

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Rosemarie Silva

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon M. Valadez
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Transcription by Technitype Transcripts

Valadez For the record, please state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Silva Rosemarie Silva.

Valadez And your birthdate?

[00:00:14]

Silva July 15, 1961.

Valadez Marital status?

[00:00:18]

Silva Single.

Valadez It says "Do you have children?" Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:28]

Silva Sacramento, California, downtown.

Valadez You're a Sacramento girl.

[00:00:34]

Silva Yes, I am. [laughs]

Valadez What did your parents do for a living?

[00:00:37]

Silva My dad worked—he came to California from Mexico and he started off, I believe, as working in the laundry which was located down on 3rd Street, and he worked there, and then he worked in a cannery for a little bit. Then he moved to working for the city, waste management, picking up garbage from commercial buildings.

My mom, she was a *cantinera*, but, of course, in the early fifties and sixties, that was not a good thing for a Mexicana to say she worked in a bar, so she said she was a waitress. She worked at one of the well-known places in Old Sac which was known at the west end in the early fifties, and then they moved to Franklin Boulevard.

Valadez What was it called on Franklin Boulevard?

[00:01:37]

Silva Mexicali Rose, right next to Caballo Blanco. They had their inaugural in 1962 when they moved from Old Sac, and that's when Old Sac was starting to change.

And I do have one child.

Valadez Oh, you do. Okay.

[00:01:59]

Silva Yes, I do, a daughter.

Valadez You're our youngest. [laughter] We've gone through all of the older.

And what is the name of your child?

[00:02:11]

Silva Angelica Maria De Toro, and she presently is a student here at Sac City.

Valadez Oh, fantastic. Brothers and sisters?

[00:02:22]

Silva I have a brother, Arturo, who lives here in Sacramento.

Valadez What does he do?

[00:02:31]

Silva He works for UPS.

Valadez Can you describe for us, please, your early experiences as a child and youth, growing up in—

[00:02:45]

Silva They were very positive, very fulfilling. Both Mom and Dad worked. There was always a parent at home. Dad worked during the daytime, so by the time he came home at 5:00 o'clock, my mom then would go to work. And it was always fun sitting around watching TV with Dad, watching his *Rifleman*, his programs, and the news, Harry Reasoner, Walter Cronkite. He would cook dinner for us. He is a lot of my motivation because he exposed me to a lot of the culture, making sure that I spoke Spanish since Dad didn't speak good English, so I always spoke Spanish up until I started school at five. He'd take me to the *charreadas*. So he really enriched my life as a young child.

Valadez Where did you go to the *charreadas*?

[00:03:44]

Silva There used to be a place that I remember, because I was very young, in West Sac when it was all fields back then, and I remember going there with him.

Valadez Did you ever go to Woodland?

[00:03:59]

Silva We probably did. We probably did in the early sixties.

Valadez Yeah, that's the ones that I remember, the big *charreadas*.

[00:04:06]

Silva Mom would stay home with my brother, because my brother's younger, and then I would be with Dad.

 And then during my youth, growing up in downtown Sacramento on T Street, on 9th and T, it was a very enriched neighborhood because everybody came from the same background and we had multiple cultures. We had Chinese, we had African Americans, we had Mexicanos, we had Chicanos, so it was very well-versed, and that was the nice thing about it because that's the way the world was for me because that's all I knew, being in that mixture.

Valadez Ninth and T is very close to the Virgen de Guadalupe.

[00:04:56]

Silva Yes, that's our parish in Southside Park. We spent *many* summers in that park, and I remember the early years where my mom would pack a picnic basket and we'd spend the whole day, summer, during the summertimes, go swimming at the pool there. Fourth of July, they would have fireworks. It was a very rich community. That Southside Park was a very, very rich community. Everybody would come together. And the nice thing about it, too, is we had a lot of Portuguese family, so

when they would have the ceremony of the Lady Fatima coming from the old church on 4th Street, they would come down 12th to the new church on 12th and S.

Valadez Wow. Dressed in their regalia?

[00:05:44]

Silva Yes.

Valadez I only have heard of that from—what's the one that's outside of Sacramento going toward—

[00:05:52]

Silva Courtland?

Valadez They have a Virgen de Fatima—

[00:05:57]

Silva [00:05:57] Fatima. That's where they have all their ceremonies now.

Valadez Okay. Yeah, that's the one that cried?

[00:06:04]

Silva Yes.

Valadez My sister follows the Portuguese rituals a lot. She grew up with Italians, Swiss, and Portuguese, did a lot of farm labor with them also, but her association with the Portuguese has always been very, very strong, so every time they have a festival, when they used to have the *corrida de toros*, she would always want to go there. I guess they've done away with that now. I don't remember.

