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Interview with Sergio Sanchez

Sergio Sanchez

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Sergio Sanchez
Interviewer: Benjamin Bahena
Date of Interview: November 8, 2012
Duration of Interview: 44:33

Benjamin Bahena 00:08

All right, my name is Benjamin Bahena, and I will be interviewing Mr. Sergio Sanchez on November 8th. The time is 1:21. Do I have your permission to get this interview both recorded in audio and video?

Sergio Sanchez 00:24

Yes.

Benjamin Bahena 00:25

Okay. All right, well, I'd like to start off this interview by asking you a little bit about your family history and how you came to this area.

Sergio Sanchez 00:35

To Salinas?

Benjamin Bahena 00:36

To Salinas—well, from Mexico over here. Wherever you want to begin. Your earliest memories.

Sergio Sanchez 00:46

I was born in Mexico City, and at six months, my parents brought us to—brought me to Guadalajara, Jalisco, and I spent most of my childhood there, until about age twelve or thirteen. In 1979, they decided—my mom decided she wanted a better life, so she came out here by herself. She used to be a nurse in the hospital and always dressed in white, but she came to the Salinas Valley to pick broccoli and, you know, [unclear] and be a farmworker. So, she made that sacrifice. She was out here for about a year, and then eventually told my dad, "You need to bring my kids." I'm one of seven kids. Six boys, one girl. And then eventually my father also quit his job in Mexico. He worked for the Mexican railroad company. Good job. Good government job. Quit that to become a farmworker also. So, that was 1979 we came to—'78 my mom came. My dad came in 1979, just like I did with my seven—my six brothers and sisters. We were in the San Joaquin Valley. Did a lot of farm work for many years, even as a child. And, you know, started doing what everybody does—assimilating, and learning English, and going to school, and, you know, working hard. What everybody does. I've been in this country since 1979. Moved to the Salinas Valley, maybe, like, in the 90s—late 90s, mid 90s. Been here since.

Benjamin Bahena 02:25

Was it difficult being one of seven children transitioning from Mexico over here to the United States?

Sergio Sanchez 02:33

It was a horrible experience. I mean, it's—being [unclear] out of your community, from your friends, from your school, from everything that you've ever known, to come to a place where you're not

necessarily welcome. And not speaking the language, not understanding the culture, even the food. You know, it's not—there's nothing like it. And it's just a way of life. It's just a completely different world. So, it was a horrible experience coming over here, just being a—as an undocumented kid with brothers and sisters and [unclear] of cars and things like that, with the kind of life that you go through just to make it here, and it's a horrible experience. It's unfortunate that human beings have to go through that. I think it's very inhumane. I think it's a horrible experience, just the culture shock of it. I think it's worse for the older kids than for the younger ones. The two, three-year-olds, they're just happy to see a different place. For someone my age, I think it's very difficult. It takes a lot of time to get used to it, and some people never get used to it. And sometimes there's tragic endings, where kids commit suicide or become—they develop mental illnesses and things like that, just because of the culture shock. Just like any other immigrant from other countries, if they can't adapt easily, it could become problematic. And so, it took a long time for me to get over that.

Benjamin Bahena 04:13

Was this experience—and this is your own personal experience. Do you say, or could you say, that your parents shared the same perception coming over here, and having it be a horrible experience for them. I mean, just knowing that coming over here is very hard, do you think they—

Sergio Sanchez 04:33

Well, you know, adults always make decisions for young kids, so I would say that they made a personal decision to do it as adults, but I believe it was just as hard on them, because it is culture shock. It is completely different. And they're not kids. Kids can get away with some things adults can't. Adults become homeless. My mom was homeless for half of the year that she was here. She lived in her car, and sometimes she had to eat off trash bins and beg for things because she couldn't find her way. So, I think my dad leaving his good job and the good things he had in his life and sacrificing that for us, I think to this day he's still hurt by that, you know, having to end up for thirty years working as a field worker and as a packing house worker, from having an accounting degree and working for the government. I mean, it's just—he loves traveling and, you know, thank God now he got a job with Amtrak, and now he gets to travel just like he used to. So, he did a complete, you know, 360 degree turn, and he's back where he started. And so, he created opportunities for him, but for thirty years, I think his life and his health and everything took a toll because of the hard labor that he did. So, I think it's just as difficult, but for kids it's different, because kids don't make those decisions. Adults make those decisions. I think they complain less about them or display less of their pain, because they're adults. But, you know, just the same as adults, they have a hard time transitioning and getting accustomed, that they end up having depression and all kinds of other mental health problems because of that, because of the shock. And they just—on top of that, they have the responsibility of taking care of a family.

