The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Estanislado "Tanis" Ybarra, Jr.

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon Valadez
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Transcription by James Lu and Technitype Transcripts

Valadez For the record, please state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Ybarra Tanis Ybarra.

Valadez Your birthdate?

[00:00:13]

Ybarra October 29, 1945.

Valadez Marital status?

[00:00:18]

Ybarra I'm married to Marta Lascano Ybarra, been married forty-three years.

Valadez Children?

[00:00:26]

Ybarra I have two children, a son who's forty-two, named Arturo Ramon, and a daughter named Miguella Maria, who's thirty-nine.

Valadez Are they living in the general vicinity?

[00:00:38]

Ybarra They both live in Fresno.

Valadez Can you share with us a little bit about where you were born and raised?

[00:00:49]

Ybarra I was born in Donna, Tejas, which is down in the Rio Grande Valley, which is like southernmost tip of Tejas. After the war, World War II, my dad was in the service after World War II. I guess he went to Philadelphia to work in the steel mills, because he heard he could make money there. He got there, didn't like all the fire floating around, all the steel floating around, so came back to Tejas and then he decided to come to California.

The other day I was talking to my mother. We were at a funeral for a family friend, and she told me, she says—I had never heard her say that before, but she says, "I'm the last of the '47 migration."

I go, "Forty-seven migration? What is that, Mom?"

She goes, "Well, in 1947, that's when a lot of us Tejanos from the Rio Grande Valley came to California into the Fresno area."

So we migrated here. Actually, my dad came first in 1947, and then the following year he brought my mother and my sister. When we came, I was two years old, my sister was forty days old when we came from Tejas and we settled in Sanger, California.

Valadez What did your parents do?

[00:02:15]

Ybarra My parents were both farmworkers. They were laborers. They worked in the fields up until about the early sixties. My dad happened to get a job with the City of Sanger as a maintenance man, and he worked with them for about six or seven years. Then he opened up his own garage and he did that. My mother basically worked in the fields and in the packinghouses.

Valadez Your dad came from Tejas to Sanger in '47 too?

[00:02:50]

Ybarra Forty-seven, yes. People always ask me this, says, "What part of Mexico you guys from?"

I say, well, that's a hard question, because, first of all, we're Tejanos and we were in Tejas when Tejas was Mexico, our relatives. So we've been there for generations in Tejas. So we're Tejanos.

Valadez Brothers and sisters?

[00:03:19]

Ybarra I have a sister who's about a year and a half younger than me. She got her doctorate at Berkeley, taught at Fresno State for about twenty-five years. She's taught at Johns Hopkins, she's taught at Harvard. For about fifteen years, she ran a program at John Hopkins which is a worldwide program for the development of children. I call it basically the Little Einstein Program, little brains of the world. So she just retired from there.

My other sister, Mova, graduated from San Francisco State, got her master's, then she did counseling for about ten years at Berkeley, then was a counselor at Chabot College until she retired this last year.

Then I have a younger sister, probably be about fifteen years' difference between her and I. She's adopted. We got her when she was a baby. She had a rough life. She's the one probably had it the easiest if she wanted to make something out of herself, but she just took the wrong path and she's had a rough life her whole life.

Valadez Grew up in the same environment, but it went differently for her.

[00:04:39]

Ybarra Yes.

Valadez Can you describe for us some of your childhood and youth experiences?

[00:04:46]

Ybarra Childhood. Well, because my parents were farm laborers, I remember living in one-room shacks, outside toilets, outside water. I remember sleeping on a lot of floors. I guess when I think about school—I was just trying to recall a while ago. I didn't go to kindergarten. I went to the first grade twice, first of all because I didn't speak any English. My parents both speak English. They never spoke it at home. My dad would not speak English unless he had to, but at home it was always Spanish, so I never learned English. So I had to go to the first grade a second year.

I always remember the second grade because I went to five different elementary schools in second grade, and it's all within the same area, same county. You just move from one town to a different town, you go to a different school. So that was rough. I had a rough time in school, in elementary school. I got into a lot of fights, basically because the Anglo kids would make fun of me because I didn't speak English. I remember, god, even fourth, fifth, third grade, sixth grade, when they

would go around and all the Mexican kids would get hit with a sponge with white powder, which I think was DDT, because only Mexicans had lice. So I remember that. I mean, that was pretty bad, which also created a lot of fights with the Anglo kids because of that.

I remember taking our lunch to school because we couldn't afford to eat in the cafeteria, so we took our *burritos*, and I always remember myself and other Chicanos hiding and eating our *burritos*, not because we were ashamed of the food; we just didn't want to get into a fight with the Anglo kids because they would make fun of us, call us *burritos* or *tacos*. So those are the kind of memories I have of growing up. in the elementary schools.

Valadez The neighborhoods that you grew up in?

[00:07:21]

Ybarra We lived on a number of ranches because my dad was a farm laborer. We lived on a number of ranches. Then in 1955, my dad bought a house in Sanger. It was on the east side of town, which was basically the *barrio*. A block down from where we lived, they had the housing project, and that housing product was made up of some Latinos, but a lot of low-income Anglos, so the neighborhood was a mix of Latinos and Anglos, and we played together in the streets, football, whatever it was we did, but still *mucha discriminacion*, lots of discrimination going on.