[00:06:41]

Silva Yeah, I think the last I've heard of it was a couple years ago. My daughter graduated from Christian Brothers, and one of the janitors, who was

Portuguese, he said he used to love to go see the running of the bulls. That was a big thing.

Valadez Where did you go to high school?

[00:07:08]

Silva I went to high school at Sacramento High.

Valadez Do you remember a Rick Gonzales? I'm trying to think that he was at Sacramento High, but maybe not. He was a coach or a teacher there. I don't remember. Sacramento High is here in Oak Park.

[00:07:38]

Silva Yes, 34th and Y Street.

Valadez This was in about what year?

[00:07:43]

Silva Seventy-seven through '79 I was at Sac High.

Valadez And when you finished high school, where did you go from there?

[00:07:56]

Silva To Sac City. I actually had to wait a year because I graduated at seventeen and I was working at the time. It was kind of hard to try to get the classes, so I couldn't be a full-time student at that time.

Valadez Where were you working?

[00:08:12]

Silva I was working for the state, which is my place of employment now. I started there when I was fifteen. I started through the SETA Program. I was very motivated. We were located on 19th and T Street, which was only in walking distance.

So I came in as a student. The gentleman that I worked for was very, very motivating, too, an Italiano, and he believed that if you're a young person and you were willing to learn, he was going to give you 110 percent to get you where you needed to go. So when my summer program ended, I kept coming back, and he kept taking me. I told him I was like an old *zapato*; you can't get rid of me. [laughter]

So I continued until '82, I became a full-time employee working in the clerical field as a secretary, and I've been there ever since. Did a little bit of warehouse. I became a warehouse worker, but then ended up coming back to the clerical field because at that time in the early seventies, there was not going to be any movement because some of the supervisors at that time, previous supervisors, were still very young, and it would be at least ten to fifteen years before promotions. So I returned back, took a cut in pay, and went back to the clerical field and worked my way to secretary.

Valadez The next question we have asks about whether you were part of the Fellows program or Felitos program. That's a master's degree program at Sacramento State. Did you go there?

[00:09:55]

Silva No.

Valadez What are your earliest recollections of the Chicano Movement, of the events that were going around the Chicano Movement?

[00:10:10]

Silva Watching television with the Chicano Movement of Cesar Chavez and his fight for equality, getting better housing for the United Farm Workers, and

fighting for more pay, watching that on television, and then experiencing a little bit of that as I got involved in MEChA when I was here at City College, and actually a little bit when I was part of the MAYA Club in high school, watching the marches when they were marching, a few of the marches they did from Delano to the State Capitol here, and cheering them on.

Valadez Were you there? Did you join the—

[00:10:55]

Silva I joined in as they came through Southside Park. One of the second ones, we just kind of waited at Southside Park. We had a group of people that waited as they came by and then we just continued on with the march to the State Capitol, and just showing that it can be done, because I came from two parents that were always *very* motivating. I knew nothing else *but* to fight. The fact that someone would say, “No, you can’t do this,” well, that just gave me the inspiration to say, “Yes, I can,” because I knew nothing else *but* to see two working parents who worked very hard and achieved, and always said just because you may be poor doesn’t mean you cannot succeed in life. So I always had positive role models, and I knew no other way. That was my life. I didn’t know what it was *not* to be working.

After my parents separated, then I became basically the one to help my family out, and that’s why I started working at such a young age, to help my mom, even though she continued to work until she got cancer. I just decided, well, I have to take on that struggle to help pay the bills and move forward and help get my brother through school, through high school.

Valadez Did she beat it? Did she beat her cancer?

[00:12:29]

Silva Yes, she did. Yes, she did.

Valadez It's in remission?

[00:12:31]

Silva Yes. She got it at the age of thirty-nine, and she is eighty-seven now, and still going strong.

Valadez That's a good story.

[00:12:41]

Silva She actually had a heart attack a couple years ago, but because she's a very strong-willed woman from that generation that once again, you can't tell them no, she is still going strong.

Valadez That's great.

The word *Chicano* was tossed around always, and in many communities and many places with many people it struck a wrong sound, it didn't appeal to them, it wasn't part of who they wanted to identify with. How did you connect to all of that?

[00:13:25]

Silva My mom always told me that I was a Chicana because I was American-born with Mexican background. So she always told me, "You be proud. Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not a Chicana, because you are American-born."

