

## INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER This is the first part of our interview. I guess the first question, Gabe, is to tell us some personal information.

GABE REYES My name is Gabriel Allan Reyes. My present address is [REDACTED] Its in the [REDACTED] area. I was born in 1944 in Los Angeles. I was married in 1971. I have four children, four daughters: ages 15,12,10 and 8.

INTERVIEWER Why don't we talk about when you were a child about some of those experiences, because I know from my own that it does have a big impact. Why don't you talk about where you lived. Were you there for a long time? Was there a lot of movement in the beginning part of your life?

GABE REYES O.K. My parents were living in Los Angeles at the time I was born, but we moved to San Jose after I was about three months old. This was probably the second time that my parents had come up to San Jose. I was the seventh child. My dad was primarily a farm laborer - migrant. Occasionally he worked in packing houses and canneries. He did a lot of ranch work. My mom was primarily a housewife. She worked in the canneries. Well, she always worked in the fields when we worked in the fields. In later years she worked in the canneries here when the kids were old enough. They didn't need somebody at home all the time. Even then she worked only at nights. She worked the night shift. We moved up to San Jose because my mom had wanted a stable place to live, because as I've mentioned I was the seventh kid and they had done a lot of moving around.

INTERVIEWER So you were the youngest of the family?

GABE REYES I was the second to the youngest. I had one younger brother. My dad got a job here in San Jose in the packing house, Mayfair packing house. My mom wanted to stay

here so we stayed here from that point on. My dad did the packing house work and every summer we worked in the fields. Generally before the end of the school year and up into probably the third week of school we would work in the fields.

INTERVIEWER      Here in San Jose?

GABE REYES              Yeah, pretty much here in San Jose. Occasionally my older brothers and sisters and my dad would go up to Tracy to pick cotton or other places that were somewhat in the vicinity. They would have to go and stay there for a matter of a few weeks, but pretty much we did apricots, prunes, strawberries and string beans. That was what was in the area here and pears and cherries. There was a lot of crops here, so we did a lot of crops. Every summer we did crops. That was from when I was very young because me and my younger brother would be in the crib or, my mom even said in the prune box, when I was smaller. She would put me in the box in the shade and work the rows. So that was every summer. My older brothers and sisters all left school, probably around the tenth grade.

INTERVIEWER      So you were the first high school graduate?

GABE REYES              Let me think. No, one of my older brothers graduated from Tech, not from an actual high school but from Tech. I think my second oldest sister might have graduated from high school and I think my third oldest sister also graduated and then myself. My younger brother, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER      So most of them graduated from high school?

GABE REYES              Well, I think three of us did, three of the eight.

INTERVIEWER      Did your younger brother graduate?

GABE REYES              No

INTERVIEWER What kind of work did they get involved in? Did they go right into agricultural work?

GABE REYES At that time it was pretty much straight into the canneries. My brother graduated from Tech. He was a carpenter. So he got my other brother into carpentry. So he did that for a while, and then, after doing that for a while he went to barber's school. So right now my brother is a barber and one is a carpenter. My sisters are all married but they all work too. But they pretty much do high tech assembly in the electronic industry. My younger brother works in the electronic industry, kind of like a supervisor in the stock room and he has been only doing that for the last five years. Prior to that he was doing a lot of different kinds of work.

INTERVIEWER So you had a pretty stable childhood. Did you go to the same elementary school pretty much the whole time?

GABE REYES Well when we were here in San Jose, basically we moved all over the place. We first lived here on Eighth Street and then my dad wanted to buy a little ranch. We bought a little three acre ranch over on Hilary Avenue, what is now a housing development. But, since there was only San Jose High and Lincoln at that time my brother had to take a bus to San Jose High which was just too far; so we moved back downtown. We moved to Austin Court. That's pretty much where I grew up, in Austin Court, because I went to elementary, Washington Elementary is there. I actually started Woodrow Wilson when I was living there but then we moved over by, where my mom currently lives, Sacred Heart church, which is closer to Woodrow; so we went to Woodrow from there.

INTERVIEWER How were your folks able to get the money to buy a three acre ranch? I mean the prices were a lot lower then but...?

GABE REYES        Yeah actually it wasn't much. It was just a piece of property, three acres with an old house on it. There wasn't really any living there. My dad still did work for other people at that time on their ranches. We couldn't have had much money because when we moved from there to the house we bought my parents paid \$3,500 for that house. So the ranch couldn't have been much.

INTERVIEWER        So did you share your room with all your brothers?

GABE REYES        We had a two bedroom house and a big basement. So my parents had one bedroom, my three sisters had the other bedroom and the five brothers slept in the basement.

INTERVIEWER        Did you go down to Mexico much?

