

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Xavier Carlos Tafoya

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Lisbeth Sánchez and Jéssica Cuevas
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Q Can you please state your full name?

[00:00:09]

Tafoya My name is Xavier Carlos Tafoya.

Q And your birthdate?

[00:00:14]

Tafoya My birthday is 9/2/43, September 2nd, 1943.

Q Can you also share your marital status?

[00:00:20]

Tafoya Never been married. [laughs] No kids.

Q Okay. Thank you. Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:31]

Tafoya I was born in a city called Woodland, which is about eighteen miles from here. The town was very rural at that time. I lived in a ranch when I was a young boy. At the time, I didn't know, it wasn't that great, but I got everything I needed, so I thought that was good. But then I moved to downtown Woodland, and things really started opening up, had a lot of fun.

Q What was the demographic like?

[00:01:05]

Tafoya Demographic was, I would think, at that time about 75 percent Anglo, 20, 25 percent Hispanic, very few Blacks at all, and that was about it.

Q How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:01:29]

Tafoya I'm the tenth child of eleven. I have five sisters and five brothers.

Q What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:40]

Tafoya My father came and he was a farmworker. He was very fortunate to have a very good boss, and he worked as a farmworker then. My boss sold my father a commercial scale business, and we did that for years. Then my father opened up Tafoya Drive-In Market. In those days, the drive-in market meant that you could drive in, like a mall. You drive in and you had all this open space to park. In those days, you parked on the curb and you went on the street and buy your stuff and came back out. There was nothing like that. So it was a great innovation. We were one block out of the city limits, so we could sell. I don't know whether you know what blue laws are. You can't sell meat after a certain time, you can't sell liquor because of all the health codes. So we didn't have to abide by those laws.

Q Can you please describe your experiences growing up within your family and within your neighborhood in Woodland?

[00:02:55]

Tafoya Yeah. I said I grew up on 900 3rd Street this part of my life, and it was like a new world to me because we were in a nice neighborhood and we had friends who were Japanese, Anglo friends, and we had all kinds of friends. We played baseball, football, basketball. Funny part, we used to—there was a truck that came and sprayed for spiders and for mosquitos at night, and dumb kids, we all got on the bicycle and would follow that guy. [laughter] I don't know how we all lived, but we did. [laughter]

But it was a real nice time to grow up. We had the ice cream truck come by, and we had the guy with the vegetable truck come by and sell you vegetables and stuff like that. It was really nice.

Q Were you a Fellow or Felito or were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:03:57]

Tafoya I wasn't in a fellowship program, but when I got to Sac State, I saw that. I thought that was really good, because I met kids from Dinuba, all these different towns in the Valley, and I thought that was just great, because here these kids can get out of their environment and have an opportunity to have a college education. I worked hand-in-hand with them and went to school hand-in-hand with—it was something I really enjoyed, because I also wouldn't have met half the people at Sac State.

Q How did your participation—I guess you weren't really involved in the Mexican American Education Project, so—

[00:04:52]

Tafoya I was involved with it, with the Chicano Movement. When I went to Sac City, I met Robert Hernandez, and he was very—not demanding, but he was very boisterous about the Movement. I never knew about the Movement. I come from a nice middle-class family in Woodland, and I went to Christian Brothers High School, went to Holy [unclear] School, so I grew up almost protected, in a sense. But when I met him and all the Mexicanos at Sac City, it was really inspiring, because these people know—we talked about things that are human rights and things that a lot of them never had a chance to have.

I started using the word *Chicano*, and I just was introduced to a whole new world, and I thought it was fantastic. I really believe that if I didn't meet this guy, my life would have been real blah. It would have been just go to work, go to school, go home, stuff like that, you know.

Q So how did this sort of awakening influence your involvement and participation in the Movement?

[00:06:06]

Tafoya Well, let me back up a little. When I was going to City College here, I had to take a requirement, art requirement, so I took a class from Dr. Schmidt [phonetic], and I didn't really know what it was about. It was called "Arts of the Americas." We studied about Alaskan Indians and we went to the Hohokam Indians in Arizona, then we went down to Hawastapecs [phonetic] and all these Indians. We finally got in New Mexico. This book showed all these pictures of all these Indian buildings. I go, "What?" And it was Chichen Itza and Uxmal, Palenque, Tulum. And I was so pleased, so happy. It was like a real awakening that here as a Mexicano,

these people built things that were monuments to the gods that were as good or better than we had in Europe. I was just overwhelmed.

