10-11-2012

Interview with Simon Salinas

Simon Salinas

California State University, Monterey Bay

CSUMB Oral History & Community Memory Archive
Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Simon Salinas
Interviewer: Guadalupe Casco
Date of Interview: October 11, 2012
Duration of Interview: 01:40:30

Guadalupe Casco 00:08
It's Thursday, October 11, 2012, and we are here at District 3 Office in Salinas, interviewing, Mr. Simon Salinas. My name is Guadalupe Casco and my partner is Nursal. Okay, so we'd like to start off by requesting permission to record your interview.

Simon Salinas 00:30
Fine, you have my permission.

Guadalupe Casco 00:32
Okay, thank you. So, I would like to start off by asking about your family background. So, during your pre-interview, you mentioned that your parents were migrant workers.

Simon Salinas 00:45
Right.

Guadalupe Casco 00:46
So, can you elaborate a little bit on your family's background?

Simon Salinas 00:49
Certainly. My parents came from the state of Mexico called San Luis Potosí, a little town called Cerritos. That's where the first half of the family was born—seven members of the family. Then they came over. My dad came over as a Bracero in the 40s, 1940s. He was that program that came in when they were importing Mexican labor while the US was engaged in World War II. So, that was his first years here, even though he had been back in the 1920s with my grandfather. So, they came over and settled there in Texas, harvested crops picking cotton. There were seven initially. It ended—we ended up being a large family, eight brothers and four sisters. And so, we harvested crops there and my dad was—never went to school. He only had—he tells us a story that he only had about three hours of school—in southern Texas. My grandpa took him when he was 10, around 1920. Took him and his younger brother, and my dad came from a large family also. I believe there were, like, 14 in his family. But he takes him to school there and drops him off. There was no bilingual education in southern Texas. Drops him off and says, "Okay, I'll come back at noon to bring you your lunch," and he sat him down. Well, he came back at noon, and they were still sitting there. And so, he got mad, sort of, with the school district and the teacher that didn't speak Spanish with his son. So, he took him out. And that was the last school he had. But he did something important. He taught himself to read and write to the point that when he went back to the little village, Cerritos, in Mexico, he was sort of, like, the de facto mayor, the de facto municipal judge. He knew how to read. He knew how to—he was a conflict resolution manager there for the community. So, and then he finally came back, and they started working the crops there in Texas, picking cotton around the state of Texas all the way up to Oklahoma, till 1965. That's when we

decided to emigrate, or migrate, over to the state of California, and we ended up in Monterey County. They said there was money to be made, and so we ended up coming over here to harvest the crops, whether it was lettuce, apples, cucumbers, strawberries. You know, they planted it, we picked it. And that's how the family made money. So, our period would be from around April, March, we worked till November. The first rains came here to California, we'd go back to our home base in Texas near the Mexican border. And so that was our cycle. Every year, we'd come back, work. Now part of it—growing up people ask, "Was it tough?" I said, "Well, it was probably tough." We were poor. We struggled to make enough to feed the family and make it to the next cycle, the next year. But one of the things we had was we traveled as a family, with uncles and cousins. So, we always had family around us. So, that made us, I think, able to cope with some of the things. We didn't think about being poor, like, you know, your vacations. I mean, we thought we were always moving around. We were camping out in the open fields. And so that was our life. We did that till I was 18 when—then I got a scholarship to go to college. And that's where—when I left, you know, the cycle and the migrant stream of traveling back and forth, harvesting crops.

Guadalupe Casco 03:53
So, up until age 18, you kept moving from California to Texas?

Simon Salinas 03:59
Right.

Guadalupe Casco 04:00
And can you elaborate more on the labor conditions that you experienced and your dad experienced?

Simon Salinas 04:06
Yeah, well, like, in Texas, the living conditions were pretty substandard. I mean, we used to live in boxcars, you know, train cars that get derailed. They get left over there. Sometimes there was no housing, no regular housing. So, we would just live in those boxcars. And so, you'd get into those boxcars, and you would partition. One family would stay in one corner, another family in another corner. I mean, our furniture were the tomato crates. We had no table or chairs or anything like that. It was just—this is how it was. My mom also tells us a story that sometimes when housing was not available, we even lived in horse stalls. So, what she did, she had to go clean out the horse stall, and that's where we lived. And so, in order to bathe us or whatever, she had to bring us out into the sunlight, to see if we needed to shower or to be cleaned. And so, there was, you know, pretty bad living conditions. And we were migrants. I mean, and a lot of times when I was younger and we migrated in the state of Texas, I didn't like to go to schools. Frankly, because again, you're moving—just when you're going to make friends, you got to move four weeks, six weeks. So, we tended to stick together just with my brothers, my sisters, and that was it, or the other people traveling with us. And, you know, sometimes what was, from our perspective, we think about the food and our language and everything, is, like, they would ask us to eat the free lunches. Well, I don't like sugar beans. I don't like sugar in my food. I like salt. I like jalapenos. I like spicy food. And so, when they gave us that food I—and they would punish you, if you didn't eat it—I would just put it all in the—I'd open the [unclear], and shove the sugar beans in there and say I was done. And so, you know, you grow up as a kid too. I mean, you always figure when you're playing a sport, they never pick you because they don't know you. And so, you always felt isolated.

Sometimes we got to the point where we'd tell our parents, "Look, we don't want to go to school. Let us work out on the fields. Let us pick cotton." And so, we used to do that. And we used to hide. They'd sent out—sometimes they'd sent out school inspectors to go out into the fields and, you know, we had our [unclear]. They would start whistling, "Here comes inspectors." And we'd all hide, they'd never find us. And so, we wouldn't go to school during those months when we were traveling out there. And then we'd go back home. Now, when we went back home, if you understand the valley in Texas, the Rio Grande Valley—it's called Rio Grande—it's most Latinos, it's Mexican American. And so there, we were in a system where 90% were Mexican American students. But the problem back in the 60s was that you would get punished for speaking Spanish. And I mean, I recall still the day when they would punish you, you know, with a board. They'd have a board, a paddle. It was called a paddle. And if you got caught speaking Spanish, you would be punished, which, later on when I became an elementary school teacher, I understood how damaging it is for students, right, to be punished for speaking the language of their parents. The language at home was Spanish. That was my first language. And yet somehow the school system didn't see that 90 to 95% of the student population there was Mexican, Mexican American. And those that understand the history. The two-mile border didn't, you know—we were here. My cousins were across the border. We were on this side. We had family on both sides. We listened to radio that was coming from Mexican side, versus Spanish speaking radio on this side. So, it was just—you understood what that—what is going on here. I mean, the group that is the dominant group here is a minority now that the border chains. And so we would get punished for speaking our language. We would—it was very, very, very conservative, very regimented, the education that was given there. And so you started questioning what's going on, where's the history books here? Why nothing related to the contributions of my community, of our community to this country? And again, we were citizens. We were born here. And yet somehow we were all seen as immigrants. We were all seen as foreigners in our own country, and that you grew up with, and I think that was part of what for me later on to get involved, whether it was in MEChA., Movimiento Chicano Estudiantil de Aztlán, or LALSA lawyer student association, or whatever it was, to just say, we need to understand that diversity means you give everybody a seat at the table to be able to discuss issues that are important to my community. But that was part of the upbringing and education. And again, I look back, we also had some of this discriminatory practices. You're always going to find your angels along your way, where you get good teachers that care—really cared about your education. So, I remember my fifth-grade teacher, for example, Mrs. Jenks. She was the one that really showed me to appreciate reading, to understand that reading is so fundamental to your future. And so, what [unclear] I tell the students, I have a little trophy still at home that she gave me at the end of the year, because she said, "This year, I want you folks to read"—students— "read books just for enjoying. You're not going to have to write me a report. Just write the title, the author, the copyright date, et cetera, just put it in a list. And so that year I read about 150 books, and I just developed, and I tell kids, you know, that gave me the power to go anywhere in the world, without leaving the labor camp, without leaving the camper in our truck. And so that really helped me later on. And she gave me that little trophy and a dictionary that I still have, that I carry. It's falling apart now. But it taught me, I mean, you got to learn the language. And you've got to be able to understand what's—with how the educational system works. So, you got to compete and all that, even though we come from more of a communal type of community, where we share things, where we weren't that competitive. But in the school system now, it's different, and you have to compete. You have to get the grades in order to be, you know, recognized or moved on. But that fifth-grade teacher really helped me. And then in high school, I had another counselor that I guess saw the potential that I

had, that encouraged me to apply to go to college. Otherwise, my goal back in the early 70s was just to graduate. None of my brothers or sisters had graduated, and I'm fourth from the bottom. So, it means about eight older brothers and sisters only went through third grade, fourth grade, sixth grade. Got out and started working in the fields. But, you know, that helped me be able to stay in there and then graduate later on when I had another counselor that said, apply for school, and we think that's the best way you can give yourself choices that you might not have. But do it in a way—I think that they said, what your parents do is important. Providing field labor, being agricultural workers is important. When they valued that, I think they value also me as the son of migrant farmworkers. And that was important. And that's why now I also chair a committee. We're helping childcare centers. There's one in King City, down south where the children have seen pictures of their mom cutting lettuce or working the strawberry fields. They have pictures there in the childcare center. So, they understand that they're valued, and that they're important parts of that community, something that unfortunately we didn't see a lot growing up in the 60s and 70s. It was, like, they made us feel like somehow we were coming to do something bad in the community, when we were coming to harvest the crops then. But, you know, slowly, I think that's changing. And that's part of, you know, what education helped at least me understand, you know, how systems work and how they operate, how you get in there. And that's why I got into politics to try to, you know, not complain, but also be part of a solution that could tell everybody, look, if you're serious about it, we're going to fight hard to make sure you have the opportunity to realize your potential.

Guadalupe Casco 11:11
So, you've mentioned that you had a strong sense of community while living at labor camps. Can you elaborate a little bit on that community, and perhaps what was your role as a child in that community?

