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Interview with Javier Rodriguez

Javier Rodriguez

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Interviewee: Javier Rodriguez
Interviewer: Cory Banelos
Date of Interview: October 31, 2013
Duration of Interview: 00:47:50

Cory Banelos 00:02

I'm Cory Banelos. This is—

Javier Rodriguez 00:04

Javier Rodriguez.

Cory Banelos 00:05

We're conducting an oral history about Chinatown, about his life. We're here on October 31, 2013, in Salinas, Chinatown, in the CSUMB Learning Center. And do we have your permission to record this?

Javier Rodriguez 00:23

Sure.

Cory Banelos 00:24

All right.

Javier Rodriguez 00:24

Yes. [unclear] tigo. Yes. [laughs]

Cory Banelos 00:28

All right. My first question is, can you tell me about yourself and where your family's from?

Javier Rodriguez 00:35

Well, about me, I'm forty years old at this point, going forty-one in January, which I can't believe it's already there. I'm like, oh my god. [laughs] As to my family, I mean, my immediate family, brothers and sisters, we grew up in this valley, you know. That's—this is where we grew up. I was born in King City Hospital, lived in Greenfield for a while, moved to Soledad, moved back to Greenfield. And just this valley has been, you know, my whole life. This is—I just recently got out of the valley, and went to—actually left and I went to Mexico, like, the first time in my life, and I was thirty-eight. So, I've lived in this valley—this is it. This is all I've really known. It's great. I love it. You got to understand where Soledad, Gonzalez, you know, Greenfield is. There's no—back then, you know, back when I was growing up, there was no real shop, no real stores, nothing of this, like—I think the only thing out there was, like, your mom and pop shops or whatever. If you wanted any kind of decent purchases, you're gonna buy big bulk, you had to travel to Salinas. I mean, it was a thirty-minute drive, so we spent a lot of time—every weekend was, you know, our shopping day or whatever. If we needed shoes or what have you, we'd come to Salinas, because there was nothing down there, you know. So, we spent a lot of time in Salinas, you know, just because that's where, you know, the stores were. So, I got—I have four sisters—three sisters now and one brother. And we've all lived in this area. I mean, so we've never left

this area. So, doesn't say much about my adventurous side, [laughs] but I'm comfortable. I like this climate. I mean, this little valley had its own little microclimate. You don't get severe winters. You don't get severe summers. It's great. I mean, why would you want to leave? It's, like, mild all year round. So, it's great. What else? Yeah, I mean, that's just pretty much me, I mean, in a nutshell, so—

Cory Banelos 02:58

All right. Was your family ever part of the Bracero program or anything like that?

Javier Rodriguez 03:05

The what?

Cory Banelos 03:05

Bracero program.

Javier Rodriguez 03:07

Doesn't sound familiar, but then again, I mean, there might have been when I was younger, so, you know, so explain what would that—

Cory Banelos 03:14

Bracero program was something that brought Mexican farmers, or brought Mexicans in order to crop the fields and maintain the—

Javier Rodriguez 03:24

Oh, yeah. Yeah. My stepdad—well, actually my [unclear] stepdad and my mom's sister and her, you know, they'd follow the crops and everything. And my dad was always working in the fields. My uncle was working in some kind of ag industry and, you know, I hate to say it, but my dad never got legal, I should say. So, he was always—he got his resident alien card. I mean, I was twenty or twenty-six. And he's raised me since I was, like, two years old. So, yeah, he's been illegal all that time, just working in the fields and, you know, following the crops, so on and so forth. So, I don't know if that was, you know, that part of it, but yeah, I mean, we did our share of field work and, you know, traveling different cities or what have you and, you know—but more on his end, because he would have to travel, you know, an hour, two hours, or whatever to get to where the crops were. And then that's one thing he did good, he and my mom did good, is they kept us stable, where they would have to travel out or go in, you know, the little vans or what have you to take them to the crops or whatever, so that they did. I really appreciate that. They left us stable in one area, where others would have to travel, go to a different city, a different town all the time just to stay with the crops. And we kind of suffered on that a little bit, but I think all in all, it was a good decision on their part.

