

Interviewee: Robert Munoz

Interviewer: Andrea Magana

Date: April 16, 2020

Location: Zoom meeting

Project Name: Oral History and Community Memory 350s

Q:

Okay, it's April 16th 2020. This is Andrea magana. I'm interviewing Robert Munoz.

Munoz:

Hi.

Q:

Okay, let's jump right in.

Okay, describe when and where you were born in a little about your early life?

Munoz:

I was born in El Campo, Texas, which is south of Houston. I remember the county was Wharton County. Tiny little town. We left there when I was a 8 came to California. I can remember the house. I can remember the Catholic school I attended.

Yeah, It was a tiny community we were talking- I was born in 54.

And what I can remember those days things were still segregated.

There was a white portion of town, a Mexican portion of town and a black portion of town. Yeah, I can remember that. It wasn't until after we left and later my dad would tell us different stories about back there. How he had to go to different barber shops. There weren't that many. You know little town. He found a barber that would cut our hair. Because It was very racist back in those days. So. You know. Course when you're a kid You're ignorant to it. You have no idea. So anyways, Came to California And they came out here-We moved in 63 In 1961 we had come out here Because of family told us it was best to go to California versus stay in Texas. Until they came out for the summer and my dad worked out in the fields picking fruit. That time my mother was pregnant.

So my youngest brother was born here back in 61. So is the only true californian.

She was feeling good and the baby was doing good. That's when we went back to Texas and then arranged to move out here for good. So that's the Short and sweet of Texas

Q:

So just to clarify you came to California, it was Fresno, Correct ?

Do you remember what year that was around?

Munoz:

Yes, it was '63

Because I was eight going on nine in October we moved out here in the summer.

Q:

Could you tell me about when you first came to Monterey area? What brought you here?

Munoz:

That happened in 1989 and there was a job. Going to Fresno State and living in Fresno.

And Thinking I was going to stay there forever. I have someone Call about a job over here. I didn't know the area. So it was a total.New experience. Because I didn't even know where Salinas was at you know. Anyway during the interview I knew I got the job.

Walls were so paper thin in the office. I could have him sitting in the hallway next to the office and get here every word they're saying.They're saying that we got to take him to lunch.He's the right one. We need to hire him. We need to take him to lunch. So I knew

I got the job and I moved out here. Yeah, yeah, that's how I ended up out here area. I didn't know the area or the people. So yeah it was a new experience.

Q:

How was it different from where you grew up?

Munoz:

It was well. when you don't know anybody. And you don't know the area, you got to remember this was before cell phones. So to get around I had Maps. I had a map just to figure out how to get to Monterey. How to get back home, back to Salinas. You had to Rely on the old paper maps. And I wrote to my brother who was living in New York at the time, and I said well Cas, Salinas

is like you take. You take Oklahoma and Tijuana and you put them together and there happens to be nine miles from the coast.

Because working here- the people I met at work were saying there's a lot of okies they moved out here during the thirties or forties when Oklahomans moved to this area and they worked the fields. and apparently since then I've learned. Okay oaklahomons came out here first, they were working the fields that we know about that's why John Steinbeck wrote a lot about life over here. The Grapes of Wrath story, stuff like that.

And then, apparently it was I guess a way for Filipinos that worked the crops.

And then today it's a lot of Mexicans. From Mexico that come up here and work the crops. So it's been one social group after another working the fields. I get that, I learned that just by living here. Yeah. big difference. Anyway, that's how I described it to my brother. I said because moving from Fresno to here, when I went to the mall.

Or any store I was impressed how much Spanish was spoken in the stores because in Fresno I didn't have that. And yet Fresno has one of the biggest hispanic communities, yet they didn't speak spanish in the stores. And yet over here they did. So it was a big shocker for me you can say. And again shocking because, when I was in elementary school here in California. If you were there before school and you're waiting and they have little school patrols going around seeing how everyone's behaving if you are caught speaking Spanish, to a friend you were written up. A citation. Because it was supposed to be English only. And that's in California. So that's one thing our parents did; they brought us up with English only. No spanish whatsoever, because they didn't want us to go through what they went through, all the Discrimination in, Texas.