Valadez You felt that?

[00:08:19]

Ybarra Oh, yeah, yeah. My grandmother was still alive when we finally moved to California, but I remember as a kid, even being twelve, thirteen years old,

driving to Tejas with my dad at Christmastime, that's when he made his annual trek to go visit my grandmother, and I remember going through some of those towns in Texas where you see in the restaurant the sign "No Mexicans or dogs allowed." All this stuff just got stuck in my mind over these years about all the things I saw while I was growing up.

Valadez Jumping over to another question, were you a Fellow or Felito?

[00:09:02]

Ybarra I was a Felito, came here in 1971 to the program, graduated in '73. I got my bachelor's in Latino Studies, or Chicano Studies, and a secondary teaching credential.

Valadez Take me through the transition between living in Sanger, and where did you go to high school or did you go to a community college?

[00:09:35]

Ybarra I did all my elementary school through high school in Sanger, California, graduated from high school. I never played sports. I worked every day after school. In the summers, I would work in the fields, in agriculture, and I worked in the fields from the time I got out of high school, so I never participated in sports. All I did was work after school and on weekends to help the family. I don't ever remember attending any high school dances and none of that stuff, because I was always working.

Valadez Where did you go to college?

[00:10:20]

Ybarra After I graduated from high school—and again, I don't think I was really interested in school. I think if it hadn't been for my dad—both my mom and dad had seventh-grade educations. That's as far as their education took them. But my dad was a real believer in education, so he was always pushing us, "*Tienes que quedar en las escuela, te tienes que quedar en la escuela*." So I think if it hadn't been for him being like that, I probably would have dropped out of high school. I just didn't see any value in high school.

The only thing I really took interest in in high school was I took a lot of business courses that were offered, whether it was accounting, whether it was typing, stuff like that, which I think helped me as I went through the years.

Graduated from high school. Again, my dad wanted me to go to college, so I enrolled in Fresno City College. Again, I really wasn't into it. I didn't want to go. I think I messed around a lot. I finished the first year. The grades were horrible. I went back to second year under probation. Two weeks into the semester, I said to myself, "Self, *vas por el mismo camino*." [laughs] I mean, [unclear], right?

So at that point, I decided to join the Marine Corps. I remember I left the campus and I went straight to Marine Corps Recruiting Office. I signed up and I said, "I'm ready to go. I want to leave as soon as possible," because I knew my dad was going to be upset when I told him.

So I went and told him after that, and he was like, "*Aye como no puedes!*" and this and that.

And I said, "Dad, it's too late, man. I already signed the papers. I leave in three days." So then I spent the next four years in Marine Corps.

Valadez This was what year?

[00:12:26]

Ybarra 1965. Graduated in 1964 from high school, and in 1965, October 3rd, I joined Marine Corps, I became part of the Marine Corps. I think one of the things that helped me in the Marine Corps was that after I finished all my boot camp and my infantry training and all that kind of stuff, I was selected to go to school in Memphis, Tennessee. It was a navy school, but it has to do with accounting, probably because I took all these business courses and I loved math. So I got my training in bookkeeping and budgets and stuff like that in Marine Corps.

After I finished my school in latter part of '66, I got transferred to Tustin, California. They had a Marine Corps facility there, helicopter facility. The Marine Corps had just acquired a brand-new helicopter, so just about everybody, except for the senior officers, was young. Pilots were fresh out of flight school. Most of us were fresh out of school. We trained there for a year before being deployed to Vietnam.

I went to Vietnam. Actually, I remember I left for Vietnam on May 10th, on Mother's Day, 1967, spent my thirteen months in Vietnam. Even though in the Marine Corps they say everybody is an infantryman, even though I was doing my budgets and accounting stuff in Marine Corps, we were all required to fly missions, helicopter, fly as gunners, and I think I flew about 140 missions, something like that. I also spent some time as a radioman out in the field.

After my tour was over, came back to California. I still didn't want to go to school. I tried getting jobs, but *se va*, "A sergeant from the Marine Corps? No, man, we can't use you. We don't need anybody barking orders around here."

So my dad by that time had a garage, so I went to help him in the garage. I got out in October of 1969, and I remember it was December of '69 and I was working outside. I was changing a generator and freezing friggin' cold, and the wrench slipped. I busted my finger. Man, it hurt *so* bad that I grabbed the tools, I threw them on the floor, I told my dad, "*Aye te [unclear]!* I'm going back to school!"

And I went to Kings River Community College. [laughter] I spent a semester there just to work on my grades. I went to summer school also. That was in 1970. I spent two semesters there, and then in September '71, I came to Sac State, graduated in '73. I guess I must have found something that I enjoyed, because I graduated from Sac State with pretty high grades. [laughs]

Valadez That's good. This participation in the Fellowship or Felitos Program, did it influence your involvement in the community?