GABE REYES        No. We went down to Mexico once to see my grandmother who lived in Mexicali. Basically, we just couldn't afford the travel. The only reason we went down that time was because my grandmother was sick. So my dad bought a station wagon and we all went down there.

INTERVIEWER        Your mom and dad were born in Mexico?

GABE REYES        My dad was born in Aguas Calientes and my mom was born just south of Chihuahua. Both came over very young. My dad came over because of the revolution. His dad was very well off. They owned a ranch. They owned a drugstore. They owned a cantina. So they had property. My dad said that he recalled when he was very young that generals from the army would come have dinner at their ranch with his dad. I think he was about eight when they left because the revolution was too much. So they sold everything. Unfortunately what happened to them was that my father said that they sold everything and they put all the money in this great big chest. But on the way, when they were traveling by stage coach, they changed governments, printed new money and all

that money was worthless. He said that they sold that money. They got a nickel a shovelful of money. So they had to start over. My mom was always poor because I guess her dad left her mom at an early age when she was very young. She was pretty much raised by her grandmother on a ranch area. They immigrated because her aunt had come up to the states and her mom had decided to come up.

INTERVIEWER Did you keep up a lot of contact with your uncles when you were growing up?

GABE REYES The ones in the country, yeah. We didn't have any contact with the ones living in Mexico. My dad only a brother and I think five sisters. My dad was the oldest and his dad died pretty soon after they had gotten here in an automobile accident. So he pretty much had to be involved in raising the family, him and his brother. So he always had close contact with his sisters because he was kind of the patriarch of the family after that.

INTERVIEWER Did they live in the San Jose area?

GABE REYES No they're all down in the L.A. area: Oxnard, Indio, and Ventura. My mom had her sister, her brother and half brother. Her half-brother lived here in San Jose but he passed away. So he had some family that we are still in contact with. My aunt lived in Cochilla, Indio area, so I have some cousins down there; although they both passed away. My uncle also lived down there in that area. So I have quite a few cousins down there.

INTERVIEWER Do you go down there often?

GABE REYES Only when someone passes away, really. That's the only time I really ever see them.

INTERVIEWER So your family has gotten sort of Americanized in some ways? I know that's what happened to my family. My dad was an immigrant, he came here when he was very young, but...

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GABE REYES I don't know how Americanized we've gotten but we've just not kept in contact. Well its kind of the nature of my dad. My dad was a very quiet individual. He was a real stay at home person. I mean we never went anywhere.

INTERVIEWER Did he do a lot about education in your family? Was it a big issue in your family?

GABE REYES No it was pretty much survival. My dad, I think, had gone only to the fifth grade and my mom had something like to the second or third grade. So neither one had much education. Actually it was more of a matter of getting out of school as fast as possible in order to help the family. My dad and I actually had kind of a strong confrontation about my wanting to go to junior college. He was very opposed to it. He finally relented simply because our financial need was not as great at that time because my other brothers and sisters were working, contributing to the house. So he relented and said I could go for two years. After the two years passed it was no longer an issue for him. In fact, later on, after I had already picked up my B.A. and was still in school, he encouraged me very much at that time to continue on and go as far as I could in education. So he had a change of mind.

INTERVIEWER So you went to junior college right out of high school? And then from junior college to a four year college?

GABE REYES Well, actually what happened is that I went to junior college pretty much as a peer thing. That's where my close friends were going so I went there. The problem was that they flunked out after the first year; so I stayed there another half year. I was eligible to go to a state college because I had varily good grades. So I stayed there another semester because I had gotten myself into academic trouble; so it took me another semester to pull my grades up. Then I transferred over here to San Jose State because I

had another friend who had come here. That was really the only reason. And I lasted here probably about a year. But I was working full-time and trying to carry a full load. I wasn't very motivated. So I ended up leaving and going into the service. I didn't come back to school until I had gotten out of the service, came back and worked for about a year and a half.

INTERVIEWER      What kind of work were you doing when you went to college the first time?

GABE REYES          When I was going to City, after I had graduated, I was working at the shoe store. I was selling shoes. It was a self service store. So I was the assistant manager. Actually there was only three people in the store: the manager, assistant manager and the cashier. So I was doing that after school every day. I did that for I guess a year. Then I started working at the post office. I was working there full-time for a year and a half. Then I switched over to part-time because I was really struggling in school. I was doing just about everything. Pretty much I was carrying mail but at times I would also clerk or drive. I ended up doing special delivery and at Christmas time I even drove the big trucks taking mail from one city to another. I pretty much did everything. That's what you do as a sub.

INTERVIEWER      Why did you decide to go into the army?

GABE REYES          Well like I said I was struggling in school. Working in the post office wasn't my idea of a career. I didn't have any long term aspirations for that. I think it was just that I didn't know really what I wanted to do. I wasn't all that happy being at home, going to school and working. It just seemed like I needed a change.