My godparents, both of them who were older than my mom and came straight from Mexico, they did not like me using the word *Chicana*, because my godmother

would say, “You’re not a piece of meat,” making *chicana*, the steak. So she would say “*No eres Chicana. Eres Mexicana.*”

And I’d tell her, “*No, Nina*, I’m born here, United States.” So that was kind of a struggle for me, because I didn’t want to disobey or disrespect her in any way. So I just kind of learned not to say it around her as I got older and especially in my teenage years when I was a little bit more headstrong and getting involved in a lot of the Chicano community things that were going on. So that was my only experience there, is that my mom said, yes, I am, my godparents said, no, I wasn’t. So I just learned to be a little bit respectful and not say that I was a Chicana in front of my godparents.

Valadez But you could connect to the word and—

[00:14:55]

Silva Oh, *absolutely*, absolutely, because I do believe I was born here, so I am a Chicana with Hispanic and Mexican background, not to also mention that on my mom’s side we have American Indian. She has American Indian, which I’m very proud of that, too, to share that.

Valadez What—

[00:15:18]

Silva Navajo from Colorado, because my mom was born Fort Collins, Colorado, and that’s where her family’s from.

Valadez That’s very good.

[00:15:29]

Silva So I truly believed it because I have such a rich culture. I'm proud of every little bit that I am.

Valadez When the civil rights was going on during these years, did that cast an influence on you? Did it influence what you were seeing going on as a civil rights struggle?

[00:15:54]

Silva I think it did in a way, but in a very positive which just reinforced that "I can do this and I'm going to go forward." Even starting in the workforce at the age of fifteen, I went into an environment where I went in with three strikes already.

[interruption; adjusting microphone]

Silva It just motivated me. Those struggles that they kept saying that women could not go forward, you were supposed to be home, raising babies, you're not supposed to speak, you're not supposed to voice your opinions, and to me, it just justified, yes, you can. It doesn't matter if you're a woman. You have a voice, you have a right, and you're going to fight for that right to be able to continue your education. Get into politics. Make a stand for yourself. It doesn't matter who you are, you're no different than anybody else, and we have to go forward.

As I was saying, I went into the workforce with three strikes against me being very young. I was young, Latina, and female, and going into an environment in the early seventies, it was predominantly all Caucasians. There were only three Hispanics when I started this office, and that was a struggle. And there were things that happened that they would try to kind of play dirty tricks on you. They would load my workload. I mean, to them it was like a practical joke. But I always remember what

my mom told me. She said, “You do your best and you challenge them. They give you more work, you finish it and you go to them and you ask for more.” And that’s what I would do. And every time they’d leave piles of work, I’d get it done. I said, “What more can I do for you?” To the point that I’d beat them at their own game. I challenged them, and then they realized, “Okay, she can do the work. We’re going to go ahead and have her do this. We’re going to have her do that. We’ll assign her to the gentleman—,” who hired me, the Italian, Mr. Sapernero [phonetic]. He taught me a little bit about budgeting. I used to be his personal chauffeur. When I’d take him down to the Capitol, he’d never ask for anybody else but me.

So seeing what I’d seen on television, seeing what I’d seen in the community about the Chicano Movement, it just reinforced what I was brought up with already and just told me “This *is* your life.” I knew nothing different. So it just reinforced my feelings in the direction that I needed to go.

Valadez Which answers, then, the following question, which says, did your involvement in the Chicano Movement change you personally?

[00:20:35]

Silva Oh, absolutely, to the point that even at this stage, I want to give back more to the community as a Chicana. Right now my time is very limited, but I think it’s very important that we need to educate a lot of these young kids. And it doesn’t start when they’re teenagers; it starts when they’re in grade school. And I want to just someday be able to give back and be more involved in my community, because I know this community, I’ve lived here all my life, I’ve seen the changes, I’ve seen things that have happened, and I want to be a voice in my community.

Valadez How did you see other young women during this time in their involvement in the Movement?

[00:21:29]

Silva Oh, they were just very inspirational, and they would always say, “*Mija*, what you are doing? Are you still going to school?”

“Yes, I am.”

“What do you plan on doing? Do you have a job?”

Fortunately, I was very lucky because I was already working, so I was going to school and working, so it wasn't like after I graduated, I needed to find a job. I had planted my roots already and I knew I was going to stay with this office until the day I retire, but I also wanted to continue my education, and I did. I graduated from here. Unfortunately, I had some life changes that stopped me from not continuing and going to Sac State.

