Adolfo (“Duffy”) Ramírez

Interviewed by Jen Corrinne Brown

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Corpus Christi, Texas

**Jen Brown:** It is September 9th, 2016. This is Jen Brown and I’m here with Duffy Ramirez to talk about his experiences in the Chicano movement. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

**Adolfo “Duffy” Ramírez:** Yes.

**JB:** Okay, thank you. Um, why don’t we start by, can you tell me about your childhood and where you grew up?

**AR:** I grew up in, uh, San Diego, Texas, not too far from Corpus, and I went through school, all the way through high school, graduated in ’64. My family moved to Alice after I graduated, so I was the only one in my family, I was the oldest one, and I was the only one that graduated from San Diego. But, I always have built, uh strong contact with, I still have family there and so on. And so when I graduated in ’64, I went to Texas A&I, which is in Kingsville. But, growing up in San Diego was, to me, it was a very good experience, I mean it’s a small community, uh I think about 99 percent Mexican American. So, I really didn’t have too much of an idea of the conflict that there was between, let’s say Anglos and Mexican Americans as there were in other communities where, I met students that came from other communities, where you have a distinctive division, whether it was physical, or geographic, or some kind, but those things did exist. But I wasn’t aware of it until I went to, until I left the community and went to college.

**JB:** Okay, what was your family like?

**AR:** I’m sorry, what?

**JB:** Yeah, um, what was—how many family members did you have?

**AR:** Oh we were six of us, uh, like my brother here [was referring to Renato Ramírez who was in the hallway], I have, there were 4 boys and 2 girls. My mom and dad. My dad was a World War II veteran, my grandfather was a World War I veteran. So, we’ve been in the community for generations. My other side of the family the same thing, their family came through Mexico, but back in the 1800s. Uh so, San Diego is an old community. Over the years where I’ve met people a lot of them had connections to San Diego in some way. It’s one of the oldest communities in the area. And in the valley there’s lot of communities comparable in age, that’d be like Brownsville and maybe Rio Grande City. There’s a lot of history there as far as the family goes. On my dad’s side, it was more difficult to trace back, the, um, genealogy on my father’s side of the family. But, my mother’s side I’ve had some cousins that have traced it back all the way to Spain.

**JB:** Okay. What were the schools like?

**AR:** I’m sorry, what?

**JB:** What were the schools like in San Diego?

**AR:** The what?

**JB:** The schools?

**AR:** I’m sorry, you know, I have a little difficulty with my hearing sometimes, so it’s hard to pick out exactly what you’re saying.

**JB:** The schools?

**AR:** Oh, the schools. I'm sorry. Yeah, okay. The schools were good, I feel like I got a good high school education. In fact, when I went to college I used to talk to other people from other schools and I could see the difference. I thought it was pretty good. Also, we were in San Diego they made an effort to teach us some of our cultural heritage. I remember having a Spanish teacher in the sixth grade. She was, I mean from Mexico. And she exposed us to a lot of things that you would probably be exposed to if you lived in Mexico. I mean whether it was the foods, candies that she would bring. She would make, we, we had to us recite this long poem, poems, in Spanish were called “declamacions,” declamations, or something like that. They were long, I don't remember too much about it. But I remember the focus of that class was basically to teach us about our culture. And she also put out a program uh every year in which we were participated in, uh some of the traditional Mexican dances that you see in programs today. I had had some of that, which I am pretty sure a lot of schools didn't, but I guess the school district made an effort to provide that for us. But we still weren’t allowed to, to speak Spanish outside of, in school, you know, there's, even though there's a 99 percent Mexican American community. They still had that, that rule, no speaking Spanish. So, there was that, that's something that you found in a lot of schools in South Texas. But, surprisingly, even in our own school, it was a pretty much a bilingual community. I mean almost everybody I would think had dual language abilities, even though the Spanish that I grew up with was not your proper Spanish language. A lot of what you call Tex-Mex, or Spanglish you know, sometimes you’d just literally translate things, other times you’d just make the English word into a Spanish word by adding a few letters to it.

**JB:** Why did they forbid speaking Spanish in schools?

**AR:** Well, I think, possibly because they wanted us to concentrate on English since everything was going to be done in English pretty much. The schooling, the curriculum, and everything is English, and possibly also, maybe unconsciously trying to Americanize all the students, make sure they, they uh, they learn the language of the country you might say. Although we don't have a national language as such, but I think that was probably the focus there. But, it kind of imbued a negative stereotype that, like, speaking Spanish was bad or something like that. That probably doesn't play well with the psyche of people. I know I had difficulties, when I went to college with English, regular course work, English, uh it, it, I was in for a shock when I went to college basically, even though it’s only thirty-eight miles from San Diego, itwas very different for me and I noticed that right away.