INTERVIEWER      What year was that?

GABE REYES          That was in '65.

and after that I just continued to do well in school. I had ups and downs. Junior high was kind of a difficult time. Well I was in the top section but I was like an average student. I would go from being on the Honor Roll to being off. That was because I was out on the streets half the time. I never did any homework. We use to go to the gym every night and hang out in the streets afterwards. It was what everyone did.

INTERVIEWER     What about high school? Were you active in any clubs or go out for sports?

GABE REYES        I wasn't involved in high school at all because I went to a high school that was totally alien to me. I had grown up going to Washington which at that time was a heavy Italian area changing to a heavy Mexican area. So it was a good mix. I didn't feel that I stood out in any real way as far as being poor. At Woodrow it must have been 2/3 Mexican so I certainly fit in there. Woodrow was a good time. Even though I didn't do that good academically, I felt socially really good there. I ran for offices there. I was Banner custodian, Boy's Federation treasurer, simple things like that. It was more just being socially involved. But it changed completely for me when I went to high school because I went to Willow Glen High School. The neighborhood that I was in the boundry was cut off on Willow street and so 90% of the people that I knew went to either San Jose High or Lincoln. There was maybe 5 or 6 Chicanos that lived south of that street and we went to Willow Glen High School. It was at that time and continues to be today a very upper middle class school. Plus the fact that it was a very closed community because all the kids had also gone to Herbert Hoover which is right next to Willow Glen High School. So they had all known each other.

INTERVIEWER     So you were an outsider?



GABE REYES        Yeah. The only thing that I did there was play basketball on my sophomore and junior years. I was on the C & D not even the J.V. because I was small. So that was really the only social relationships that I had. Other than that I just went to class and that was it. I didn't do poorly I did average and a couple of times I got A's and B's.

INTERVIEWER        Was there a negative attitude towards the chicanos that were there?

GABE REYES        Yeah Yeah There was a real strong negative attitude. There were situations where there were some fights there that involved ... Well I remember one particular fight because some guys came over from Lincoln to see this one chicana who was in school there. Just the fact that they were there created a great big ... a near riot because they didn't want them there. They basically chased them out. The first day I went to school I got into a problem.

INTERVIEWER        Between another student who was just challenging you? How was the language when you were growing up? Was it Spanish in the home and English in the class?

GABE REYES        Yeah, although I had a weakness in English academically. It's still a weak area for me. Grammar, I am not good at. I only took English through 1A. I never even took 1B because it is a weakness for me. I mean I got C's, but that was all I could do. Most other things I could do well in if I wanted to. English is an area I never could do well in. But it was never a communication problem. I mean I only spoke Spanish before I started school. So initially I probably had an accent but I didn't have it for long. It wasn't a problem of being able to communicate.

INTERVIEWER        What was the environment like in the junior college you went to? Was it a continuation from Willow Glen?

GABE REYES NO. No. San Jose City College was not any kind of elite school so it had a wide range of people going there. I don't recall the ethnicity standing out. I don't even recall what it was. I assume that it had a decent mix because basically anyone who didn't qualify to go to a four year college had no choice but to go there. So it had a wide range of people. Whereas Willow Glen was a very homogeneous. Which aside from being just an Anglo school it had strong homogeneous characteristics otherwise. The economic characteristics, most of the students' parents were professional people. There weren't laborers. The living environment was completely different. The section of town was distinct. It was very snobbish. I never went to a single dance.

INTERVIEWER Did your buddies who were going to Lincoln and San Jose High, would they go to all of the dances?

GABE REYES Well I talk to them and they were all involved in the social life of those schools. But I'd rarely see them. I would only see them occasionally. So I didn't have too much contact with them at that time.

INTERVIEWER What about San Jose State? What was the environment like? You were there around '63? Was that around when Kennedy was assassinated?

GABE REYES Yeah. It was kind of different. The main thing about my situation in San Jose State is that I was a pre-med major. I was carrying heavy Math, Science classes: chemistry, physics. So I was really kind of totally occupied with studying and working. I was very little involved with the campus life. I almost don't know what campus life was.

INTERVIEWER You probably weren't involved in the neighborhood situation too much either? Were you still living with your folks?

GABE REYES        At that time? Yeah. No, I was pretty much coming to classes, going to the library and going to work.

INTERVIEWER      What motivated you to become a pre-med major?

GABE REYES        Oh not much choices. A friend that I had going here was a pre-med major. I like chemistry. I did do well in chemistry in high school. There was a lot of chemistry in a pre-med area. So that's what I declared as a major.