Benjamin Bahena 06:43

Yes, exactly. Okay, and you mentioned that your family did work in the fields. Do you have any—did you or your family have any involvement in the labor struggles? I know you came at the very end of [unclear].

Sergio Sanchez 07:01

Yeah, my mom was in the valley in 1978. She got to be here in this valley, in Salinas Valley, down south county, when Cesar Chavez was organizing the field workers, and my mom was brought by labor contractors into the area, what they call a scab, to replace the workers that were on strike. And once my mom realized what side she was on, she joined—she left the fields and joined the strike. So, my mom was pretty involved back in those days, and my dad also through the work that Cesar Chavez did with the migrant programs in California. They were very involved, because we were migrant kids and migrant families. So, they got to be involved with Cesar Chavez and be involved in the marches and all those different things. But my mom was the most involved in the fields. My dad, you know, his company was organized by the United Farm Workers, and my dad was part of the group that was working to get the union, the United Farm Workers, into his company in the San Joaquin Valley. So, in both valleys, my parents were involved with the United Farm Workers and the labor movement.

Benjamin Bahena 08:20

Was there any [unclear] or inherited because they were part of the labor movement?

Sergio Sanchez 08:25

People would say that there's nothing that happens from being involved. But, you know, you get blackballed. You get blacklisted, and then nobody will give you work. So, my mom had to actually stop working the field, since she went to work in restaurants, because nobody would give her a job, so she ended up having to transition for work. And my dad went to, you know, eventually went to work for Amtrak, because once you do that, it's like capital sin. You have to—part of the consequences is you really are blackballed, blacklisted. You're seen as an agitator, someone that likes to cause trouble. Somebody that invited the union in, so that becomes a problem. And so, yeah, they both have to transition out of their jobs because of that. You know, and I worked for the United Farm Workers for over five years. My wife still works for the United Farm Workers, fifteen years later.

Benjamin Bahena 09:17

And can you say your parents' involvement in that movement, or organization, I should say, influenced that choice of [unclear] working for them?

Sergio Sanchez 09:28

Of course. Of course. Yeah, working in the fields and [unclear] all that, what they did, and following them and looking at how they literally sacrificed their jobs and everything else to join the movement and to support it. Yeah, of course, you see that, and just like you can see your parents doing bad things, you learn bad things from your parents. Well, my parents always did good things, so it showed me that it's got to be about other people, and you got to care about people and get involved and not be selfish, because, you know, taking care of you and your job, most people do that. Most people don't want to get involved. Most people don't care, and most people just want to take care of themselves. My parents never did that. They always care about somebody else. My dad was a union leader in Mexico in his company, and then the Mexican government union, and, you know, he was always involved when people got hurt, and people got to retaliate against him. He still did it, and he's still very proud of doing that. You know, now he's in another place where there's also a union, and so he gets involved, because

he understands the value of that. But they do it because they know it's important, versus protecting their own jobs, and doing what most people do, which is take care of themselves.

Benjamin Bahena 10:44

And could you say that, not necessarily to speak for your father, but was there a difference between the level of organization in Mexico when he was involved in that union over there, as opposed to the one over here in America?

Sergio Sanchez 11:05

Traditionally, in Mexico the unions are mostly employer-sponsored unions. So, there's a little bit of that conflict of interest. Here in the United States, it's actually against the law for employers to do that, to sponsor a union. And so, the difference is that the employer participates more in sponsoring the union and being part of the union in Mexico. Here, it's not the case. It's a very separate relationship that, you know—the unions are for the workers, and the unions push it and work for it and all that. But the boss actually is prohibited from putting resources, or even what is called colluding. They cannot collaborate to bring a union in without some kind of a process. You know, they can agree to some voluntary processes, but they can't literally, like, give money to the union workers or the union to organize their workers. They have to keep some distance. In Mexico, they're a little bit more sponsored by the employer. They're more employer-based unions.