Cory Banelos 05:09

Sorry, I'm just trying to phrase a question out of what you were talking about. Why do you think that they thought it was better for you guys to grow up as—commute further to do things as opposed to move you guys around and go with where the crops were going?

Javier Rodriguez 05:21

I mean, I don't know what their mentality on that is. I mean, I just know the benefit it was to me, you know, and growing up, you know, in the—how should I say—because we lived in, like, the labor camps that went out at some point and, you know, we moved around a little bit. We kind of stayed—we didn't, like, have a home, but we stayed in the same general areas. So, living in labor camps and seeing how other kids would disappear for this, and then have to get resituated to go to school and find new friends and stuff like that. I don't know if that was the reason for it, where we could stay and, like, really stabilize and have our family, so to speak, where others would have to travel and make new friends every school year or in every town. So, there was—I believe that was a reason, but I can't speak to why they did it, but seeing that as I grew up, I'm glad that they did, they made that decision, you know, give us a stable footing of, you know, where we're at and, you know, not subject us to that moving around, having to constantly—not knowing, okay, are we going to have friends when we move there? Is it the same town we were at before? So on, so forth. So, yeah.

Cory Banelos 06:48

Okay. When you were growing up, did your family ever go into Chinatown at all? Like, do you—

Javier Rodriguez 06:56

I remember a few times my—it would be, like, you know, Saturday, Sunday, my dad's off or whatever. We would come to Salinas, you know, do some shopping, whatever, and at that time there was actually businesses. There was a rib place, I believe, right down the street. So, there was actual businesses running. So, they would, you know, they would bring us down here, you know, not to so much spend a day, but, you know, just give us, you know—oh, I heard it's good ribs. That was my dad. I mean, we traveled one time all the way to Nevada, because he heard there was this great hamburger, so we drove all the way to Nevada to try this hamburger. That was my dad, you know. So, he would—he heard that there was good ribs here, so he brought the family and we came down here to, you know, get ribs and apparently he liked them, because we came here a couple times. [laughs] You know, so yeah, we came here, but it wasn't like a regular, you know, thing. But yeah, he found something he liked here. So, we came down and got ribs a few times, and, you know, that was my first introduction to this area. And I mean, back then I didn't know, you know, what it was. I just knew there was some pretty good ribs. [laughs] You know what I mean? But that was my first introduction to this area. And then, you know, later on, as it changed, we kind of stopped coming, because it changed. You know, there was—you could tell there was—the environment of the people hanging around was changing. So, we kind of stopped coming down.

Cory Banelos 07:06

What kind of changes were happening?

Javier Rodriguez 08:34

There was a lot more, should I say, unsavory elements moving in, you know, to kind of like what it is now. And it was back then—I mean, I'm pretty sure it started before that, but we, you know, my dad started really seeing it come, you know, it escalating to what it was—you know, it was—gets bad, or worse than it was now. I remember—from what I remember when I was younger, when I was eighteen, I had my first car or what have you. I would come down here and, you know, yeah, whatever you're

looking for, come to Chinatown, you found it. But I guess he saw that coming as an adult. You know, it was something—as a kid you're not going to really put two and two together, get four. You're going to put two and two together, get, you know, like, one and a half or some shit, you know. But yeah, it started—I guess he noticed it had started to change, so we kind of stopped coming. You know, so that was kind of where Chinatown kind of dropped off on my radar until I was, like, eighteen, around there. Then it came back on the radar. [laughs] So, yeah.

Cory Banelos 09:43

In a previous interview, you had mentioned that there are some women of the street who would walk around topless. Is that some of the unsavory elements that you were talking about?