INTERVIEWER      When you went into the Army what was your experiences in the Army? I mean that was when Vietnam was just beginning. Was that in your mind when you enlisted?

GABE REYES        Oh yeah I knew what was going on. But at that time I was pretty much coming from a basic Mexican background. My family, all our relatives, everybody military service is a standard thing. We have a tradition of the males going into the service. My oldest brother had been in the Air Force. He spent his time in Germany. My other brother enlisted in the Marines. I don't know how, but I don't think he lasted a week or two. They kicked him out. He couldn't adjust to that. That particular brother went to Willow Glen. He got out of there, he went to San Jose and they threw him out of there. He went to Lincoln and they threw him out of there. Then he went into the Marines.

INTERVIEWER      What was he? Just wild?

GABE REYES        Uhh just real independent I guess. He just wasn't into being ordered around by anybody. It wasn't like he was out getting into trouble all of the time. The kind of trouble he got into was fights at the dances. Just the usual rabble rousing. He wasn't into drugs or hold-ups or car thefts or any of that kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER      Where did you serve your time at in the Army?

GABE REYES I spent my first tour...well I did my basic here at Fort Ord. Then they sent me to Alabama. I was in Alabama for four months at the helicopter school. From there they sent me to Korea. I was thirteen months in Korea. I came back from Korea to Texas. I was in Texas for four months, I think it was. Then I spent my last ten months in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER Did you see any actual fighting when you were in Vietnam?

GABE REYES Yeah the whole time. I was a helicopter machinegunner so I spent my whole time...I had something like over 400 hours of combat time. In Korea that was the time that they were having some conflicts along the border. I was in an aviation unit so we would hear about some skirmishes going on but I wasn't in the D.M.C.. Our planes would fly up and down. We had Mohawk surveillance aircraft as part of our unit. So they would fly up and down the D.M.C., but we were far enough from the D.M.C.. We had infiltrators coming across occasionally. They caught this little two man sub just up the river from where we were at. But that's the closest any contact came to us.

INTERVIEWER In your time in Vietnam were there any experiences that stand out in your mind now?

GABE REYES I guess the major impact of Vietnam was the confusion and the complexity of the conflict. I think that's what everybody recognizes now that it was kind of a problematic war. The thing that to me was the most difficult was...well part of it has to do with expectations. You grow up with John Wayne on the T.V. and the American soldiers being the good guys. Well that wasn't case. The greatest problem over there was that you didn't know if you were the good guys or the bad guys. There was no...you couldn't get the messages clear. I mean it wasn't like there was somebody there for you to save or help because nobody could be

trusted. It wasn't like you had any allies. That you could clearly see that you were rescuing or freeing anybody. I mean you see the movies of World War II where the U.S. troops go in and liberate France; clearly they were allies. They were happy to see you. We didn't have any of that kind of experience. The people that were there, you couldn't tell the difference between a V.C. who was...(end of tape 1). There was no esprit d'corp. Everybody was putting in their time waiting to get out of this confusing situation we all got put into. There wasn't any idea of gaining ground, of liberating any ground, any territory. You could go in and take over an area and then just leave it. I mean there wasn't any sense to having to control any area. There wasn't any sense to liberating anybody. The people were there basically surviving, the South Vietnamese, and their survival involved doing whatever they could to survive: which meant living off of the American troops. Doing whatever they could to take whatever they could from the American troops or the V.C.. It didn't matter. I mean you go into a little town and they were selling to American troops during the day and selling to the V.C. at nighttime. There wasn't anything about loyalty. I mean there was but it was difficult to find. Basically, it wasn't like what you expect it to be: the people know that you are on their side or not on their side. It was this is a customer and this is a customer. It didn't matter.

INTERVIEWER When were you in Vietnam exactly?

GABE REYES I was there from August of '67 through June of '68.

INTERVIEWER So you were right there during the meat of it.

GABE REYES I was there during Tet. Tet was probably the major conflict time. It was at least during my time there.

INTERVIEWER      There's a lot of controversy about Tet. I don't know if you have been reading it but there is a lot of debate over what is the historical significance of that offensive. You know some people say that militarily the V.C. lost but politically they won.

GABE REYES      Well I imagine that's the case. I'll tell you from my own experience, and it's hard to say because I wasn't all over the country, but where I was at and the area was considerable because we flew all over that area we won the war the whole time I was there. We were never losing the war. Our whole time was spent trying to find the enemy, trying to get into fights. We were never, we may have come out on the losing end in some individual battles but nothing major. So militarily I never had the sense that we were losing the war. Morally, philosophically, politically we clearly weren't winning anything. The individual soldier, I don't know if the soldier was trying to win any of that. The soldier was just trying to fight the war and survive it. But there wasn't any sense that we're making progress in ending the war. that we're making progress in liberating these people who asked for our help. Those questions were gone almost immediately. I mean it didn't take you long to realize this is not that we are here to liberate and help someone who needs help. We didn't know exactly what the situation was but it wasn't that. Once you got there and seen it, that was all you had to look forward to: just get out, putting your time in and getting out.