Benjamin Bahena 12:15

And to backtrack just a little bit, during the interview, you said your mother was initially not part of the union, but then she decided to join the union. Was there a specific reason why? Is there a story behind that?

Sergio Sanchez 12:34

The story is she was brought by the contractor to come and work. When she realized she was a replacement worker for the striking workers, and she saw the organizers, and they came talk to her, she realized she was on the wrong side. And so, she left the job. She walked out and joined the strike. But she was a replacement worker, and she realized that that was not the side she wanted to be on. And she understood what unions did because of my dad's involvement in Mexico. So, she realized very quickly that she was on the wrong side. I don't think she worked more than a few hours before she really realized that she was replacing somebody's job, that were fighting for their own jobs. And, you know, that cost her her job and future jobs. She had to move to hospitality to work in hotels and restaurants, because she couldn't get work in the fields anymore.

Benjamin Bahena 13:28

When looking at your move from Mexico to the United States—the difficulties attaining jobs, essentially giving up your life in Mexico to come over here—can you say that there was any sort of discrimination faced by yourself or your family?

Sergio Sanchez 13:47

Discrimination by who?

Benjamin Bahena 13:54

Other people, you know, for migrating into the United States. Not to [unclear]—like, racial [unclear]?

Sergio Sanchez 14:05

Well, you always have the fact that even kids don't accept kids who don't speak their language. They'll make fun of them. They'll call them names. They'll use the same language their parents use, and they use that in a hateful way towards, you know, kids. And, you know, I got into plenty of fights in school, because people would call me names. You know, I never supported being treated differently, and so when people chose to use words against me or to hurt me or to, you know—I didn't let them. I let them know I didn't care for it. But other kids would let them. So, you face that all the time, and back in the days, it was not too many people speaking Spanish at their workplace, or McDonald's or things like that. So, you know, if you couldn't speak English in a way that they could understand, you were given a different treatment. Call it whatever you want. But, you know, when it came to, you're not speaking Spanish, or English, or not being the right look, I mean, you didn't get the—you get the crappy jobs, because those are easy to [unclear]. You know, for a long time, I didn't want to go to school. I didn't go to school, because I didn't care for those kids that were just pretty—just mean. And, you know, again, hate is a learned behavior, and they learned that from their parents. So, if the parents use names like that when they talk about Latinos and Mexicans and immigrants and undocumented kids and people—they heard it from their parents. They heard it from somebody. That's a learned behavior. Hate and racism, they're learned behaviors. They learned it from somebody. So, you face it everywhere. Still—you still have it.

Benjamin Bahena 15:58

Yeah. Do you think that—granted, back in that time, that was when my parents first came over here. They experienced some sort of discrimination because of it. Do you think that it is still perpetuated within this community, this local area?

Sergio Sanchez 16:18

I think it's gotten a little bit better. I think some of it has gone underground. I think some of it is institutionally there. The fact that people are not given the opportunities to succeed. The fact that people are not given the jobs. You know, look around. Who's the leaders of business? Who's the leaders in government. Who's the leaders in the different industries? Latinos and Latinas are very few to be found. There is more and more getting in there, but especially in government, it's really hard. It's really hard. And, you know, that's unfortunate, because there's a lot of good, qualified people that could lead some of these organizations. And there's still, you know, the nonprofits and the government and agencies are not being run by what the majority of the community looks like. So, the fact that, you know, we live in substandard housing; the fact that we have the crappy job with the crappy wages with no benefits; and the fact that our schools are allowed to fail, and there's no accountability. You know what I'm saying? There's just so many things that I think, institutionally, they're just discriminatory. You know, we have a jail in the middle of our community, on the east side. That would never have been allowed in some of the affluent communities. I mean, people would go crazy and not allow it. But we have it in our community. There's one right in the middle of the neighborhood. I mean, kids literally see a prison and kids in prison uniforms around barbed wire from their backyards, from their front yards, before they go to school. That would never be allowed anywhere else. To me, that's discriminatory,