Javier Rodriguez 09:53

Yeah. That was those elements. It was—back then, they were a little more blatant, I should say. You know, this was a red-light district. I mean, you had, you know, you had Fort Ord open, so there was a lot of military coming down this area. So, this was the red-light district, so to speak. And yeah, when I was eighteen, it was, like, the typical, you know, street person that you would see like in CSI, whatever, with the fishnet stockings, the whole—that's what they were dressed like. I mean, they were walking around with just bras or what have you. That's what it started coming down to. You know, and that's what I remember from when I was eighteen. You know, it was like, you wanna go dance or whatever. And, you know, this was a place to find it. You could find it other places, but it was so readily accessible here. Why would you go anywhere else? You know what I mean? [laughs] You know, but, I mean, on the other hand, I have to put this in there, because now I work here. I've been working here for five years, and seeing what it is now compared to what it was back then, it's almost night and day. I mean, I see it, you know, if all the services and all the good things that the college and Dorothy's and everyone's putting into here, I can see it getting back to at least what it was when I was younger, when my dad brought me to get some ribs. I don't know if it's gonna be back to its heyday, but I see it now—you know, when I was first stationed or put here, because I started here through the CalWORKs program, which is a—well, it's CalFresh now. They've changed so many names. It was a welfare system. I don't know if you know anyone or you know how the welfare system works. In order for you to maintain your cash aid or your food stamps or your medical, whatever, you have to go to school, have a job, do volunteer service. You got to pay something back to the community. Well, and I was—when they told me I was going to be put up at a garden, I was, like, cool, garden. I like being outside, you know, whatever. It's in Chinatown. I'm like, are you serious? [laughs] I was, like, you know, the night before I'm thinking, you know what, I'll have to lock my car. I mean, should I take a bat with me? It's, like, because that's what I remember, you know. And so, I was pleasantly surprised once I got over my preconceptions of what I was going to see. I really saw what was here. I was surprised. I was pleasantly surprised that it wasn't what I remember. It had—I don't know if it has to do with Dorothy's or CSUMB being here, the downtown community. I don't know. I don't know what it is, but it was really mellowed out. It kind of—it wasn't so blatant. It wasn't so out in your face. It was a lot more calmed down. And slowly I started to, you know, develop, you know, I wouldn't say friendships, but acquaintances. And I made some friends. I mean, and just me being here on a consistent basis and interacting with people, it got to the point where now I bring my daughter on the weekends to kind of work with me. You know, I wouldn't have done that back when I was eighteen, if I had a kid when I was eighteen. But the way it was back then, there's no way I would bring my daughter, you know. And now I

feel comfortable bringing my daughter, so I see that—I guess it's—I don't know, it's—my dad brought me down to this area, and now I'm bringing my daughter, so it's to that point now. You know, I see that it's getting better. So, there's a lot of work to be done, but at least it's to the point where I see, not just my daughter—I do see some kids every now and then come down. And other people bring kids down here, so it's getting there, you know, which is great. You know, we can get a little more work, a little more services, and really put some effort into it, I think it could get back to where we can come get some ribs. [laughs] You know what I mean? So, but I just had to put that in there because, I mean, it sounds bad, everything I've been saying, but it's the truth. That's what it was. It was—that's what I saw. That's what I noticed, and that's what I realized, how it's—I think it's coming back. It's a lot of work to be done, but it's—I can see it coming. I mean, it's gonna take some time, and it's not gonna be done in the next year or two, but it's working. It's working. I mean, a lot of good stuff's happening.

Cory Banelos 14:37

You had mentioned some services. What services do you think are helping out most with toning it down in Chinatown?

Javier Rodriguez 14:46

Actually, what I believe, you know, from being here, working here five years and really seeing how it changes, stuff like the Service Learning Institute, getting different faces, different energies, different people coming in on a regular basis. You know, the fact that people know that the Learning Center is here for them, to help them. And, you know, Dorothy's is helping people. And so, just all the positive energy of the church groups, the students, and the constant change of people, the constant energy that people bring, and, you know, hate to say it, but them not knowing who's a cop and who's not, because the faces are constantly changing. There's always a constant flow of people coming in and out because of these service providers that are constantly, you know, looking for volunteers, and volunteers are coming from different areas. I think that's the main thing is just the flow of people and getting the awareness out there that, you know, this place isn't what your rumors, what you've heard about this area, it's not what it is. It's maybe what it was, but it's not, and getting that notoriety, or that idea, or that truth out there, what this area is and what these people are, you know. The people in this area really are people, you know. A lot of people don't see that. And me working with a lot of students—I mean, I get students—I mean, CSUMB students come from all over the place. I mean, and really getting their input on what they thought they were going to get into, and constantly hearing, "Oh, well they told me, you know, if you're gonna go to Salinas, you're gonna get shot." You know, just Salinas, not so much this area, but you're gonna go to Salinas and get shot, whatever. And then them coming here, and then within about a week or two, you know, about midterms, whatever, they're, like, you know, it's not what I thought. You know, and getting that idea out, getting that information out is, I think, what's helping change. You know what I mean? It might be a long-winded explanation too, but that's what I've seen. It's the constant flow of people just coming in, and people like you doing stuff like this and really getting the word out of what it actually is and not—you know, if I can be up on a stage or whatever and tell someone is, don't believe your misconceptions, or don't believe the rumors. Come see it for yourself, because it's not what people think. It's what people remember is what they're telling you. It's not what it is now. So, that's what I think. That's what I think is the main factor in changing everything is just the constant flow of people, and constant flow of people wanting to help.