INTERVIEWER      Now the people you were serving with were they all a mixed bag?

GABE REYES      Ethnically? Yeah I say my company was primarily Anglo. But that was because my company was a helicopter unit. The people who went into the helicopter units were primarily tested in.

INTERVIEWER      So your college background helped you get in?

GABE REYES        Yeah, I didn't ask to get into that. In fact I had enlisted to go airborne and they just redirected me.

INTERVIEWER       Why did you want to go in airborne? More action?

GABE REYES        Just part of family tradition. Just what people in my family did (laughter). There was a few people, probably, actually I can remember that in my squad there was only one Chicano and two or three blacks. That was about it.

INTERVIEWER       When you got back here to the States that was after King was killed, assassinated and Kennedy. What was going through your head? Were you just trying to get back into the swing of things?

GABE REYES        Yeah, when I came back I went to City College for a semester and got a job. I didn't even ask for a job. A friend of mine got me a job. This friend of mine had been in the Marines. A close friend of mine, somebody who I grew up with. After sitting around the house for a month; I was having a good time; I didn't have any intention of doing anything but resting; but I guess he thought that I was getting into a rut or something. So he talked to a friend of his who was a supervisor in a company. Got me a job and I thought, "what the hell I guess I'll go". So I went ahead and started to work. But even at that I asked him, "Well I'll go work but I want a job where I can be alone." I didn't realize at the time but I really was recovering from the effects of the war. I really wasn't into... I don't know exactly what I was into. I wasn't into much of anything. Anyway he got me a job as a receiving inspector working in a room inspecting the products, the raw materials. I went ahead and enrolled in school and started taking I guess one class. I was working swing shift. And then it was a new company and they started expanding quickly. So they needed a supervisor for the swing shift for quality control. So they asked me to do it and I said nah I didn't want to supervise

anybody. So there was this guy who asked me if I would mind just helping them out if they had problems, if they need some help with something because it was all women. I was the only male in that section, the quality control section. So I said O.K. I don't know what he told them but I just got barraged with things. They were just constantly over there for me to come over and straighten out this thing or that. Basically they needed supervision. They didn't have anybody so they just used me for that. So I said well fine they are already using me I might as well do it. So they changed me from being a receiving goods inspector to a quality control section supervisor. And all of that was happening very quickly. I went from being a receiving goods inspector to a quality control section supervisor in two months. I did that for about four months and then they opened a plant in New Jersey. It was G.R.T. corporation: General Recorded Tape. Making cassettes and 4 track and 8 track. So they bought this company in New Jersey and they asked me to go back as the quality control manager. It was fine with me. I wanted to get away from home for a while. Mentally I was having some difficulty being at home. I didn't particularly want my mom to see me. I was unable to sit down and eat. I couldn't hold a fork. My hand would just shake. I don't know why, it was just shaking. So I would do that, get up and walk out. Sometimes I would fall asleep eating and my mom would come in and turn off the light. I would hear her. I mean mom was very quiet but I would hear her and I would come flying out of bed and scare her because... I don't know. I hear the noises, you know, so I thought, 'Oh man it's no good'. So I took advantage and went back to New Jersey. It was real nice for me. It gave me the chance to get away and I wasn't so self-conscious anymore because nobody knew me. So I worked back there for a year and a half and so finally I just said I am ready to go back home.

INTERVIEWER      When did you get your B.A.?



GABE REYES I picked it up in '72 when I came back. I had spent time in school but I hadn't got very far. I had actually only completed about a year and a half of school when I came back on the G.I. Bill.

INTERVIEWER What about your high school friends? What were their experiences through those times? Was it varily similar?

GABE REYES My one friend who had gone into the Marines and come back; he was a corpman so he was working in the hospital. Just before I went into the service I found out he was gay. So we were gone apart all this time when I came back. He was working then. He had already finished school and was working. When I came back I lived with another friend, Pete the associate director. Pete and I grew up together too. I knew Rene even before grammar school. Pete came in to Washington elementary around fifth grade. He lived three or four blocks from us. Pete was very active in the Chicano movement at that time when I got back. So I immediatly got immersed in the movement. Rene wasn't much involved in the movement so I didn't see him much for the next couple of years.

INTERVIEWER How exactly was Pete involved in the movement?