Simon Salinas 11:26
Yeah, well, you know, living in labor camps, I think you develop a close knit. We're going to be there for eight or nine months. Usually, there's brothers or sisters, uncles and other families that live. Some camps were like, you know, 30 families, 40 families. I mean, this is your network, sort of, because, you know, you have your parties, all the little kids from the from the camp are gonna come to your party. And all it was, was, you know, mom would get one of those boxes and cook up a cake and ice cream. And so that's your—that was your entertainment. Somebody—if you had a quinceañera, well, there wasn't money to go rent a hall, like now some families that have more resources can do. So, that was going to be it. You'd have your radio, your record player, play songs. People would dance and try to have a good time, entertain themselves on [unclear] basically. And so that was the network. If we were lucky, like, back in the '68, '69 timeframe, if somebody had a black and white TV, that's where everybody would go, right, to watch wrestling at night on Friday nights, or, you know, that was the place where you would go. So, you learn how to share resources. I mean, if somebody needed some money, everybody would pitch in to help that family that needed some help. You would help them make it through the year. Work wasn't—there wasn't too much work available. Everybody would pitch in. So, I was usually sometimes—I was, since I was a kid, sometimes we had, you know, was eight, nine, and we wanted work. So, we'd have some—when our parents were out working in the field, we'd find someone, "Eh, you have any work for us?" I sort of was in charge of getting my little crew of brothers and sisters to go pick up pipes or something. And so even then, I guess I was a supervisor, supervising my little brothers and cousins, and we'd go do some work for a couple of bucks. And so that was the

upbringing. I mean, you know, it was, like I said, it was a tough life. But at the end, you know, you heard music. You heard people telling stories. You heard the elders. And so that's how we grew up. They'd go up and set up a bonfire outside. And when the men and the women would come in early, we'd hear their stories. And as little kids, we would just sit around and listen, as long as they'd let us. And then we'd go out and play around the open fields. And so that's how we would do it. And then once we went back home, then, you know, people would try to buy their home, and that was [unclear]. You'd go back to the other families that didn't move—your brothers and sisters that stayed in their location. You were certainly waiting and anxious to get back to see them again, after being away for seven, eight months.

Guadalupe Casco 13:51
So, what kind of stories would you share, or would they share to—

Simon Salinas 13:55
Well, you know, some of that, if you're Mexicano, Mexican American, we heard the stories of La Llorona. I mean, we loved to hear that story, especially around Halloween, and about the lady that lost her children and dropped them, and now she's wailing away. And we used to live by a railroad track. So, sometimes we'd hear the La Llorona, and we [unclear] train of some sort. But that's how we grew up. They would tell us a story. My dad would sit us down and tell us stories that, I don't know if part of it was fact or fiction, but he says, "Oh, I rode with [unclear], and I have scar here to prove it." I said, "Dad, you probably fell over the gate when you were crossing the border there." There was no river someplace. There was just a gate. But he would tell us those stories about, you know, our Mexican roots and the history of Mexico. And then stories about, you know, how they moved and how they migrated over there. And so, we'd ask him, for example, "Tell us about our grandfather." He says, "Well, we don't know. He was caught in the revolution, and when he was a kid, so somebody adopted him and raised him." And so, some of those stories were important to us, and then we'd have to, you know, certainly growing up we were in two cultures. We'd hear the English stories, books that we'd read at school, and then at home, the stories that our parents would tell about their growing up and how they were very poor also in Mexico. But my dad tells us that he also grew up tending to some of the most, you know, famous families back then in 19, maybe 1930, 40s. Some were ambassadors, and he was a waiter. And they hired him to do it. My mom tells us a story when, you know, she was, like, I don't know, maybe 17, 18 years old, and she had to go to and stay over at a house where she would take care of children for a doctor. And they would pay, like, one peso a day. And, you know, how she would have to save like 30 days just to buy some fabric to make herself a dress. And she tells us the stories of, you know, growing up, she only had, like, I think she says she only had three months of schooling in her little village, because they had to teach her and they could only afford to pay him three months, the whole village there. But she learned how to read and write with those three months, and to us, when my son was doing a family tree and interviewing family members, she said, because he asked her, "What was what your most enjoyable—what do you remember most about growing up and your youth in Mexico?" And she said, "Those three months of schooling." She said, "That was the best time I had, because it really showed me—" And she always wanted to be a designer, clothes designer, and she ended up learning how to, you know, design shirts for us, and sew stuff for us, because, I mean, when money was tight, all she could do was afford to buy some fabrics and cloth, and then, you know, make our shirts and work on pants or whatever. But she'd learned how to use those patterns that she'd buy. And eventually, she ended up making quinceañera dresses and other dresses for a family that would

pay her a couple of bucks. And so, but that was her upbringing, and a lot of talent. But sometimes, when you don't have those opportunities—I mean, they ended up just working the fields and doing the best they could to raise, you know, 12 children.

Guadalupe Casco 16:54
So, you mentioned that both your grandfather and your father were part of the Bracero program. And I know that a lot of the workers that were part of the Bracero program never got their pension at the end. So, maybe can you elaborate on how that affected your family?

Simon Salinas 17:16
Yeah. My dad came over and they brought him to Kansas, over in the Midwest. And he says he came and they were working, but the cotton was real bad. Now again, my family is sort of [unclear] of what happened with a lot of families. Some of his younger brothers were citizens, because they had been born in Texas. The others had been born in Mexico. So, my dad says they brought him to Texas and was working there, but it was real bad. So, he sort of escaped. He escaped from the program that they had there in [unclear]. And he says he escaped, and it was real cold, like a February, a bad blizzard, and he says, "And I didn't have a place to stay." And this is—again, remember, this is, like, the 30s, the 20s, 30s, then the 40s when there was more discrimination, more blatant discrimination. And so, he said that in the restaurants, they would have their "No Mexicans or dogs allowed." And so, what he'd have to do, he said, "I was there and it was cold. It was freezing. I didn't know a place to go. And I had sort of left the camp where they had us." And so, he said, luckily, some Native American Indians picked him up. And they said, "Hey, hombre, come here. They're not going to rent to you here. But we will take you to the reservation. Come with us. And then tomorrow, we'll take you to the bus station, so that you can go find your brother." And so, my dad said, "I would have frozen to death. I mean, I don't know what to do." He says, "They took me to a reservation, and the next day, they took me to the bus station. I went and I found my brother." And so, he stayed there. There was better work in Texas at that time. And so, he did that only for a year, I think. And then after that, he decided to get his documentation. So, in 1954, he got his documentation, brought the family over. And from then, from that year forward, they stayed here. They were legal residents now. But he tells us back in 1920, "We just walked through. They didn't even ask us for anything. We just crossed the Rio Grande there." And it was no problem. In fact, my sisters tell me, my older sisters, that there were sometimes when they'd be harvesting, you know, working at tomatoes or whatever, and then immigration would come. And they'd pick up my dad, one of my brothers, and they would [unclear]. And they said, okay, they'd catch them, round them up and go deport them. [unclear] they'd find them in the morning. By the afternoon they were home for dinner, you know, because they just crossed the border again. And it was—the immigration laws weren't that enforced, because certainly they needed the labor on this side. So, I mean, they'd tighten up when they didn't need that many workers, and then just sort of looked the other way to let workers come in. But then in '54, that's when they finally—he got his document. He says, "Look—" He asked my older brothers, "Do you want to stay in Mexico? Or do you want to go to the US?" And they all agreed let's go to the US. So, he brought them over and then that's when my older sister, the one that's older than me was born here. I was born here, and then younger brothers—younger brother and sister were born here and then another younger brother born in California. And so, after '53, '54, we were here. They were stayed—they stayed here permanently now in the US.

Guadalupe Casco 20:08
Has your dad talked much about what it meant for him to see Mexican Americans being excluded from mainstream culture? Like, you said in the restaurants, they said no Mexicans, no dogs, but what it meant for him to have Native Americans give him a—

Simon Salinas 20:27
Well, yeah, well, I think he certainly understood the concept, I guess, that even with the Native Americans, that they were going to help those that were—I mean, certainly they understood what it felt to be mistreated. They understood what it meant to be discriminated. They had [unclear] and sometimes our color of the skin was the same. So, they probably saw somebody that reflected them also, somebody of a group that was being discriminated against. And so, he certainly appreciated it, and from then on I think developed an appreciation for, you know, minority groups and how they were treated here. But he saw [unclear], and yet, somehow they said, we have to survive. I mean, he understood how sometimes the police could come in and right away make assumptions that, oh, it's a minority person that's guilty of something. He tells us one story when he says they were at the labor camp. They had come back from work, and then this sheriffs come in, into the labor camp, and they were—they went and arrested this Mexican farmer who was there. And everybody said, "Well, why are you arresting him?" And they said, "Well, because the Anglo farmer says he stole some stoves from him." And they said, "But he didn't. He's been here with us." And they said, "Well, you better go because, I mean, unfortunately, the sheriff here doesn't care whether you're innocent or not. You will be guilty. And so, he said, everybody was trying to—poor guy, he had no money for an attorney or anything. They arrested him. And yet, they all knew that he wasn't guilty of anything. So, it gave you a sense of, you know, the injustices that were there and how eventually, you know, there was more and more activism. And I remember us back in '68, when I was about 10 years old. When we first heard of Chavez coming, Cesar Chavez coming into the Rio Grande Valley to try to organize farmworkers. And there was a fear. There was fear that he could be killed, shot, because of the antagonism towards him by the ag community, by those that didn't want to see change. But, I mean, there was 10,000 farmworkers at that gathering in San Juan, there in Texas, and people were starting to get more involved. People were starting to question the system. I mean, certainly the Vietnam war was going on, and the Chicano movement was happening, and throughout the Southwest, we had Cesar Chavez here, Dolores Huerta. We had Corky Gonzales in Denver. We had Reies Tijerina in New Mexico. We had Gutiérrez, José Angel Gutiérrez, organizing young people in schools, and we need to organize. The Raza Unida Party was coming to the fore also, and so a lot of activism, a lot more questioning of the system and trying to, you know, either ask for answers or become part of the solution, which is, at the end, we needed more [unclear] to get an education and be able to understand how the system worked here.

Guadalupe Casco 23:18
You mentioned also that your father escaped the Bracero program. So, has he told you, like, why he chose to escape? And was that common? Did a lot of people do that?

Simon Salinas 23:32
It was probably not too common, because you had a contract. They brought you from Mexico, and then they—you had to work with that contractor for a certain period of time. And in order to get that 10% that

they were deducting, you had to go back to Mexico. My dad escaped because he had brothers—they were citizens. So, he had somewhere to go. And so that—I guess it wasn't too common to escape. Others certainly probably did also, you know, especially when you were told, we're bringing you to work, where he said, where we ended up, the crop was no good. We weren't making any money. And so, he said, I was just going to waste my time there. So, that's why when he escaped and he found a lot, better fields where he went to with his brother, and then he ended up, you know, buying his own truck and bringing people around to harvest the cotton fields. But he did it for one year. He didn't do it too long, because he probably figured, you know, this doesn't give me a lot of money. Eventually, he wanted to bring the family here to the States.

Guadalupe Casco 24:28
So after, if he did it for one year, what did he do afterwards?

Simon Salinas 24:33
Afterwards, that's when he decided to—he decided to go back to Mexico, stayed there for a couple of years. And then he decided to come to—permanent residency. That was 1953, '54. He brought the whole family over, and then he started working here, but now he was a legal resident. He wasn't dependent on the Bracero program, or he wasn't an undocumented worker. He now had legal papers, documentation.

