

FIRST INTERVIEW
AT BEA V. ROBINSONS HOME
11/29/89

Diane: Just for the record can you state your full name, present address, year of birth, birthplace, marital status and year of marriage?

Bea: My name is Bea Vasquez Robinson and my address is [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I was born in Ventura, CA. so, I am a native Californian. I am single. I have been married but, I was divorced and then after that , he died. We were already divorced when he deceased so, I am single. The year of my marriage, I almost feel like I have to go look for it. I'll look for that.

Diane: How many years did you live in the house where you were born?

Bea: I think I was only there until I was about three or four. Which was in Ventura.

Diane: Where did you live later? Do you remember why the family moved?

Bea: We moved, my family followed the crops from the South to up North, my brothers and father would do that. At one point, my parents decided that we should all come up North, and so we started

traveling up North. We would stop at different places to pick what ever crop was there during the season. The first place where we stopped for a permanent location was Gilroy, CA. I can't remember how many years we lived there, but it must have been three or four years. Then we moved to Sunnyvale and after a while, we moved to San Jose. We have been here ever since. I have been here ever since I was very young, third grade. So, I consider San Jose as my home.

Diane: What impact did the move(s) have on your family?

Bea: Well, as I said when I was very, very young, we were moving and we were very, very poor like all fruit pickers were and we had to improvise. We lived in a regular house, but when we were traveling (following the crops) we lived in tents. There were many kids and my parents so, it was very crowded conditions. We were just very, very poor and as a result of those moves, I had to go to several schools. But, mostly the biggest impact it had is that it is nice when people say - Well, I was born in such and such a town and this is where I lived and this is where I grew up and that's where I went to school. Where as for me, I did leave that place and then traveled from place to place so it kind of gave me a little scattered childhood. Although, I have been in San Jose for many years, I still felt a little bit rootless because of that time that we wandered around. So, I don't remember having that many friends until I got to San Jose, I guess in terms of school children my own age, until we stabilized. One of the things that happened, is when I went to school my dad didn't want us to speak

English at home and at school, they would not let us speak Spanish. So, when I first started school I could not speak English, that was very difficult for me.

Diane: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Bea: As I said, there was nine of us. There were six boys and three girls.

Diane: Can you list them eldest to youngest?

Bea: 1) Jose, who died two years ago.
2) Jesus
3) Manuel
4) Charlie
5) Lewie
6) Henry
7) Bertha
8) Frances
9) and myself (Bea)

Diane: What do they do for a living?

Bea: My older brother Jose was a manager, an administrator, and he was a business for himself and he also was a community activist. My brother Jesus, was and is, in a very limited part-time way, deals in Junk and I literally mean that. He finds old metals and then sales them to the scrap iron businesses. He had two trucks and now he only has one. He has injured himself so, he does very little work now. My brother Charlie, has also injured himself at work, he use to work in construction. He was a laborer. My brother Manuel, was a carpenter. My brother Lewie, is a painter. My sister Bertha, has never really worked outside her home. Although, in the recent years, she does run a Day Care business out

of her home now. Her husband retired and so they do it together. My sister Frances, is an eligibility worker for the county of Santa Clara. Unfortunately, Henry died of pendicidus at the age of eleven.

Diane: What is the highest education degree among them?

Bea: Actually out of all of us, only three of us got a high school diploma which was my brother Jose, my sister Frances and myself. My brother Jose went on to school at the University of Bridgeport but, he didn't receive his B.A. He was very close but, he did not get it. My sister Frances, and I have both attended college at different intervals but, neither one of us has a degree. I happen to have (I brag about this from time to time) a Honorary A.A. from San Jose City College. So, I do have an A.A. from S.J.C.C. and I also have other credits/units that I have taken out at San Jose State University but, I have no degree. I have taken lots of courses management and other courses.

Diane: What did your parents do for a living?

Bea: My father did many things. At one time he owned businesses, they were mostly food and alcohol service related; he had bars, restaurants. He also was a laborer, fruit picker. When he died he was already retired. My mother was right along with my father in the restaurants, she was the cook and did those kind of things around the restaurant. When she separated from my father, she ran her own restaurant for quit a few years. Then after that, she worked in laundry, cannery etc... (they were just workers).

Diane: If your mother worked who looked after the children when she was at work?

Bea: Actually, when they worked in the fields, we went with them. When my mother worked in the cannery etc... we took care of ourselves.

Diane: So, it was like your brothers watching over you?

Bea: No, because my family was so larger, it was like we were two families. The first bunch were the first six, and the last three kids were kind of like the second family. Most everybody had left, they were older than us. So, we kind of took care of ourselves. When she had the restaurant by herself, we were there and we worked in the restaurant.

Diane: Where did you and your brothers/sisters go to elementary school? College?