[00:16:08]

Ybarra Yes, it did, but I was also already involved, because being from Sanger, United Farm Workers Union had an office in Selma, which is like seven, eight miles away. When I started really college, my parents were strong supporters of UFW, *eran miembros*. I decided to go and see what I could go do to help them. My sister at Berkeley had been real active in everything. I mean, Berkeley is the campus, you want to find a cause, you're going to find it at Berkeley. So I got involved with the UFW in January of 1970 also, and I continued helping them up until the time I came to Sac State.

I got to Sac State and I continued helping with, like, the lettuce boycott and stuff like that, but the project, not having known a lot about, I guess, Chicano history

and all that kind of stuff, I think that's where it really helped a lot and really helped open my eyes some more as to I know the discrimination I have seen, things my dad had always talked about. My dad was a real activist. *Se metia en todo*. I mean, he was always fighting with the city council in Sanger for one thing or another. So I come from a family that was politically active, active in the community, but, yeah, the project helped a lot in just expanding my knowledge of Chicano history.

Valadez You finished your Felito Program and then did you stay on to the master's program?

[00:18:08]

Ybarra No, no. I had made a commitment to Cesar when I came to Sacramento. I said, "The day I graduate from Sac State, I'll be back with the union working full-time." I had done my student teaching *aqui* in Sacramento, because I got the secondary teaching credential, but I realized it wasn't for me. I had already been bit by the activism and the *politica* and all that kind of stuff, and I was really committed to Cesar and the farmworkers, so I decided, "I don't want to teach. I'm going to go back and if I'm going to do any teaching, it's going to be because I'm going to be educating farmworkers about their rights."

I didn't even go to my own graduation. The day I took my last exam, the next day I was working with UFW at a great salary of $5 a month. [laughter]

Valadez Big time!

[00:19:01]

Ybarra Big time!

Valadez So the next question is going to be more for somebody who was a Fellow or a Felito but that stayed on. Did your study of cultural anthropology or your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:19:28]

Ybarra Well, I wasn't a Fellow, but I think all the different classes we took, because we even as Felitos took anthropology classes, again helped open my eyes. I learned a lot.

I eventually got my master's back in 1980 from the University of San Francisco. I went through a night program, two years in the evenings, and I got my master's in public administration, which is business. I like business.

Valadez But when you went back to work with Chavez after you graduated from the Felito Program, did you apply some of the ideas that came from cultural anthropology? Did it help?

[00:20:20]

Ybarra I think it helped. I just don't recall, to be honest with you. I think the project really helped me develop my own leadership style. I did a *lot* of work for the UFW during those years. In the early years, I went to jail God knows how many times for civil disobedience. But, yeah, I think basically what it did was open my eyes and helping develop that leadership style and how to work with people and deal with people.

Valadez What are your earliest memories of Movimiento Chicano? I guess it was with the Farm Workers Union.

[00:21:16]

Ybarra With my parents. My parents were involved with the Farm Workers. My dad was always politically active, and my dad was, by no means, not a person that you would say believed in nonviolence. I remember I must have been four, five years old, because I remember we were in a pickup. He was working as an irrigator on a ranch, and I was standing on the seat of the truck, so I couldn't have been very old. But I remember the farmer stopped him and started cussing him out for God knows what reason it was, I don't know, and I remember my dad got out of the truck and he grabbed him, and, man, slugged him and laid him out cold, grabbed a shovel out of the truck and threw it on the ground. We didn't have much belongings, right? We were living in the company house. We went over there and loaded up the few things we had, mainly clothes, and we quit. We were gone.

So my dad *era duro*. [laughter] I always heard from him about all the discrimination he suffered in Tejas. It's like the term *Chicano*, I grew up hearing the term *Chicano* from my dad, because he said *en Texas todos éramos Chicanos. Éramos Tejanos y Chicanos*. So to me, I grew up with that term. Yeah, I grew up in a family that was politically active. I guess my dad had seen a lot of discrimination.

One of my dad's brothers, actually he was the oldest brother, and my dad was, like, one of the youngest siblings, so there was a good number of years between the oldest and my dad. But he had a brother, the oldest, who *también* was very active and everything, and he would help people in any way he could. Basically, he and two of my uncles got framed for a murder. It was all a frame-up. I remember we dug up all the documents and I read them and I go, "Man, what a farce, this whole case." I

mean, you just read it, right? This is a farce. But my two uncles wound up serving, I think, thirty years each. My dad's brother got the electric chair. So all that anger is inside my dad, right?

Valadez Well, sure.

[00:23:52]

Ybarra And all that discrimination that went on. So I think he just like *nunca se dejen.* Defend your rights. He talks about my grandmother making a pilgrimage because my uncle, because he was involved in so much stuff, *tenía dinero*. My grandmother used it all fighting this illegal case. I think it took them like seven years to convict him till the money ran out. Her last act was to do a pilgrimage from the Valley to the State Capitol of Tejas to ask for clemency. They didn't even say hello to her. So I grew up with all that stuff as I was growing up, so being politically active was just like—it's just what we were supposed to do, man.

Valadez It became a part of you.

[00:24:39]

Ybarra Became a part of me.

Valadez Would you say that the Movimiento Chicano changed you personally or was this change that you experienced already started by the politics of your parents?

[00:25:03]

Ybarra It had already started because of the politics of my parents, but it also changed me. I came back from Vietnam, and you're involved in all this violence, right? And here's Cesar talking about nonviolence, and that's probably what attracted

me to the organization, how you create change through nonviolence. So I was really taken by that.