And after that, I went to Mexico about every other year for a long time, and I got my degree in cultural anthropology and another degree in—what do you call it—Ethnic Studies. So I have a degree and teaching credentials in both, so that's really affected me. I would teach kids, "Hey, you guys, your forefathers were amazing." And they wouldn't know that until I told them.

When I was here, I got involved with Robert, and we would boycott the grapes, we would go to the Safeway stores and we would picket the places. That meant that we were making a difference in life. Things were starting to happen.

I also know that when we were doing all these things, it was all catalogued in my mind what we were doing. I went to Sac State and I met José Montoya, is my mentor for life, him and Esteban Villa, Mojo [phonetic] and all these different people. They taught me—like, I was a green kid. They taught me culture, they taught me "You're not the most important person in the world. You may think you are, but you're not. Everybody's equal."

Really, you hear that stuff and that's fine, but when you start practicing, you feel much better within yourself, because lots of times—an old man the other day, he came into this gas station I go in, and I had this beautiful cowboy hat, but it was just too small. Somehow it shrunk up. I said, "I'm going to give it to that guy." I said, "Hey." I had to talk to him in Spanish. "Come over here," blah, blah. "Hey, try this hat on." And it fit him perfect. "It's yours."

He goes, "My hat?"

“*Es tuyo.*” I told him it was too small.

He goes, “Wow.” I knew him before, but he was just shocked. But he was happy and I was happier because the hat fit him and I made a friend. It’s just part of life.

Q You mentioned José Montoya. I remember learning about his involvement with the Royal Chicano Air Force. Would you say you have some memories with them? What are your earliest memories of the Chicano Movement?

[00:10:06]

Tafoya I was the—what do you call it? I was the supply sergeant, you might say, because my brother, he ran the Woodland National Guard unit for the state, and he’d always have surplus backpacks and hats and stuff like that, and he always stored them in my barn, my family barn. So I’d give the guys backpacks, I’d give them just different items from the surplus that didn’t make a difference anymore.

And then I had an Army Jeep that my father had, and once we were invited to the Mother’s Day Parade—that had to be like in the late seventies—no, we weren’t invited. They just showed up. I said, “Hey, it’s a Mother’s Day Parade.” We got the Jeep out, and they all put on their flight jackets and their hats. We had a guy named Bill Gee [phonetic], was one of our honorary Chicanos, and he had a Japanese t-shirt on, had a star there, and we had another guy guying him like he was a guard. They took first place in the parade, not knowing it. [laughs]

But every time they needed something, I’d say, “I’ll get it for you. Don’t worry.”

Then at Sac City, my boss, I worked at a clothing store, and it was rather unique because I'd come to school, go to school, and then I'd go to work. I worked at one of the nicest clothing stores in town. So I wore my grubby clothes and I had to go to work, had to change into these real fine clothes because that was my job. I mean, people would spend them \$1,000 for a suit, \$50 for a tie, \$75 for a shirt, and I just couldn't believe it. One guy, he must've spent about two or three thousand dollars, and to me, it just didn't make sense, you know. I told the guy—I got to know him pretty well—"You know, you've spent more money today than I made this year working." He just kind of laughed at it.

But for me to come back then to here, I remember one guy that really set me back. I never forgot it. This boy said he had to drop out of school. "Why?"

He said, "I don't have enough money."

"What do you mean, you don't have enough money?"

"I could probably make it till a month before, make it right before school ends, but I don't think I'm going to make it. I'm going to have to drop out."

I just couldn't conceive that. "What do you mean? I'll help you."

"No, no, no."

But that was one of the things I'll never forget, because he could not finish school. He wanted to, but just didn't have that money. Here's the other guy spending three, four thousand worth on clothes. I thought, "What's going on here?"

Then I remember we had a rummage sale here. I got my boss to give me all the clothes that returned from people, didn't work or something, and we had a ton of clothes. I mean, we had a lot of clothes. So my boss said, "Well, just take them. I'll

write them off.” And we must have sold about \$1,800 or \$1,500 worth of clothes, and then we still had a pile out there. We sent them over to the farmworkers in Delano, and that was one of my first experiences of working with Delano and the Cesar Chavez Movement.