Bea: Well, I went to school in the San Jose Unified School District that was called Longfellow, which is no longer there. Longfellow Elementary School. After that, I went to Peter Burnette which again is in the San Jose Unified School District.

Diane: Is it around this area here (here meaning Bea's home)?

Bea: Yes, it is right down the street. Fourth Street. Then I went to San Jose High School, and then to San Jose City College and attended some extension courses at San Jose State University.

Diane: Did your brothers and sisters all go to the same schools?

Bea: No, One brother Lewie... Lewie, Frances and I were like the last three kids and only we attended the same schools.

Diane: So, your other brothers and sister attended school...

Bea: ...in Los Angeles, Ventura and other places.

Diane: Among the few of you who went to college, did you find financial support for your educations? Financial Aid? Worked their way through college?

Bea: My brother did and I can not tell you to what extent. He was in the Air Force.

Diane: He kind of worked his way also.

Bea: Yes, he was in the Air Force during World War I. He was an Areal Gunner and a staff Sergeant. He had many decorations, he was a hero. Lewie has the Silver Star which is a very high honor. He enlisted in the Korean War. During World War II, he was shot down in enemy territory. He landed in France, but he escaped. He was eligible for the G.I. benefits and thus able to go to school with some of that money. Frances and I have just supported ourselves through school. We have worked our way through, Had part-time jobs in the evenings and Saturdays.

Diane: What were you doing in 1965? What would you say were your main concerns at the time? Were you active in artistic, social or political groups in the early 1960's? Please describe the nature

of the group(s). Did you help to organize them or join in later?

Bea: What I was doing in 1965, was that I was very married and I was raising my children. What I did during 1965, well I was active, but I was active more in school activities like Parent-Teacher Association, Home Owners Association etc...

Diane: Were you in college?

Bea: No, I was married and raising kids, but I was involved in the school activities of my children. I was like a Den Mother, I was in the PTA except we called it Home and School Club. I was also in the Booster Club, it is an organization that raises money in support of the athletic activities at a High School or it could be a college, but in this case it was for Oak Grove High School. So, I was involved in these kinds of activities relating to school. I also did things like work on election day to help, because they were always looking for people to help staff the election booths, and so I would always volunteer to do that or sometimes I would get paid. I did a lot of civic things, but not necessarily related to the Chicano Movement at this particular point. It was not until, probably 1968 when I started to get involved.

Diane: Were you active in artistic, social things? Did you paint or write?

Bea: I like to write and I have had somethings published, but on a very minor scale. I write poetry and I like to think that I am writing in a more serious way. And, I have been doing this for a long time but I can not say that my name is known for those reasons

(Chicano Movement). My name is known for other reasons.

Diane: Do you have any scrapbooks, photos or news clippings from the period?

Bea: Oh God, I had just told you that I have thrown some away, but I am going to look through my stuff and see what I have for you.

Diane: Do you recall the walkouts at Roosevelt Jr. High and at SJSC?

Bea: I remember reading about them.

Diane: Can you tell me a bit about them?

Bea: Well, No I can not other than I just remember reading about them.

Diane: Do you remember what lead up to those incidents?

Bea: No, I honestly could not tell you.

Diane: Did you have friends that were involved? What happened?

Bea: Yes, I do have friends that were involved. Like Antonio Chavez and he was also involved at the University of Santa Clara when they had their walkouts. I don't know if you were aware of that?

Diane: No.

Diane: Do you recall the Fiesta de las Rosas? Were you there? What happened?

Bea: No, but my brother Jose Vasquez was one of the organizers. And, I remember that he use to talk about it a lot. He was very heavily involved and it was his dream to get it going again.

Diane: Were you involved in the Chicano student movement at SJCC or SJSC?

Bea: No.

Diane: Were you a member of MASC. or any other student organizations?

Bea: No, I don't remember.

Diane: Do you know of anyone who was involved in any of these organizations?

Bea: Yes, I know a lot of people who were students during that time and so, they were involved. Like in MECHA, etc...

Diane: Have you heard of the Mexican American Youth Organization or other organizations at the high school level?

Bea: MAYO, yes. I remember R. Chacon was involved in all that.

Diane: What did they do and/or provide?

Bea: Well, I don't even know if MAYO still exists.

Diane: It does! I graduated in 1985 and it was still going strong at Mt. Pleasant High.

Bea: Well, they are like support organizations for chicano students and it allows them (student) the opportunity, and I do not

know to great detail what they do other than it is an organization that allows hispanic students to network and gives them a base of power which gives them a taste of political understanding.

Diane: Were you aware of the existence of Chicano EOP at SJSC and can you tell me a bit about it?