I spent thirty-five years with the UFW, went through the hard years with it. Like I said, we started off making $5 a week, and I remember like eight, nine years later, we got an increase to $10 a week. Of course, they paid our rent and our utilities, but we didn't have much. But it was a real sacrifice. I admire my wife, because I used to spend a lot of time away from home on campaigns. She basically raised my kids, our kids. So I admire her for everything she did as her contribution to *la causa* also, because it was a big one. But, yeah, I was, like I said, influenced by everything my dad did, my mom, but it also affected me, the way the whole Movimiento, the whole thing with nonviolence.

I remember when I was in Tennessee. I had seen discrimination, like I said, as a kid. You see the signs "No dogs or Mexicans allowed," that kind of stuff. When I was in school in Tennessee, I remember going into my first encounter with what the Ku Klux Klan was. We were walking through a park in the evening and I see this fire. I'm walking with this Anglo friend of mine who was from Chicago, and I go, "What is that?"

He goes, "Oh, that's the Ku Klux Klan."

I go, "What's that?" I didn't even know what that was.

We went over there, and, yeah, they were burning a cross, and had all these guys in white hoods talking all kinds of garbage. But that was a learning experience.

Then I remember going into Mississippi, some little town in Mississippi. Why did we go there? Because in Tennessee, you had to be twenty-one to drink, and in

Mississippi you only had to be eighteen. So we wanted to have a beer, so we went into Mississippi. We're walking through town, and I look around and I remember all these Black guys, only Black guys I saw wearing these striped uniforms. I go, "What are these guys?"

"Oh, they're all prisoners."

I said, "How come they're all Black?"

"Probably because everybody on the police force and the judge are all White."

"Oh." Then I'm looking around. I go, "Why some of these doors have these white borders all the way around, like twelve inches wide, these white borders?"

And he goes, "It's for White people only, man. You don't go in there unless you're White." And he says, "Blacks go through other doors or they through the back or whatever."

And I go, "Man alive." So that was an indoctrination. "So we're going to go in there and get a beer. What do I do?"

"Oh, no," he says, "you're considered White. If you're not Black, you're White."

I go, "Whoa!"

So, very hesitantly I walked inside. But, no, I didn't have any problems, but I didn't stay there very long. I was just, like, nervous. I said, "Nah, man. If you're not White, blue-eyed, get outta here." [laughter]

So I had those experiences when I was in the South. In '66, I remember at the base camp, riots, *los negros* and the Black folks and the African Americans and the Anglos, where the entire camp would be put on lockdown because of these riots on

the military base, which we also encountered a lot of—I want to call them race riots in Vietnam, man, in the base camps, again between the Anglos and the African Americans. I remember *la raza* just saying, "*Ey carnal, que se maten ellos solos.* We're just going to stay back here. It's not our *pleito*, man." So I guess I have seen a lot of that stuff over the years, in the military.

Valadez Impacts you.

[00:29:42]

Ybarra Yeah, it does, tremendously. Of course, my daughter is the one that's always asking me questions. She's the one I call my social activist. She's a teacher, teaches second grade, been teaching like for twelve, thirteen years. She's *always* asking me questions about history, my parents, my grandparents, this and that. Now I have my grandson who's eight years old, the oldest one, he's asking me a lot of questions too. My son, he's my capitalist. My daughter's my social activist, my son's my capitalist. He's about making money. [laughs] But he's very generous with what he does.

Valadez How did you work through that memory of all of that discrimination and you?

[00:30:37]

Ybarra What do you mean "and me"?

Valadez What you have absorbed from all of that all that violence in you, I mean, it affects you.

[00:30:48]

Ybarra It does. I think I've always had a level head. I can distinguish between right and wrong. I've always been the type that says, "There's got to be a better way to do things." I tell my kids about some of the stuff I've seen, some of the stuff that's happened, I go, "Look," It's like something like Arturo said. The *problemas* are still there. We just have to approach them differently. So I always say there's always room for change. There's always room for bettering ourselves and helping others better themselves. But I guess because I've had such a level head and I saw so much anger in my dad. I think that held him back a lot because of his anger. I didn't want to go through that.

Valadez You didn't want that, yeah. What do you think of the role of women, the Chicanas, in the Movement?

[00:31:56]

Ybarra Oh! I grew up with two sisters [laughs] that are a big influence, a big education. I think it's important. I mean, again, my own sisters were very politically active, they're very independent, even my mother. I mean, just in the household I was the oldest one. Both my parents went to work early in the morning, so I had to make sure I got my sisters up, got them dressed, combed their hairs, took care of them. So even the way my mother raised me, "*Tienes que enseñarte a cocinar.* You got to learn how to iron your own clothes. Someday you're going to have to do it yourself." So it was just her instilling all that kind of stuff in me, also of *respeta la mujer*, those kinds of things.