**JB:** How were those experiences different?

**AR:** How was, the, the college?

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** Well, when I went to A&I at the time, I went there, I entered in 1964, was I think the possibly, the ratio was 20 percent. I mean, there was about 20 percent Mexican American students, so we were a minority. A&I had, uh there, there were divisions, you could see it, all you had to do is look back at some of the yearbooks. I have, I remember I have three of the ones that I uh, of the 4 years I was there and you can see for example, uh, in fraternities and sororities they were totally white. You wouldn't find any Hispanic students, Mexican American students in those fraternities. I remember there was one guy, that was Hispanic, but he was from Argentina and he worked at the King Ranch. So, you know, but you take a regular Mexican American from South Texas, not in there. There were dances every Thursday night, they had a dance called a tegalas(??), that’s, uh usually with a live band and you could see there too, you know, the Mexicans, the Mexican American students would be on one side of the ballroom and the Anglo students would be on the other side. And there was no crossing over. And it wasn't something that, I mean, it wasn't overt, it was just the way it was. Sitting in the cafeteria once in a while, again the Mexican American students sat in a certain section, whether it was by choice or not once in a while there were people that did, of course, move around, but uh, there were those kind of differences. And it, I remember the first class that I took 2 classes the summer that I entered school, an English class and a history class. History was great, my favorite subject, I did well. But I was in English with the head of the department. I was the only Mexican American in that class and I was totally intimidated. I was out of my element completely, and then the professor didn’t help. He was kind of aloof. He dressed like a southern plantation owner, with the hat and the white shoes and stuff, you know. It was like—it didn’t, it didn’t register with me. Anyway, so one of the things about going to college was that I lived there in Kingsville, even though a lot of people that lived close by were commuters. I didn’t. I wanted to live, I wanted to live there while going to college. I wanted that experience. And I did get that experience, I got to meet students from South Texas that also were too far away to commute, so I got to know them, we got to kind of bond together. So, a lot of people that came out of the movement from A&I. Jose Ángel Gutiérrez was there two years of the four years that I was there. I think he was a junior when I entered as a freshman, but I got to know him. And not only that, his roommates, so there were people from the Winter Garden area, people from Del Rio, people from Laredo, people from Brownsville and parts of the valley [Rio Grande Valley]. And, since we were there on the weekends we got a chance to talk and get to know each other and in some cases, this, I, particularly the guys from the Winter Garden area, begin to, kind of, impact my thinking as far as you know there is something, we need to do something you know. Because they had grown up in divided communities, you know, and something which I hadn't, but I could see what was going on at A&I and they began to talk to me and eventually I began to come around to their way of thinking, that changes needed to be made and so on. Everybody was in that mindset, a lot of things were happening in ‘64 and in those years, uh around the country. Movements had begun. In ‘62, the farm workers had started their, their picketing and protests and all that. You had the free speech movement in California in ‘64. The war was escalating, at that point, it had started to escalate and not too long after that, they started drafting people. So those were things—and of course civil rights movement was—even though you didn't have as much of that in A&I or the Valley because you didn't have that concentration of black people, but you still had some. But we were conscious of what was going on with the Freedom Riders and all this stuff more down South. So, all those things had an impact on your mindset, that you want to be a part of it, we were young also and it was exciting. We got involved in school issues and some elections. I remember we campaigned for a guy right here from Corpus, Ronald Bridges, he was running for State Senator or something and I—some of the people that I was hanging around with, they were actively working on his campaign. He was a good guy or something. Um, there were issues, there was an underground newspaper at A&I for a while there, a kind of newsletter that was called *The Rag(e)*, with an E in parenthesis after that. I remember one time going with one of my friends to the professor's house to pick up copies of it so, I figured out well there must be where they’re running them off. It was a sociology professor of mine Dr. Benninger, and we would go and put them in different parts of the campus to distribute. Nobody knew who made this or what, but I got an inkling that obviously some of the teachers who were involved and some of the students who were writing articles for, usually with issues of the university. I remember another issue that happened there while I was still in school there was, a dorm mother who was pressuring this young lady, she was Anglo who was dating a Mexican American from Rio Grande City. She told people about it, that she didn’t like the way she was, it was—that dorm, you know that, she was kind of telling her look it’s going to be bad for you, you know you shouldn't go out with this guy because you know. Whatever reason she was laying on her, but, but she didn't appreciate that and that was actually a whole march towards that dorm. Uh, people I don't remember how, or how it got organized, but I remember we marched, and had some signs and stuff. And, uh, I think the lady got removed, the dorm mother got removed from that position, I don’t know. But it made me see that change could come about sometimes through confrontation, through just simply going out and demonstrating that you didn’t like what they were doing. Those things had an impact on me. I got involved with MAYO. MAYO by the time I was a senior, junior or senior, MAYO had—Jose Angel had gone to San Antonio, was going to St. Mary’s, and MAYO got started. I remember I used to have a picture with a MAYO button on my cap. So I said I know it was during college, I remember we drove, I had this friend of mine named Carlos Guerra who has passed away, but he was from Robstown and he was another one that was very involved in the movement, and he’s in some of the pictures that I gave your man here [referring to Anthony Quiroz who was scanning some pictures]. We drove to Laredo, I remember we drove to Laredo. There was a meeting in a theater, and I'm assuming it was a MAYO meeting. I can’t remember exactly, there was discussion and it was decided at that meeting that we were going to target Exxon for discriminatory hiring practices. I think it was called Exxon back then still, I mean before, I know it changed its name, but it was the Exxon company, and that was basically the decision that came out of that meeting. I remember we came back to Kingsville and by the weekend we were picketing, there in the Exxon building in Kingsville, close to downtown, and we went and picketed on a Saturday afternoon or a Saturday during the day, walked around with signs, claiming that they were discriminating in their hiring practices and so on. The building wasn’t even, I don't even think it was open that day, but we just wanted to make a point, because that’s what the decision had come to in that meeting in Laredo. In fact it has been bugging me that, I wanted to ask José Ángel whether, was that a MAYO meeting, I don't know. I assumed it was because it was, there were people there from all over, it was, it wasn’t a mass meeting, but still there were people there that I didn't know and this discussion was done and action was taken.