Guadalupe Casco 24:58
Did they settle here in this area, the Monterey area? Like, permanently settled?

Simon Salinas 25:03
Permanently in Texas. That was home base. And again, between '54 and—10 years, '54, '55 to '65, it was Texas, just harvesting crops around there. And see what's funny, and for a lot of them, you know, his younger brothers were US citizens. Yet when they went back to Mexico, they all went over there. And he says, like, in 19 [unclear] or something, there was a time when the US threatened to seal the border. So, he asked everybody that was a Mexican descendant, if you want to leave, you better leave now because we're going to close the border. And so that's when a lot of US citizens were also sent out, because his younger brothers and sisters were citizens. But yet the family, his mom and dad, my grandfather and grandmother, were Mexican nationals, and they wanted not to be stuck here in the US. They wanted to go back then. So, that's when thousands and thousands of Mexicans were sort of deported. But you were also deporting US citizens. And so, and then when they did that—and he said he loved being in Mexico, because he, like I said, he developed a little store. He had a [unclear], he had some [unclear], where he harvested corn and all that. But then at some point, because he'd been here and because his other brothers were moving over here, they decided to come over and settle in Texas. And then in '64, '65, that's when we came to Monterey County to harvest, you know, the crops here.

Guadalupe Casco 26:22
So, before we move on to the next subject, is there any story or experience that your parents faced that you would like for us to know, to remember? Because I know that a lot of the Mexican Americans that came here, their voices were very oppressed. So, is there something that you would like to say about that?

Simon Salinas 26:50
Well, I think one of the things that the young generation, those that never got to experience what that generation experienced, was that they were probably, you know, like, they say, The Greatest Generation—Brokaw wrote that book. This was our greatest generation. They came in here, they worked hard, under very difficult conditions. They had no health insurance. They had to rely on themselves. Like I said, we're communal, so [unclear]. My dad was almost like a doctor, because my primos, everybody would come to him. "I have a stomach ache. Can you give me some yerba?" "Can you do the [unclear] in our neighborhoods?" And so, they had to struggle a lot. I mean, I remember some of the—maybe the images that you want to get out of your mind, was seeing my mom with so much pain because we didn't have dental insurance. And so, they had to wait when it was kind of late, and you see your, you know, your mom on the floor writhing in pain and all that. And you see how people have to wait or figure out how to take care of us. And so, I think we were trying to probably do a lot of preventive care by—because we worked in the field, we exercised quite a bit. But and then you try to eat, you know, [unclear], a lot of healthy, nutritious food that kept us healthy. But what they did, I think, is to be recognized. They did a lot to build the railroad tracks in the southwest. They came to work in the plants here when the US was involved in World War I and World War II. They developed the southwest. You see all this agriculture develop because of the work and the labor and the sweat of this generation that came here. The women, my mom, I said, I sometimes think about how sometimes we complain too quick. I mean, she had to raise twelve kids. She had to make 10 dozen tortillas every morning. So, my mom had to get up at four, 4:30 in the morning. By six, when we went to work, she was ready to go to work. She didn't stay home. She went to work also. And then she'd come back. We'd wash our hands, but maybe go watch TV or something. She'd have to roll up her sleeves and get food ready for dinner. And yet through that, I mean, you know, my dad had to be able to feed twelve children, so very fiscally conservative when it came to go spend money. Had to be very frugal. I mean, I don't remember ever being, you know, not having food. There was a staple. There was tortillas, huevos, papas, beans. You know, the staples were always there. So, I think they were able to figure out how to be able to provide for [unclear]. These were—again, my parents and many, many counts of parents didn't have a lot of education. They just, through their networks, they were able to be examples to others. And again, in the southwest, you see a lot of that—maybe not resignation, but the willingness that we will survive. We'll find a way to survive, and because they come from, you know, tough upbringings also in Mexico, there was always a way to deal with adversity, and then that's what that generation did. I mean, they never had the opportunities that we had, and yet somehow they were able to continue working, to work and survive, and but I think doing it in a way that they were proud—a proud community. They weren't going to back down, and it shows when it was time to go to war. [unclear] were ready to go to war, whether it was World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam. And I think when they started coming back, they started to say, "Wait a minute. You know, we're dying for this country, yet in our own country, we're not looked at as equal partners or that that constitution supports and should be equal for everybody. And so, they—I think through that they taught us about hard work. I mean, my dad said, hey, we're going to give them—they pay us an honest day's work. If they pay, we'll give them an honest day's work. And, you know, well, we want more. I said, you know, this is what we'll do. He would never—I mean, if the employer didn't want to treat him with that respect, then we'll go find somebody else. But I knew that in his mind, he had to work. I mean, so a lot of times, you say, well, why do they endure those conditions? Because they have to provide for their family. And so that's why later on when, you know, and I got to work with Chavez, and I got to see the farm worker movement,

and my sisters were out there. We had that sense, we're not going to take it anymore. And, you know, we walked off the field. We joined the strikes in the 70s to say, look, we want better working conditions. We will work with you. We'll negotiate with you, but we're not going to put up with it. And we're going to demand that, you know, that there's certain standards any human being ought to be able to expect from an employer.

Guadalupe Casco 31:07
So, one last question about family background. What type of home remedies did your family use and pass down to your generation?

Simon Salinas 31:19
There's, you know, like, [unclear], my mom could identify them—[unclear] or yerba buena. Little mixtures of those things, how to do it. And even my mom tells us that in—to deal with arthritis, for example, in Mexico, she said they would take the marijuana plants and roll them up with alcohol, and put them on their knees for arthritis. She said those were there. I mean, those were something that they would use. I mean, it wasn't like somebody would come in with a medicinal [unclear] or anything, you know. [laughs] That's what they used. Here is more of that, like, yerba buena, and using different teas that she would go by at the mercado. And so, all those things were part of—and even a [unclear], you would think where they would take an egg, break it and then put it under your bed, and that would take care of the evil eye [unclear]. And I remember, I mean, they would do it. And then women would bring children [unclear]. And so, my mom knew how to do the rezos and with some type of—and only she knows the type of plant that she would use to sort of do the blessing on the child and then break the eggs and put them under. And there was a [unclear]. They knew how to do that. And so that was part of it. And then the curanderos. I remember those that you would go to and, you know, some of them, you know, had studied how to do, sort of, massaging and all that for your aches and soreness and all that, but they could also tell—one time when I was 10 I broke [unclear]. I fell down. I was playing Tarzan. My brother and sister were playing Tarzan and Jane, and I fell down and broke my hand. And we were getting ready to leave, and my dad said, "Oh no." We were getting ready to go north. And so, my sister says, "He broke his hand." And dad was mad, because he said, "Don't be jumping! You're gonna break your hand." [laughs] And so I did. And so, my mom says, "Well, let's go to the curandero." I mean, because we don't have money to go to a hospital. So, go to a curandero and he looks at the bone sticking out. He says, "I can't. This is—he needs to go get a cast. I can't help him." So, then they took me to Mexico, across the border. It was about 20 minutes. So, I had to wait with pain, just holding my hand. They took me to Mexico and then there the doc says, "Yeah, let's adjust the bone. Put the cast on." And so, you know, that's how we had to adjust. First you try your home remedy—curanderos, whatever you could do. And then only in the last resort would you go and spend, you know, your hard-earned dollars to get medical treatments.

Guadalupe Casco 33:40
Yeah. So, you mentioned that you had to learn how to navigate between the culture at home and the culture you received in public schools. Can you elaborate on how that was for you as a child, and then how you managed to live with that?

Simon Salinas 34:08
I think for me, it was great. I could take the best of both worlds. And even in our music, I loved hearing Norteñas—Little Joe, Ramón Ayala, Los Tigres del Norte, whatever it was. Los Panchos—all those mariachi bands from Mexico. And we used to go to see a lot of the Mexican actors that, you know, the drive-in. 50 cents a car load. So, my dad would pack up everybody in one truck. So, we grew up with all, you know, Mil Máscaras, El Santo, you know, and all those cowboy movies in Spanish. Then we'd turn around and we'd come and look at the Lone Ranger, F Troop, and hearing the shows that were starting to come out on black and white TV. And so, I'd—Spanish songs, English songs. Mexican food—tamales, pozole, menudo, tortillas, whatever, nopales. Hamburgers, pizzas, and ice cream, and sundaes. So, you'd go back and forth on either one, and I mean so I was very comfortable. And then I grew up having to be bilingual, because my dad wouldn't let us watch TV unless we translated for him. And, you know, had two channels, and it was in English. So, he says, "If you don't translate, you can't watch TV." "Aw, man." So, I had to—okay, so I'd translate and sometimes I'd summarize quickly because I wanted to listen. And so, we grew up in that. And then you understood the, like, the culture. My mom and dad—initially my dad, "Speak English, speak English. You have to learn the language of this country." But then when he couldn't understand because we were starting to become more fluent. "Eh, I can't understand. You speak Spanish only, so that I can [laughs] understand." But it was—I remember back, I mean, many probably my age remember when the Beatles first were coming to America. And everyone was watching The Ed Sullivan Show, and this is '62, I don't know, '63. But here, like, my dad, "Oh, no, no, that's the devil's music. You can't be watching that." And, "Yes, we are, Dad. We're gonna watch it." And so, and then you'd grow up with that—him thinking his history and our history, and we [unclear]. But I think [unclear] by forcing me to be there and translating, that helped me later on when I became a bilingual teacher. I didn't lose my Spanish. I kept that skill and the fluency, and so that [unclear]. So, it was always two cultures. But you also started in history books, starting, well, I'm reading the American culture, the American history. What about the Mexican or the Mexican American history? And so, you didn't see a lot of that in your history books that you were reading. You didn't see a lot of that in the media. You didn't see—I mean, in 60s, all we saw were, like, there were—Mexicans were maids. They were the Frito Bandito. They were the bandits. They were sleeping under a cactus. I said, "Hell, I wish we could sleep. We're out there working hard. We can't afford to sleep." And so that was the images that you would see through the media and all that stuff. But that was—I mean, and then later on, I grew up hearing, you know, [unclear]. You know, there's Michael Jackson, the Temptations, and then some of the other bands, Los Lobos and all this stuff. So, to me, I think I felt more enriched because I could fit in both cultures well. And I could understand that, and so I think I became more open to diversity, more open to, you know, being mindful that, you know, groups bring their own music, their own food. And when I ended up teaching at Hartnell, I'd love to hear the histories of the Vietnamese students that came here and their stories. The Sikhs that were here from India, from Pakistan, from all those countries, and then from Central America. You know, everybody has a story to tell, and so that was, I think, because we were in a bilingual, bicultural world, we understood that and we could work. I mean, now some, sometimes get—you know, but you also see the conflicts that it can create. I mean, sometimes—if you're from Mexico, you're from Mexico. You understand your history. You come here, you understand. And if you're American, well, you're an Anglo, you're from here, you understand your history. But we were caught in sort of the middle. I mean, we had roots, and proud of our Mexican roots. But yet, when we were here, we were the—to the Mexicans. We were the pochos—those that can't speak Spanish. I never had that problem, because I could communicate well with them.