Again with the UFW, seeing women like Dolores Huerta who were very independent and strong women, and not just Dolores, but over the course of years

with UFW, so many strong women that I saw within the UFW, women that were probably on the par with Dolores. Within themselves, they just had a lot of energy and a lot of power. *No tienen miedo.* I always say on a picket line, give me a picket line of women over a picket line of men, because they're not afraid. The men will always be hesitant, they'll hesitate. And women know, man. *Son de arranque.* [laughter] So I admire women for their leadership. I admire women, my wife for being a mother and raising my kids. So I take my hat off to them.

Valadez Young women at Sacramento State when you were here, did you feel like they had an equal part, that they were given an equal chance to play those roles, to be in leadership roles?

[00:34:39]

Ybarra Well, I don't think that women have ever really been given an equal role in anything, because we still see it, right, whether it's pay inequality and issues like that. At Sac State when we ran for Student Council, it was one of the things that we decided we needed to do is we needed to find out what the issues are with the women, because it wasn't just about us as Chicanos. It felt good, three Chicanos being elected to the Student Council, but it is beyond that. There were other issues that were more important. I take my hat off to Michael Parturo when he addressed the women's group and listened to their issues, didn't promise anything, but we said, "Look, we will look into your issues and we will deal with them." And we did. As Arturo mentioned, we put women on committees. We did a lot of things we could just to try to merge that, give them that equality.

Within the UFW *también,* I always tried to strive and make sure that every one of our committees—we called them ranch committees—on all these different companies, that at least part of the committee had women on it, again to develop that leadership, and they sort of provide like a different type of guidance *también*, different perspectives of how to do things. [Spanish], and the women, "Hey, *vamos hacerlo de esta manera*, and we'll get to the same goal."

So I think, yes, I think we provided a lot of different opportunities to women just like they provided opportunities to us to be able to excel, because, one, we knew we had pretty much the Latino vote for Student Council at Sac State, but if we're going to win, we needed the women. And they supported us based on what our ideals and our philosophy was.

Valadez What did you personally initiate or help initiate in this Chicano Movement at the time that you were here?

[00:37:07]

Ybarra What I helped initiate. I don't know. [laughs]

Valadez Tell me about the election.

[00:37:19]

Ybarra The election? Take our hats off to the RCAF, right? They were a big part of the campaign, as were a lot of other folks, I guess caught us off guard because I don't think I was really ever interested in running. It just so happens that we got hooked up in the whole thing and decided to run, and they provided a lot of support for us as far as posters and leaflets and stuff like that, but it was through the RCAF and a lot of other Latinos that I think our involvement in doing this created an energy

tambíen within them to "*Mira alomejor si se puede.* Let's go do it." I think it's just everything that moved it. I think we created a lot of changes by what we did.

I think about when in 1982 I ran for the city council in Sanger, I spent a whole year doing voter registration, and we weren't even the majority as far as Latinos, but I said, "You know what? If I register enough Latinos—" A lot of folks don't vote. Latinos surely weren't voting. They were voting in very low numbers. And I didn't want to run. I wanted to put the campaign together because I like working behind the scenes. I get a lot more done. But I spent a year registering voters, organizing them.

When we finally got ready to pick the candidates, we knew what two candidates we were going to get, and I got drafted as a third one, even though I didn't want to, and developed a lot of strategies there with regards to the absentee ballot. The absentee ballot has been around forever, and people use it to vote when they were out of town or they were sick and stuff like that.

Well, myself and a very good friend, Jesus Paron, said, "You know what? Let's use it as part of a campaign tactic. Let's set our goal. We're going to vote every *mexicano* in town before the elections." And we did. We put up a whole campaign across town. I had committees everywhere and we went around and signed the people for absentee ballots. We educated them. It was all about educating people about the process, right? We had election material and samples. "You're going to get an envelope like this. *Cuando la recivas*, put it on top of your refrigerator." Sure enough, man, you'd go back whenever it was time to pick them up, and at 12:00 a.m., "Oh *si, esta aca arriba de la hielera*." [laughter] So you're educating people with everything that you do.

And come election day, we had probably voted 100 percent of the Latinos in town already. We won. It was myself, Marcus Zocorro-Avila, who now lives in Sacramento. But basically the city council in Sanger had always been White.

My whole thing was to show people that you can create change. We had probably had ten real serious shootings prior to me running for office. All that came to a stop, man, when we got into office. The east side of town, which was considered the *barrios*, were totally neglected, no curb, no drainage system. When we got on, the previous council has already approved the budget. We went through the budget with a fine-toothed comb. Oh, and they had like I don't know how many millions of dollars to friggin' allocate.

The east side of town had two-inch water mains The west side had four-inch water mains and were going to upgrade them to six. We took all that money and transferred it to the east side of town, increased the water mains, put in curbs, gutters. Areas that would rain and would be flooded for *weeks* after the rains, put in a new drainage system there. We did all of that. It was all about showing people that if you really want to make change, you can make it.

The result of all this was that they ran a recall against us, and we got recalled. People used to tell me, "God, aren't you embarrassed you got recalled?"

I said, "No, man. I'm surprised I lasted two years. I thought I was going to be out of here in six months!" [laughter]

But we created a lot of change. That city council and that town's never been the same. It's always been Latino now. So I pride myself with having been able to create a lot of change and, in the process, educate people.