Q How did other Mexicans and Mexican Americans and Latinos react to the term *Chicano* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:10:06]

Tafoya Well, back in the late sixties, early seventies, it was demeaning, in a sense. “*Estoy Mexican.*”

I said, “What are you? You’re American or Mexican American?”

He goes, “Yeah.”

“You’re Mexican? What did Mexico ever offer you?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you go over there, they’re going to call you *pochos*. They don’t care for you. You’re a traitor. You left the country.” What do they call it? Birds of paradise. You leave, you come over here. “You left us. Why would we want you?”

Then other people say, *gabachos* here, “You’re Mexican. You’re no American. You’re a Mexican. You belong in Mexico.” So they were very ambivalent, how it was.

I said, at least with *Chicano*, they hear it. They don’t like it, but it’s there. We have a reason to be called Chicano, because that’s our identity. “You won’t accept us as a Mexican, you won’t accept us as Americans.” I explained it to my mother, and she didn’t like it, but she understood it. That’s what I care about.

Q So then you would say that your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano changed you personally?

[00:15:17]

Tafoya Oh, it changed me. I tell you, it changed me when I was here, but it really changed me when I went to Sac State, because José, he was so dynamic, and Esteban and all the different guys. Esteban was there, Senon [Valadez], Mojo [phonetic], all these guys, Sam Rios, Dr. Hernandez, they all contribute to my knowledge, you know.

When I got done at Sac State and I went to school in Mexico, I knew all about the music of Mexico, the history of Mexico, the arts of Mexico, anthropology of Mexico, so everything I did was centered around Mexico. If you go into my house, you'll see I had a hand-carved statue that tall [demonstrates] in my yard, just all through my yard, the Aztecs, Toltecs, Chichimecs, Zapotecs, and to me, that's me, that's my pride, that's my culture.

Q So you mentioned that you have five sisters, correct?

[00:16:34]

Tafoya Yes.

Q What role do you believe that Chicanas played in the Movimiento?

[00:16:39]

Tafoya My sisters grew up being Mexican American. They're not Chicana. They all had a very good education. I had one sister who was a teacher, and I was so proud of her because in, I think, 1955, she graduated from a university, which was almost unheard of back in those days. She taught at all the low minority schools, like

Lincoln School, the school over there on Freeport. She taught kids, all poor students. She [unclear]. She insisted that she would not teach at the—only teach Mexicanos, all the kids that needed help, the Black kids and stuff like that.

My other sisters, one worked for the county projects and one was a university employee. Another one was—what do you call it—AAA salesman. But they all were like my—because they were all older than me, they could all boss me around. I said my mother was working all the time, my father working, and they would school me, “Hey, you better straighten out or I’m going to whip you.” And they did whip me. I didn’t tell my mom, and they whipped me again, but we’re very, very close, still a very close family.

Q So what do you think, coming from a family of, like, strong women, what do you think, in general, the role of Chicanas were in the Movimiento?

[00:18:24]

Tafoya Well, see, I still think we lag behind with Chicanas, because we’re having—there’s no—okay. I was the first Chicano city councilman. Then came [unclear]. He was the first mayor. Then we had Art Pimentel, then we had some other people, but still to this day, in Woodland we have no Chicano leaders, and that, I think, is missing right there. You can be appointed to something, that’s good, but when you’re elected, that means the people want you, for what you stand for, you know, and that means a lot more than being given a job. To me, that’s how I feel about it. I think that’s something that we’re going to have to work on in Woodland.

Q So what did you personally initiate or help initiate within the Movimiento?

[00:19:29]

Tafoya Well, I know that I was very close to fundraising all the time for the farmworkers. It was funny, because we always had fundraisers and we always had artwork by Montoya, Villa, all these RCAF, and since I worked and I had a job, I had a little bit of money, too, so they would put some up and I always had enough money, and my brother would loan me money, we'd buy a lot. If you go into my house, you'll see there's Montoya, there's Villa, there's so-and-so, there's so-and-so, and I'm very proud of that, because I got my culture and I've got my friends up on the wall, you know. It's very inspiring. People say, "How come you got all that ethnic stuff?"

"No, it's art. It's my art," I tell people.