So, they could—they always thought I was Mexican. Well, no, I was born here. I'm an American citizen. And so, we would try to be sort of in the middle of both groups, of both cultures, to try to make sure that we understand we have the same roots here. We have the same history, same traditions. But it's unfortunate that for some that don't look at their history and understand it, they sort of didn't think somehow that they—or maybe they thought they were better than somebody else because of for cultural reasons or, you know, language reasons or whatever.

Guadalupe Casco 38:45
You mentioned that being here in Monterey and growing up in two cultures, it made you more open minded to being in a society that's multicultural. So, what were your experiences in Chinatown, and what—do have any memorable moment that you'd like to share?

Simon Salinas 39:09
Chinatown for us was mostly for weekends. Since we lived out in labor camps, we never had a chance to come too much into town. And so, Chinatown to me was most mostly, like, my older brothers that were older. They would come to Chinatown. They used to have some Mexican bars there. Some Mexican bands would come and play music, so that was like a center for them where they would come. There were some old bars that are no longer here. There was Pancho's Village. Mariano's Club is here for those that know Salinas. Those have been, probably, long standing bars and nightclubs where people would go listen to music and, you know, their entertainment. Other than that Chinatown for us was just Chinatown, and we thought it was mostly where the Chinese hang out, and they do have their church there and other—but it also became, like, the rundown part of where the homeless would go and live, and a lot of drug dealing was going on. And so eventually that sort of became more of the perception of Chinatown, where, you know, you had, you know, you had the homeless, you had churches maybe coming in to take care of the homeless folks that were strung out. And then eventually, the Mexican nightclubs moved out of the area, and it became more isolated. The only reason I remember that too is because I have family that lived right across there. There's a housing authority right there on Calle Cebu near Chinatown. So, we used to come visit my uncles who lived there and cousins. But it was like, you know, we knew it was there, but it was never too much mixing or a lot of events that would bring the Chinese American community and the Mexican American community. Not a lot of interaction back in the 60s and 70s. I think you see more of it now, is the children of those folks now are more involved in mainstream organizations. And now I go there once in a while for their celebrations. We go and they invite us as elected officials, but also as members of the Mexican American community here.

Guadalupe Casco 41:03
So, you mentioned that you have an uncle that used to live in Chinatown.

Simon Salinas 41:05
Right.

Guadalupe Casco 41:06
And so, can you tell us about your uncle, and as a child, what it was like to go and see the street and see where your uncle lived? And what did your uncle do?

Simon Salinas 41:17
My uncle was a farmworker also. And he was [unclear], and he now moved back to Texas to where we used to live. So, he was one of my uncles here, and then I had another uncle in Greenfield, and they were the uncles that we would come to see in the big city. You know, we were out in the outlying areas here in the small communities of Las Lomas, Prunedale, [unclear]. But when we came to see him here, for us, I mean, when we came to see him, we were almost in awe of such a nice apartment where they lived. They had a two-story apartment, and they were housing authorities. They were low income. But it was nice. It was, like, decent housing. And so, you know, I would kid them. I said, "You complain about your housing. This is like the Hilton compared to where we live"—in some of the labor camps and in some of the more substandard housing. So, we would come and visit them. And to us, it was like coming to see the family again. So, if you hadn't seen them for a while, you know, I'm sure my dad loved to sit down and, you know, when you're hearing their conversations. How's the harvest going this year? How's this—como estas las fresas? When are you headed back? And, you know, how are the kids? And so, it would allow us to connect. When we were in, like, the labor camps, we were all there. So, there were other uncles. And like that uncle had lived with us when we were in Watsonville, in—called the Red Camp. And so, you know, we would stay together and connect. And then sometimes we would time the departure to travel together back to Texas. But I remember the first time when we came here, there was about, I don't know, maybe, like, 10 cars that were traveling caravan. So, we would come all the way from Texas through San Bernardino, Riverside. And I remember, there was a lot of orange orchards there in that area that are now gone, but we would just pull over, and my mom would—they would build a fire and my mom would cook chorizo con huevo and tortillas. I mean, for us as kids, man, that was, like, wow, we were out here. But that was how we would travel. I mean, that was the cheapest way. I mean, we couldn't afford to rent a motel or a hotel. So, [unclear] it was mostly using the rest stops. You would see a lot of families. We weren't the only ones. There were hundreds and thousands of families that would use a rest camp to sleep and then continue on their path back home or up here to harvest crops.

Guadalupe Casco 43:32
So, what did it look like? What did Chinatown look like—the area that your uncle lived in? What did it look like?

Simon Salinas 43:38
It looked like, you know—there, it was just typical apartments. I mean, there was some apartments, grass in the front. And they had, you know, parking lot. Not—I don't think they had the amenities that we try to put into apartment complexes now. So, it was just, you know, their apartments, parking, maybe a laundromat where they could wash dishes—wash their clothes. And so, it was very, very standard. But I thought they were decent. They were clean. And so, then they would see Chinatown, but I think there was more of a perception that it was dangerous to go to Chinatown, that, you know, that there was drug dealing, that there was prostitution. Eventually that was the perception of Chinatown. And even to now, we're trying to figure out how do we deal with the homeless issues? How do we deal with, you know, a renaissance there in that area? And it's never easy because, I mean, it's tough. Right now, I'm working on a 10-year homeless master plan to figure out what do we need to do to lower the number of homeless folks and, you know, how do we deal with, you know, revitalizing that. I work with Dorothy's Kitchen that's there in Chinatown, to be able to deal with those folks. And so

eventually, we hope that with enough resources, and if there's federal help, that we can do something for those families too, and those homeless individuals, that we can get them into, you know, decent housing and then transition them there to full-time, gainful employment.

Guadalupe Casco 45:06
What other things were around your uncle's house?

Simon Salinas 45:09
There used to be another, like, a mobile home camp that they closed, and I had some cousins that lived there. So, here you had, you had the apartments. Right next door there was, like, a mobile home park, that they closed. And that became almost like one of the big camps during the strikes, where, you know, people lived and, you know, they would gather there. And so that's the last I remember that, because again, because we didn't come here often. And as kids, we would come once in a while. The only time we'd come also to Salinas was when my mom would save the S&H Green Stamps. Those were stamps back in the 60s. We would get stamps when you'd go buy food, and you'd put them in a book. And then you can get toys, or get a stove or something for the number of books that you saved. So, I remember, we wanted to come because that's when she could buy us a toy. And she would get us those Tonka trucks. If you look back, they were called Tonka trucks, and so she could, you know, she would save, like, 20 books throughout the year, and she could use that to buy us toys. And so that's the only time we remember coming to Salinas, to trade in those books for toys or whatever else she had to buy. And other than that, I mean, we wouldn't come here often. We wouldn't come here often because we lived, you know, in the Watsonville area. Our shopping was done in Watsonville instead of coming to Salinas, because we always felt like [unclear] Santa Cruz, instead of being part of Monterey County and then Pajaro was, you know, very small. A lot of farmworker community. That's where we grew up.

Guadalupe Casco 46:44
So, what, when you—you said your mom would come here to get your toys? What did that look like? And what did that mean to you?

Simon Salinas 46:54
Well, to us, it was like, God, I mean, this was like Christmas. We never were expecting any gifts or a lot of stuff. So, for us when she would commit to getting us something, it's like, I mean, because my younger brother is about two years old, whatever I got, he had to get, because sibling [unclear]. And then for my sister, it was maybe getting her a doll, or something. And to us, that was like, wow, that was great. It was, like, man, you valued that piece, that toy, because you know this is all you're going to get the whole year probably. So, you would take care of it. You would value it, and I know that sometimes growing up also—like, for example, I saved, I don't know, like 30 bucks to get my first bicycle. Must have been like in seventh grade. And I saved the money and I bought it brand new here at JC Penney, or wherever I got it. Fixed it up, and then I took it with me to Texas. But then I left it over there because we couldn't be carrying too much stuff. I left it down and then they stole it. [laughs] They stole our sofas and stuff that we had left at the house. So, I mean, you're devastated. Here you saved for a whole summer to buy yourself a bike, and now it's gone. It was stolen. But so, we really appreciated it. I mean, to us, we appreciated every toy that our parents could give to us. And so those are the ones that I remember. That one, and then a little—one of those little red wagons, you know, that you pull. A little

red wagon. And we got that not because it was a toy. Initially, it was because our dad needed it for us to pull the sacks of cucumbers. He [unclear] was okay, I'll buy you this [unclear]. It's to pull the cucumber bags out of the fields, and then maybe you can use it after work. So, we used that little wagon train and that red wagon for many years. Like, those are the only memories I have of toys. Other than that, we made our own. You know, if you know how to make those guns with a little board and you get a clothes pin. And then you can shoot those rubber bands, like you're [laughs] making a weapon. So, those were our toys that I remember growing up. So, that's how you dealt with the lack of, you know, money to buy fancy toys.

Guadalupe Casco 48:52
So, did you help your family in the agricultural—in their—did you help your family harvest?