**JB:** So, how did the students get connected to other students? Was it just, uh, personal connections elsewhere, with I mean, compare Kingsville to say San Antonio or Laredo?

**AR:** At A&I, you mean?

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** Um, could you repeat that again?

**JB:** How did you connect to students elsewhere?

**AR:** Oh, well, like I said it was a small community, I mean, we hung out with each other, we partied. We’d meet at parties or in class. We took classes together because at A&I at that time it didn’t have the big population that it might have now, I don't know what the student enrollment is, but it was still a small community within—and then smaller for us because we were less of us. So, that’s how we got to know each other, usually through social contact and Dr. [Emilio] Zamora, who is also going to be one of the presenters [at the Chicano Voices symposium held on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus on September 9-10, 2016], he was in school with me during that time also.

**JB:** His roommate’s coming today by the way. Uh, his roommate who lives here in town now, is coming. Just as a heads up. Um, how did the other Anglo students treat this small group of people involved in the movement?

**AR:** Well, I don't know if they were even aware of what we were doing, I mean in terms of being in the movement. There were some Anglos and black students that were also involved in some of the campus-type issues. I remember there were a couple from here in Corpus, Mary Jo Sanders and her brother Mack. They were black students, they went to school there. Marva Sams who’s still here in Corpus, she was involved. We had Bill Reche, Pat Lawrence, there were some liberal Anglos that sympathized and, we all were thinking along the same lines of changes. I remember, this was campus stuff, but it hadn’t grown into the statewide movement that it became later on, but this was the beginnings of it. It was just wherever they were from, I remember, I had friends from Brownsville, um, like I said Winter Garden area, and all these areas and sometimes we visited each other. We were friends, in some ways.

**JB:** What sort of campus issues did you start with?

**AR:** Campus?

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** Well, for one thing, most of us didn’t live in the dorms. You know we all had, um, whether it boarding houses or little apartments where we, usually 3 or 4 guys lived together and stuff, and same thing with the girls. In fact we knew where all the girls lived and they, you know, and so we, we hung out together. I remember Dr. Zamora, who was—he lived in a house, we called it the haunted house, it was old and I remember the floor sagged. You know, we walked in and it made this creaking sound and it sagged, and, and there were you know we used to have, there were parties there, because it was a big place. Um, and it was close to campus. I remember he used to cut my hair. He on the side would cut guys hair to make some extra money and stuff and so, if there was something going on people knew about it, especially on the weekends. So, this was how we all kind of became bonded in a way. And then a lot of us ended up getting involved in the movement and once we left college and so we’d see each other in different places. I mean, when I went to the valley, there were people who had been at A&I that I hadn't met at A&I, but yet I got to know them over there and then others who had, who I knew at A&I who were also working in different areas of the movement. There was political activists or artists, we had quite a few artists too that, that did movement stuff. A lot of their work was movement oriented during that time and it was quite exciting, I enjoyed it.

**JB:** How did everyone start getting involved in the larger movement?

**AR:** In the larger movement?

**JB:** Yeah, I mean, what, what was your involvement in MAYO?

**AR:** Ok, well, like I said like that meeting, but the thing is that this was happening toward the end of my college days there. When I graduated in ‘68, I had went to the valley and got, me and this friend of mine named Tony Bill, both got a teaching job in Brownsville. There was a guy walking around campus with contracts. At that time there was a teaching shortage, and they were even hiring people with as little as sixty hours to teach, but I mean here we were graduated, and Tony and I said well what do we do? You know, well I hear there’s this guy, he’s hiring teachers in Brownsville, so we talked to the guy. We ended up signing up and we ended up at the same school in Brownsville, an elementary school. Not what I wanted, but still it was a job and it kind of kept you out of the draft I think at the time, I don’t remember if we got a deferment for that, but I remember Tony was sweating that because he was from Kerrville. By the way his name is Tony Bill, but his real name, well his full name is Antonio Truñeda(??) Bill, he’s a Chicano, it’s just that he’s got the last name Bill.