And still, in all of that, I was still taking care of my family, too, taking care of my mom, helping her pay bills, and making sure that my brother finished school. So I kind of was involved in a lot. It wasn't just me. I had to still take care of family. Family was number one for me, and I think part of that was because it was always embedded in me that my dad said, “You're the oldest. You have to take care of the family.” And I did. I didn't let things fall. I did make sure I finished college, even though it was a struggle for me, but I did it, because it was just that being the oldest, you tend to have a lot of pressure. You're required to take care of your family. There were times that I think I could have went the other way and just threw my hands up and say, “I have too much. I'm just a *kid*. And why is it my responsibility? I'm trying

to better myself.” But there’s part of you, there’s that commitment to family, that unity that you say, “I can’t. If I turn away, I don’t want to be shut out by my family. I don’t want to be looked at as a loser or someone who gave up on family because I was too selfish and I only thought about myself.” So I did it, though. I stuck in there.
[laughs]

Valadez That’s the history, the story and the history that you’re making of yourself, and it’s inspirational because not a lot of girls can take that pressure. Parents sometimes put so much stress on the children that the children reject the pressure and they go in a different direction. But it’s a unique person that can take the pressure, they use it to propel themselves, to motivate themselves, to keep trying to excel and successfully do it, and maintain still some kind of autonomy over their own lives. It’s really, really difficult.

During this time period, what do you think you participated in or initiated that can be said to be a contribution to this whole movement of changes from the status quo to a fight for social justice or whatever that—

[00:25:20]

Silva Just being that voice in the community. And in my career, they looked to me to talk to the younger kids who come in, like the students that we hire. I always make it a point, if they don’t come and ask me, then I go to them and I try to instill in them how important it is to work, how important it is to take pride in your work, and don’t ever tell yourself that you can’t.

Just recently, we’ve hired a few students to work in our warehouse, and I’ve made it a point to go back there and introduce myself and let them know that “If you

have any questions as far as career moves, how to get there, don't ever look at yourself," I tell them, "don't ever look at yourself, because you are a minority, that you cannot do something, whether you're male or female. Don't let anybody put those barriers up for you. And if you want to talk to somebody who's been there, my door is open. Come and talk to me and I will get you the resources that you need. But if you ever need to talk as far as your career, feel free to come and see me."

Because I think it's important, because I think its people who like me who have lived it, who have been through it that can provide the best advice to our younger kids that are coming up in the workforce. I mean, they can read things in a book, but a lot of times they tend to read the book and go, "Yeah, okay. Well, what do they know? They don't know what my life is." So I make it a point to say, "I know where you're at. I've been there. I've lived it. I've walked it."

Valadez That's what I mean, one thing is to read it or to hear it from somebody else, but it's very difficult, very unique to find it from the person that's gone through it and is able to share that, is able to still say open enough be able to communicate with the generation that now requires guidance, like every generation requires guidance.

[00:27:33]

Silva Oh, absolutely.

Valadez But it's a unique guidance that's not easy to find. That's why I think the people that you got involved with in your world of work did that.

[00:27:45]

Silva Well, and that's just it. From my counselor—and I wish I could remember who my counselor was when I started in SETA, because he was very, very much into the community, very much into making sure that I stayed on track. He went one step beyond. He didn't just say, "Okay, turn in your papers. At your place of employment, turn them in." He always would ask me, "How are you doing? Is there anything I can do for you? Where are you at at this point in your life? Do you need someone else to talk to? What can I do to make your life more enriched, whether it be education, whether it be the employment world?" And I really wish I remembered his name because he was very inspirational to me, and his door was always open if I needed to talk to him.

Those are the kind of people during my years as a young teenager growing up that instilled those values because they had those same values, and also the people in the community that I was involved with when I was here at City College. When I was with MEChA—in fact, he is still here—Juan Lachica, he was our advisor during MEChA and he was always very involved in the community back then and very much into education.

And, of course, the Chicano art person that I took art as a young person in the back of Our Lady Guadalupe, Mr. Montoya, José Montoya. His boys and I went to school together. I took his class, and same thing, very motivating. There were no boundaries. He'd tell you, "Open up those boundaries. If you have it in your heart, show it through your art."

So those are the people back in my early years that I was involved with in the community and ones that I didn't know personally, but I was around because of

events or things, and they had those values, and that's what just instilled in me, it's like, "Okay, now I feel it's my mission to pass that on."

Valadez What other activities were going on that you participated in, either with MEChA here or activities in the community?

[00:30:20]

Silva Probably just a lot of the—when they would have the Cinco de Mayo celebrations at Southside Park, just being there, knowing a lot of the people. If they needed help, I never did volunteer because it seemed like they always had a lot of volunteers during that time, but I'd make it an effort to go there. It was a family thing, so I'd take my mom and we'd be a part of that.