GABE REYES Well he was one of the persons who started the campus grape boycott committee. He was very involved in the farmworker movement. He and these other three friends, Mauro was one of them, Sid Flores and Ramon Martinez were the four persons who started the grape boycott committee. They were very successful with that. Then they got active or maybe at the same time with M.A.S.C. which later became M.E.C.H.A.. When I came back, they were just talking about starting a newsletter; so that was an activity that we all got involved with right away.

INTERVIEWER That was around 1970? And prior to that when you came back from Vietnam during those two years you were getting yourself readjusted back into society?

GABE REYES Yeah, well I was just back in New Jersey working for a year and a half. I was here for only half a year. I was immersed in work. There was what, two shifts and I didn't have anything else to do so I was working from 8 o'clock in the morning through the swing shift. I'd get home about 10 o'clock at night. Pretty much the plant and the people there were my whole life.

INTERVIEWER So what was going on in the outside world, you basically weren't paying much attention to it?

GABE REYES Yeah. It's amazing how little I knew of what else was going on. Woodstock took place when I was there. One of the guys who worked for me took off and went to Woodstock. I didn't know anything about it. I didn't read a thing about it. I didn't know it happened. He came back and told me about it. I said, "What in the hell is Woodstock?". I didn't know a thing he was talking about. I didn't realize to later what the whole thing had been. Yeah a lot of things were going on but I was pretty much, totally involved in the industry there. I did know what was going on with music because we did music. I had to learn a lot about music and the groups of the time. We handled a lot of their recordings, did work in the recording studios, seen some of the recording studios we had in New York and Chicago. That was about it.

INTERVIEWER You were a student in San Jose State in 1970?

GABE REYES I came back home from New Jersey in May of 1970. I had been corresponding a lot with my friend Pete Rochelle. He would send me tapes. Pete was very active with the grape boycott, the farmworkers and the student organizations of the time. So he would send me tapes telling me what he was up to. Kind of keep me informed with what was

going on. So when I came home I called Pete, got together with friends and ended up renting an apartment with him over here on Tenth Street. I intended on going back to San Jose State. That's why I had come back, to go to school. So we got an apartment over there. So he was very involved in everything, I didn't have anything else to do and I started tagging along with him. Basically I would end up going with him to the pickets at Safeway and Lucky, to the meetings of the farmworkers. They had an office over there on North First street at the time. So I was going to those meetings. There were a couple of M.E.C.H.A. meetings that took place during the summer and so I went along with him to those because I wasn't working. I came back and I didn't intend to work. I had enough money to be able to get through the summer and I was going to use the G.I. Bill to go back to school. So I hadn't intended on working this time because last time I had worked too much. This time I was just planning on going to school. So I ended up starting to get involved with these things. A lot of community meetings going on. A lot of police brutality things going on at the time so there were a lot of meetings. I became familiar with organizations like La Conferacion de La Raza. So I had some involvement with that just from attending some meetings. The Model Cities Program started up at the time so I was attending Model City stuff. United People Arriba, I went out on the Community Alert Patrol. I really didn't know too much about it just enough: that it was about the police brutality issue.

INTERVIEWER All of that was going on in the summer of 1970? What were your perceptions of all of these organizations? I mean you were coming in varily fresh.

GABAE REYES Well actually before I left I had attended a M.A.S.C. meeting at San Jose City College and a couple of other things I has attended. I was aware of what was happening basically before I left. To me I was aware how

serious of a thing it was and I didn't want to be dragged into this hostile thing that was going to happen. I just couldn't handle another hostile thing like that right now at that time. So I was aware of what was happening, of the seriousness of the issues and of my own feelings about it because I felt very sympathetic and very strongly. Heh, there were some very serious injustices going on and somebody needed to do something about it. So I had the orientation already. So when I came back it was just a matter of O.K. I am ready to be involved with things. So I already knew what was going to happen more or less. I was looking forward to getting back in touch with the situation. I didn't understand the extent of my involvement that was going to happen. I just didn't think about it, really. There were some things that I just kind of got dragged into as they came up, on the individual issue itself. But my sensitivities were very strong. Everytime something came up I could understand, I didn't really have any difficulty the seriousness of the injustice and the unfairness of it all. Clearly my sympathies and allegiance were, with regard to these issues, in support of the Chicano movement's position. So I just naturally kept getting in deeper and deeper with this. Well you know school was about to start and Pete at this time was involved with three other people in the Farmworkers Organizing Committee here on the campus. They were the Farmworkers Organizing Committee. It was himself and Sid Flores who is now an attorney and Mauro Chavez and Ramon Martinez. So the four of them and myself started to get together talking about 'O.K. school is coming up what are we going to do?'. I was basically just sitting in. They had already I guess been working on the idea of putting together some newsletter. Ramon had gathered some materials for doing layouts. So we started having meetings just before school started and pretty much formulated the idea to go ahead and do this. There were some politics around it like this was going to be called the Voice of M.E.C.H.A. but

there was some issue about what was the M.E.C.H.A. leadership going to say about it.