And Louis "the Foot" [Gonzalez], I have all these guys. They meant a lot to me. They not only were artists, they were dear friends to me.

Q What do you think was the significance or is the significance of the organizations you were part of, of the art that you've got?

[00:20:58]

Tafoya Well, I think I was very fortunate because my father was a community leader, okay? And him and his friends [unclear], and they started the Ch____ Mother's Day Parade, okay? Then he helped start a bank. He did this, he did that, and I just picked up on that, you know. And my sister and I started the Baile Folklórico de Woodland.

Then we started also the—what was it called—the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. I told my buddies—they wanted to start something. I said, "I used to be a board member of the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber. Why don't we do a chamber in Woodland?"

“I don’t want—.”

“Yeah, but that means more. We’re businesspeople. I think that means a lot.”

So we started that.

Then I helped start several organizations, and I was questioned by the mayor. He called me, said, “Why are you starting another chamber?”

I said, “What do you mean?”

“Oh, we already have a chamber.”

“Yeah, you have a chamber, but you’re two successful businessmen who are Anglos,” I said. “And I don’t care what you do, Hispanic people who are from Mexico are not going to identify with that. Maybe I would because I’m second, third generation, but you talk to some guy, he’s going to say *chure* instead of *sure*, and they might laugh at him, or he’s going to be dressed a little funkier than most people and they’re going to think—he never owned a suit in his life. He just wore a pack of khakis. So all those differences,” I said, “we just want the people to join our club, get acclimated, and later on if they want to join the Woodland Chamber, that’s good, that’s good. But there was nothing that we were trying to compete with you.”

Q So did the Movimiento Chicano raised your consciousness along social, cultural, and political lines?

[00:23:02]

Tafoya Well, I have a degree in cultural anthropology. [laughs] I studied years in Mexico City, here, Morelia University, and I still can’t get enough. I go back every other year and look for more things to do, more things to buy.

My father was very proud of me. He said, “I never told you, but I’m very proud of you.”

“Why?”

“Because you finished school, you and your brother finished school, and you’re the only one who want to work with a suit on.” I used to work for the state one time, and he thought that was great.

I thought, “Okay.” [laughs] So it meant a lot to me.

Q What do you feel is the importance of helping, like, your family or peers and significant others, like, to raise their social, cultural, political consciousness?

[00:24:02]

Tafoya You know, it’s something, again, I was knocking on doors running for city council [unclear] knocked on the door. We had the low-income housing there, and I knocked on this door. “Hello, I’m Xavier Tafoya. I’m running for office.”

“Xavier Tafoya? Was your father Ramon Tafoya?”

“Yeah.”

“You know, if it wasn’t for your father, I wouldn’t own this house.”

I said, “What do you mean?”

He goes, “I went to see your dad about buying a house. They had the 220 homes that are low income and they’re very good, and I asked, ‘What do you think?’ ‘I think you should do it.’ ‘What are you going to do to raise the money?’ ‘I don’t have the money.’” My dad loaned him the money, never said a word to nobody, and she got her house and she paid it back. But I get stories like that all the time. So the impact is there.

Q Can you describe some of the impacts that your involvement in the Movimiento had on your career?

[00:25:08]

Tafoya [laughs]

Q So I guess it totally altered the path that you took.

[00:25:11]

Tafoya Yeah.

Q Can you, like, elaborate on that?

[00:25:14]

Tafoya You know, the impact happens every day, because I see these young kids—right now we have five—I was the first Hispanic councilman in Woodland. Then we had one in Winters and then we have two mayors, Hispanic, in Woodland, and two more councilmen. Well, I thought that was fantastic, but the impact on me being elected in Woodland meant that the other guy thought, “If Xavier can do it, so can I.” We would get together, and the Woodland old high school director is a Mexicano, and the guy before him was Mexicano. The sheriff for the county is Mexicano. So this maybe tells these kids that they can do it. Just we’ve got to get a woman in there.

Q So looking back at your experiences within the Movement, do you see any issues that are still left unresolved?