On the absentee ballot, we got sued. We went to the Supreme Court on this. They were trying to get us on what they called third-party handling on the absentee ballot. The court was almost like a circus. They showed video of us picking up ballots. They showed video of us delivering ballots to the post office. But we made sure that everybody voted their own ballot. We would teach them how to vote, have them seal their own ballot, have them sign it, put their own stamp on it, and we would deliver it for them. The whole issue boiled down to third-party handling of the absentee ballot. Went to Supreme Court and we won, and that became pretty much the standard way of voting now. They use it for everything now, although you can no longer do third-party handling. There was some campaign where they messed up. They just totally messed it up.

Valadez It has to go through the mail.

[00:43:40]

Ybarra Yeah. But I remember in the court that our attorney stood up, "Your honor, for the record, yes, we did it. Your honor, for the record, yes, that's us."

"Mr. Perez, please let the other side put on their case, okay?" [laughter] What we wanted was a decision, man, to go on.

But, yeah, I've always loved to create change.

Valadez That's a big one right there.

[00:44:11]

Ybarra Even within the UFW, I spent all those years. I actually spent ten years with the UFW. I got sick. I walked into a field with pesticides and messed up my

lungs. I was hospitalized for a couple of months, three months. I was supposed to lay low for a year to let my lungs recuperate.

About two weeks after I get out of the hospital, Cesar says, "I got a problem in Oxnard. Can you go?"

So I went to Oxnard. He says, "Just two weeks." Two weeks turned into six months, and back to the hospital.

At that point he says, "You know what? You better just take a leave from the union." So I was out of the union for about ten years.

Then when Cesar died, "Artie" Rodriguez, who was his son-in-law, had just been appointed president, says, "Tanis, time for you to come back." He says, "I'm an organizer, man. I don't know *anything* about finances. That's just strange, man." He says, "You're a good organizer, but your strength is finances. I need you."

So I say, "When do you want me to start?" And when he told me, I said, "Okay, give me thirty days to shut down my business." Because I had started an accounting business while I was out of the union.

And I shut down my business and went back to the union and spent another twenty-five years with them.

Valadez Wow!

Ybarra And even within the union, I helped create a lot of the administrative changes. I said, "Look, guys, not to say that we didn't have quality staff, but if we really want to retain staff, people can only work so long, man, at $5 and $10 a week. Not everybody's crazy like us." We spent our lives here.

So I helped create a payroll system, a salary system, upgrade benefits not just for us, but for the workers. So I learned a lot, man. I think a lot of that is basically everything I learned in life about creating change, which I think the project had a lot to do with, because everyone in the project was involved—

Valadez To some degree or other.

[00:46:32]

Ybarra —in creating change, to some way on another in creating change.

Valadez You applied your awareness and your knowledge base and you kept on doing it. Did any of these changes impact your family? Was there a time when the family suffered because of your involvement with Cesar or in the Movement?

[00:46:59]

Ybarra Oh, yeah. Yeah, we were getting $5 a week, right?

Valadez How do you make it?

[00:47:04]

Ybarra Of course, they paid our rent. I remember my rent was $95 a month. They paid our utilities, and the $5 was really our "mad money." That was your "mad money." Then you got a five-dollar food allowance per person in the household. So it impacted a lot financially. I think if it wasn't for my sisters, who used to help us out, I don't know if I would have lasted, because a lot of us stayed in because we had families that would help us. Then we learned how to work the system really well to be able to get ahead. It impacted my children from the standpoint that I was gone away from home for a long time. I'd be gone up to six months sometimes on campaigns. So, yeah, it had a big impact.

Valadez Describe some of the impacts of your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano and the effect on your career. It impacted your career.

[00:48:25]

Ybarra Oh, tremendously, tremendously. Again going back to what my dad used to talk about, what he went through, the things I saw in life, even some of the early battles that my dad was involved in in Sanger impacted me as far as wanting to create change.

I saw folks that—I remember this gentleman in Sanger, his name was Felix Lopez. He was a real estate agent, the only one in town that was a Latino, and he was fairly successful as a real estate agent. I remember he got involved with the school and talking about creating change and helping the students. That guy got blackballed, man. He went bankrupt, lost his business. You talk about boycotts and the Anglos started doing that to you, man, and especially when they're part of your client base. But I saw the guy. He survived. He said, "Look, I did what I did and I'm not sorry. Cost me my livelihood, but we got to do something to create change."

Again, I learned a lot from farmworkers. I knew what being a farmworker was because I had lived it. My parents had lived it. But it's sad to say that I think a lot of the same conditions still exist, even though through the UFW we've created a lot of changes. I mean, as long as there's somebody out there that all they care about is greed, they're going to abuse people. Cesar used to tell us, "*La lucha nunca se va terminar*."

You asked a question earlier to Arturo about if things were better now. Yeah, things are better now, but there's still a lot of change to be done. Look at the high

school dropout rate among Latinos. God, it's crazy. We have so many Latinos dropping out of high school. The numbers are still low for Latinos. Yeah, we got more Latinos going to college, more Latino doctors, but our numbers still real low when it comes to graduating from universities, not to mention Ph.D.'s. I mean, there's even fewer of those, right?

Valadez These are the unresolved issues.