because if it's not good enough for somebody else, why is it good enough for us? We have a garbage dump site right in the middle of our community. You know, there's rats, there's mice, there's seagulls. I mean, the seagulls are not here because of the ocean. They're here because of the garbage, because it's in the middle of our community, in the middle of the city. That would have never been allowed in Pebble Beach or Pacific Grove, or any of those places. Why is it allowed here? You know, the housing that we have, I mean, that needs to be torn down, [unclear]. Nobody should be allowed to live like that. Why are we allowed to live like that? Institutional discriminatory practices. And just plain outright we don't care. So again, you know, people might deny it, but—it's probably gotten better, because there's not a lot of name calling like they used to, but I think it still exists, because people are still not given the right opportunities, and people literally have to sue their way into anything

Benjamin Bahena 19:23

So, yeah, it's essentially—historically speaking, it's [unclear]—

Sergio Sanchez 19:30

It's there. It's better. It's gotten better. Still there, but I think a lot of it has gone underground, and institutionally, that's really what you got left. There's that kind of good ol' boy kind of structure still there.

Benjamin Bahena 19:50

And talking about communities and neighborhoods, keeping in mind the current attempt to preserve the history of Salinas, do you have any stories of Chinatown that you can share? City efforts to restore Chinatown, current issues surrounding Chinatown?

Sergio Sanchez 20:04

There's a lot of resources and effort that has been—and energy that has gone into rebuilding Chinatown, which I think is a great idea. Talk about something that really can bring communities together and be more of a humane and more sensitive society in that community is by rebuilding that. Historically, that was the center of a lot of activity in Salinas. You know, it's a good collaboration between all the Asian communities—the Chinese, the Japanese, the Filipinos, Koreans. They're all working together with organizations like CSUMB and others in the city of Salinas, and I think they made some great efforts. They have long ways to go. There's a lot of issues that need to be dealt with and a lot of resources that are needed. A complete rebuild of Old Town—I mean, of Chinatown—is going to be very costly. It's going to take a lot of years and a lot of time and effort from volunteers and from people that have resources, but I think it's probably one of the biggest efforts of the city. But that's exactly what needs to happen in the east side, where the Latinos also live in some very similar conditions, but also where there's some very historical things that need to be preserved and need to be brought back to life. So, again, a lot of effort, a lot of time has been going into that, and it's got a strategic master plan on how to bring it back, and a lot of people put in resources and time into it in the city. I think it's in the interest of this community to preserve that and to bring it back into what it used to be at one time, to preserve that history, because history is important, because just as bad things happen historically—and talk about the Japanese internment and the way the Chinese were treated and all that. It's important to preserve our history, just so you can also remember the mistakes that were made by this country, and by this county, and by this city, so we don't commit those errors again.

Benjamin Bahena 22:05

[unclear] you were talking about [unclear] with racism, and that community was essentially a bunch of unwanted people. That's why they built that center there initially, the Chinese and the Japanese and the Filipinos. And later on [unclear]. I can also see that happening on the east side of Salinas. A lot of issues going on over there.

Sergio Sanchez 22:36

Monterey County has been a center of a lot of things, including politically, by this district election because of the disenfranchising of Latino voters. We have the issues at the school where there's lawsuits, there's consent decrees at the county for discriminatory hiring practices. I mean, you name it. There's a lot of history here. It's not just hearsay. There's a lot of documented history of disparate treatment and discriminatory practices in hiring and teaching and educating and just in general. I mean, there's a lot of historical things here that have happened, including one that went all the way to the Supreme Court regarding voting rights. And that's why this county is one of the few counties in the entire nation that's under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, because of those discriminatory practices. So, I mean, we still have them now. It's still there.

Benjamin Bahena 23:41

And backtracking a little bit, your mother and father were really hard workers. You yourself were. So, what drove you to pursue this career, to get a higher education and then to become an activist for the community, for the Hispanic community essentially?