Where they went to school. So I'm a generation where I don't know Spanish. And now let's see,

my nephew's. They didn't know Spanish, but their kids are learning Spanish. It's like Okay, we're pacing back into knowing a second language. Where it was prohibited before. So I'm the generation where they say, what do you mean you do not speak spanish. Well that's the way life was. I wish I knew the language, what little broken spanish I know is just living here and picking up things but that's it. I can not carry a whole conversation. So when I went to CSUMB, it was amazing to see people speaking spanish and Filipino's speaking in their language, a totally different world compared to the one I lived in. When i get "you don't speak the language" hello you wern't under the rules we were under. So learn it, Learn the history, just because you were able to do it, big deal, there were a lot of restrictions in our life, and they always change. Who knows what the future will be like when it comes to languages? But aye, this is where we're at right now.

Q:

I know you mentioned your brother and your parents. Did you want to talk about a story that Speaks about your relationship with them or who they are as a person?

Munoz:

Yeah, well my dad passed away now seven years, so I think.

But my relationship with my folks has always been very odd. They never accepted idea because I am gay.

But that's one subject you never spoke about. They would say, no no no, they don't want to talk about that. To the point my youngest brother was gay And this is almost- god he hasn't spoken to my parents Or my mother now. Close to 30 years.

Because he told them When he was in New York, that If they cannot accept he or myself as their gay Sons. That says don't bother calling me until you could accept me. Well, guess what? They never called, so that's their ow doing as far as I'm concern

And then I learned because of all that after my dad's death. I learned that my dad was gay. And He was a generation where they believe that you get married and you'll be fine. You'll be okay. And when I learned that my dad had- was gay a lot of things made sense. He never. As kids he never attended anything we did at school.

My brothers are in all the sports from baseball to football. And he never went to their games.

And I think that what he was doing is that he he he always worked, and when he would come home as little kids we'd go daddy's home and run to him. And he'd say no no no I need to take a shower. He'd shower, come over to have dinner. He'd never asked, after all these years I realize, How are days or what we did in school? How was the game? Nothing. He sat down. He had a conversation with Mom on how work went. That was it. Dad never had a conversation with any of the sons straight or gay.

Because he was a breadwinner. I guess he is distancing himself because one he's gay and I know my mom Dealt with it because I did-things happened, that I remember. She was crying one morning he had left to work, he always left before we got up.

And that situation was what it came down to is that you know, she learned about whoever he's having an affair with and I think they must have made that agreement. You know, you're the

breadwinner, we're married, we're catholics, we can't get divorce. We'll take care of the boys.

That's it. So this distance was clear. Yeah, and that's the way they dealt with it. That

generation. And it's interesting I remember in my young 20s, back in my days, that's when disco was a big deal, when the bars were always packed, and I would always go to the straight bars.

And dance my butt off, and there was a group of us, Oh man, what was the name of that funny

club in Fresno, oh yeah the name of the club, that was the biggest thing in Fresno, there was a

line to get in, was called the climax bar? And you think about it, the climax? Oh that's a good

one. Everyone thought it was a straight bar. Well I was one of the best Disco dancers there.

There was a group of us that became known as the climax dancers.

All I have to do is just bypass everybody in line, walk to the door at they'd let me in.