[00:26:25]

Tafoya Well, you know, again, I keep on harping on we don’t have enough Latina politicians. I’m sorry to see a lot more—well, I’m happy, a lot more doctors

and professionals in doctors' offices and places that make me feel good, but I still think that we need—there's a lot of things we haven't got yet, and for me to sit there sometimes, I get upset because how come we don't have—here it's the year 2015, we don't have this, we don't have that, and I get upset because, you know, I was a city councilman, and the police department—my nephew went into a liquor store to get a soda after work, and he came out with a brown bag, and the cops arrested him. He just kind of laughed. "This is orange juice."

Then the guys said, "Well, your eyes are dilated too much."

"What?"

So they arrested him for buying liquor or whatever, being under the influence.

He calls me up and says, "I'm in jail."

"What for?"

He goes, "They said I was drunk."

I said, "You just got off work. You couldn't have been drunk."

I called up the police department, and I go, "Hello. My nephew just got thrown in jail, and his name is Samuel Tafoya. He just got off work at my place and he couldn't have been drunk." And went on and went on, and I was upset. [unclear].

So, finally, they let him go and I took him over to the county and had him tested for all the drugs. Well, comes out that he had nothing on him.

I went and saw the city manager, and I chewed his ass. I was upset. "Well, you know, Xavier, you don't know what's going on."

“Hey, how come you didn’t call me up? You’re the city manager. If this happened, you should have called me up and said this happened. We probably could have done this, we could have controlled the damages and stuff like that.”

He goes, “I’ll tell you, I’ll call the chief up and we’ll do this, and the three of us will meet.”

I said, “Not on your life.”

“What do you mean? Don’t you trust me?”

[laughs] “What do you mean, don’t I—you already demonstrated I can’t trust you.” He was really upset.

I thought he was a good city manager. I said, “If I meet with you guys, it’ll be two against one. I don’t know, but I have to be aware of that, you know.”

But here it is, he was clean, he had nothing on him, but the chief still wrote an article saying—he wrote a response saying, “There are still drugs that we cannot detect,” which was being a lie, you know.

But, see, and that still happens in Woodland and everywhere, I guess, but I’m saying we have to improve those conditions. I’m always hammering for more Mexicanos in the police department, more Mexicanos at the city hall. You go to those counties and those county jobs, they inherit those jobs. What I mean by that is if so-and-so has a job and her son marries this lady, well, he’s a carpenter, well, she’ll work for the county, get a job at the county because she has the benefits, and he can work as a carpenter and they’re set. That’s what I’m saying. All those jobs are passed on and passed on to a lot of the Anglos, and if you’re looking for a Mexicana or Mexicano, they’re hard to find. Well, yeah. If you get your priorities straight, we

won't have those problems. So those are the things that I still think we have to look at, as many things, but we're not aware of it, the average guy, of it, the way I do.

Q In a more positive light, you mentioned a bit about how community life changed in Woodland. How do you think it changed in Sacramento?

[00:31:08]

Tafoya Well, I think the biggest influence, I think, was Joe Serna. He did things and he did things so well that he really didn't—he did it so professionally, he had no one to upset, at least that I know of. He had the ear of the Capitol, he had the ear of the city hall, the county supervisors, and he really changed Sacramento. Now we have a mayor that's Black. Is he good or not? I don't worry all that much. But I'm saying he—but it's not that uncommon to see people, minorities now. We had an Asian man. So now things are wide open now. There's no holding back, I think, in Sacramento.

Q So, many of the activists, you know, many of the influential activists from the Movimiento have passed, so can you tell us about some people that you feel really influenced the Movimiento, and their significance?

[00:32:37]

Tafoya First comes Montoya, then comes Serna.

Q [unclear]?

[00:32:45]

Q José Montoya and Joe Serna, they're the two, I think, they're the pillars of the activism in California.

Q Why?

[00:32:59]

Tafoya And then we have—oh, I can't remember. We had some real tough, strong women, and they were back in the projects. I can't remember their names right now, but they would come up and they were strong and they would go to city hall and just let the council have it. I just cannot remember the names, it's been so long ago. But I was very proud of that. I thought that we didn't recognize that, but I thought that was just—here's this woman, almost built like a man, just chewing up—and they all respected her. And here she was just a housewife who got tired of it all, you know, and just said, “No, things have got to change.” She would let them have it, and I thought that was fantastic.

Q So you don't remember her name?

[00:34:09]

Tafoya No.

Q So you remember an event?

Valadez Martha Bustamante.