Cory Banelos 15:01

Nice. So—[laughs]

Javier Rodriguez 15:50

That's why they got an editor. [laughs]

Cory Banelos 18:15

[laughs] So, you think the constant flow of change and people wanting to help is improving the atmosphere and the knowledge base, but do you think that people just wanting to help or they're actually improving the community, or do you believe that it's possible they're just trying to stroke their own egos and—

Javier Rodriguez 18:32

A little bit of both, you know. There's people out here that I know—I've seen it myself. I mean, I've seen people come in and volunteer, and they feel good about themselves and, like, oh, yeah, I did good. And then that's the first and last time I see them, you know. So, it was more of a benefit—they benefited the area, of course, but it was for their, how should I say, their own self worth. They did this because I gave something back, and I feel good. Now I'm good for a year, you know, type of thing. But then I've seen some people that come here all the time with really no expectation of monetary reimbursement. They just come. So, I've seen both sides, and any kind of help, whether it's to stroke their own ego or to actually do it because they love it, whatever you do, it's going to help area, you know. But I think if I would have to put percentages on it, I would say of all the people that I've seen here, about seventy-five to eighty percent are people that come in because they want to help, you know, because they really feel that they're doing good, and they want to continue doing good—not out of self-satisfaction type of thing. It's more, like, they want to help, and the other percentage is, like, okay, yeah, thank you, see you next year, you know, type of thing. But any help, any kind of volunteers, any kind of help that people are willing to come in, it's gonna benefit. But, yeah.

Cory Banelos 18:51

So, you mentioned that, along these lines, you mentioned that you've been coming here for five years working in the garden. What type of impact do you think the garden has made? And how has the garden—what's the garden to you in Chinatown?

Javier Rodriguez 20:29

Well, that's a—there's gonna be a long-winded answer right there. What the impact I've seen, you know, personally, I've seen is a sense of community, not so much just that people that use the garden on a regular basis or use the garden for food. But the—I mean, I'll just say it. I mean, drug dealers have at some point in time, you know, come up to me and tell me, you know what, there was a guy in the garden after hours, and I told them, you know what, you can't be in there. You don't disrespect the garden, type of thing. So, it's a sense of community. It's a sense of ownership that we're giving the people. You know what I mean? Giving them, you know—this is not a project of CSUMB or a project of this or—it's a project of the people, because the people on the street physically built the garden, you know. So, that kind of gave them a sense of ownership, and some of the people that physically built it are still coming around, you know, talking about, you know, to the service learners or to anyone that