INTERVIEWER            Was that M.E.C.H.A. already or was it M.A.S.C.? So you weren't involved when M.A.S.C. became M.E.C.H.A.?

GABE REYES            It was M.E.C.H.A. at that time. No I wasn't, it had already happened. Juan Oliveras was chair of M.E.C.H.A. at that time so they with Juan and. No, Ramon met with Juan. Then Ramon came back to report to the rest of the group. Juan was very adamant that he wanted it to be the official arm of M.E.C.H.A. and to be controlled by M.E.C.H.A. leadership. Pete, Sid and Mauro didn't want it to be like that way. They wanted to do their own thing with it. They wanted to basically serve M.E.C.H.A. and other groups but they didn't want it to be controlled by any one group. So there was kind of a clash about that and as a result of that they decided that they needed kind of a neutral image. Anyway this is all my interpretation and their's maybe a little different because I wonder how in the heck I ended up being coordinator of that paper. My sense is that that was it: I was a new person. I wasn't aligned with any particular group within M.E.C.H.A. itself. I could be seen as a neutral figure head and really that all it was. The way we structured it being a coordinator doesn't mean you run the thing. It means you carry out the duties of being a coordinator. The people who do the writing carry out those duties. The people who put it together. Basically it was... I don't know...democratic, something more than that. It was a real leveling of authority. Everyone is equal. Everyone is a worker. My responsibility happened to be that of coordinator. So I ended up being coordinator and we got started in the year and that's what dragged me heavily into student politics. Because then everybody started seeing me as the coordinator of this paper and started contacting me regarding issues and things like that. One thing led to

another and there were some internal struggles going on within M.E.C.H.A. itself. So we went on doing the newsletter for the first semester, very heavy in the campus politics at that time. Things were going on the campus that we naturally got involved with. Struggles with the administration for more funding for students. I can't remember all the issues. It seems that every week there was a different issue. Racism in the campus paper and stuff like that. I am not exactly sure how but around the middle of that year there was a struggle within M.E.C.H.A. and I ended up in the middle of it trying to act as a go between. As a consequence of all that a vote was taken and Juan Oliveras was removed as the chair of M.E.C.H.A. and I was voted in as chair of M.E.C.H.A.. During this time I had also been working with the EOP. I became an EOP tutor. Pete and myself had been asked by Humberto right at the end of summer to put together a screening committee to screen the new applicants. Basically to make the decision about who was going to be brought into the program. Anyhow the main thing that happened was in March when we did this march to Sacramento. It was Humberto and Jose Carrasco who came up the idea of this march. They approached me as the chair of M.E.C.H.A. and I knew Jose and Humberto very well by now because I had worked with them. I had worked there a lot of hours during the summertime interviewing students so I had the opportunity to met and talk with them a lot. So they came up with the idea of the march and I remember it was myself, Mauro, Jose, Humberto and somebody else. Jose laid it out, 'O.K. this is the route here.'. He laid out a map and said, "I think we can do it in five days if we walk. there's this leg and this leg". So what we did one day, we drove out, dropped Mauro at first leg, somebody at the second, somebody at the third and like that. I think maybe it was Ramon and I. To pace it out and also to identify rest stops, lunch stops and break stops and water and restrooms and things like that. So basically, that's what we did: go out one day

and laid all that out. Then we went about contacting community organizations along the route to help provide the food and to help provide places to stay. I think Jose did most of the thing about finding places to stay. He did a lot of that through the church because he had strong ties with the church. Because like in Stockton we stayed in a church. In the outskirts of Sacramento we stayed at Sacramento City College. In Thornton we stayed in a community center over there. The first day over by Livermore we stayed at a ranch and that was through the church. (end tape 2) So Jose was identifying the places to stop. Humberto was the director of EOP and he basically identified the issues, the concerns, the cutbacks. Basically gave us the data. This is what is going to happen if Reagan cuts out the EOP budget. So Humberto kind of outlined the issues and the students did basically all the work: handled the public relations effort, were the spokespersons, were the manpower the personpower to do the walk. We went about getting the sleeping bags. I think the YMCA donated 200 sleeping bags for us to use. Lawrence Ugem's father had a little trucking business down south near Visalia. Anyway so he brought a big truck and that's how we transported all the supplies and sleeping bags. We made contacts in Sacramento so we could have some kind of rally when we were there.

INTERVIEWER Was there much controversy around the march? I understand that there were some kind of changes in M.E.C.H.A. because the preparations weren't being done effectively?

GABE REYES That's kind of funny. I had forgotten all about that. Yeah that was kind of the problem with the issue of why they voted Juan out. It had to do with the march too. I guess Juan's administration's willingness and cooperation in carrying out the march.