And even in the early years, kind of going back when they used to have the Mexican Center, which started in the sixties, and that was on the corner of 6th and X Street, that was a family event and it was a safe place where families could go, they can listen to music. They had a kitchen. In fact, I used to help the lady in the kitchen wash dishes. I mean, it was just one big family and you had people coming from all over. I believe that was run from the radio station guy, his name was Tapia. I think his name was Tapia, out of Roseville. That was a given on Sundays. After church, *everybody* made it a point to go to the Mexican Center because it was a family event, it was a safe place where people could enjoy themselves.

Valadez I came in '68 here to Sacramento, and I remember '68, '69, '70, even '71, that Centro Mexicano was always doing something. They always had some kind of event going. I think '71 was the last year.

[00:32:09]

Silva That was the last, yeah, because times were starting to change. It was starting to get rough, which was really sad to see it close because of the things that were happening on the outside, because then families lost a place to go after that. That was the changing of the times in the seventies with a lot of the younger folks who were getting involved in drugs, and there were more riots going on in the community and it was just like, well, you know, he had to close.

Valadez It seemed to me that things changed from that Center just like it spread over to the Southside, and Southside became the big gathering.

[00:33:00]

Silva The big gathering, yes.

Valadez Did MEChA have booths at Southside?

[00:33:08]

Silva Yes, they did. They used to have booths there that had information, and for incoming new students that were starting college, we were the voice to help them get them in if they were interested in joining the different clubs there were available.

Valadez Do you think that the Movement raised your consciousness about the world in general along social, political lines or anything?

[00:33:38]

Silva Yeah, it did, it did. It just continues to open your eyes of how the world continues to change, and it makes you think, "Okay, what do we need to do next?" In the early years, you had a mission to accomplish one thing, and about every

ten years it seems like there's something different that we need to focus on in the community. So it's just being aware and constantly making changes and reaching out.

Valadez It seems like you came from a home that empowered you, though not with words but by deeds, by the things that your mom and your dad and others around you dealt with you, and then you started to take on that responsibility at age fifteen and beyond. And then as you got older, you were experiencing more of the social events, the cultural events that were going on in the Movement, but you were still driven by the same sort of values from home—

[00:34:52]

Silva Absolutely.

Valadez —that were instilled there at the very beginning. And it seems like that's kind of how it's gone for you.

[00:35:00]

Silva Yes.

Valadez Did any of these changes that were going on with you and with the Movement, with things that were going on around, impact your family or those that knew you before? Did anybody say, "*Hay pos te cambiatse tanto?*" or, "You're different now. I don't understand you anymore"?

[00:35:27]

Silva [laugh]

Valadez Everybody? [laughs]

[00:35:30]

Silva Well, I think a few of the kids that I grew up with then, I think they've seen me changing, but changing for the good and not like I turned them all away and forgot where I came from. I think they realized, "Wow! She did it. Why didn't I do that?" Because some of the kids I grew up with totally went a different way and they were in those early years where, like I said, when you're a teenager, you have "Well, I'm poor. I don't get good grades. I can't make it."

Well, instead of using those negatives, I turned those negatives into positives, and I moved forward, regardless of where I came from, because like I said, my mom never told me that "You can't do this because you live like this." She made it "You live like this. I did it. You can do it too." And I never knew my mom *not* to work, and my mom, as she told me her stories in her early years, she started working at the age of twelve. Her and my aunt worked in the laundry at the base, ironing shirts, and she lied to get in, because at twelve years old, she wasn't supposed to be working. She actually got an award for putting out so many shirts. Her and my aunt would set the standards for that laundry, and she said a lot of the ladies were very envious of them because here are these two sisters who were *planchando* and then they started not just doing regular shirts for the regular enlisted soldiers, they started doing it for the brass, because they knew how to do the creases and they were able to—

Valadez That's hard to do.

[00:37:32]

Silva Yeah. So when she told me all of that, once again, that's all I knew. So she told me, "You go forward."

So seeing the kids that I grew up with, some of them didn't succeed. Some of them just finished high school. Some didn't and just kind of went a different way. They know me today as "Yes, she grew up the same way, but she didn't let anything stop her. She hasn't changed who she is. She hasn't forgot where she came from. If you see her on the street, she's going to talk to you. She's not going to think that she's better than you are." So they've seen me change, but they know that I've never forgot where I came from, because I'm very proud of where I came from, who my parents were, where I lived.

Valadez Do you think that the Movement affected or influenced or impacted your career decisions, or was it more something else going on?

[00:38:44]

Silva Yeah, I think it was something else more going on, because since I was already motivated in that way and I went straight into working, so it was like going to school and working was already part of my makeup. So I wasn't trying to strive to get in the workforce, because I was already there. It just now made me start thinking, "Okay, now I'm in this new environment and now I have other struggles. Because I am a minority, I have to prove to them that I can do the job as well as the next person, if not better." So, yeah, it was just all positive for me. I was already in that environment.