[00:34:13]

Tafoya Martha Bustamante. See, he knew. [laughs]

If it wasn't for the Chicano Movement, they wanted to drop Chicano Studies from a lot of the colleges here, and I wrote an article. I said, “You drop Chicano Studies, you drop the community.” Because we as students would always go to the community for help, and they would come to us for help. It was very significant, because I remember one boy was shot by the police years ago, and, boy, we did not take it lightly. They had hearings and things like that, but we as students went over

there and protested, and that meant a lot because they couldn't—who's going to pay attention to some poor Mexicana or Mexicano? But when you start having professors and students out there, it meant a lot. The community and stuff, they spoke for us. So I told them, "You drop Chicano Studies, you might as well drop the community, because that's the strength of the community and that's the strength of the Chicano Studies."

I think a couple of programs were dropped, a couple of departments have dropped, and they know what they're doing. They're doing it just till they can get more of their programs and get our people off their backs. If you drop Chicano Studies, why don't you drop European Studies? Why don't you drop history? Why don't you drop the Romans? Why don't you drop the Greeks? Same thing, you know.

It wasn't until I talked to Dr. Schmidt, took his class, that I did not understand. As a little boy, we talked about goddamn Ponce de Leon, talked about all these navigators, Columbus, all these people, you know, they did this, they did that, and every year I said, "What about a Chicano? What about a Mexicano? Didn't we do shit? What happened? Did we just fall off the Earth or what?" And I kept on waiting until I got even in high school, not a word was said, and I'm going, "We were invisible or what?"

Then I took Dr. Schmidt's class. After that, hey, man. And every time one of my nephews or nieces graduates, "Come on, we're going to Mexico." I take them to see all the pyramids, I take them to all the people. I see one place, how poor it is. I see one place, how nice Mexico City is. I see all the pyramids, what we did, to make them understand that we have a rich and glorious past, but we never heard about it.

Now with the last ten, fifteen years, you do hear about it, but it took that long to do it.
I would get very upset.

Q Since you're mentioning about learning, like, Chicano art history and everything about that, are you familiar with D-Q University?

[00:37:47]

Tafoya I remember that a while back, yeah. I just remember vaguely. I don't know if they're still in existence or not.

Q No, it stopped in 2006.

[00:37:54]

Tafoya They kind of dropped off. They started up and they dropped and they started up again, but that was, I think, a big one. They overtook that weather place or that station there. They did it for a while, then kind of fizzled out. It didn't have the support the way we have.

Q You mean from the state? They didn't have support from the state?

[00:38:20]

Tafoya More so community support. You really need the community. You need activism to do something like that. I'm surprised that the casinos don't haven't—they have houses, and if you're an Indian, even in that tribe, you get so much a month. I mean, you get a good cut, a good chunk of money every month. I'm surprised they didn't put some into education or more into education.

Q Do you know anybody who attended D-Q?

[00:39:06]

Tafoya No, no, not that I know. This is a while back, a long time.

Q So I guess my question would be, you know, this work is empowering and it can be really beautiful at times, but also it's like really heavy stuff, you know?

[00:39:31]

Tafoya Yeah.

Q And sometimes it's painful and makes you angry. So I want to know what advice do you have for the next generation in doing this work?

[00:39:42]

Tafoya I found out when I get pissed off, upset, that it's always better to react than to respond. What I mean by that is if I'm going to hit something hot, I pull my hand away. That's because that's just the nature. But if somebody gives me a hard time and they say, "Oh, he said this about you," blah, blah, blah, blah, I want to—I just wait. I calm down and wait a couple of days. Then I'll come back and we talk about it, and that way you don't lose sight of what you really want to say. You can say anything when you're angry, and it doesn't make you any better person, but I found out that if I respond and it's a couple days later, I can respond in a more professional way. Sometimes you say things that are very sharp but they're to the point, but sometimes they want you to respond in a negative manner, you know.

"They said you were drunk at that meeting."

"I wasn't drunk at that meeting. You know what? I've been going to meetings for twenty years. I've never been drunk. So where'd you hear that?" So I diffuse it before I got there, and that's the thing we should do, is listen to the question and turn around it on them and just be calm about it.

Q Did you experience a lot of discrimination and racism in all these years?