wants to hear it that, you know what, I built this garden. There's pictures of me with hammers and shovels in my hand. I built this garden, you know. And that kind of gets passed along to other people. So, the main thing is a sense of community, because that's what the garden is here to do. I mean, if we wanted just to have a garden to give people food, then we wouldn't have made it a community garden where it's for the community, open to the community for the community to come in. It was—it would be, okay, we're working—what do you want? Vegetables? Here. You know, so we built it on the premise of bringing people together in the garden, working in the garden for mutual benefit. And it's working. It's working. I mean, I've got Girl Scout troops have adopted a bed. I got homeless—well, I wouldn't say homeless. I would say a local resident. He's got a bed. I have a nurse. She's got to a bed. An acupuncturist, an Asian acupuncturist, he has his own practice. He's got a bed. And where are you gonna get these people together in one place to communicate? I mean, you're not. These people are not gonna interact on a regular basis, on a normal basis, out on the street, but yet, the garden has brought them to one area, and they've talked and they've communicated and, you know, might not have been heartfelt communication, but at the very least, they've said hi to each other or something like that. And you're not going to get that anywhere, you know, out in the general public. So, I mean, that's what we're here to do, is provide food, of course, because that's what a garden is for, but also to provide a community, provide a place where people can just leave the streets and sit in the garden and the gazebo, or play in the dirt or whatever and just leave the streets behind for an hour, two hours, as long as they want to be in there. You know, and it gives them peace of mind. And that's what we're there for, you know. I mean, now that the gazebo is completely finished now, I get people sleeping in the gazebo. And, you know, people get upset like, oh, it's time to go. "Aw, man. Can I stay a little longer?" Sorry, you know. I wish I could, but I can't. So, it's that feeling of community, of serenity, that they get in coming into the garden. I mean, that's what we're there—and that's what it ultimately is—it's important to me. I mean, I work for AmeriCorps on a stipend, and the money doesn't keep me coming back. [laughs] I can tell you that right now. It's not the money that keeps me coming back, because if it was the money bringing me back, then, you know, I'd be earning a lot more money, you know. So, I mean, it's the friendships and the community and everything that we've built that keeps me coming back, because, I mean, I was a retail manager earning a hell of a lot more money than I'm earning now. But I've still—like I said, I've done this for five years. So, I mean, it's the good that I know we're doing, and wanting to give back and wanting to help is what keeps me going back. So, that's pretty much what the garden means to me, what I've seen, what it's doing. What I've seen—what has changed? What the garden has changed? I mean, I got so many stories of stuff that I've seen, people have said, stuff that people have communicated to me. But, I mean, the best one to really convey what people feel when they come for the garden is, what it's, like—about two years ago, give or take. There was a gentleman out here sitting in front of that—what used to be the rib place. He got his—it was before they had fenced off the areas. The guy took his backpack and just—he had it sitting on the ground—and ran right by, picked it up, and just kept running. And he started yelling, "Hey, my backpack!" So on and so forth, whatever. So, the guy ran through the—around the garden this way down Lake Alley, and then the guy was going to chase him around that way, and he thought, you know what, if I go around this way I might catch him. So, the guy that got his stuff stolen is, like, I don't know, it's just like something stopped him from coming into the garden. Like, he went up to the—he ran up to the [unclear] full speed, ran to the gate, stopped at the gate, and he's looking, like, thinking, like, should I go through the garden or should I, you know? And it wasn't something that—no one was sitting there stopping him from, you know—I saw it because I heard the yelling. So, I looked, like, what's going on? And I saw him, like—it looked

like he hit a forcefield. He just stopped right at the gate. And he's looking and, like, kind of in his mind doing a shuffle, like, should I? Should I not? Should I? Should I not? And he's, like, screw it. He ran around the garden, you know, instead of running through the garden, he ran around. Ultimately, he lost his backpack, but that's what people have told me that they—when they come to the garden, as soon as they get past that gate, they feel that, like, there's, I don't know, just something there that they just feel more relaxed. And I was, like, oh, yeah, garden. You know, everyone likes flowers or whatever. But that was, like, that kind of really brought it to mind, like, he stopped. Like, I mean, it was like he hit a wall. He, like, stopped and he's, like, looking like a deer in headlights, confused. Like, should I go through the garden? He's, like—he's just, ah, screw it. He ran around the garden, you know, instead of taking that potential violence or whatever into the garden. You know, so that's like a physical representation of what people feel about the garden is, like, yeah, it's a plus on both sides. So, that was, like—that was when I first kind of, like, yeah, I guess there is something here. People feel it—people tell me all the time, "You know, it just feels so nice in here." Like, I'm used to it, so I guess I don't get it, but other people do.

Cory Banelos 28:30

How'd it make you feel that something that you made is giving people such comfort and not wanting to come in there and bring in their violence or any type of those intents in?

Javier Rodriguez 28:44

I mean, I can't say how it makes me feel, but I'm a lot happier now in my general everyday life. So, I know that's a part of it, because, you know, like I said, I don't feel it. I don't consciously feel it. I don't take, you know, mental note, like, oh, I feel different when I come in. It's just—now just being here for so long doing what I'm doing, I'm just happier in general. So, I guess that would—I guess feel good, I guess. I don't know. I mean, like I said, I don't really pay attention too much to it. I just know, in my life, even though, I mean, just got divorced and everything, I'm happy. [laughs] You know what I mean? I'm good. You know, I don't know. I guess that would be the best way I can explain it.