Simon Salinas 49:02
I helped them since I was, like, six or seven. I mean, we started everybody that could get out there was going to do their part to help the family. So, even when I was six or seven, we'd go pick the cotton and lay it up in little mounds of cotton so that my mom or my brother or my dad could pick it up. Then when we'd get over here I started working in the strawberries also. And, I don't know, what, like, nine, 10, we started picking by—they wouldn't pay you by the hour. I guess they couldn't, but they would pay you by the box. So, I would—as many boxes as I picked they'd pay me, so pretty soon I would sometimes make more than my brothers and sisters that were getting paid by the hour, because I was a fast picker. And then people would help me. They knew I was getting paid by the crate, so they would leave me mounds of little strawberries so I could fill up my box fast. And I would work after school also. I would help the—when we were with some Japanese growers, they'd let me weed the strawberry fields and, I mean, I put in three or four hours after work. And I could do that every day. So yeah, I mean, I remember since I was like six or seven working. Working the fields and then when we started sharecropping strawberries, you know, we had to do irrigation, fertilizing, everything that needed to be done. And so, you know, my dad taught us. I mean, we were at work from five [unclear] six. We had to drive sometimes from Watsonville area. And I'd be the driver when I was 15, 16. So, get up at, like, five in the morning, get on the road by six, be at the field out here in Salinas by 6:30, seven. As soon as we could—the sun came out—we'd start harvesting, picking strawberries. And so, we did that for about 20 years, I think. 15, 20 years. And it was back breaking. It was tough. I mean, you'd have to sometimes, you know, you got to work weekends too—Saturday, Sunday—because the strawberry, if it's hot, they ripen, you got to harvest them. And so, but everybody did that. My sisters were there, my younger brothers, my mom, my dad. Sometimes we'd even hire other folks to help us, you know, harvest the strawberries. But yeah, I remember from as long as I can remember, we were all pitching in. And then I felt guilty when I left to go to Claremont, where I went to school, because you'd think, I mean, around October, around this time, it starts getting cold. And you'd go out and the leaves are wet, and you got to put your hands out there, and man, you can feel when it got to the 30s. Boy, it was cold. And you'd have to—the longer we stood there looking, I don't want to do this, the colder it got. So, just bend over and work hard, and maybe your body will start feeling a little warmer. But so, when I got to, like—man, this is great. It's warm here, and I can go into the library, or the classrooms, or the cafeteria—all you can eat. Yes, I like this. But you sort of thought back about your parents. They're still out there working the field. So, I'd come back [unclear] and still harvest, help them. Even when I—I never walked the line

for my BA at Claremont. It was around end of May, so I said, I'm—just give me my diploma. I'm going home to help the family out.

Guadalupe Casco 51:54
So, going back to Chinatown. You said that your uncle lived in this low-income housing? How did he—how was he able to apply to live there?

Simon Salinas 52:09
Well, that's what we would ask, because he was doing better. I mean, getting in there was important. And maybe because he was lower income. I think because there was like eight of us at that time. And when you add it together, maybe we were just over the limit that we could qualify. Now, we finally qualified for housing authority in Castroville. And I tell the story when we finally qualified for housing authority, and there was eight of us, so they give us a big two-story. I think it was, like, a three bedroom. And I tell the story when we moved in there, man, we didn't even want to touch the walls, because they were so clean. And it took us a while. I think it took us, like, two weeks to go up to the second story. Because it was so huge—the living room and the kitchen. And we only—we had the one TV. So, as I said, we were all there. I mean, this was beautiful, beautiful building. We thought it was, you know, the first time that we felt part of a community that we wouldn't have to be, you know, embarrassed that we lived in the houses that were falling apart, without houses and all that. And so that was a good feeling. And that's why I've always been a supporter of providing affordable housing to families, because I know when you're a young kid and you're in high school or something, they drop you off. And, you know, the houses that look like they're, you know, meant for Halloween instead of for living, because they're falling apart. And so that was a good feeling. We qualified for [unclear]. They were very strict, and I think they should be, so that they make sure that others that come out. So, once you get—make over the income level, then another family move. We move out, somebody else moves in. But it's—but that's why we would ask our uncles. And then we would ask our uncles, how do we get into sharecropping, because sharecropping paid a little better, and so they finally got us into where they were working. And that's where we started making a little more money. You know, you could afford a nicer car to be able to, you know, move the family around. But yeah, we—that's why I said I was envious when we'd come and visit my uncle, because we thought they were living the high life there. And we were still out in the labor camps and, you know, very, very poor housing.

Guadalupe Casco 54:09
You also mentioned your older brother would tell you about the Pancho's Village and stuff like that. Did you ever visit those places?

Simon Salinas 54:17
Later on, I did go, before, like, Pancho's, before it got torn down. I went in there. It was packed. I mean, a lot of dancing, a lot of, you know, good life for the folks. And then I knew about it because my brother used to play in a band—my older brother, he passed away. He passed away a couple years ago at 72. But he played in a band. He played the accordion, the organ. Anyhow, they'd play in conjuntos. They'd play quinceañeras. They'd go play weddings. They'd go play the little bars in Watsonville and here in Salinas. So, they came to those places a lot more than we do and, you know, like what you'll see there are a lot of, like, single men that come over to them, and it's their recreation. That's where they'd on the

weekends. They'd spend their time going to those little bars out there. But as I was growing up, I mean, they started broadening against the two cultures, right. And those sort of, like, lounges, cantinas. It was more Mexican conjunto type of music. We wanted to go also to, like, the City Lights. That was a big lounge here, and that was more English music.

Guadalupe Casco 55:17
In Salinas?

Simon Salinas 55:17
In Salinas, yeah. They had other places—the [unclear]. That was there before. It's gone now. That almost in those areas also.

Guadalupe Casco 55:24
So, was that in Chinatown?

Simon Salinas 55:25
That was about a couple of blocks from Chinatown.

Guadalupe Casco 55:27
Okay.

Simon Salinas 55:28
And so that was the [unclear]. Pancho's was a couple of blocks from Chinatown. But the railroad connects it. It goes through there. And so those were the areas, so. We didn't—by then, I mean, it's in high school. I mean, by then in high school, then as a senior, I'm more into the English music and going to that. But eventually, like in Watsonville, they had an armory hall where they would bring big name Mexican bands that we would go to. And so even our English speaking, Mexican American friends [unclear]. Some of the cool people went to the Mexican dances and dance cumbias and all that stuff. So, we would see them also trying to understand our culture. And so, it was interesting, because again, as I said, I was almost in the middle. We had the native-born Mexican Americans here, the Mexicanos that were coming in. And because we were bilingual, and because we were from here, we always tried to say, look, we're all [unclear]. Let's not have this fights, because somehow you feel because you're born here, you're better than the immigrant Mexican that's here. And so, you know, we tried to do that. When I was in a senior, we formed the Mexican American youth organization. Again, that was as a response that we didn't want to be in the traditional student body, and those clubs that were there. We wanted our own. And so, we formed it. And we, you know, the first year, we sold a bunch of tostadas to raise money. We raised a lot of money to go to Disneyland trip, to pay to go to Berkeley, to go visit colleges in Santa Cruz and other places. And so, you know, I worked on forming that and, you know, hopefully there's probably another organization that's an offshoot of that 40 years later.

Guadalupe Casco 55:38
What did Pancho's—

Simon Salinas 55:55
Village.

Guadalupe Casco 56:52
—Village look like? What did those places look like?

Simon Salinas 57:11
I mean, they—like your typical bars. I mean, they weren't very fancy. They were nice places. They have their stage where the bands would play. They had their lounge where they would sell their alcohol or liquor. And by the time you get a little older, I mean, it wasn't, like, you want to be seen there. [laughs] You didn't go there, because if you were seen there, it was, like, man, what are you doing there? They weren't seen as, like, for the upper folks to go there. It was a place where, you know, you got to be careful because there could be fights. You got to be careful if you drink too much, they could beat you up or something. So, it wasn't the most relaxing place. But, you know, when you're young, we just did it because our brothers did it. We were going to go there too and check it out. And so, we did some of that. I didn't do that as much as others. I mean, like I said, by the time I was growing up, and we were in the mid-70s, we were going over to Monterey. They had nightclubs out there. And, you know, here in Salinas, like I said, they were developing some nightclubs more for the Mexican American youth and the young people, versus some of the ones that are mostly traditional for the Mexican population.

Guadalupe Casco 58:24
So, when you were going to high school, did you and your friends ever go to Chinatown for anything? Or was—

Simon Salinas 58:32
We might have [unclear] by, but you were almost hesitant, I mean, that you might get busted or something would—that there would be fights or—It was known for being, you know, a tough area. It wasn't known for being, like, you just go there and it's safe. I mean, it was developing a reputation that, you know, there was a lot of prostitution there, and there was a lot of, you know, dealing maybe, drug dealing. And but because at the end of Chinatown, that's where they had the two or three Mexican lounges. So, that's where you would go. But I might have maybe gone once in there, but never again. It was kind of a little dangerous. And you'd say, I don't want to get busted here. Your parents hear, oh, you're going to Chinatown [laughs]. So, I don't think that was really an attraction for at least my generation when we were growing up. We just knew it was there. And maybe we'd do it just because as a rite of passage maybe, to go there and say, oh yeah, I've been there. I've been to Pancho's Village [Guadalupe laughs], or I've been to those bars there in Chinatown. And so that was, that's where—and they became more attractive, I guess, like the Rodeo would come in. And then you'd have even, like, some of the [unclear] would come from out of the area to make money, because, you know, that's when a lot of the cowboys would come in too. So, they would frequent Chinatown and go to our Chinatown. But again, it was mostly for recreation. Somebody wanted to go cruise by. But it wasn't, like, a destination that you wanted to be there too long.

Guadalupe Casco 1:00:04
So, did Chinatown look similar to what it looks like now?

Simon Salinas 1:00:08
Yeah, it looks similar—the buildings, the structures are there. And I don't know if there's maybe made much change in the demographics. I think there might be more Latinos that are homeless that live there. I haven't been there for a while now. In terms of the demographics, or how much they're, like—I know Dorothy's Kitchen is there now. And then they do I think a wonderful job trying to provide meals for the homeless. Like I said, the Mexican bars are gone. I don't think they're there anymore. And so those went, because again, the reputation that, you know, it was a tough place, and you know, law enforcement was going to be focusing on that. And so, they ended up closing. And I don't think there's any businesses there now. It's mostly social services, mostly those types of, you know, businesses that are there providing those type of services to the homeless population. I know that the Church now on the other hand—not the church, but the—we got the Confucius Church still does events there. And they have, that's the other strip, not where the Chinatown, the main strip is, but the other one. There's—that one is—you can, if you go look at it it's cleaner. It's because the Chinese American—I mean, they still use that. It's still actively used as a church, and they do community events there. That's still pretty vibrant and active.

Guadalupe Casco 1:01:32
So, you previously mentioned being the co-chair of MEChA for your chapter, and being part of other, I think it's safe to say, Chicano activist organizations. So, why did you choose to become both an advocate and an activist in your community?