Sergio Sanchez 24:04

Well, they're still hard workers. They're still working hard. My mom right now, she's helping clean up my campaign offices from our recent campaign. You know, part of that is the sense of caring that they brought to me, because I think they care too much about the community. My mom had a free health clinic at our house. She was a nurse during the night, and during the day, she would deliver babies and give shots and all that, because nurses are allowed to do a whole lot more in Mexico. She's always had a free clinic at our house. My dad always got involved in his union, got involved in a lot of different things. We were always involved in community stuff in Mexico. So, I've always seen that. I have seen nothing but that. to me. So, to me, it was a no-brainer. That's what you got to do. Caring for others I think is one thing that's very lacking in our community, and most people are very selfish, and I guess they don't realize how selfish they are until somebody either brings it to your attention. Most people just care about themselves. Most people care about my job, my house, my yard, my kids, my bike, my car, my iPod, my shopping. My, my, my, my. It's all about ourselves. Seldom do we ever try to do anything for anybody else beyond ourselves. And so, you know, to me, it's always been a natural instinct to be involved, and a natural instinct to help improve situations for others. And so, to me, there hasn't been a lot of debate on where I should be, or what I should be involved in. I happen to have a very supportive family that supports my effort. But I mean, to me, it's a must. But just an automatic, a default thing to just be involved in. I don't know anything else. I just know that that's what you gotta do. You can't go to bed thinking I'm a good person, I'm a good citizen, if you've done nothing but taking care of you. If you have a belly full of food and you have your coat and you're happy and you're at home, then I think you have failed as a human being, and you haven't taken care of—what's important is looking at the struggle of others, the pain of other people. And if you can just comfortably go to bed and go to sleep

with your belly full of food, I think you gotta ask yourself, is, you know, what am I about? What do I care? And you're gonna find that you're really pretty selfish. And so, to me, that's not how people should be. That's not how I live my life. If I have, you know—looking at homeless people, looking at people living in substandard conditions, people being mistreated, and people being not treated right, that's always going to have me busy doing something about it, because I can't take care of me well, you know, when somebody else is struggling to put food in their belly, or to put a shelter over their heads. And so, I don't know, it's been pretty automatic for me. So, I don't know anything else to do.

Benjamin Bahena 27:49

Do you think that is something that is based on the culture, like, cultural—

Sergio Sanchez 27:56

No. No, it's got to do with principles and the way your parents—I know a lot of Latino kids—I know a lot of Latinos like me that don't really care about no one else except themselves. And we probably eat the same food and live in the same neighborhood, and probably brought up by the same kind of parents. But it's what they instill in you. And so, parents are so influential in what kind of human being you're going to be. That's why there's those that don't respect life, and they can go up to another Latino and shoot them in the head with no mercy and no—I mean, they'll go eat afterwards, and they'll go—they'll go to church. And that's having no love and no respect for human life. But then you have those that are totally [unclear] and can never do something horrible like that. So, I mean, it has to do with the principles the parents instill. It has nothing to do with ethnicity or gender, or whether you're rich or poor or white or Latino or Asian. I mean, it's about what your parents put in you. It's principles as a human being. And those are learned behaviors. Those are learned things that parents teach. And so, I know some very dedicated people that are very rich and very non-Latino, and they give their hearts to the world at all [unclear]. So, it just has to do with what parents put in you, and having sensitivity, and having a heart, really. If you have a heart and you feel somebody else's pain, you're gonna do something about it. You can't ignore it. And if you ignore it, again, we go back to the selfishness of us human beings [unclear].

Benjamin Bahena 29:44

[unclear] What differences have you seen the time that you've spent here in this area, you know, from when you got here until now in the present?

Sergio Sanchez 30:04

I think there's been a—politically there's been a lot of changes. I mean, the fact that, you know—good example is my career as an elected official, you know, being an undocumented kid that comes to this country. And that's what every other kid that came like that, Chinese or Japanese or whatever other ethnic background, and to be able to run for city council and be a councilmember and run for mayor, and run for super—do those kinds of things. And be a chief of staff for a local legislator. I mean, I'm very proud of those achievements, and that's something that has changed, that, you know—it's taken a lot of work, and more work than most folks. But, you know, so politically, there's some changes. Obviously, you see more people of color in positions of power. We're far from being where we need to be, but I think politically, there's been a lot of change, especially from newcomers like me, because I call myself a newcomer, because I'm an immigrant. I'm not a Chicano. I wasn't born here. I'm an