Cory Banelos 29:35

That's a nice explanation. [both laugh] No, it's—lost for words on that one. So, you were mentioning that the rib place possibly coming back, being a family place and what not. What do you feel about a museum being brought into Chinatown, which is primarily currently homeless residents?

Javier Rodriguez 30:09

Well, I think it's good. I mean, ultimately it's gonna—how should I say? Ultimately, it's going to be a good thing, you know. It's gonna have it's, you know—just like the garden had—its growing pains. It's gonna hurt a lot of people, and a lot of people are gonna get hurt. There'll be a lot of bad feelings, whatever. But ultimately, it's going to be a good thing, because it's going to bring a positive flow of either money, people, energy. It's gonna be a good thing. It's a good thing. I mean, and also, I mean, there's a lot of people that don't even know that this was the Chinatown—I mean, the Chinatown in the area. And I think it's important for people in general, but I mean, Californians, or Salinarians or Salinas—whatever you want to call them—to really grasp on to that. I mean, because that is, I mean, the reason they're here is because the railroad came through, and the whole—I mean, if we lose that, then I mean, really, why are we doing those people or ourselves justice of not knowing what—why

we're here. You know what I mean? So, I think it's a good thing. I think, you know, [unclear] right now to oral history museums. So, you know, it's good. I mean, any kind of documentation is good, because I know if there was, you know, a building or what have you that, say, I was conceived in or what have you. I would love to have that archived, you know. Who knows, maybe in the future, we might get another Bill Gates somewhere and, you know, "My parents owned this property." You know, but without having that knowledge, you know, what good is having that person know whatever and not having any kind of visual aids to really help. You know, I'm kind of going in a circle, but yeah, it's good. It's good. I think ultimately, it's going to be—ultimately it's a good thing to document anything that we as people do, because like that old saying, if you don't learn from history, you're bound to repeat it. [laughs] So, yeah, the more we can document, the more we can have and really see where we come from and what we've sacrificed. Well, not me personally, but we as a people, what we've done, and how people have sacrificed, is good to have. You can never have bad history, you know, even though some of history, they go, oh, that was a bad part of it. It wasn't. It was a good part of it, because we learned from it. So, there's—I don't think there's bad history. It's just unsavory history. [laughs] But there's no bad history, because you're gonna learn something from—or someone's gonna learn something from any history as documented. And if you don't document it, you're not going to learn your lessons.

Cory Banelos 33:23

Okay. Do you end up sharing any of the history of your family or Chinatown with your daughter?

Javier Rodriguez 33:34

No. I share with her the last five years of what we've been doing since, not so much what was before, because, I mean, I'm a father. [laughs] You know, I mean, are you gonna tell your daughter, you know, what have you, what you did when you were younger? [laughs] You know what I mean? At the same rate, I mean, she's—I think she's still too young to really comprehend. I mean, if I did mention it to her, she's not going to be able to understand what I'm saying or understand the meanings behind it or the actions behind it. She's not gonna understand, so why do that now? Maybe in the future when she's old enough to, or she is gonna go down those same roads, I can bring this up. You know, I was there. I was young. I was your age before. I was thinking of doing—well, I did those things you're thinking of doing, [laughs] and this is how it affected me, and this is how it affected people. So, maybe then we can—I can open up that part of it. But now, I just want her to see what the good is of us coming down here and really changing things. I mean, a lot of people on the street know her, like, by name. So, she's—yeah, she's good with it. She's good with it. She knows why we're here. She knows what we're doing, so that's good enough for me right now.

Cory Banelos 35:08

So, from the sounds of it, would you be comfortable with her frequenting Chinatown?