**JB:** Mm-hm.

**AR:** Anyway, we—lost my train of thought. We both got a job teaching in Brownsville and, for example, Emilio he stayed, I don't know, he didn’t graduate in ‘68, guess he graduated after me. I know that he was involved for example with another ex-student, another student friend Victor Nelson, who is also a Mexicano, in helping one of the professors, Dr. Allbram(??0 develop a Mexican American studies problems class because his area of expertise was Mexican history, not Mexican American history. So, he really didn’t know, and these students, I found out later on, had helped him develop a course. That was, for example, that was their involvement and then later I know Emilio went on to higher education. Me and Tony were teaching at Brownsville and nothing much was happening as far as the movement was concerned with us. Now, in the valley this was in ‘68, my first year there was ‘68-‘69, there was a walkout in Edcouch-Elsa in 1968, but I really didn’t go out and get involved in it. The following year I got a job, I left Brownsville and I got a job teaching in Weslaco, and that was in ‘69, the year, school year ‘69-’70. Well that December ‘69 was when they had that MAYO conference at the Lomita Mission in Mission, Texas. I didn’t go to the conference. I didn’t even know about it until I read about it in the paper, because I had kind of been out of touch with the movement people during the first year and a half that I had been teaching. I knew there had been a conference, I didn’t know what had happened at the conference, but teaching in Weslaco, some of the kids that were—I'm sure, a lot of the kids from the Edcouch-Elsa walkout had been at the conference. I was teaching some other kids from other school districts got fired up who went to the conference, also, because I know that in Weslaco there were two students that came back after the conference in the spring, and, which would be early 1970, and filed grievances with the school board. There were only two, with something like big, large mass walkout, but these two students took it upon themselves to file some grievances and they were also filed with the US Commission of Civil Rights and with the DEA, which, then investigated and found out that, yes, they discriminated against students, tracking them for example into vocational, when—instead of the academic part of the school curriculum.

**JB:** Did you experience any problems teaching there as a Mexican American?

**AR:** No, well, see I was teaching in junior high, and these were high school kids, so I didn’t know exactly—junior high was different, but I suppose Weslaco was very different. When I was teaching in Brownsville, I was allowed to grow a beard and stuff back then. So, when I went to Weslaco, I had to shave and I had to wear a shirt and tie every day. They were kind of strict and very—in that way, but um, personally I didn’t experience any of that because in junior high, it’s pretty basic. I found out that there was a rally that was being held in support of these students. I found out about the students who had done this and I said I’m going to go check it out. I went, and this was like in April, before the school year ended, they had organized this rally for the students in support of students. I went to listen to it, and after the rally finished, I approached some of the people that spoke. One of them was a teacher from Donna. He was from Weslaco, but he taught in Donna, which was the community next to Weslaco. I just said, hey I teach here in this school district, is there anything I can do to help? I sympathize with what you’re doing and all this. And then they said, we’d like you to meet someone, it’s in Mission, this person is in Mission. In fact, it was, he was living at the La Lomita Mission. The place where the conference had been held, happened to be also the headquarters of a daycare center and some people who had been at the conference had stayed on, in particular this individual named Aurelio Montemayor because he had—when at the conference there was a lot of people wanted to—they had this idea for starting up a college, a Chicano college. Okay. That’s where the idea was born and at that conference.

JB: That became the *colegio* [Colegio Jacinto Treviño]?

AR: The *colegio*, yes, that’s what became the *colegio.* Aurelio was one of the persons, along with another guy named Narciso Aleman, who were kind of pushing this idea for a Chicano college. And when I think about it now, a lot of the kids from the valley in particular, had been part of the walkout and stuff like this that, they were also behind this idea. They liked the idea of having a school where they could meet, fulfill some of the grievances. For example, that they had—they weren’t allowed in the regular schools, learning about the history of their own people, and being able to speak Spanish, and things like this. After that rally, we drove to Mission and I got to meet Aurelio, Aurelio Montemayor, and he was, this guy was very enthusiastic, very gung-ho with the idea. By the time I met him they had already made contact with Antioch. Antioch was the school that ended up being our accrediting college. Um, so, they had already contact with Antioch and he was now in the process of looking for other people to join the project, and the project was going to involve having graduate students, students who were going to be working on their masters. At the time, Antioch offered a Masters of Arts in teaching, a MAT. It excited me because, one, I would get to work on my masters, I get to do something that is very unique and in some ways radical ,because it was going to be—I mean nobody had ever done this before. You know, you start a college, and then you start, you want to, the college to be a reflection of your culture and yourself, it’s like a Chicano College. So, uh, I said yeah, I’ll go with you guys. In fact, I went back to Weslaco, to school the next day, I mean, this was on a Sunday, I remember. On Monday—by the way at the rally, there was a guy that stood, the assistant principal had also gone to the rally, he was this big, tall white guy named Larry Cross. And I said Larry, he asked me what I was doing there, he said what are you doing here. He said, oh, they sent me here to check it out you know. So, sure enough first thing Monday morning I get called into the principal’s office and he's saying what are you doing? What are you doing getting mixed up with these people? And I told him look, I met this guy, this is what I’m going do. I’m going, I’m going to get involved with this thing. He said, oh man, this is going to mess you up. And this was a Mexican American principal that was talking to me, he ended up becoming the superintendent of Weslaco High School later on, I mean Weslaco School District later on. But he thought it was going to be bad for me, he said, ah it’s going to ruin your career, whatever, you know. I said, well, I'm already committed, I said, I’ve made a commitment and I’m going to do it. And I did it. Between April and May, and then part of the summer, we would, we started recruiting, started helping out Aurelio, we were driving to Austin and meeting with people over there that we were trying to see if they would work with us. In fact, Juan and Marta Cotera uh, and Andre Guerrero from Laredo, but also was living in Austin. I remember meeting with them, we all met with them and we’d sit around and talk and discuss what we wanted to do. We were also, Aurelio also was gathering information for position papers, we wanted to have some position papers by different people as to why we wanted to do this and how we were going to go about it, if we could. They made a commitment, too, and they became part of it. In the end we had, we ended up with fourteen students that were graduate students, all working on their masters. Some of them were recruited by other people and then some came in at the last minute, but right up, by the last minute, I mean school didn’t start until October, so between the time that I met with them in April and up until then we had been working towards that. There was a small firm in Washington, DC called Interstate Research Associates led by an activist named Raul Yzaguirre. Now Raul Yzaguirre is more known for being the head of the Southwest Council for La Raza for many years. He’s the one that kind of helped build up that organization to what it is today. He was a guy from San Juan who was actively involved in the movement, in the early stages of the movement, and he enabled the meeting between Antioch and Aurelio and Narciso. Of course, this happened before I came along, but during the summer, he also helped us obtain a grant, a planning grant to develop a Chicano Learning Center. I think that was what the grant was. It wasn’t a lot of money, but it enabled us to—and he also put houses in, he also, they had an office in Edinburg also, so he let us use their office. And we hired a secretary, we got a typewriter, and we started putting out information, mostly to other Mexican Americans who wanted to be part of this effort. You know, so, we were still trying to recruit not only students, but faculty members, people who were willing to come down and teach weekend seminar or something, because obviously these people had jobs. The only time they could devote or contribute to us was maybe on weekends. We were trying to get people like that to come join our effort.