[00:41:23]

Tafoya Oh, yeah. I was a little boy, somebody made remarks about me and about being a Mexican, so I punched the kid. [laughter] I went to county school. They wouldn't throw me out, but they gave me a hard time. The kid admitted he did call him that name. He shouldn't have called him that name, but you shouldn't have punched him. But even later on, not too long ago, people say things. Because you have to remember, farmers have been farmers all their lives. It's been passed down to generation to generation, and sometimes these really come off the wall, and it hurts because you think they would learn by now, but can you imagine what they do to employees sometimes, how they treat their employees? There's not too many good ones. I know some good ones, but they're far and few between.

I was applying for a job at the college, and I get a project for Senon, and he wanted me in this project. I get a project on this survey about the school, and before they had the [unclear] of schools and after, what the results were, the results were worse. I went and talked to the—what do you call it—the director of the school district, and I said, “Look it here. I got this from you,” blah, blah, blah, blah.

When I went to get a job in Woodland, I couldn't get a job, my brother couldn't get a job. We had to come to Sacramento to get a job. We knew why. We come from a good family, we speak our mind. No one's going to change it. So sometimes you've just got to look at it just that's the way it goes sometimes. But, you know, most the time, people know who you are and that you're not going to go off the wall if they know who you are, really. They'll say, “Xavier didn't say that,” or, “Mr. D _____ didn't say that. I know him better than that.” That's how it goes.

Q What do you see are current or future challenges for the Chicano community?
[00:43:56]

Tafoya Well, getting Mexicanos elected. Too, we have to get the Mexicanos and Mexicanas out to vote. We had better luck when I was going to school, I think, here than we have now, and it's not just Mexicanos. All the young people, they don't want to—I get this readout of all the people who are going to knock on doors to vote, and half the page is empty, more than half of it's empty, and no one hardly votes anymore. I'm going, “Whoa!”

I grew up, when my father became a citizen, he took his citizen test, he passed it, and we were so happy that he passed it. Then he voted for Adlai Stevenson, was way back when. From then on, I've never missed an election. When I got to be twenty-one, I voted for Hubert Humphrey and Lyndon Baines Johnson, and I've never missed an election since then, because I saw my father, the value he had in the voting. And my family, they all go vote.

Q What do you expect to see in the future for the Chicano community?
[00:45:24]

Tafoya Well, we're 40 percent of the population now, and I see that we'll have a lot more opportunities for good jobs for Mexicanos, because just by numbers alone, we work. I see also that we're getting a lot of education, a lot of Mexicanos and Mexicanas educated, young kids like you, and that means more to me than anything else.

When I was at that meeting yesterday to Power Up for PG&E and us talking to the city councilman, I said, “You’re young guys.”

He goes, “Well, what do you mean by that?”

I said, “Hey, I was elected in ’82 for city council.”

And he goes, “Gee, I was born in ’82.” [laughs] I felt real old. But the idea that I was that old and he was that young meant that there’s something going on. Now that people see him as a young man, he’ll be going on to bigger and better things. That means more to me than a lot of people say.

We had a gentleman named Art Pimentel, who was just fantastic. Now he’s the dean of the West Sacramento school, and he grew up in Woodland, very successful.

Q Do you see yourself as staying involved in meeting challenges for the Chicano community for as long as you live?

[00:47:15]

Tafoya You know what? I’m a bachelor. I have a big home. In fact, one of these papers has the back of the house on it. I didn’t know I had it on there.

Q I saw that. [laughs]

[00:47:27]

Tafoya It must be yours there.

Q No, I’m pretty sure it’s on this.

[00:47:31]

Tafoya It had the back of the house on it, tan paper. I’m just thinking that I’ve been in that house since I was probably ten years old, and I just feel that I’ll probably

stay there all my life, but it's amazing, sometimes if it's not every day, it's every other day, somebody will come at me to talk about this, talk about that, and I feel good because they want my opinion, need my help. It's almost every day that that happens, and I feel like that that is—I mean, to me, that's being successful.

“I want to run for office.”

“Talk to so-and-so.”

“I want to do this.”

“Talk to so-and-so, see so-and-so.” Okay. But like I said, every other day, if I don't get two or three people in the house talking about something, and that means that I feel I have done something, because they can trust me to get my opinion and stuff like that.

[End of interview]