Javier Rodriguez 35:12

Yeah, I would love for her to be with me every day. [laughs] You know what I mean? With me. But yeah, I mean, during the summer she's with me four days a week here. So, yeah, I mean, I'm completely fine with her coming down here, frequenting—you know, I mean, half of Dorothy's staff knows her. [laughs] You know what I mean? So, she's been down here quite a bit. I mean, like I said, I've been coming for five years at this point, and about three of those five, she's come with me on a

regular basis during the summer or on vacations or what have you. So, yeah, I have no problem with her coming down here. You know, I'm not gonna let her run roam the streets by herself, you know, even though I know that people on the street will watch out for her and take care of her. But still, I'm a dad. [laughs] That's my baby. You know what I mean? So, but yeah, no problem with her coming down, which is surprising compared to the way I thought it was going to be when I first got assigned here. I was, like, oh, my god. So, that's like I said, it's complete night and day from what it was to what it is. You know, that's a really good example of what it was. I mean, I had misconceptions of what I thought it was going to be. And that was the night part of it. That was the dark parts that I was thinking. Now it's the day part where I see—I mean, I'm cool, and my daughter can come with me anytime she wants.

Cory Banelos 36:40

Okay. I'm not trying to be rude, I just remember you said you need to be done at four. I want to make sure we haven't gotten there yet. Okay.

Javier Rodriguez 36:52

We have some time. [laughs]

Cory Banelos 36:53

Yeah, we've still got some time. So, what do you want to see in the future of Chinatown? What do you want—or, I guess, what do you want Chinatown to be for you in the future, and your family?

Javier Rodriguez 37:13

I mean, I can't say, you know, that I want it to be somewhere I could bring my daughter, because I did that already, you know. What I would like to see is a shift in the amount of homeless that's here, you know. There's reasons, you know, people are homeless or what have you, and there's reasons—and I know there's people on the streets right now that are fighting to get out of this area, or actually move themselves up. But, you know, dealing with them for five years and hearing their stories and, you know, hearing their rants about, oh, I tried to do this, and I just, you know. What I would like to see, you know, for this area which would help and would probably help everywhere, is the services being more readily available. Because there's services out there, don't get me wrong. There's a bunch of services and, you know, homeless shelters or what have you, but from what I've seen, and, you know, talked to people, is there's so many restrictions on, okay, you'll get in sooner than other people if you're female with kids and whatever. If you meet that criteria, you're gonna get moved in. If you're just a single male, you know, and you're homeless, then you know what? You're gonna get put to the back. And just open up those restrictions where people can get the help that they need, and this place could get back to where there's shops open, where there's money coming in, because right now the only money coming in, it's just going in circles. It's not—they're not getting in. There's really not getting any infusion of money from outside of this area, which is what the area needs. It needs money to come in. I mean, that's why some towns don't get any bigger, because their money just stays in the town. You know, everyone works at mom and pop shops, and then they shop at the mom and pop shops, so there's no new money coming in. Only money that comes in is when a truck or whatever comes in and buys something. Then there's new infusion of money, and that's what's happening here. There's no outside influence giving money. You know, yeah, they're getting food. They're getting, you know, donations for Dorothy's or whatever. But that's not reaching the people. It's not getting directly to the people that need it. And if restrictions

on shelters or what have you open up, make it a little wider, a little easier to get in, I can see this place, you know, really—a lot of the unsavory aspects of it would start moving out, because there's not that need. They don't need that escape anymore, because they have a home. They have a place to go to. And that would open up more likelihood of companies or businesses coming in, saying, you know what? This is not too bad now. It might be worthwhile, you know, opening up a business, because, I mean, Main Street's, like, right there. I mean, if you go down any—go down Main Street, from South Main Street to North Main Street, within a block or two of Main Street, there's businesses. We're, like, a block away. [laughs] You know what I mean? Why can't that happen here? You know what I mean? And yeah, I think it's doable. It's possible, but we just gotta restructure how we're dealing with it. But yeah, ultimately, I think I would like to see more businesses open here.

Cory Banelos 41:09

What type of businesses would you like to see open here?

Javier Rodriguez 41:16

Hell, food stands. [laughs] I mean, I work at a garden, so, you know, that would be good for me. But, you know, just any businesses. You know, commercial business, any kind of business, just as long as they're coming in, you know. Right now, I would, you know—hell, I would take warehouse space, you know, just to get them—get that money coming in, and get that, you know, just—I'll take that. I mean, then later on, we can, you know, worry about opening a Subway, you know. [laughs] But right now, let's just get some money in here. Let's get some flow, get some people coming in. You know, like I said, even if it's just warehouse space, you know, would be money coming in. But ultimately, I want that rib place open. [laughs] I like ribs. You can't go wrong with ribs. Nice pork ribs—the best.