**JB:** How did you recruit them? I mean, what sort of language and goals?

**AR:** How did we recruit them?

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** Well, we just appealed to their sense of La Raza. This is why we were doing this, we wanted to change things. We wanted to change the system, or push the system to change. Just the fact of what we were doing was actually going to push the system, anyway, because things began to change after that. But there was a lot of resistance in the valley, for example, the valley tends to be more conservative. People don’t like big changes. So we were very different from what people would expect professional Mexican American students to be. Even though a lot of us had degrees and so on, we were seen as radicals, we were seen as rabble-rousers, whatever, you know. I mean they, they were creating more problems for them, for other Mexican Americans than trying to help. That’s the way some of them saw, especially the professionals. The were worried about getting involved with us because they could tarnish their reputation, that kind of thing my principal was telling me when I made the decision to go with the *colegio*. But, there were others that were, especially more the intellectuals, the ones who were, who were teaching at universities and so on, who were more inclined to—and those that worked in areas outside the valley. We didn’t get a lot of support from the people at Pan American, for example, that was the university there in the valley. But we got a lot from A&I, University of Texas, Sam Houston State, University of Houston, places like that where there was an occasional Mexican American professor, a noted professor of some kind, and they believed in what we were doing. At least, they were willing to come and work with us. Américo Paredes, Tomas Rivera, people like that, came down and helped us out and, and they didn’t need a lot of convincing. I think that they understood what we were trying to do, and wanted to support us in some way and were willing to contribute their time.

**JB:** Um-hm. How did that idea of a community controlled—you know, nature of the *colegio*, impact the university, the college itself and the work?

**AR:** The basis for the *colegio* was for us to be accepted in our community. We made an effort to go out into the community and talk to people and tell them, explain ourselves to them. We didn’t want them to be freaked out with what we were doing. The white community was. They were, you know, they didn’t know what we were doing and they were worried. In fact, in some cases, they started to attack us through advertisements and so on. But, we didn’t care about that so much, you know, because that’s not who we were trying to please. We wanted to make sure our own community accepted us, and I think they did. Some of the things we were involved in, for example, we got involved with grassroots organizations in the valley. One in particular was Colonia del Valle, which worked with unincorporated pockets of population in the county, and trying to get them basic services like trash removal, and water, things like this, the streets, paving streets or lights. This is the kind of things that people needed, you know, basic stuff. We worked with organizations like that. The farm workers the same thing, Antonio Van Dine(??) who was the organizer for the United Farm Workers in the valley, he came and spoke to us about organizing, how to do things, to try to get change in the fields. That’s how we approached the community in terms of the people that lived in the barrios. We had an open house in February, because we were—like I said, school started in October and Antioch was on a quarter system, so the semester actually started in October. We had seminars, classes and so on, but at the same time, we were planning on having some kind of celebration, an open house to kind of let the community come in and see what we were doing. And we did it. It was on February, I think it was February the 14th, I have the date somewhere, when we had it. Right before that, I think on February 6th, there had been the Pharr Riot. There was a lot of stuff going on in the valley during that time. The riot, you know, some of our people were involved in it. In terms of like they were there when it started, uh, we had been picketing the police department, I know I'm getting off track here.