And everybody looked like who's that who's that. To this day I still have it, on my birthday the bartender gave me a shot glass with my name on it. The thing was I was going there when I was

20 I wasn't 21 yet, and we gave me that drink in the shot glass, and said happy birthday, I went

with the group and they told him it was my birthday, when he handed me the drink he says Happy

Birthday Robert and please don't tell me how old you are. Cuz if I told him I was turning 21,

he'd ask about all the times I shouldn't have been there. I still have that glass. Anyway, After

that. Straight people always shut down earlier, shut down at 2 o'clock, but after that we'd go to

the gay bar because they would stay open longer. And that was our routine, I would dance my

butt off at the gay bar and then I would go to the gay bar and dance my butt off and eventually get

home. 4 o'clock, whatever it was. That's the way life was for a long time in Fresno. All this, I'm

still living at home. I'd never get asked questions by my parents or why are you home so late,

you know, where did you go? They just knew that I went out. They wouldn't say did you go to a

gay club or whatever, nothing was ever said. As long as I was home safe, I guess that they were happy.

My dad. Comes down all of this because he was gay and when. And they must've had an understanding between them. I'll never know the full details because mom would not talk. She's not letting it out. Plus she has remarried since my dad passed away.

And my husband John says we'll can't you tell she's so happy I said John she's happy because she married a straight guy. She's been doing things that she and Dad wouldn't do. You know, so it's a totally different scenario. Grant it, she's happy, it's good someone can take care of her old age. She will be 90 next January.

Q:

Can you tell me a story about something your father did that you'll never forget?

Munoz:

The only story that I can remember is allowing me to work with him replacing the roof to the house. No, dad did everything I mean, I guess in that generation he knew how to take care of a car, he knew how to add a room to a house. He knew Roofing. Yeah, that was a generation that did those things since that all these Generations. We don't, we have to go to a mechanic vs. my dad working on the car, you know that type thing. He wanted to replace the shingle roof of the house. I don't know how old I was, I must have been like a senior or maybe just graduated from high school?



Must have been like 19-20 I guess. I just remember my nephew was born he was just a little thing and he could talk. Anyway, I was up there. And dad was telling me you know, we took all the shingles off by hammer. And that he was showing me how the process is. Now theres me, my brother was only 11 months younger than I am. It was his son that was done there looking up at us and I helped my dad put that roof on. Now I'm the gay one up there doing this roof with my dad while my brother, his son is down there asking why isn't his dad helping us. And I said because your dad is afraid of heights.

He will not climb the ladder. And I'm thinking, I'm the gay one and I'm up here working my butt off my dad and yet the straight one is down there scared to climb a ladder. Like Who's Butch now? Hello? I'll always remember doing that roof with my dad. It was just me and him. And he showed me everything. My house is a tile house nd I don't think I'd get up there and work on tile. I'll always remember that. It's always in my head. That's the only time I actually did something with dad in my whole life.

Q:

I know you mentioned you had a straight brother or how many siblings did you have?

Munoz:

It's four of us. I'm the oldest, and then the youngest, we're both gay, and the ones in the middle are the straight ones. They have their kids now, and grandkids.

Q:

Could you tell me a story to help describe how they are or who they are as a person as well Your relationship with your siblings?

Munoz:

Well let's see, Richard is 11 months younger, to this day we don't talk. We'd never have Growing up we never played with each other. We simply shared the same bedroom together. And we're salt and pepper and that's the way it's been all our lives. Yeah, that's the way it's just been it's just natural. I mean. Yeah. We'd never Play together. He did his thing, I did my thing and then we started school. We'd come home from school and he would go and play was going to play with kids around the block. I didn't I Always came home. Did my homework mom was always hard, always disciplined with me being the oldest. Show always made sure that I did my work and then when I got into junior high.

I was so come on do my work but then I started prepping dinner because I was learning how to cook watching her. So they got the point. I would start process because once she got home. She would complete dinner. Or I did the laundry, you know and you should do the laundry, whatever mom always kept me busy and then as time goes by I realize. She kept me busy because they knew I was gay, they had to of known. And that was their way of protecting me from everybody else outside of the house. Because I never got bullied, well I never was outside to get bullied. Yeah, and that's why it always turned out to be so I did my way that was their way of protecting me. Even though they wouldn't acknowledge why they were protecting me.