Cory Banelos 42:16

I gotta agree with you there, man. I love some ribs. [laughs]

Javier Rodriguez 42:20

[laughs] I tell you, you can't go wrong with pork ribs. And you got a garden with fresh vegetables right there. Ribs—yeah, can't go wrong. So, yeah, pork ribs, man. Smoked, two- or three-hour smoke, and it's falling off the bone. Ah, I'm getting hungry.

Cory Banelos 42:44

[laughs] Have you ever thought of trying to open up your own rib place or food stand in Chinatown?

Javier Rodriguez 42:56

Yeah, I mean, I thought about it. I mean, I even thought about selling, you know, some of the produce that we grow there, you know, in the garden. But ultimately it goes against what we want to do. We want to give the food away. We want to make sure people in the area have nutritious, fresh organic food, and by going around selling it, it's kind of defeating the purpose of why we're there. You know what I mean? Which I know we could we could probably do. We can—I can maximize the yield in those areas, but then it ceases to become a community garden, and it starts becoming a farm or ranch or whatever, so it would completely defeat the purpose of why it was built. So, but I thought about it. I think

we did good, but ultimately, it's like I said, it's gonna completely change the dynamic of what we're doing, why we're there. So, no, I don't think it would be a good thing.

Cory Banelos 43:58

Okay, but what about you as an individual, as opposed to the people in control of the garden? Have you thought of personally trying to open up a business, like, in the spot where it used to be a rib place that you're talking about, just down the street?

Javier Rodriguez 44:14

Yeah, actually, one of my dreams [laughs] is, you know, if I ever—you know, everyone's dream is win the lottery. People think I'm crazy, but, you know, I would buy up this block. Totally buy it up. You know, I'd buy it up in a heartbeat and really build stuff that's needed. You know, I would build, I wouldn't say low income housing, because low income housing is not going to work. You got to do no income housing to get these people off the streets. And at the same time, you know, open up a restaurant, you know, get some people coming in and, you know, put in a laundromat, you know, stuff like that that's needed, that's gonna bring money. And, you know, call me crazy, but I would do it as a co-op type of thing where the homeless are the ones running the laundromat. And, of course, I would get a cut, because it's my money. But, you know, give them the opportunity to do that. Give them an opportunity to get themselves out of where they're at. You know, call me crazy, but that's my—if I ever win the lottery, I'd buy up this block in a heartbeat. And if it was doable, if they were willing to sell—yeah, I would totally, you know, open up a laundromat, coffee shop, rib place, something where they're gonna, you know, get themselves going. And, of course, I'll be making my money. I get my cut. But, you know, give them an opportunity. And that was—yeah, that's my thing. But I gotta win the lottery first, because it ain't gonna happen without it. [laughs]

Cory Banelos 46:08

Where do you think that nature of wanting to help out Chinatown and be a part of Chinatown comes from for you?

Javier Rodriguez 46:14

I don't know. I think it's always—I've always been the type of person that, I don't know, gives. I mean, I'm the person that people would always—since I was younger. I mean, since I was in high school. I would get friends coming in, oh, you know, I'm having so much trouble at home and this and that. I've always been that person. It's not something I intended. I don't know if it's personality or the fact that I actively listen. I don't know. It's just—I've always been that person that people come to. Even my family, it's, like, hey, my wife kicked me out for the night, you know, can I come to your house? And I'll say, "Yeah. I gotta room right there. Hurry up, let's go." You know, and that's just been me. So, I don't know where it comes from. It's just something that's always been there.

Cory Banelos 47:08

I see. Is there anything you'd like to tell us about yourself as the last question? Because we're hitting upon four pretty soon.

Javier Rodriguez 47:23

That's—no, I'm just, like, doing what I'm doing. I mean, like I said, it's not the money. I just like what I'm doing, so long as I can keep doing that and be happy, then I'm good.

Cory Banelos 47:46

All right. Thanks for your time.

Javier Rodriguez 47:47

Yeah, no problem.