the ethnic contribution to this country. I think that's a big area that we need to push, and it's good to see that Sac City Unified District is moving in that direction, versus what happened in Tucson, Arizona, with their school district and Ethnic Studies. So I think that's one area.

I think helping the undocumented population, there are so many Dreamers, and getting them connected to more resources and pushing that agenda so that we have a national immigration reform, because that's just too many people, more than 12 million in this country, to be living in that limbo state. So I think those are some of the areas. And of course, in our community, just getting the people connected with these resources, employment, education, and other opportunities.

Rasul You kind of talked about yourself, how you've developed, and your career, etc. How do you think the community has benefitted from the efforts of the Chicano Movement in their daily life, in their spirit, etc.?

[00:41:10]

Ruedas I think the community benefits a lot, because when you can get immigrants from any community, and especially Latinos because it's the largest immigrant community, and those that have been here for generations as well, if you can get them to move up in their socioeconomic stature, so to speak, education, employment, and if you can do that without compromising their cultural identity, their sense of where they came from, then you've been successful because you're able to move somebody up, in a sense, in certain areas, but without having to lose something, which has always kind of been that mindset, is that you're not going to be successful unless you lose your language or your culture, which, you know, that's not true. It can happen and it should happen, because then our community and other immigrant communities and Native communities enrich the community at large.

It's so cool now that when we play at a venue, our band, and you see all these different *razas* dancing *cumbias*, you see African Americans, you see *gringos*, you see everybody's just into the music and they're out there in this mixed crowd. So I think that's an example of how we're enriching the community with not just our food, because that's always been there, Latino food, but now music and hopefully other areas where there's an appreciation, not a depreciation, of our culture.

Rasul When I saw you at Día de los Muertos in Old Town a couple years ago, it was a variety of people there, not just *mexicanos*.

[00:43:11]

Ruedas Yeah. It's cool to see that.

Rasul Many Movimiento Chicano activists have passed on. Can you identify any one individual or two or three individuals that contributed to the Chicano Movement, and maybe about their character?

[00:43:34]

Ruedas Well, there was Jesus “Chuy” Leyva at UC Davis. I don’t know if you met him. He was very involved, and he was a Vietnam veteran just like you. He was very involved in those early years and he really promoted the Chicano Studies Department, supported students on campus, so he’s one of our beloved community members that passed.

Bill Chavez, he was very involved in the Capitol, and that political connection is very powerful. To have lost him early, I think that’s tragic.

Roberto Gracia [phonetic] was very involved with the Youth Leadership Conference. Those are some of the people that come to my mind right now, locally.

Rasul What do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:44:35]

Ruedas Well, I think, to me, one of the biggest ones is maintaining that or infusing that sense of commitment that goes beyond the self, the Millennials, to get them looking beyond your own needs, to look at the community, where are the inequities, the disparities, and how they can be part of that. I think that’s a big challenge. We see that with our students at the community college. You try to get them to go out and do some volunteer work, and sometimes you don’t get the numbers that you hoped to, and you try to infuse in them the sense of “There’s people

out there that really need to hear your voice. They need to hear your experience, your testimonial about how you got to college, because that can be an influence on them.” So I think that’s one area, is trying to infuse that sense of commitment, of community service, of involvement.

I think the other challenge is maintaining the cultural roots and cultural ties so that people don’t lose that. I think oftentimes we, as parents, don’t push that enough in our children. We don’t expose them to the culture, and sometimes they lose that and then they don’t value it, I think that’s a big challenge, yeah. So that’s why we’ve taken our kids to Mexico every year and we’ve infused the music and the culture. Our daughter is really into *folklórico* dancing, and so that’s kind of cool to see that continue.

Rasul Very good, very good. I think I know the answer to this, but do you see yourself continuing to be involved in the community efforts?

[00:46:39]

Ruedas Yes. I mean, just like you, this is where you’re mentoring me, you know, because when I retire, which, hopefully, will be soon, I hope to stay active by maintaining my foothold in different projects both music and culturally, but also educationally, politically, to keep moving the agenda, to not let things stagnate. And I think we, as the *viejitos*, need to stay involved, because sometimes we do have younger people listening and they see that historical knowledge is something to be valued.

It goes back to the generations where you respect your elders and you learn from them, you learn about the *pasado*. I think about when we would sit around in

Mexico at one of my *tíos*' houses and they're telling stories, and then you see the little kids listening. They don't interrupt; they just listen. It's going into them, where they remember that, and I think that's important that our voice doesn't get lost either. But we need to support youth, because the agenda will change as well. There needs to be some compromise when we're not too set in our old ways, right? [laughter]

Rasul Well, thank you, Manuel, I think you've been a great asset and resource to our community

[00:48:29]

Ruedas Thank you.

Rasul Unbelievable.

[00:48:50]

Ruedas I appreciate this project and this effort you're all involved with here.

Rasul *Adelante.*

[00:49:15]

Ruedas *Gracias.*

[End of interview]