Valadez The Movement, the first fifteen years that we're recording, whether we're looking for people at that time who were actively doing something, for fifteen years made a major change or created a major change from what used to be the status quo to something different. And it's like if you saw things the way they were before

and you saw things the way they were fifteen years later, you knew that a change had taken place, but you always had in mind that there were still more issues that needed to be dealt with. From where you were as you were going on into your career, are you aware, do you see issues that need to be dealt with that are not, at the present time?

[00:40:49]

Silva In my career, not so much because there has been an *astronomical* change in the diversity that we have now. In fact, I sit and talk to people who are fairly new to our office, and I said if the old-timers, people who have retired already from the sixties and the seventies when I started, if they could see how this work environment has changed, some of them would probably flip in their grave, because we have *so* much diversity now. I mean, to see that, to me, is wonderful. And the changing of how people seem to be more to work together, wanting to help each other, where when I came into the workforce, it was not there. You pretty much were like a guppy in this big fishbowl, and because there was only a few of us, we stuck together. To this day, there's only one other person who's still working, because him and I both came in at the same time and we kind of look back and we say, "Boy, we've seen a lot of changes, have we?"

And I say, "Yes, we have," which is a good thing. So I think it's just very positive. It has changed. We have finally opened those doors and have more diversity in the workplace, whereas before it wasn't like that.

Valadez I wonder why. I wonder how that took place.

[00:42:42]

Silva Well, I work with engineers, and I think in the early years, engineering was a male-dominating world. Now you have females. We have females who sit as supervisors, which was forbidden in the early seventies. They were all male-dominating fields, positions. Even the deputy director in the early years was a male. Now we have a female. So seeing that, and the fact that they're female, too, I'm going, "Yes! Hallelujah!" [laughter] It's good to see that, which you didn't have that in the early seventies.

I think it's because now women realize that they can, too, be an engineer, which I think a lot of women in their early years were told, "Engineering is a man's field. You should be clerical. You should be a secretary. You should be working in the library. Engineering? Oh, no, that's forbidden." But I think women started breaking those barriers and realizing, "Why *can't* I be an engineer?" So now I see those changes, and I started seeing the changes in the early eighties, when we started hiring straight out of Sac State, female engineers in our work environment. To me, that's a plus.

Valadez Yes. I can't help but think that the work ethic that you showed when you went to work there, and even though they would increase the workload, that you would get it done and be ready for more taught them what it takes many, many entrepreneurs a long time to learn, that people are capable. Just give them an opportunity, and they will perform. Treat them right, and they will perform, and they will surprise you, because they have that motivation to try to do. So often the expectation is very little, and therefore the result is very little.

[00:45:15]

Silva Exactly.

Valadez When the expectation is high, you are motivated, encouraged to try to achieve it, people will step up. And the more that people do that, the more that it opens it up.

[00:45:30]

Silva Yes.

Valadez So you're probably one of those individuals that helped create that by being the way you were when you went to work there.

[00:45:37]

Silva Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Valadez And then it opened it up and it taught them right from the beginning that if they gave other women a chance, they could outperform as well.

[00:45:48]

Silva I used to tell one of the support staff, I said, "I may be young, but Mama didn't raise no *tonta*." [laughter]

And she would just kind of laugh and go, "Well, yeah, I guess so."

And I said, "Bring it on!" [laughs]

Valadez Looking back, well, I guess that's what we just talked about. Looking back on your experiences in this whole Movement and in your job experience, which in part is almost like a mini Movement in itself, are there issues that are left unresolved, other things that need to still be focused on?

[00:46:37]

Silva I think there are still people there that need to be educated about breaking down those barriers that females should not be in certain fields, and I think they need to understand that times have changed. It's time for them to start opening up their horizons and look around. We've had very successful women in history. Give those people a chance. So that's what I see, is continuously keeping the eyes open and making people understand that times have changed and you have to give people a chance to succeed.

Valadez Do you think that the Sacramento community has changed from the community that you were growing up with years and years back?

[00:47:41]

Silva I think it has. And I know the drug issues and riots, I mean, that has always been there, but it just seems like there's been so much more of that now. And it's like what is it that has changed that part? Why do we have so much of that? Why do we have so many of our young kids involved in drugs? What changed? And I think that's important to focus on, trying to find out what's going on in our community. Why are there so many young kids on drugs, not going to school? There's still a large amount of young kids that are dropping out of school. Girls, they're not finishing their education. What happened? And it'd be interesting to find out and get involved and see what's happening. Where did that change? And the crime that's going on. Because you hear more and more of the younger people and it's like I know that all of that has always been there, but for some reason, it's just exploded. And I don't have the answers. I'd like to get to the core and find out what that is and what can we do to change that. What do we need to do in our community to get those things changed?