[00:50:59]

Ybarra Unresolved issues, yeah. They're still out there.

Valadez How about for the farmworkers? What do you see as being still the more blatant—

[00:51:08]

Ybarra Well, I think now for farmworkers the most blatant is the same as it is with all your undocumented immigrants. There's not a lot they can do. They work in the underground economy. They get abused. I said to Arturo earlier, I said in the seventies, most of your farmworkers were resident aliens. There were still a lot of U.S citizens who were farmworkers, Mexican Americans who were farmworkers, a lot of resident aliens. So it was easy to do strikes, to create change, because if you went to jail, there was no fear of you being deported. Now when 90 percent of your workforce is undocumented, you're not going to pull a strike. You're going to wind up getting deported. So that's a big issue for farmworkers. They really can't take real action like, say, through strikes, because we have a fear out there of them being deported. Low wages is still a problem for farmworkers, as they are for most service

workers, most immigrants. Healthcare, another big issue *todavia* for farmworkers and low-income immigrants.

Valadez How did you think the Movement impacted the local community here in Sacramento from the memory that you have of when you were here or in Sanger today?

[00:52:46]

Ybarra I think the Movement impacted Sacramento, Sanger, L.A., all these different towns the same way. One, now you have college graduates that are Latinos going into the colleges, not all of them, but a lot of them were creating change through their own way of doing it, through teaching, through counseling, whatever it was.

If I speak for the UFW, we educate a lot of the people about the political process. I think people like Joe Serna were trendsetters, man. He was involved politically before most of us even knew to get involved in politics. So all we got to do now is look at how many Latinos are in the legislature, in the Senate, in the city councils, in the rural areas. Like in Fresno County, I think of the fifteen communities in Fresno County, probably all of them but two are Latino-based as far as city councils. So I think the Movement has impacted a lot of people that way, politically, educationally, to go to school. But again, the numbers are still very small, very, very small considering that we're, what, the largest minority in California? Our numbers don't show it when it comes to educational attainment.

Valadez There's a lot of activists who have passed on. When we rallied people together, 2013, did you come to the reunion at that time?

[00:54:36]

Ybarra No, I couldn't make it.

Valadez We found that we had ninety-nine of the community and university graduates and community people that had passed on.

[00:54:48]

Ybarra Wow.

Valadez That was in 2013. José Montoya was one of the latter in that group. But it seems like every year, more and more people are going, that were very heavily involved and stayed involved all the way through.

[00:55:10]

Ybarra We're that age group now, huh? [laughs]

Valadez Yeah. We're the endangered species. [laughter]

[00:55:14]

Ybarra We're the endangered species. I always say as long as I open up the paper, don't see my name in the obituary section, I'm doing great, man. [laughs]

Valadez You can breathe easy, yeah. What individuals do you think had a lot of impact in this Movement in your life and in the way that your life went?

[00:55:37]

Ybarra My dad, my mom had a lot of influence on me. Of course Joe Serna just from the whole Chicano aspect of political. And I think a lot of the professors that we had, Latino professors that were involved with the project impacted us a lot *también.* I mean, they'd been through the system already. Most of them had Ph.D.'s.

So they'd been through the system, however they were able to get through it. They had big impacts.

To me, Cesar, Dolores, even some of the folks that I've been involved with and met who were in the military. Dr. Garcia in the American GI Forum now, we all found that.

When I was out of the union those ten years, I used to do a lot of stuff for the union still. Cesar would call me up and say, "Hey, can you help me do this, do this?" Called me up one day, said, "I need you to go to Iowa."

"Iowa? Okay. When?"

"They're taking you a ticket right now."

"When do you want me to leave?"

He says, "Tomorrow," or today or something.

But I went to Iowa, and in the southeastern part of the state, it reminded me a lot of home, a lot of little towns like the Parliers, the Sangers, the Reedleys, all those, heavy Latino. LULAC had a very strong impact in that area, and I was surprised at how many Latinos were down there. Most of them were Tejanos. Most of them got there because they followed the tracks, the railroad. They were working for the railroad. So that was another experience. I mean, I'm coming from California where *barbacoa, cabeza*, and all this stuff, *tripas*, we eat them at home. I go back to find out that—and I'm talking 1986, 1988, and now if people wanted *tripas*, *cabezas*, they had to buy it through the black market at night from the *mantazas*. It was against the law—

Valadez Wow!

[00:58:09]

Ybarra —for people to buy that. So, again, what's affected me in life? All these different things that I've been able to see through my travels and stuff.

Valadez It's outlawed because there's not enough people—that's their diet, that's their—

[00:58:31]

Ybarra Yeah, probably because there weren't enough people, that's their diet, and probably the Anglo community saw it as garbage. I mean, probably the reason we eat *barbacoa* or *cabezas* is because that's probably all the Aztecs and the Incas ate after the Gachupines came. *Les daban pa que comieran*, right*?* I'm just assuming that, right? [laughter]

Valadez I don't know. I won't say that. It's a delicacy.

[00:59:04]

Ybarra Yeah! To me it's a delicacy that you grew up with.

Valadez What do you see as current and future challenges to the Chicano community?