**JB:** No, no.

**AR:** By going into this riot thing, but this was all part of what was going on at that time. They had been picketing the police department, claims of police brutality and things like this. Pharr had a reputation for being heavy handed with people, especially the cops, and there were allegations of police brutality. The mayor used to have meetings when nobody could go, community and stuff like that. So, Mayor Vogt was mayor at the time, people were against that, and MAYO was there. MAYO was organizing, was helping to organize. There was another guy, Efrain Fernandez, who was also from Kingsville and had gone to A&I. Although, I hadn’t met him in Kingsville, I got to know him in the valley, working with MAYO, while I was working with the *colegio*. And that day, that, that happened— I happened to be—because one of the things we also did was talk to civic organizations and community organizations. Like we go to Lion’s Club, Juan and I would go to Lion’s Club or we would go to school board meeting, in the schools like Mercedes where we were located. That day I think I was at a meeting at Pan Am, meeting with teachers, educators, who were interested in kind of what—well, they wanted to know what we were doing. So, I went to explain what we were doing as far as the *colegio*, the organization was a short-lived organization called TEAM, stood for Texans for the Educational Advancement of Mexican Americans. And, on my way back, because that weekend we were also having a seminar, um kind of a retreat at this place in Weslaco, when I found out about the riot. Well that blew the retreat because everybody wanted to come back to Pharr and see what was going on and all this, of course, it was already over. But a man had been killed and, that, that wasn’t good. And then there was big march after that, that marched from the church at San Juan to Pharr, to the cemetery in Pharr where the man had been buried. I remember was a flat back, flatbed truck that was used as a kind of, um, a stage and where people got to speak. And also, three priests had a mass, right there on the truck, on the flatbed, and this is some of the pictures that I have. Efrain spoke, and you know, and that was that. Um, but our open house was like a week later, we scheduled it for a week later and there was a big turnout. I think the community was kind of accepting of us, I mean the community that we were interested in.

**JB:** Um-hm.

**AR:** They were there en masse, we had food, we had entertainment, we had a gato campesino(??), we had music, we had speakers, and I think it turned out well. We had put up a kind of booklet together in Spanish explaining who we were, and who the students were, and how we worked, and all this. We were giving them out to people who came to the open house. So, I think it worked out pretty good. My experience with the *colegio* started, came to an end almost a year to the time that I had met Aurelio around April. Um, things began to get, a little weird there at the *colegio*.

**JB:** What do you mean weird?

**AR:** Um, clash of personalities, uh, philosophical differences, there began to develop a split in the group.

**JB:** What sort of philosophical differences?

**AR:** I think it had to do with—some of it might have to do with people claiming that you weren’t Chicano enough. You know, and this, I had seen this in other, in other groups where…

[End of Recording #1]

[Interviewer’s note: the battery in the recorder died at this spot, but I didn’t realize right away. In the missing sections, the narrator speaks more about his experiences at the Colegio Jacinto Treviño and at Juarez Lincoln as well as about a MA student at the Sorbonne who is originally from the Rio Grande Valley and is writing his thesis on the topic. The battery problems continued, which is why the recording keeps stopping and starting, but little was cut out of the other sections.]

[Start of Recording #2]

**JB:** Okay, sorry about that.

**AR:** Crystal City was, had, um, gotten funds from the Carnegie Foundation to help train Mexican Americans to be superintendents. And so they had recruited a bunch of guys who wanted to be superintendents, and worked through the Carnegie Foundation so they could get their certification or whatever is needed to be able to become a superintendent at some point in their career. A lot of them were assigned to school districts, some of them in the valley. We got a bunch of them at Edcouch-Elsa, and they helped us do the new proposal for the next round, because the way the proposal works, every year you have to submit a new proposal. They helped us create one, and it was a much larger one, like double the funding, and so on. So they were very helpful. Again, that’s the movement in Crystal City having an impact on what we were doing down here in the valley. IDRA was another company that was working with our school district, helping out school district because we were going through this transition from Anglo to Mexican American, I guess. That program that they—the ARCH program in particular, we developed what they call an estudiantina(??). It’s a musical group, it’s cultural, guitars, singing, and all this, which eventually led into the mariachi programs that you see in schools all over the place now. But back then, I think we were the first ones that did it. After a while, La Jolla, another school district that was very Mexican American, hired the music teacher who had developed mariachi over here to their school. And it began to spread, and now , I can't think of schools that don't have a mariachi, or some kind of cultural ARCH program of some kind.

**JB:** How do you think that, you know, you’re talking about these changes with Mexican American education, how did it change from the sixties to today, or when you retired?

**AR:** Well, all you have to do is look at, at people like Derrick, like the guy who just wrote my, who wrote the new master's thesis on the *colegio*. There’s young people like that that are working on their masters and doctoral programs, that I’ve met personally, and you have people who have gotten into positions where they can then, in turn, recruit people like that. Example, I have a friend named Jesse Garcia, he called me yesterday, he was coming to the conference I had told him about it. This was a guy, I knew him since he was like 20 years old. We were going to Pan Am, he had been tracking to vocational, he went to a technical school first to be a diesel mechanic. He didn’t like that, so he decided to go to Pan Am, and did well and, in fact, he got his masters at Pan Am. And then he got recruited by Dr. Rogelio Saenz, Dr. Rogelio Saenz was at that time at Texas A&M in College Station, in the sociology department and he was recruiting Mexican American students to come and get their doctorates in sociology. My friend Jesse was one…

[End of Recording #2]

[Start of Recording #3]