Bea: Yes, well other than it is there and it was a hard struggle to even get it started and its purpose is to provide assistance to hispanic students and other minority students in the pursuit of their academic achievements. It stands for Economic Opportunity Program. And, it is important to have minority staff, that's because they are the ones who are sensitive to our needs etc... and it provides assistance in many ways to our minority students.

Diane: You mentioned you have sons and daughters, were they ever involved in EOP, if they went to college?

Bea: No, not to my knowledge.

Diane: What happened in 1968... were you aware of the Economic Opportunities Commission of Santa Clara County?

Bea: Well, I believe in 1968, that was the year when there was the...As a matter of fact I think that you should also note that my brother Jose was the founder of the Chicano Employment Committee (CEC), which was in fact the plaintiff in the law suit against the city of San Jose in the county of Santa Clara to force them to hire Latinos. Latino Police Officers etc...and it was a result of that consent decree that the city of San Jose was forced to begin hiring

hispanics to the police force. I was a member of the Chicano Employment Committee and my brother as I say was the founder so I am quite aware of all that. I am also aware of the Economic Opportunity Commission because of the Chicano Employment Committee and all its work involved in that. Also, I have to say that it was during those years that there was a lot of activities going on. I remember my brother being jailed because (he was) in support of low income housing for people and I remember forcing the construction industry to live up to the executive order that forces them to (hire) have, to afford contracts to minority firms in the building of any government subsidized facilities and so as a result of that the Santa Clara plan was drawn up in this area. I mean you're asking me a question that really is a huge question it was a lot of things going on at that time, the other thing that was going on, and I can't even remember the exact year now because I sat on it, the Treveno Killing, I think 1978. (That is referring to the Cops Committee and why we worked to fire the police chief and to get a new police chief because they were killing and using violence).

Diane: Have you heard of United People Arriva? Were you or friends affiliated with this group?

Bea: Yes, I've heard of them but I'm not involved in them. I've just heard of them in passing.

Diane: Do you know what their goals and objectives were for the groups?

Bea: No.

Diane: What do you know about the conception of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA)? The Mexican American Community Services Association (MACSA)? How were they founded?

Bea: Well I know that MAPA is a national organization and I know who the State President of California MAPA is his name is Ben Benavidez and I know that at one time that Blanca Alvarado was very involved in it and I know the purpose of MAPA and that they have conventions and I belong to it from time to time. We don't have a really active chapter here but we did at one time. Blanca Alvarado was very involved in it, she was a state officer at one time. So I am aware of its existence and the purpose of it (to try to promote hispanics to political offices and it's very important because we just don't have special representations and political bodies. MAPA has really helped. MACSA, I'm very aware of. My best friend is the executive director (one of my best friends Esther Mendina). But again I am aware of many of the people who founded that organization, Lino Lopez, and all those people who were involved, and how it was formed. It was formed because there was a great need to have a base of operations to further the goals of the hispanic community. And so, MACSA was formed but it was a result of Lino Lopez and his coming into this area that MACSA is in existence. I've been involved with MACSA from time to time as a matter of fact, in the middle of the year, I did a function (special event) for them and it was when Blanca Alvarado was appointed Vice Mayor of the City. I helped coordinate a function.

I brought together fourteen organizations to work cocktail reception in her honor.

Diane: That must of been a lot of work.

Bea: Yes, it was.

Diane: Do you recall any local newsletters or newspapers that were published during the period?

Bea: Yes, there is a newspaper that came out of San Francisco, and I don't know if you consider that local and I can't remember the name of it right now and it was really popular in this area, there were newsletters El Greto that was put out by the farm workers that was very popular.

Diane: Was the newsletter popular amongst everyone or just selected groups?

Bea: Well with politically active people it was popular. I was not involved in any of those. I was involved in a womens paper which was in fact called The Womens Paper and I wrote articles for that and I'd have to look for those articles.

Diane: How did you become involved?

Bea: I was asked to write so I did and I wrote an article for a magazine and I'd like to get that for you.

Diane: What was your involvement in the Farmworker Movement? Did you participate in any boycott/strikes?

Bea: As a matter of fact I did, I was involved and went to some

of their gatherings in the Salinas area and some of the rallies and then also I was one of the people who helped in the boycotts. I would stand in front of stores and try to get people to not go in to buy selected products. At that time it was lettuce and I remember I went there and my son was four years old and I would take him with me to try to get people not to buy lettuce and to sign petitions etc...

Diane: Knowing that they were successful boycotts do you feel that you made a contribution?

Bea: Absolutely, I was very happy to have done it and I would do it again. I had participated in other boycotts and I still support the farmworker movement.

Diane: Are there any other organizations that you were involved in that you would like to talk about at this time?

Bea: Well, I was involved in...I don't cross picket lines but I support workers and workers movements.