American, but I'm an immigrated American. I came here and became a US citizen, did all that stuff. But so that's a different shift. In the past, you know, twenty years there's been a lot of change between how Latinos are involved in the different political levels. I think business has become a lot more dominated by Latinos and Latino entrepreneurs and Hispanics. You know, majority of strawberry growers now are Latino. That's huge. That's a huge shift. So, that's changed since I came here. I think there's just so many other things that have not changed and probably have gotten worse. But there has been some of those opportunities, and that's a change, positive change. [sound of fire truck siren] That's the good thing about editing. [Benjamin laughs] You can cut that piece off, put it in your phone as a ringtone.

Benjamin Bahena 32:34

You stated that some things within this community from then until now have gotten better, and you did elaborate. But you also mentioned that some things have gotten worse. Can you explain that?

Sergio Sanchez 32:51

I think in general, the economics and the family dynamic and how families are really struggling to survive. And that was even before the whole economic crisis. I mean, people have been struggling for quite some time, and that hasn't changed, and probably it's gotten worse. Housing opportunities for people have also gotten worse. Just because there's, you know, hundreds of foreclosed homes—we just have a lot of families living—multiple families in one place. I think the situation for farmworkers when it comes to their living conditions, that has not improved. I mean, there's still—there used to be labor camps where people could live. Now they don't have that, so now people are living where? So, those things have gotten worse. I don't think they've gotten better. I think the whole issue of immigration and all that, just the public sentiment of how they feel about immigrants, I think that's gotten worse. It's probably the worst it's ever been. There's a lot of resentment. There's a lot of inside, kind of, hatred. Maybe some of it comes from 9/11. And after 9/11, it's just—it's trickled down to now Latinos, and even to subgroups or other groups of Latinos, like mestizos and [unclear] community now that have become a target of those kind of a—by Latinos themselves, by Mexicanos themselves. And you see that in the south county, which is unfortunate, and again, that's gotten worse. Those relationships have gotten worse.

Benjamin Bahena 34:39

I don't want to be a little too forward here. It may be considered a little obscene. But when you first came here, when your family first came here, did you guys live in a labor camp, or did you have your own home?

Sergio Sanchez 34:59

We lived in the back of somebody's house, in a small little trailer. There was seven of us and one bed, and the bed was as big as the trailer. So, my mom, my dad, and five of us lived there for quite some time—a few years. Probably farmworkers in the labor camp had a little bit more space than we did. We didn't have a whole lot of space. But, you know, from having our own home in Mexico and having enough space, we went to living in this little—horrible little trailer. Like a ball—like a round ball. Old and smelly, with one big mattress in the middle. Didn't even have its own bathroom, so you had to go do something outside. Yeah, not very good conditions. Not for people that work that hard. You would think if you work that hard, you should be living in a nice place.

Benjamin Bahena 36:08

Yeah, I mean, obviously.

Sergio Sanchez 36:10

But, you know, there's been worse times. I remember one time—because we would migrate, and obviously I got to go to a lot of schools, and at time there was not enough space, so my brother and I, we would sleep outside under the car. That was okay. That was normal, unless [unclear]. So, even labor camps—I mean, compared to sleeping outside underneath the car.

Benjamin Bahena 36:46

What was your experience moving from place to place, and, you know, obviously trying to get accustomed to this society and having to deal with different people?