Simon Salinas 1:01:51
Well, I think it goes back to my parents' upbringing. They taught me history from the beginning. So, I knew my Mexican roots, my Mexican history. So, I don't think I was confused, like some that don't understand, that don't take the time to understand what their parents came from. And so, I think that in itself gives you a sense of confidence of who you are. Nobody's going to put your community down, because you have the facts. You can you can tell them, you know, what [unclear], the Mayan culture. What, you know, great literary writers had come. My dad loved to read. And so, you knew that our community had the potential as anybody else to write the Nobel Peace Prize winning literature, and scientists, and so I learned that part. Well, then I came here and then you learn the other part. But I always question why is it that a system like this doesn't cover our community in the history books? Why is it that the media doesn't portray us in a more positive role? And why is it that we get punished going to school for speaking our first language? And then why is it that we're working hard, and we're not making enough to be able to afford the thing that others that don't have the color of my skin able to afford? And why is it that in my community, there's a railroad track that divided the Anglo community from the Mexican community? And the streets on this side were dirt. The streets on that side were paved. And why is it that people making the decisions that affect my life, my family's life, don't reflect the color of my skin? Questions like that I think surface, and then you start going through high school, and that's why, you know, I said, we formed our own organization. Well, we want something that we feel comfortable. I don't want to go to a traditional group here that I don't understand what they're talking about. I don't understand, you know, the things they do. I mean, maybe my way of looking at things is different. And if I'm not going to be listened to, then I don't want to participate in it. So, even in high school, and then I had been active in Texas. We had walked out in ninth grade. There was a lot of activism back in like '67, '68. That's my first time when we decided to walk out of classes. And it was

2000 mostly Mexican men, but there was a lot of fear. What happens if you walk out? So, we walked out and they—we were expelled from school for a while, but then we had teachers that would come and teach us at the plaza, so we wouldn't fall behind. And all because we were asking for [unclear]. We speak Spanish, our language, and then, you know, not to force us to cut our hair too short. Over there, you had to cut your hair real short. Your ear had to show. And you had a certain dress code, very uniform, very traditional. So, some of those things. And then in high school—and when I got to college, again, the Chicano movement was still very strong. So, we had to do a demonstration. So, we walked out of classes to say, don't get rid of the Chicano Study Center. And so that was part of my activism still working. We had participated in the strikes of 1970 with the UFW, United Farmworkers, to, you know, indicate our willingness to negotiate contracts for better working conditions, better pay. So, all that was part of my activism. And then in law school too, I participated in La Raza Lawyers, La Raza Law Student Association, looking at ways to help other law students get into school, helping them with financial aid, making sure that we continue to provide advocates for other communities throughout the country.

Guadalupe Casco 1:05:12
So, with that, what does Chicanismo mean for you?

Simon Salinas 1:05:15
What Chicanismo mean to me when we were growing up, that this is who we are. We're not going to let anybody define us. We're not going to let a system tell us who we are. If we choose to call ourselves Chicanos, that's who we are. We're proud of that. And that's a term to us that was rooted in our Mexican traditions, and our Mexican roots and history. And Chicano was a term—I think also a term of rebellion. We were angry. We were angry of what was happening. We were angry of feeling hopeless at times. That we didn't—that we saw the injustice, we saw the treatment, and somehow we felt hopeless. Nobody was around to help us. So, the Chicano movement was strong with us, and that's how a lot of us got our first taste of feeling the power in numbers [unclear] together to change the system. And I think that helped carry us through, because when we went through college, there were other Chicanos. So, we shared a history. And that's why I tell folks, you got to understand, I mean, we were from here. So, some would say, well, you're Mexican. No, we're not. And we're American? Yes, we're American, born here, but we have Mex—so, Chicano to us is who we are. We are, you know, Americans of Mexican descent. We are who we are, and we have our history. We have our traditions. We have a blending of cultures, a blending of languages. I mean, some of us spoke Spanglish, which some people would put down. I said, that's a form of communication. You go to Texas, I mean, we'll be speaking Spanish at one moment, [unclear] espanol. We'll mix back and forth, and we're comfortable. We can communicate. So, who is to say that that's not a language or a way to communicate? And so for us that—Chicano was a term that we chose to be, and we were proud of it and, you know, there was, like, groups that were Chicano and other groups that wanted to promote that. And then, you know, then we had I Am Joaquin. If you've read the poem by, you know—

Guadalupe Casco 1:06:56
It's powerful.

Simon Salinas 1:06:57
—yeah, by Corky Gonzales. Talks about our history. We have others that—you've seen the posters for 160 years of Chicano history, and so to us that was a way that if you—we understand, we're trying to understand. We understand diversity. So, why don't you take the time to understand us, and understand what we're about and why our agenda is similar to others' agenda, but this is what's going to be important for us. And this is what we're going to advocate for, and this is what we're going to prepare ourselves for. And, you know, so it's gone through an evolution. I mean, later on, we also realized that if you're a Mexicano, you can't force them to be Chicano. They're Mexicano. But I think if they study the Chicano history, I say, well, we agree with that. There's some truth to that. And so, we ought to be able to work together on that. And if you're Anglo, if you're not Chicano, then you study it. And then you say, well, you know, what they were fighting for makes sense. They weren't asking for anything that was revolutionary or radical. Like, some will say, "Oh, MEChA, they wanted to be separate." Well, that's nonsense. Nobody wanted to be separate. We're here. We're Americans. This is our country. And so, when you look back at the history, I mean, you know, our Mexican American community, the Chicano community has paid dearly, in blood and, you know, folks that never came back from Vietnam, from—they're in, you know, Afghanistan right now. They're in Iraq. And so that's part of saying, this is who we are now. First of all, we accept we're all Americans, yes. And we're going to fight to protect this country. But at the end, you should study and understand who we are, just like we understand who you are, who the colonists were, the history of that. And then I think they would better understand, like, when we talk about the 2000-line boundary between the US and Mexico. And it's like when they say they're going to get rid of Spanish. Really? [laughs] You can't get rid of it. I mean, if you're smart, you'll learn Spanish, because I think you're going to have to serve bilingual populations here. And there's nothing wrong with that. I mean, it's, you know, topsy-turvy when they try to say, lose your Spanish when you're a kid in elementary, but learn it when you get to high school. So, I think it will be trilingual, if we [unclear] Europe and some countries. So, those were some of the things that I think we wanted to make sure that we were going to say, this is who we are, this is what we believe is good for our community. And, you know, we're going to do everything we can to keep opportunities open for those that came after us.

Guadalupe Casco 1:09:10
You also mentioned that you worked with UFW. So, can you tell us about what it was like working with Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez?

Simon Salinas 1:09:19
The only work we had was when we were teenagers. I mean, the first—there was a big general strike called around '71, '72. And, you know, I had seen Cesar. I had read about him and heard about him, and seen him when I was 10 years old in Texas. So, when we're here, we're living in a camp. We're picking strawberries and, you know, I'm about 14, 15. I speak English, so I had to sort of be the translator for the adults, for my parents and others that were there. And so, I remember when they called the general strike. So, we tell the grower, Japanese grower, we want to form a union, and we want to negotiate. So, I'm translating, and I'm kind of tense because, you know, they're talking contractual terms that I don't understand. And so, the grower says, "Okay, well, as long as 50% of you want to negotiate, we'll negotiate." So, I mean, I didn't know anything about contract negotiation. I'm 14 years old. My parents don't speak English. So, I said, "So, we want to do that." And he says, "Okay,

well, then we'll negotiate." And so, I said, "Okay, more than 50 [unclear]." So, we put the flags that—we were just following [unclear] that we heard on the radio or something. If you're going to organize, just get yourselves a flag and stand guard. And so, me and my brother would put—stand guard there, and with the UFW flags, and we're saying, "We need direction. What do we do now?" I mean, we were going to negotiate and we want somebody to help us, but it just grew. I mean, it just got out of—and everybody, you know, thousands of people went out on strike. I mean, there was so much pent energy there. And I think it was, like, [unclear]. And so, the UFW only had so many organizers, so many contractors to send out that that afternoon, we talked to the grower, and he just said, "Look, we don't want—I don't want you here anymore. Vacate your housing." I said, "But you told us that—" He says, "Yeah, but I don't want you here." Because not everybody went out. Only about half of us went out on strike. And so, we were told to leave. And we had to leave. Now we didn't know where to go. So, my dad—we had to go find a place to live. And that was the extent of it. After that, you know, some companies were successful. Others, you know, they went back to work because they couldn't get a contract. And so that was the extent of it. Then after that we just moved around, became sharecroppers. And so, but, like, my uncle that I came to visit by Chinatown, he was big into the UFW. He was, you know—their company went union. My uncle in Greenfield were also union. They went union down there and were big supporters. And so, but that was the extent of it. Then, you know, you move on. And then I would—I didn't have contact other than supporting, like, the great boycotts, going to picket [unclear] with Dolores Huerta, going to different activities in college also supporting the farmworker movement. And then when I came back, I saw Cesar again—Chavez. And we were—in that picture that you see up there, we were handing out the first pension checks to the retired farmworkers here at the armory. So, he asked me to join them and to be able to give out retirement checks to farmworkers that were now in their 60s, 70s, under the Robert F. Kennedy, I think, pension plans. So, that was nice to see that result of all those years of organizing. So, I've been with—I worked with them on different issues off and on. So, that was how I worked with them, you know, throughout the years, and been supportive of them. I mean, I go back and I tell the stories about how we used to be out there. I said, think about it. I mean, I'm with my sisters, my brothers were out there working hard, and there's no toilets. Where do—at least us guys, we can go find a car or something. But what about a woman? And what do—really, what do they do? And if there's no water, what do you do? And so, I think those things, people have to [unclear] that those things are changing. I mean, it's still hard breaking work. But now, I mean, if you go out there, they have to have shade. If it gets too hot, you got to put shade for the farmworkers. They have to provide water, and they have to clean toilets. And I said, it's not so much also for the workers, but I said you gotta keep clean fields out there, because now with E. coli and all this stuff. And so, you know, I've been working with the Ag. We got to keep it clean now. We got to make sure that they have water to clean their hands. And so, I think now it's an evolution of that. But before, if you didn't have water, too bad. It would get hot. I remember when we're a kid—and Texas gets hotter than here. I mean, you'd faint. I mean, because it was so hot, you were dehydrated. So, I remember my dad would always have us carry some lemons with us. Always have a lemon to suck on, if you start feeling faint and you start feeling dehydrated. So, it's been—that was our, you know, our part of working there. You know, there were times with one grower—and it had nothing to do with the union or anything. It was just that we had a bad grower that was, you know, a jerk. And he gave my sisters a hard time. And then I'm with my mom and my two sisters, and we're working hard. And I know we had to work hard because we had to—you know, the season is only so long. You got to make enough money to pay your rent, buy food, and save something for the next year. And I guess he

was giving my sisters a hard time. And so, my sisters got mad. They grabbed the—[unclear] little carts for the bush berries. My sister got mad and threw them at the boss. "Here, we quit!" And so, then my mom says, "You know, your sisters are walking out." [laughs] I said, "Why? We can't work out. We need to work." [laughs] So, but they told me and they were—and he was being, you know, very abusive with how he treated workers. So, I said, "Okay, then. Let's get the hell out of here." We left and we went to, you know, find work somewhere else. But so, you know, you think about—there's workers that sometimes say, "Well, everybody should go out." Well, but, you know, they have to think about their family. They got little children at home. They got to feed them. So, we left. I mean, we were able to leave, but I told my sister, "Damn, you guys are more radical than I am." [laughs] I would have maybe tolerated more, but they said hell no. And so, we took off. We left the field. We said we aren't going to take it.