[00:59:17]

Ybarra Education, a big one. Education. I still get disappointed. I mean, we have a lot of Latino politicians, but I still get upset because they get in office and a lot of them are still more interested in being reelected than creating change. I still see that if you're going to get involved, run for office, then, god, go do something meaningful, man. Create some change. It's not like there aren't any issues out there.

There's a *lot* of issues for us that we're facing as a community, but a lot of them just look at the next step.

Those that I'm familiar with in small rural communities that go in and create change right away, our own people sometimes turn against them. When we ran for office in Sanger, we were in this little building that was our campaign quarters. A friend of mine let us use it. The building was painted pink, so it was called the pink structure. That's where we were. One day, this was like two weeks before the election, we see all these police cars coming and the streets were blocked off and police came in like stormtroopers. They said that we were committing voter fraud. They went into this back room and they came out with this electioneering material. "This is what we were looking for! Voter fraud!"

I remember saying, "Hey, guy, Election Department gave us that. Those are educational materials for teaching people how to vote."

"No, this is what we wanted." This is two weeks before the election.

Next morning in the paper—and our *raza* are funny, huh—big article, "Election Fraud Found in Sanger Election Probe."

And, man, I saw that in the paper early in the morning, I cut it out, made a leaflet with it, and called all my people. I said, "Guys, let's go poll our people."

We go there, and people go, "*Si, ya oímos en la noticias, y sabíamos que había algo mal*." [laughter] So it hit hard, right?

We turned on the heat on the D.A.'s Office, a big turn on the heat. Four days before the election, the D.A.'s Office capitulated and they put it in the paper *salio un* article that "No Election Fraud Found Sanger Election Probe."

Man, I cut that out of the paper, made another leaflet out of it, went to every house y *la raza.* "*No pues nosotros sabíamos que ustedes estaban bien."* [laughter] But to me that was all part of people becoming educated about how the system works. I didn't blame the people at all for the way they were thinking. It's just part of our whole educational process. So it was interesting, it was interesting, everything we went through for a tiny city council election.

When we got recalled, there was this guy, they called him "the curmudgeon," an old redneck, started a newspaper. I used to tell people, "You know what, man? I got recalled. It cost that dude a million dollars to recall me." That's what he spent to start his newspaper. After I got recalled, he closed it down. But we have all the newspaper articles, "Watch out for Brown Power, Chicano Power." I mean, talk about racist crap, man. You're talking 1988? Still we're being hit with all this racist crap.

Valadez Yeah, you have to be able to call it, though.

[01:03:32]

Ybarra Yeah.

Valadez You have to be able to call it. You got to take it and keep on going.

[01:03:37]

Ybarra Yeah. So that's what I said. "No, man, you know what? I'm surprised that I lasted two years. I didn't think I'd last for six months!" [laughter] And it cost him a million bucks to get me.

But I feel good. I told my *compa* I don't think I'd change anything in my life. I'm happy with what I've done. I'm still very involved. I'm on the board of the Cesar Chavez Foundation, I'm on the board of the UFW Foundation, I serve as a trustee,

still, for the Farmworkers Health and Welfare Fund. I'm on the committee for the *soldado* restoration, appointed by the governor. So I feel good. I stay very involved. I don't think I could sit around the house and do nothing. It's just not me. And then, of course, chasing after the grandkids, that's another *trabajo.* [laughter]

Valadez So you live in Sanger and you're here all the time?

[01:04:40]

Ybarra I'm in and out of Sacramento every month.

Valadez That's good to know.

[01:04:46]

Ybarra I'm in touch with Pedro Hernandez—remember Pedro Hernandez—Freddy Romero, all those guys. Juanishi [Orozco] *también*.

Valadez Well, that's good. Anything else you would like to add to this?

[01:05:02]

Ybarra No, I wish that there were other projects like the Mexican American Education Project. I think it provided an opportunity for a lot of us to continue going through school. I think it educated a lot of folks about the needs of the community. It educated people about being committed and being involved and, more importantly, creating all the change that's needed. So I just wish there were more projects like that that could help people. But as I stated earlier, there's a lot of needs still out there for a lot of people educationally.

Valadez I want to thank you for coming in and participating in our oral history initiative or program, project. We hope to get some mileage out of this interview not only in the Archive, but it becomes part of our history. Everybody came from

different walks of life, different things that were going on, but something happened here. For most people, something good happened here, and they walked away empowered to do things that they had not thought about doing before. Some people like yourself came already with a sense of political awareness and consciousness, but something obviously encouraged that, because you had a successful election here and you walked away empowered.

[01:06:39]

Ybarra Oh, yes.

Valadez That's something really good that—

[01:06:41]

Ybarra Definitely.

Valadez —that took place there. Thank you for your sharing of that history with us. We thank you very much.

[01:06:45]

Ybarra I want to thank you for just taking the time to do all these interviews. It takes time to begin to record this type of history.

Valadez It takes time, but it's been well worth it.

Ybarra Good educational experience. We never stop learning.

Valadez No, and we have 86-some interviews already and we're shooting for 100.

Ybarra Wow. Oh, great.

Valadez So you've made your mark.

Ybarra Thank you.

Valadez Thank you very much.

[End of interview]