In highschool I was a nerd. It was always school, school, school, and yet with Richard they never did that with him and so in high school, I was the bookworm with all the Books And you have

Richard the kid at the parking lot with a black jacket being the tough guy. Didn't do good in school. And that's the way life was. So we never associated at all. My next brother, Renee, I always thought we were really close, and it wasn't up until the last 10 years we've Grown Apart. Cause like he has two boys and I was real close with them. I would take them to movies when they were little kids.

I can remember taking his sons to go see Bambi at the theatre and they insisted sitting on my lap. So I had one on one leg and one on the other. That experienced all I can remember is oh god, these boy little butts are really digging in my legs. And I can remember the youngest one, when bambi's mom got shot, the little one turned to me and said uncle bubba, which is my nickname in the family, did bambi's mom die. And I said yes mijo she did, and he says oh okay, and turned around and looks at the movie. The oldest one didn't say anything, it was the little one that was inquiring. And I'll always remember that, now they've grown up and have their kids. Anyway, 10 years ago. It seems like 10 years ago. With my brother Renee. I guess he is the one that decided that they were leaving the Catholic church. And joined something more extreme, So therefore they cut off ties with me and my brother. Yeah. So whatever- whatever religious ties he went on, I can care less if you're going to go that extreme because I don't have time to waste on that, it's not worth it. I haven't talked to him. It was weird. I haven't seen or talked to him a long time. Yet his boys call me, text me at least once a year to see how am I doing. They'll Send me pictures of their kids. So there's still a connection with my nephew's but not with their dad. And then the youngest Ruben, ofcourse he's gay, he lived 25 years in New York, he did Broadway, but he finally got tired of broadway and moved to Seattle. God. Maybe 12 years ago.

After spending all that time in New York, he said enough is enough and he moved to Seattle, and he lives there now. Unfortunately, he doesn't even have a partner of any kind. He's just gay, and he loves his life and that's about it.

Yeah, that's what it's like with my brothers. My nephews are all fine, except the oldest nephew, he's gone conservative. It's funny when I do happen to see him and his wife. She runs over and hugs me and how are you doing? And she says kids kids this is your uncle bubba. I rarely see them. And when he was younger I took him to Fresno State, to introduce him to what university was like and what all the feelings of yeah, we can go in a direction in life whatever you want to do in life if you come here and pick that Path.

And that's where he went. He went to Fresno State, just like I did. I had no idea he was going to pick for Criminology. He's a CHP officer he's been doing that now, for god- I think of my age and his age. He's been doing that for maybe 20-30 years now, a CHP officer. He's doing good with his family. But his sister, I saw her last year in October up in Portland. God her kids are growing up so much to pit time- time goes by and kids get old. You see these kids when they're all babies, and now their all grown. It was good to spend time with her And then Renee's two boys, to see them. That's life.

Q:

What was your most memorable positive family memory you had with all your siblings and your parents growing up?

Munoz:

I can't think of any that stuck in my head. I can only use look at pictures- my parents took a lot of pictures of the pictures. There's just boxes and boxes of pictures that are just that my other was going to put in an album- that never happened. I was going through pictures And I don't know what year this was and I found this picture of us four boys. Oh, where do you send visiting my uncle my dad's family? I believe it was my aunt that took the picture of us four boys. And I asked my mom if I could take this. I was going to duplicate it. And she said just sure. I ended up having that little whatever-it-is commission that little picture- I had it blown up to 4 by 6. What it is the larger size?