Guadalupe Casco 1:15:09
So, can you tell us more about that day where you were translating for contract negotiation? And then that afternoon, you said the Japanese owner told your family to get out of the camp. Can you tell us about that day? What was that day like for you?

Simon Salinas 1:15:27
Well, it was devastating. I mean, because I thought for—we felt good. We went on strike and, you know, we're going to do something. We're going to win this. We're going to be able to help to negotiate a contract for the workers. But again, we weren't trained. We didn't have the training. And to me, I mean, I was nervous, because I had to translate. I didn't know what it meant to, you know, put something down, or I didn't know what wages, benefits, and working conditions was. And so, when they told us to leave them, I said, "But you told us that we could negotiate something." And you just felt like, you know, you felt let down. And you didn't know where to go. I mean, again, it was so big. I mean, this whole valley was up in strikes everywhere. Hundreds of people, thousands walking out and asking for direction. And, you know, that goes back to, you know, coordination also. You have to have good coordination to be able to sustain something and have trained people. And for us, I mean, for me, it was just the emotion. I want to be part of this movement, and we want to do it. And sort of—but I think even the older folks said, well, it's time to leave. If somebody's not going to respect us for standing up for what we think is right and at least negotiate something, then we probably don't want to work here anymore. But we also knew that, you know, that's our season. And, you know, the strawberry season is only so long. So, I think we were able to go and find somebody else that needed workers. So, we went—we were able to find work. But it was at that point, it was like, you just felt, now what? I mean, you know, we thought we could win this, and we wanted to. I mean, I think [unclear] different had we negotiated something. They would have said that that was a success. But in the end, I think it helped us also grow. To say, look, we can stand up for—it might not be a victory at that point. But it'll teach us that we have the ability, and we have the courage to stand up and say, look, we need to talk about these issues. We're not going to ignore them anymore. And so, I think for my dad, I mean, for me, [unclear] for my dad to be able to do that, and my mom and my older brothers and family members. I don't know what went through their head, but I'm sure they were very concerned to—now what do we do? But they didn't question it. They said, okay, let's go. You know, they tell us to get out, we're going to get out. We're going to go somewhere else.

Guadalupe Casco 1:17:44
So, where did your family go that night?

Simon Salinas 1:17:46
That night I think we went to some relatives. There were some relatives that, you know, put us up, and then I think we were able to find—you know, back then, growers needed workers. So, it wasn't hard. One grower told you no. Well, we'll go work with somebody else. And a lot of them would offer you housing. So, I think we found another Japanese grower of strawberries who said, "Yeah, if you want to come, I've got housing for you." And so, it was better housing. So, we went there and started working. And then later on, it started changing. Initially, when we got here, they would provide housing, and then later on, you found your own rental. And then you just went and found, you know, where there was better work. So, they—I think they also knew if they didn't treat us well, we'll go find somewhere else. When [unclear] labor, they're going to try to, you know, keep you and, you know, hopefully not treat you as bad because then you'll go to somebody else. And if you're documented, we've got papers. So, you know, we're not at your mercy. We can go look for work somewhere else. So, I think that gave us at least that opportunity, but it was tough. I mean, I don't think my dad had ever been on a strike before or had, you know, been, you know, kicked out of a job site. I think, you know, I was just more nervous. I guess I was relieved to not have to be the negotiator. When you're 16—I'm still in school, right. But I still remember that I still don't know where we were. But me and my brother were standing in front of the ranch there on [unclear] Road, and traffic going by and cars waving flags, and we're standing—yes, we're standing tall here with the union. We're standing on the union. And then we're gone. [laughs] Leave, get out of here. So, again, that's part of our experience, part of our life. And so, you just learn to appreciate it and, you know, when people think about those—it's a lot of sacrifice for people that have to go on strike. And so, I don't—you know, why you want everybody to participate [unclear] also the pain in those that can't. Because sometimes—in this one, it was some family members who wanted to participate, others didn't. They're saying, "Nah, I don't want to go. I need the job. I need the money. I can't afford to get fired. I need to work." And so, you deal with [unclear]. Well, you know, really are we going to get any [unclear] better? They'll just do like this next year. They'll just kick us out or fire us for being with the union.

Guadalupe Casco 1:20:05
So, after they kicked your family out, what was the union's role in perhaps, like, any follow up with your family and the union? Or was your family the only family that got kicked out?

Simon Salinas 1:20:22
No, about half of the families—15 families. And most of them were my uncles. But this is my uncle that ended up in Calle Cebu. We got kicked out of there, so everybody had to scramble, go find someplace to live. And so, but, you know, everybody found somewhere to land. And so that's why my uncle, when he moved over here, I think they continued with the union. And like, if you were in a big company that had contract, then, you know, there was organizers. There was people who organized. I think what happened with us was that so many people came after small little ranches. And the union, I don't think had enough organizers to say, okay, this is what we're going to do. This is what our rights are, as people that have decided we're going on strike. Well, we didn't know that. You know, they didn't have enough lawyers probably to go advise us. And so, we just left, and I don't even know where we landed.

We went somewhere. We must have landed somewhere. I'll have to ask my mom, because that's [laughs] just—all I remember in my mind, I don't know, was translating, when we said we're going on strike. I remember standing out there with my brother with the UFW flag. And then I remember when they told us get out of the camp. And so, it's like almost like a blur of what happened. And so that's—and that was just one year. I mean, I think afterwards, you know, it continued for a while. So, but I mean, we've always been, you know, supporters, with, you know, getting people their, you know, decent treatment and all that.

Nursal Matsu 1:21:50
I actually have a question. I'm very proud of your history, and it looks like you got great education from your family. What do you think about the education that Chicanos, Chicanas are getting in Salinas? Do you think they're getting the proper education about their own history? Do they know [unclear] to their community?

Simon Salinas 1:22:11
I don't. I think they should have more, you know, Mexican immigrant Chicano history for kids to understand. I think that's part of the whole gang violence out here, the gang mentality. You got Sureños, the south, Norteños from the north killing each other. Red and blue. And, I mean, don't they understand, you're killing your brother. You're killing your sister. If you understood your history, you wouldn't do that. You would be informed. I mean, I think it's out of ignorance that they're killing each other. And yet, you know, we don't have that. We don't have—you know, now it gets so bogged down with just testing, testing, testing, that you forget to develop the confidence in children. That's why, like, I tell the little children, I said, I want them to [unclear] their parent who's a farmworker. Be proud of that. And nobody, I mean, whenever I would tell my kids when I started teaching sixth grade, "Look, you ought to thank all those people that are out there." Every day in the mornings, at six in the morning, you see floods of cars going out there. Somebody has to do it now, so understand it. And so, I think if we did a better job, we'd maybe have less of this tension between kids. It's, like, you know, like a little civil war going on here. And, you know, sometimes you ask them, why are you—? That's my territory. Do you own this? You are renters. It's not even your house. It's not even your block and you're—so, I think that's all part of it. I mean, that's what I tell when—I always felt like trying to bring groups together, right, and [unclear]. And let's talk about each other. Maybe it's the poverty. Maybe it's something else that is creating that hatred, because somebody's exploiting it, right? And those people that are the dealers that make the money out of these poor kids and get locked into the gang lifestyle. But so, I think the school districts can do a better job, in terms of trying to always teach history so that kids understand. I mean, I know it's always tough, because they have math and that, but I said, you can always read it into reading, into language arts. You know, teach them about history and teach them—and it's hard because I think with the—now it's more Mexicano. It's no more kids—there's less native born here. I think the numbers would be declining. But so, you've got to do a better job of trying to make them understand, and because if you don't understand your history, then you don't know how to explain your existence. And if you don't think that there's just a gang lifestyle that you're only capable of—and sometimes you got to make them feel good. You got to give them that, you know, that positive reinforcement that they need, so that they know. Like I said, I've never felt like, you know, somebody's—why are you [unclear]? Explain to me let's, let's dialogue, and [unclear]. And I feel sorry

for you if you haven't understood that it's the differences that make us humanity and humane and we got to work through that.

Nursal Matsu 1:23:11
So, what kind of changes do you think that could have a positive impact on those kids that are involved with gangs or crimes?

Simon Salinas 1:25:11
Well, I think you need to give them some good role models. I've always liked sports, and sports, you get a team together. You can get Sureños, Norteños, put them into a team and say, look, you're only going to be successful if you work together. Everybody brings a certain strength. If they're a football team, you have the quarterback, hopefully has a good arm. If you're big and you can tackle, you're going to defend your quarterback. If you're fast, you're going to [unclear]. So, I think they start realizing, look, if we work as a team, then, you know, I should be rooting for each other. You should be putting each other—and that's something that I try to tell them. Look, we all make mistakes. So, instead of putting the person that made a mistake—go pat him on the back and say, come on, we're going to pull it together. You know, we're going to—we're a team. We're going to win together. We don't win as individuals. And you try to, you know, mentor them, try to make them feel good about something that they do. A lot of times I know, because I've seen it. I could tell in sixth grade, I knew which kid was getting headed to the gang, which young girl was going to be pregnant in seventh or eighth grade. And then I go back. So, you go back a little bit. What is it? There's a problem at home. There's either domestic violence, there's drugs, there's something going on at home, or maybe the dad is in prison. Here's a kid that doesn't have a role model. We need to get them a Big Brother, Big Sister, something to say, look, I value you. I'm going to take you on weekends. And those kids, I mean, otherwise, they're going to get sucked into that lifestyle. I mean, the gang gives them validation. The gang reinforces them—you're bad, go beat up somebody. And, you know, you're the bad—so they make them [unclear] about doing something bad. I think we got to [unclear] now. It's one young people at a time. I mean, it's one young person at a time, and that's how you reach them. And that's why I think with me, sports are so important that we let every kid play soccer, let every—let's mix them together and do it in a way that is positive. I mean, I don't agree with some of those that yell at kids and call them names because they don't do good. I mean, I said—when I coach, I would see coaches like that. I'd tell the principal, "We're not playing at your school again if you don't cut that out." That coach was making—even my players were feeling bad for your school's team, because that coach was yelling at those kids, calling them, "Stupid idiot! Look, they scored on you." That's not acceptable. I mean, all that helps build self-esteem of these kids. So, I think it's about building their self-confidence, their self-esteem. People sometimes think that—I know it's very important. I know it's for young Latinas too, and how our family sometimes, you know, don't give equal treatment sometimes. It's got to come there. And I believe it. You gotta love your children from day one. I mean, zero to five, I tell parents, you care about your kids. The minute you know you're going to have a child is the minute you start understanding what you have to do to develop their brain. It's by year three, 80% of their brain is developed. So, you gotta worry. You got to care about that.