Valadez Many activists have passed on. When we did our first reunion to try to gather activists back in 2013, that year when we pulled in whoever we could contact, names that came up, people that knew somebody who knew somebody, that's the way that all of these names tended to emerge. We found that ninety-nine had already passed away—

[00:49:49]

Silva Wow!

Valadez —of the ones that started, they were active in '68. So between '68 and 2013, ninety-nine had gone, and who knows how many more that we don't know about. Those are just the ones that we discovered because we wanted to pull them in so badly.

[00:50:07]

Silva That's a large number.

Valadez Those are a lot of key individual people that were doing something, who in their own way, like you, impacted a place, and because they were there, things changed. If you had not been there at the age of fifteen, if you had gone someplace else, I wonder what would have happened there. Change would have happened eventually.

[00:50:34]

Silva Oh, absolutely.

Valadez But it would not have happened necessarily in the way that it did, except for the fact that you were there. Because you were there, you were one of those examples that broke the image that they probably had before, and made it

possible for them to accept more people in and to hire more people and get them involved in training programs and things like that.

[00:51:01]

Silva Exactly, and that's what they did. They did a lot of training programs for the engineers and the technicians. We deal in public safety, so we have engineers who actually do the write-ups for what the agency statewide, what type of radio equipment they want. Our technicians who are up and down the state of California are the ones who install the equipment. So they had numerous training for those individuals.

Valadez See, and when somebody is gainfully employed or when somebody is receiving those accolades or those praises, those "You're doing well. Keep it up," whatever, so long as you're hearing that and you're motivated, you're going to excel. You're going to do well. But if you are part of that sector that is failing out of school, getting into trouble, and once you get into trouble, that escalates.

[00:51:59]

Silva It does.

Valadez You're not hearing those words anymore. People are not surrounding you, giving you guidance and encouragement to keep trying. So you fall into this other side that has a lot of violence, has all the drugs, and—

[00:52:16]

Silva Exactly

Valadez —everything else goes crazy. So the magic is really a very significant point, and that is the role of those who are the positive models and how to perpetuate

that, how to communicate that, how important it is for every individual to become that kind of a model, to try to see how important they are—

[00:52:48]

Silva Exactly.

Valadez —to the people that are around them, in their own families like you—

[00:52:52]

Silva Oh absolutely.

Valadez —and other people, as an employee, other people as a friend, as a woman, as a partner, as a helper, as a supporter. We're all connected that way.

[00:53:07]

Silva And that's what I said. It doesn't start when they're teenagers. It starts in the lower grades, when they're in elementary school, to start being positive role models for them, and sometimes you just got to continue to follow them all the way through, or at least letting them know "My door is open. If you ever need someone to talk to, you need guidance, call me. I'm here. I'm going to be your positive role models. Maybe your parents can't do it or maybe they don't know how to go about giving you that positive reinforcement, because maybe they didn't have it themselves." But these are the kind of people we need to follow these children and get them out of that and make sure they don't fall into that category.

Valadez So what person or persons stand out from this mass of people that you've come to know, that you are thankful for or that you see in them the kind of model that we're talking about?

[00:54:21]

Silva My parents, my parents. The three men that gave me the opportunity to work. One was a chief of our office, the other one was the assistant chief, and then the gentleman that actually hired me. They believed in me, they allowed me to excel, and they basically were very proud that at that time our chief, who was willing to take on students through the SETA program, he was so proud to say, “Hey, I want to brag that I have a young person who is outstanding. She never misses a day of work, she’s an outstanding worker, she gets along with everybody. You give her anything, and she will take it and make the best out of it.” Those three gentlemen in my career, I thank them for it. They have been very strong in my life growing up, because basically they’ve seen me grow up. [laughs] I was like one of their children.

And my parents and other family members who kept telling me, “*Mija*, you can do it. Don’t ever let anybody tell you no.” So a lot of it is family who were inspirational to me and just kept encouraging me, knowing that I had a lot on my plate, but just encouraged me to get an education and work, and as a woman, don’t let anybody stop you from what you want to do.

Valadez Future challenges to the community? What do you see as still some remaining future challenges for us? I know you’ve identified some already. Are there any others that you have thought about as being important things that we as a community or as members of a community should strive to correct or strive to focus on or try to resolve?