**AR:** …in the seventies, and they said, they claimed that they were with the *colegio*, or they were *colegio* students. Well, it negatively impacted the *colegio*. Ah, we knew it all along you know, they are a bunch of radicals, they are a bunch of pot smokers, they are a bunch of gun runners, because there were instances in which people had been arrested in Mexico on allegations of trying to supply guns to the Marxists revolutionaries in Mexico…

[End of Recording #3]

[Starting of Recording #4]

**AR:** …student movements and, you know and all this, that Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City…

[End of Recording #4]

[Starting of Recording #5]

**AR:** Where did you go to school?

**JB:** I went to school at University of Montana-Western and then at Washington State University.

**AR:** What was the first one?

**JB:** Uh, Montana-Western.

**AR:** Montana-Western.

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** Okay.

**JB:** Yeah, okay so, where we were?

**AR:** You were asking me about failures or something, I think I was talking about that.

**JB:** We were talking about how the movement was changing over time. Um, what else did you witness of how the movement changed?

**AR:** Well, um, I don’t know. I’m just saying you know that, it’s changed, I mean the people haven’t changed, it’s just that titles and names have changed. You know, like I was talking about the Mexican American Democrats, you have a lot more people that are more aware now. Um, so, I don't know if it’s changed, I think the movement is still moving. I think it’s still very much an ongoing thing that people, you have more people involved in it in some aspect or another you know. Um, so I, I don't know, I see it in a positive view that, the movement is still moving.

**JB:** And you also mentioned that the perceptions of Chicano in the movement have changed over time, can you expand on that?

**AR:** Oh, well the word Chicano, um, I don't know exactly, but it started out in the time of the sixties when people started using that term. For a long time, people had labeled us. I remember growing up and at one point we were Latin Americans, we were referred to as Latin Americans, Spanish-speaking Americans, Spanish Americans, Mexican Americans. Chicano was not a word that anybody put on us. It was a word that came out of the people themselves. Anybody can tell you that the word Chicano comes from the word Mexicano, which is a Nahuatl word, the X is pronounced like a -ch, so you have the word Chicano or from Mexicano. I think it was more of the fact that people just wanted to identify themselves and not be identified by somebody else. And of course, even our own people, they didn’t like that older people like our parents. I think a lot of the people got involved in the movement like at A&I, that people I knew a lot of themwere first generation college students. They were the first one in your family ever gone to college. When we started calling ourselves Chicanos a lot of them, you know, were like what is that? And they would come up with all kinds of explanations what that word really meant, that it was something bad, and all this stuff. Well, we didn’t buy it, we just used it.

**JB:** When did you realize and start calling yourself Chicano?

**AR:** Back in college. I remember we, we referred to ourselves as Chicanos, and Viva La Raza, these were some of the expressions we used. I don't remember exactly, it just was something that happened. I couldn’t pinpoint the fact, the first time I used the word Chicano to describe myself. But I know I've used it throughout my life, as I became involved in the movement and movement related things, and people would still you know, like oh, you know, but I didn't care. It was not a label that, like I said, that was put on us by somebody else, we, we came up with it ourselves. There was an organization back in the days also called MECHA. It was mainly out of California, I think. Just like MAYO, this was MECHA, but it was mainly more college students, and they, MECHA, in Spanish MECHA is a match, like a match that you strike. It was basically an acronym, it stood for Moviemento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan, that’s what the letters MECHA stood for. That’s the first time I think I ever saw the word Chicano in there, and maybe that, maybe that's how it came about, I don't know. But I remember that MECHA was Movimento Estudiantil Chicanos de Aztlan. Aztlan, I don’t know if you’re familiar with Aztlan, but Aztlan was like the, represented the Southwest. That might have been the where the word got more popular use, I don’t know. But I know that, and there was no MECHA down here, as far as we knew, A&I didn’t have MECHA, but we were reading stuff and we were finding out about things, and somewhere along the way, we started using that word.

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** It became standard, especially if you were in the movement you know. It kind of helped identify you, just like, we had a handshake.

**JB:** What was the handshake? (both laugh)

**AR:** (leans over and demonstrates handshake) Well, if you were a Raza guy, and you were meeting another Raza guy, we’d shake like this you know, we’d go like this, then we’d go like this, or no like this, like this, like this, and sometimes we would do this. And then sometimes later on, we added this. I don't know what, but it was just a thing, it was like, okay you're one of us.