Sergio Sanchez 37:07

It was the same horrible experience as the first time. It's like an unending nightmare. I mean, it's like, okay, now you just made some friends. Now you just got settled. Now you gotta pack it all up and you gotta move. So, eventually you get used to not making friends because you know they're going to be temporary. And, you know, ended up in a neighborhood that you never knew before, trying to find out where the store's at, trying to find out who the good kids are, the bad kids. And starting school all over from scratch, and then three months later, you're in a new school. It's horrible. And that's the story of every kid that does that. Their parents take them all over the place. And, you know, they got to follow—adults, again, make decisions, and the kid has to follow. But it's a horrible experience. It's very traumatizing. It's kind of like what, you know, Army brats go through. You know, kids that live in the military. But migrant work is every three months, not every year. So, whatever, like, Army children do—us, it was like every three months, following the crops. And you never knew where you were gonna end up, what crappy housing you were gonna end up if you got any housing. Sometimes we stayed in the car. You know, people sometimes slept in the fields. You know, here in Salinas, they [unclear] in the caves. People live through that Creek Park, you know, underneath the bushes. So, it's a horrible experience. I don't remember anyone—I still don't know anybody who says, "Oh, yippee. We're moving. Great." No. Kids cry. Kids suffer. It's a hard thing. It's hard for parents, but it's hard for kids. They don't understand why. Why do I have to leave everything that I just built. So, then you learn to live on a temporary basis on everything—relationships and housing and everything else, because you never know when they're gonna load you up in the car and move on to the next spot. That's life now for a lot of kids. They go to Mexico. They go to Santa Maria. They go to Yuma. They go to Oxnard. They go to Calexico. They go to Arizona. They're moving all the time. They go to Oregon. They go to Idaho. They get moved all the time. I just had a kid that called me, she was in Colorado. She says it's horrible, I want to come back. I hate this. She just left, and she hates it. She's miserable. She's, you know, moved around a lot, but now she's in Colorado. Strangest place to be at. Talk about internal culture shock. And she was born here.

Benjamin Bahena 39:44

Wow. [laughs] That is—

Sergio Sanchez 39:48

Very traumatic. Very unfortunate, but that's life.

Benjamin Bahena 39:53

And do you think that—I'm going to go back again—that these experiences also made you who you are today, not really belonging somewhere?

Sergio Sanchez 40:13

Yeah, I think at minimum it's made me more sensitive to those kind of issues. That's why I get very bothered when people try to use names, like, discriminatory names, to try to blame us for things. I get very defensive, but I'm very sensitive to all those kinds of things when it comes to housing, healthcare, access to good education, all those kinds of things, because I've seen them. I've lived through them. I don't think it's pushed me to what I do, because many people have gone through the same thing and have moved on with their own lives, what I call selfish kind of lives. And so, I think it's just between a combination of my parents, I think it makes me more sensitive to some of those issues, because there's no way you can understand how a farmworker lives if you've never been a farmworker that lives like that. You can understand what it's like to be a farmer. You can understand what it's like to be a rich guy who lives up in the hill that went to Harvard, or you had to go to Ivy school. And you can understand about always having healthcare, and you can understand about always having a car and having internet and all those things. But you can never understand what it's like not to have food in the refrigerator and go to bed hungry. So, I think you need to be one to know one. I think people can attempt to be sensitive, but I think what people lack when it comes to sensitivity, is they just lack the personal experience of it. There's no way you know what it's like. I mean, there's no way you know what it's like to be in the trunk of a car for three days when you're a child. And you're not playing. You're literally, like, fighting between your life and being caught, and being incarcerated and being deported. You're not just playing hide and seek. You're fighting for your life. Hopefully somebody opens that trunk and you don't die in there from heat. You know what I'm saying? So, if you don't have those personal experiences, I think you can sympathize. I think you can try to understand. There's no way to know. You don't know unless you've been through it. A lot of us have gone through that, and sadly enough, people actually forget what they've been through. And some of the meanest people towards people that are newcomers are the same ones that used to be newcomers not too long ago. That's pretty unfortunate that you forgot. You know, that's the whole thing of don't forget where you came from and what you've been through, because if you forget that, then it doesn't make for a good person when you can know there's suffering and know what people go through, and then now that you have it better, look down on them and look down on people. So, again, it's about principles, and about principles that parents put on kids. Because if you learn to be sensitive and respectful and understanding and humane, I think that's what makes a better person. And I don't think I'm a better person than anybody else, but I just know what my parents taught me, and let's me [unclear] what other people are doing.

Benjamin Bahena 43:46

Well, thank you very much.

Sergio Sanchez 43:48

Thank you.

Benjamin Bahena 43:49

And do you have any questions? Well, thank you very much. Thank you for—

Sergio Sanchez 43:55

No problem. Thank you.

Benjamin Bahena 43:57

—having this interview with me. It was really [unclear]. There was a lot of, you know, [unclear].