And I had them framed and I gave them to each of my brothers. And for me was like, okay. There's a picture of Innocence. There's the four of us, now Richard by the way, even though he's much younger than I, everyone thought he was the oldest. Cause he was taller growing up as little kids, and because he was heavy. And to this day he's extremely heavy. His daughter, my niece, said Have I seen him lately? I said no she says oh Robert you he's like 350 lb he's huge that he can't work anymore. I said, he was always large, but she said yeah but it's real bad now. Anyway and that picture is Richard heavy, large. There's me with my glasses dorky glasses. Just looking like a skinny little guy. And then there's my brother Rene. Holy God. He has a helmet on and a football. And then there's Ruben just smiling big old smile. He's the youngest. But it's the picture of innocence that struck me, here we were as kids and I need to reproduce that in my head for some reason. I have the picture at home on the wall. I Gave the same pictures to my brothers. My sister in law, thanks for the picture this is so cute, and ofcourse Richard is complaining oh why pick a picture of him when he's fat. I told her mija he's always been fat,

why is he complaining. Literally so fat that his shirt is parting where the buttons are at because he was heavy. I'm thinking he's always been that way.

I don't think I'll find a picture where he was thin. But I have that picture Just because to me it was a time of Innocence. Here's the four of us. We were just grouped and someone took the picture of us. So it was like that. People will come to my House and say oh that's me and my brothers. And I'd say pick me out and they would say oh that Has to be you with the glasses. I would say yes that's me.

Other Memories of Us Do anything together?

I don't I don't know because Richard always always went out to play Renee and Ruben would also go out and play. But I was always in the house. So I can't think of everything that stood out as a big memory for us as a group.

Q:

I know you mentioned earlier that- I forgot to ask you a question. I'm sorry. You knew you were gay from the moment you were born you had mentioned. Could you explain that more to me and if you felt that impacted your life growing up?

Munoz:

As long as I can remember. Watching TV. Or even later growing up and being able to go to the movies. Because back in those days. On a Saturday— going to the movies was \$.25. and they would drop us off at the theater to watch whatever the film might be. Appropriate g film of course for us.

But as long as I can remember I could always recall the male actors. I knew their names. I've always been fascinated by them. Any female actress I'd have no idea? Couldn't tell you who they were. I was always attracted to the man. Yeah, always. It didn't bother me that's just the way life was for me. I told you one time that one of those pictures my mom had— should go get it.

Where we were at Sequoia National Park. Must have been General Grant. And there's a picnic table and dad took a picture of us mom and us for boys, but I'm at the end Of the bench and I've already posed—like one of these styles.

And I'm lookin at that picture and I don't know I was just a little thing in thinking. But oh my god, they had to know I was gay, give me a break what straight kid is going to pose like that. I've always been attracted to men I've had Friends that are all girls. All my friends were really girls but I wouldn't hang around with guys. I didn't think of myself as being a girl I was comfortable being with them because I could look at the guys. So I've always been gay. So to me that I've always been it's never been an issue for me. More people like my husband John said he didn't realize he was gay till he was early 20s. Yeah, I can't relate to that because I've always have been. That's the way it's been for me. People who Come out later in life they have to explain their awakening. To see what's going on in their head.

Yeah, that's the way life's been for me. It's never been struggle it's always been an acceptance for me.

Q:

So going on.

Did that influence you to be a part of or being involved in any causes ?

Munoz:

You know I always thought.

Like I was there. I was alive. I was existing when Stonewall happened in New York. You know, I was young but older people will take care of that.

When I started working and those days.

If they found out that you were gay they can fire you.

Until the law—I have to look that up. When did The Law pass in California that gave protections?

But that was I was working I could have been fired

Luckily. I wasn't fired because I learned later that

The office manager that I work for, he was gay. So I was safe.

But in my head. I guess. I was thinking other people will take care of it other people will take care of it. It was until I realized that I have to do something when I first moved here from Fresno to here. I can tell you I didn't know anybody here.

And I was so bored you being in my apartment. When they were advertising on TV about walk for aids in San Francisco. And how anybody can participate and be involved. I told myself. You know what. I can do that. So I got the information they sent me information. Once I got my forms.