Guadalupe Casco 1:27:52
I have a question. So, I know that in the 60s and 70s, the Chicano movement was at its peak. So, where do you think the Chicano movement is now, and where do you think it needs to go in the future? So, what would be your advice for young Chicanos and Chicanas now? And what would your advice be for Chicano movement in the future?

Simon Salinas 1:28:18
Well, you know, I would hope that there's enough young people that understand that—and I don't know if they're cutting down a lot of the Chicano programs and colleges and all that, but I think it's important that they understand, and if you are part of that Chicano community, that you understand, we still have a lot of work to do. We still have a lot of important information to give people to understand, what is the Chicano? A lot of it gets lost. You know, for a while I was Hispanic. A lot of people said, "I'm not Hispanic." You know, now the word is Latino that tries to—and I understand it, because it's like a general term maybe for all the Spanish speaking communities—the Puerto Ricans, the Mexicanos, the Dominicans, the Central Americans, but at the end, you know, we are a group that has our own unique background, our own unique history, our own unique perspective that we bring. And so, I would hope that they could—that they would understand it and use that to develop the confidence that, you know, we are, you know, contributing members. We are who we are, and I'm going to have the capacity or the [unclear] be a surgeon, an astronaut. We have the history of those that have done that. And not to get too bogged down. I mean, you know, the Mexicanos need to feel like you're part of our Chicano agenda. That's what we're going to call it, or Chicano-Mexicano agenda, Chicano-Latino. That's okay because we have to understand that we're one [unclear], but we're part of a bigger group. But for our specific group, the Chicanos, those that feel proud of who we are, Americans proud of their Mexican roots, their Mexican heritage. And, you know, there's nothing wrong with saying, look, I'm an American and I'm an American person. I was born here, but we're proud of our Mexican heritage, of our Mexican roots, and we use it to tell others from our community, look, never feel inferior. Never feel less than anybody else. We can give you so many examples now, but we need a lot more. But there's examples of, you know, Supreme Court justices. There's astronauts. There's all sorts of folks that have demonstrated that they can come from a migrant background and be able to achieve their dreams. And I think that ought to be a sort of, you know, confidence of giving you that [unclear] to do what you're going to do amidst well, even if there's still discrimination, even if there's all this, you're going to succeed, because others have shown they can succeed. And I think if we can use that to go back and teach. If you're a Chicano or Chicana, I can go back and teach in Alisal. If you can go teach and go tell those kids, look, I'm going to respect you for who you are. I'm going to do the best I can and be the best teacher that I can, because if I do that, then maybe you too will go on and realize that in fifth grade, somebody taught you how to read well. Somebody taught you the importance of doing your homework. Somebody that connected with your family, with your parents to teach them how important education is. I mean, we just multiply that. I mean, that—to me, I think that's the biggest thing that we as Chicanos can do is to help others understand the importance of that, the importance of participating, the importance of, you know, teaching your kids not to give up, the importance of telling them, look, life is tough. You're gonna make mistakes. You're gonna fail at things. But don't give up. I mean, and that's something that in life I think we learn that, because there's a lot of, you know—I certainly loved to go out there and party when I was young. And I think, you know, you get those forks in the road, and we're all going to face those decisions. When I was 18, I was cruising. We were doing relatively well. We

were sharecropping strawberries, and I had my '73 Monte Carlo. This is in '73. And I was enjoying cruising. I had the nice car. People probably thought I was a drug dealer or a pusher because I had a brand-new car. But this was [unclear] that we had made. And so, to me, it was high school. But then I had, like, that counselor. And my parents always pushing, that counselor that's saying, "Well, why don't you go get an education." And so, I tell young people and parents, there's going to be your teachers, and the teachers can have so much impact on our young people. But we got to be the best that we can be, because we lose generations if we don't. And so, I always encourage our best and brightest, go be a teacher, because if you truly go put your [unclear], maybe then you go on to something else. But go back, and maybe you encouraged another five, 10, 100 to go on. Then that's to me that's what—I think the Chicano movement, that it gave us hope. It gave us a source of pride to move on and to not give up. To say, you know, amidst the obstacles, we'll succeed.

Guadalupe Casco 1:32:31
So, what do you think the Chicano movement needs to do now in order to carry forth or advance the movement forward?

Simon Salinas 1:32:40
I think what they have to do now is certainly accept some of the challenges. We have the Dreamer Act. I mean, those are our brothers and sisters that are out there. We need to do what we can to mobilize, to focus on that issue. That's important. So, I think you've got to prepare, those that are in this movement, to prepare to run for office. They got to be willing to step up. Are they willing to go into cities and to deal with city councils? Are they ready to deal with board supervisors? All these areas where they can impact policies, those are areas where, you know, we need [unclear] that want to do that, to be involved in the political process. Not everybody can do it, and not everybody maybe wants to do that. But then maybe you can go be a district attorney. Why? Because as a district attorney, maybe you can you use your sense of justice and not prosecute a case where you say, "Why are they prosecuting this Chicano?" In his case, if he had money, you would probably get a program instead of being sent to prison. So, I said, you know, we need Chicanos as district attorneys. We need Chicanos as public defenders. We need Chicanos [unclear]. If you are going to be a banker, because you want to make—get into that position. But maybe you can use that to influence that corporation giving money back to scholarship programs that you see, identify. So, we have a role. And there's a lot of room for all those that say, you know, we are Chicanos and we're going to change the world. Doing it through education, doing it through our activism, and being involved in little different ways. And in other ways, you can go out and be a mentor in a school in your neighborhood. You can find some time where there's this young Latina, young Chicanita, that is lost, and that needs a big sister, because momma's working 12 hours a day, doesn't have the time to go take her to a museum. And so, there's little ways and bigger ways that we can all do it. So, I mean, I think the Chicano movement will be there somewhere in the Southwest in the US, as long as somebody's willing to say, look, there's an issue. I need to organize. I need to mobilize some people, if not at all, at least myself to do something that when all is said and done, I can look back and, you know, I helped this kid. I helped this young lady. I helped this family. And because I was fortunate, and I was given the opportunity to educate myself. And I think it's a little way to, you know, pay it forward. And if we all do that, I think we can start, you know, doing something about so many kids that get lost in the shuffle. And so many kids that I see here, they just need somebody to

believe in them, and to validate them, you know, as human beings. I think if we all do that, I think it would be—it would pay off in big, big ways.

Guadalupe Casco 1:35:13
So, I know we've already taken two hours of your time. So, let's get ready to wrap up. So, is there anything that you would like us to remember or anything that you haven't mentioned that you would like to tell us, or something that you would like other people to know about either your family, or something?

Simon Salinas 1:35:42
Well, I think the most is that I'm so proud of my dad who passed away a couple of years ago, in 2006. He was 96. And my mom, who's still with me. I mean, to me, it's like, you know, [unclear] your teachers, your heroes, right? Nobody writes about them. Nobody knows about them. But we do. And when we put all that together, I think we have so many history, so much to tell about our community and their contributions. And at the end, I think what I would do is that I hope that, you know, as I look back in my life, and I've had [unclear] to serve on city councils, been a teacher, farmworker, and in the assembly here, is that my goal has always been, can I leave this a better place for others to come? Can I really tell the story about, you know, the story of, you know, [unclear] a very tough life sometimes, but at the end, also a history, I think, a family of ethics, of values that our families taught us, and about pride in our history. And so, you know, hopefully we could translate it to others to understand that even though right now you may be living in a one bedroom with your three or four brothers and sisters, I know it's tough, but if you just persevere and if you just get that education, then you can show your younger brothers and sisters that, you know, there is nothing you can't accomplish if you really set yourself to it, and recognize that it wouldn't be easy. I mean, you're competing against others that had all the advantages that life could offer. But I think that's what made us tougher, is because we came from that background, that we weren't easily dissuaded from continuing with the movement or continuing with our personal education. And that's what I hope, you know, everybody could take. I mean, we have—we see the histories of others and we learn from that, but from my perspective, just look at your families, and if you have an uncle that's successful, learn from that and then, you know, hopefully you can get it to the rest of the family because, I mean, we can't afford to lose more generations of so many young people and young women that get—you know, succumb by a gang lifestyle or drugs, or whatever. We need to just [unclear]. And basically, it comes back to family, you know, loving your family and making everybody feel validated as part of your family unit. And I think that'll go a long way to getting through some of the tough times and some of the obstacles that we all face in life.

Guadalupe Casco 1:37:54
Can you elaborate a little bit about why your dad made you proud and how his character and his persona influenced you?

Simon Salinas 1:38:04
Well, I think my dad [unclear], and I understand it. He had to be tough. You're raising twelve children. I mean, you didn't have the time to sit down with everybody and nurture them as much as I think we wanted to. But I think everything he did was to teach us, you know, you have to be—you know, if you don't go to school, I'm going to teach you how to be a good worker. I'm going to teach you how—and my dad, I mean, never drank. He never smoked. So, he always taught us good values. I mean, I could

never complain. But at the end, if we learned something from it, I knew he loved me, see. And so, for other children that don't, you got to tell them you love them. See, my dad, my mom—as moms, I mean, very lovable, huggable. My dad was tough because he had to be. He had to show his family, look, somebody has to be in control. I'm the patriarch to provide. I have to work hard. I expect discipline. I expect you to listen to me and to obey me. But at the end, you know, I knew he loved me. And at the end before he died, he said, you know, I'm of proud of you. And he's in one of those pictures there. So, I could see it in his face when we were campaigning that he was really, you know, proud of me. Even though I didn't need him to say it, it's always good to tell your kids you're proud of them. And but for us, for my generation, we grew up and we understood that our parents loved us. But now I tell them, as you grow old, as you study, as you read, man, tell your children every day. Like I do my son. I love you, son, and he's away in school. But I'll do that every day, because we need to do that. And if we just teach parents to do that with their kids every day. And like I said, if there is a single mom or single dad that needs somebody than [unclear] somebody along the way comes and tells that young person, or young boy, or young girl that, you know, they're loved by somebody. And I think that goes a long way. To me, that's what we always had in my family. That's why I also never steer too far, because I'd go back and I said, I don't want to let my parents down, right? What they taught you, what they sacrificed for. I don't want to let them down. So, I'm not going to let myself fail, because I want them to feel proud of what they did for me. And so, I think it helped with my younger brother and sister after I went to school. Okay, Simon's out there doing it. We got to do it too. And, you know, that brings pride to the family.

Guadalupe Casco 1:40:12
Anything else that—

Nursal Matsu 1:40:17
Well, thank you so much for sharing your history with us. It was really purposeful and meaningful.

Guadalupe Casco 1:40:23
Yeah, thank you so much for letting us interview you.