[00:56:55]

Silva Just reaching out more. And when I say reaching out, I’m not too sure how to go about that, but maybe that’s one of the areas. I know we do that through

career fairs. The colleges are involved in a lot of career fairs, fundraisers, but I think we just need to reach out more. And maybe, as you mentioned, we have so many of those earlier activists who have passed away and we've lost that information, those key people in our lives. I think it's important that we bring new people that have been involved, we still continue to stay on and pass that on to the younger generation, reach out to those people and say, "We need your help. You're a legend. We need you to be the voice to our community."

Valadez Do you belong to organizations, community organizations?

[00:58:06]

Silva No, actually, I don't. Right now I don't. Right now what I do is still very involved in the high school for Christian Brothers, even though my daughter's already graduated and she's in college, but I'm still very involved in the school community. But someday I would like to get more involved in the community, because I have a lot to offer.

Valadez I would agree. Margarita Colmenares, who is trying to rally students to go to UC Davis, to enter the educational programs at UC Davis, I think she works with 400 or 500 young people graduating from high school, encouraging them to look at the colleges as possible. I think you'd be an excellent inspirational speaker—

[00:59:06]

Silva Thank you.

Valadez —somebody that could come in and talk to them a little bit. So if you don't mind, I can either forward your name to her—

[00:59:17]

Silva Oh, absolutely.

Valadez —and tell her to give you a call—

[00:59:20]

Silva Oh, absolutely.

Valadez —and let the two of you work it out. She's always looking for somebody who can come in and who can relate to the problems of the kids at that age, and yet can provide them the more mature guidance that they need, because they need it and they know they need it, but they get often caught up with all the other messages that's conveyed to them, that, "Nah, may as well go get a job or something and go to work and don't go on." Because even though they haven't a clue as to what to study, they're just going to go there to be four years and without any idea as to what they want to do. Sometimes they just need to have some guidance in thinking about what they're doing now and what are their skills, what are their strengths, and use that as a jumping—

[01:00:13]

Silva As a tool, as a tool to get them to focus on what career path they want to take.

Valadez Yeah, that's very excellent. I want to thank you for coming in and—

[01:00:24]

Silva Oh, this is pleasure. I'm glad I did.

Valadez —participating with us. I said that you were the youngest of the interviewees [Silva laughs], but you are one truly who has shown a great deal more of

the wisdom that has come out of your experience in all of this. So I'm very glad that you came.

[01:00:47]

Silva Thank you.

Valadez I know we tried to make contact several times, and sometimes I get discouraged because I'm looking for those key people that are not the ones that got all the fame, the ones that got always in the paper, but are the hardworking people who made a difference.

[01:01:06]

Silva I'm kind of behind the scene. It's like I've never been one on television and one of these out there fighting for the cause. I'm always behind the scenes.

Valadez Yeah, but you are those individuals that do the hard work, the ones that put in their time and do the hard work—

[01:01:27]

Silva Absolutely]-

Valadez —while other people get the credit. [laughter]

[01:01:31]

Silva I'm their foundation. [laughs]

Valadez Yeah, without people like you, they wouldn't stand a chance, because that's what's made a movement. A movement is not the leadership; a movement are the people.

[01:01:45]

Silva Exactly.

Valadez Everyday kind of people that are highly motivated, turned on a life.

And that's you.

[01:01:54]

Silva That's me.

Valadez I'm so glad that you came in.

[01:01:56]

Silva Well thank you, thank you. It's a pleasure. I'm glad I was invited to the one workshop at Sac State, and that was actually through—and I think I mentioned it to you, she was my neighbor. We call her Yaya; that's her nickname. We became very good friends, and, in fact, she still stops at the house to see my mom and check on my mom. Actually, in one of her plays she did a part about my mom from—what was it? I think it was *Calle de 18*. It was part of her play of an old Hispanic woman sweeping a street, because that's what my mom does. [laughs] She does a better job than the city.

So she became a real good friend, and then she happened to call me one day, and she says, "Well, I remember you talking that you know a lot of the artists, local artists, and you mentioned something about you knew José Montoya."

And I said, "Well yeah, I went to school with him." I said, "I went to Sac City."

So she goes, "You know what? Would you mind coming out to the workshop?" She goes, "You sit at any table and they'll ask you questions."

And I said, "Oh, okay."

And it turned out I got to see a lot of people there, a lot of the elderly people that I knew from when I was growing up, which was a good thing, and the fact that they're still involved. Armando Botello, I got to see him. So I said, "Yeah." Because someday I want to be able to get back into, like I said, with taking care of my mom, but as time goes on, I want to be able to give back, because I believe that that's part of me. I need to share that information. And the fact being born and raised here, I have a lot of rich information on the community.

Valdez That's great.

[End of interview]