I simply went around the office to everybody and asked them to sponsor me. And I was the first person to ever Ask them to sponsor for an aids walk. And I can remember this one guy that



worked in purchasing. He's the one that. Very reluctant And. He's like okay Robert. All he gave me was a dollar. I said well Thank you so much. I walked away and he wouldn't sign the paperwork. So I'm back to my office. Filled out the line with his name. Of course, I have access to payroll. Of course this was a long time ago. I went in there and got his address and I wrote down that he gave me one dollar. I said you know what I've never experienced someone being harsh to me. And to me that was my first type of harshness. I was determined, your name is going on here and your address and if you get mailings from them Goodluck. Anyway, then I drove to San Francisco and Did the walk. Again not knowing anybody. I turned in my information. I did the walk. People all around me, I didn't know a soul. I guess kind of an introvert because my parents taught me to be secluded and to take care of myself. That's how I was brought up. It didn't bother me. I just watched people. I watched people listen to conversations. Did my whole walk? Then got a water and got my car and drove back home. But That was my first. My first time of doing something. And It happened to be for the Aids. Now my husband Jon. When Reagan was not gonna fund any research for AIDS.

Jon went to DC and he protested about the White House. He always remember that's. This guys told me that story so many times. He's told so many people, I've heard it so many times. But you know what he went to D.C. I can't say that. I went to San Francisco. And John's always been an advocate and He's got me more involved in fighting.

You know, especially with Prop 8. God. That was just. Yeah. That's when we're going to get married. And we thought we were going to have a November wedding.

As I mentioned Jon was a priest now and he had to get permission from the bishop. Whether you're straight or gay and if you're going to get married, you have to get permission from the

bishop. He let them know and she came back saying she was happy and great and that she would perform our ceremony. That was going to be in November like right before Thanksgiving. The same time that Prop 8 came up.

This is crazy. These people are idiots. All this money coming in from the Mormon church, I can't believe the Mormon church was tying up with the Catholic church. Two religions getting together fighting this. I always went home [to Fresno] for my birthday in October but when I went home that year. And I turn the corner and my brother Renee—who he and I don't talk now. We don't talk now.—When I saw a Yes on Prop 8 [sign] on his yard. I was livid. I knew it was going to be a bad visit.

And so going with my folks on that, Saturday to Mass. And for that priest to be up there and his whole sermon had nothing to do with the gospel, nothing to do with readings, was all about voting yes on Prop 8. I was livid.

In my head, I was like you keep church and state out of this. I can't believe this. I was [fit] to be tied down and I was so mad. I wanted to get up and scream, but if I did my folks would just have a heart attack and I would embarrass them and everything. It wasn't till we got out of the church, my mother could tell on my face something was wrong. And she said, "Mijo are you okay?"

"No mother I'm not. I can't believe that asshole of a priest up there." I was just letting it all—cause it's what I said to her— "Is up there telling you people to vote Yes on 8, if you're not hurting anybody. You're not confronting anyone's rights." "Oh Mijo, Mijo. Calm down, Calm

down, we don't listen to him." I said "Bullshit. I know this Catholic church. You guys are just reigned in. You do whatever they tell you and that I am never going to step foot in this church again, Mother." "I had it. I'm gonna go home." I get home, and of course Jon says "What's wrong?" and I told him. The whole experience, the sign on my brother's yard, and what I experienced at the mass. He says, "Calm down Robert. Are you afraid? You want to get married now?" I said, "Yes I'm not going to wait until after election day, what I experienced back over there and the way the Catholic church is going about this, all these people are going to vote because their priest told them to." So he says well I need to call the bishop, but with her arrangements. She couldn't.

She told us okay have a civil marriage, get it done. And later on, when you guys are ready, we'll do a religious ceremony. So we went to city hall, made the arrangements. It was interesting, here I'm doing my best letting everyone know to vote no on 8, when the justice of the peace comes to the house and she inquired about why we're doing this now. I said because of prop 8. I said, "I think we're losing that battle because as much as I tell everyone to vote no, I have a feeling that a lot of the gay community don't even vote. So they don't realize that they can't protect themselves," I said "We planned November, but we need to do it now."

{ END OF INTERVIEW }