**JB:** Yeah.

**AR:** You do the handshake you know.

**JB:** Seems like there was a lot of fraternity in the movement.

**AR:** Well, yeah, it was small, I think it was a small community. I could count on my hands the number of people that I knew within the movement, whether they were from the Crystal City area, from Austin, the valley. It’s like, I don't know, we all knew each other, a lot of people knew or had worked together in some facet of the movement of some kind. Even people from Colorado like, that guy who helped start the *colegio*, Narciso, was more affiliated with the Crusade for Justice in Colorado. That was headed by Corky Gonzalez. Now Corky Gonzalez has his own place in Chicano history. He wrote a poem, an epic poem, called “I Am Joaquin” and I remember we used to, I remember listening to that in, back then what they called a multimedia, it was a slide projector and they would add music and it would flash this light on the screen, and somebody's doing a dramatic reading of this poem. I remember sitting there watching it, you know watching the pictures, listening to the thing, with the sounds and all that and it had a big impact on me. It got all me riled up, it got me like—it just, I don't know, it was something. He was an interesting character, too. I read about him. Back in the days, in the early sixties in college, the main three were Cesar Chavez, Corky Gonzalez from the Crusade for Justice, and later was José Ángel with the MAYO organization. Oh and there was another guy, but before José Ángel, Reyes Lopez Tijerina which was a land rights activist in New Mexico. But, except that they got a little carried away and ended up killing somebody, I don'’t know what happened. But those were the three main things of resistance that were going on in the early movement, the farm workers, the Crusade for Justice, and the land rights guy in New Mexico, Tijerina, and of course later on in Texas you have MAYO springing up.

**JB:** What did you do in MAYO?

**AR:** I'm sorry?

**JB:** What did you do in MAYO?

**AR:** In MAYO? Well, MAYO it wasn’t like a card-carrying kind of organization. If you were working in the movement, you were part of MAYO. It wasn’t like—I've read some of the stuff that José Ángel has written about MAYO. The only ones that were like on a list, you might say, were the hierarchy of MAYO, the people who were the board of directors or whatever who was in charge of MAYO and made decisions. There were chapters, there were pockets of MAYO around. Sometimes they were high school kids, but there was no membership list or anything like that, if you were in the movement, you were a part—you were doing MAYO's work. I know when I was in college, I considered myself part of MAYO. But we didn’t have meetings as such. I remember going to that meeting in Laredo that I was telling you about earlier where the decision to boycott and picket Exxon was made, I'm pretty sure that was a MAYO thing. When I left college, I kind of lost track with MAYO, they weren’t sending out memos and saying, hey we are having convention or something like that, so, I didn't know about that, and I didn't really know the people in the valley that I could contact with at that time until I ended up meeting the ones from the *colegio* when I was teaching in Weslaco. There was no place that I could say, well let me call a phone number MAYO. I mean, it wasn't like that at all. It was just about being (phone ringing)

JB: Oh, you can take that.

AR: No, no it’s okay (phone continues to ring). This friend of mine is coming, that's my friend from Texas A&M in Lamar, that sociologist I was telling you about, he teaches at Lamar and uh, he uh, he was coming down to the conference. I had told him about and he said yeah I think I can come down. So, I got in contact with him.

**JB:** Great. Have you kept in contact with a lot of the people in the movement?

**AR:** Some, but not a lot. I’ve met people along the way that are part of the movement now, now it’s at a different level, but I haven’t really. We had a reunion, I think it was 2008 at A&I, and it was kind of a reunion of Chicano activists of A&I. A lot of the people that I was talking about José Ángel, Emilio, I was there, artists, Carlos Guerra, Cesar Martinez, Janie Alba, these were all people that were, we were in school at the same time and were all involved in the movement, in some aspect of the movement, at different times. That reunion, and there was another guy who used to have a reunion also periodically, from that group, but he would have it over here in Port Aransas. But, uh, that was it, and after I kind of like stayed out of it. I kept on teaching and periodically I would hear things and all that, but I kept on teaching in public schools. That bilingual directorship I did, I did that for like four years and then politics got involved, this time Mexicans fighting against Mexicans, school boards, and one faction wanted to get rid of the other faction. And I left and I said, I wasn’t from the community so I said I'm quitting, and I went back to teaching, which is what I liked to do and I ended up teaching for another 25 years. All total, in public education, I’ve taught 34 years.

**JB:** And you were teaching history?

**AR:** History, and I got into computers for a while, but early stages of computer education, not, not technical at all, but mostly history.

**JB:** Did you talk about Mexican American history in your classes?

**AR:** Oh yeah. Whenever, in fact, I did teach a Mexican American Studies class in La Jolla High School back in 1980, I don’t know anybody was doing it, but the superintendent I knew him from the past, and he said you know let’s come up with a course, and they gave me the best students and I used Rudy Acuña's book *Mexican American Chronicles*. It wasn't—it was pretty basic textbook, more of a, kind of loose notebook, but I used that to give them basic stuff about our history. I brought in speakers, José Ángel came spoke to my students, Amado Peña, Carmen Lomas-Garza, these were artists (phone beeps). That guy Leo Montalvo also, were guys that I brought in to class to talk to my students. I did, but I only did that one year, and then that superintendent got ousted, or he left or something, and then they didn’t want to do that class anymore. Then I ended up leaving and going to another school district. But whenever I taught history, I always incorporated the culture, the history of our people, into my lessons. I tried to give them something that they could be proud of or something that they didn’t know about, that wasn’t in the books, because it wasn't in the books. I had to make—design my own lessons for that. But that’s, uh, (phone rings).

**JB:** Is there anything else that you wanted to mention about your involvement in the movement or anything that I missed?

**AR:** I don't think so, I think I'm pretty much talked out.

**JB:** Okay, well, thank you.

**AR:** Besides I need to go to the hotel and stuff, so why don't we go ahead and end it, I think.

Transcribed by Dominic Castillo and Jen Brown