INTERVIEWER What went down in that meeting when they voted him out? Do you remember much around that?

GABE REYES. Well I remember a little bit about the final meeting but most of the real discussions took place outside the meeting. There were a couple of real strong power groups at play there. Basically Juan and the people who worked closely with him on the leadership of M.E.C.H.A. and another group of people, a more diverse group of people. Those of us in the Que Tal group were very behind the march and wanted to pull it off. There were a couple of other groups but I don't remember exactly which ones who were also aligned to that position. There were actually a couple of votes taken, a couple of different meetings. But there was a lot of this feeling that 'Hey you're stacking the meeting' and things like that. Finally there was a well-known time and date when the issue was going to be brought up. Most of the people knew it. It wasn't on the agenda but most of the people knew it. There was some hard feelings about that because a lot of coups were going on. A lot of people didn't like the idea of coups and some people had some strong resentments about that being done.

INTERVIEWER Do you think that weakened or strengthened the movement?

GABE REYES Well I think it would have been a lot more damaging if we had not had the march. I mean immediately in the same meeting where he was put out and I was put in, my first thing was to set up the committees. We had to set up those committees. It was getting too close to the time that we had to do this thing. So the rest of the time of that meeting was spent putting together the committees and the chairs, making the assignments of who needed to do what, and starting to plan out.

INTERVIEWER Were other chapters of M.E.C.H.A. involved in this march on Sacramento?

GABE REYES No, basically it was just San Jose State. Maybe there were some people from Santa Clara. There may



have been some people who came over from Berkeley and Stanford. Basically it was all San Jose State?

INTERVIEWER Do you think that the central M.E.C.H.A. was dragging its feet?

GABE REYES Central, statewide, there wasn't any at that time. In fact there was even a M.E.C.H.A. statewide. There was FRENTE in Berkeley and FRENTE in Santa Barbara, though I am not quite sure. Most of the other campuses had M.E.C.H.A. but some still even had M.A.S.C. and stuff like that. So there wasn't any real strong central organization at that time. In fact that started to develop right away; but right at that time there wasn't any.

INTERVIEWER So what do you think was Juan's motivation for not being too supportive of the Sacramento march?

GABE REYES Oh I don't really know. My own personal assessment was that it wasn't that he wasn't behind it so much as who is going to make decisions, who is going to be the spokespersons, who is going to set up the timetable. It was just disagreements on the implementation of it. I don't think there were any real disagreements about the issue itself. It was more over who is going to call the shots.

INTERVIEWER What happened to him after that?

GABE REYES Well in fact Juan is still here. He's teaching here. He's working on his doctorate out of Berkeley, but he's also a professor at Hartnell. He's on leave from there right now. He's on a sabbatical. That's where he is from. He's living there now and he's been down there I guess for the last ten years. But he's been up here occasionally teaching and taking classes. I run into him once or twice a year. But what happened to him right after that? I don't know, I think he was still here. I think he graduated shortly after that and he may have gone up to Berkeley.

INTERVIEWER        What was the students' response to the Sacramento march?

GABE REYES        Oh it was real good. The best thing about the march really was the involvement that everybody had. Because its the kind of situation where you're thrown together for a week in kind of harsh circumstances. You know where you're out all day. Having to be walking all day and be finding places to eat and sleep and all that. You have to have a lot of inter-action and you have to do a lot of working together with other people. Basically the nicest thing that happened was that people came out of it with real strong personal ties.

INTERVIEWER        About how many students were involved in it.

GABE REYES        About a hundred. I think when we got there, there were about three hundred, but that was with people coming in and out and a large group joining there. But basically there were about a hundred.

INTERVIEWER        They were mainly all Chicano? Do you know what was the Chicano population in school then?

GABE REYES        Yeah. I really don't know. You know the figures were so bad, the actual university figures were so bad. At one time I thought that there were a couple of thousand, but I don't know. We may have had half of the Chicano students on that march. The situation at that time was that you actually almost knew all the Chicanos and the great majority of people were involved. Those who were only part-timers, who weren't here most of time, probably were not. But, those who were here full time, you probably knew them all.

INTERVIEWER        What do you think was the impact of the march on the administration?

GABE REYES      You know we got real good media attention. I don't know if there was any impact on the administration. You would think that they were aware of it because it got very good attention and it got it for five days. I mean almost everyday we were in the newspaper or on the t.v. that night. Front page and stuff, so it was good media coverage. So I am sure that they were aware of it. I don't think that the campus itself got involved. They didn't need too. It was an issue with the state. I think it made a good impact in Sacramento because it was one of the few rallies taking place at that time. We certainly got a lot of media attention, so I think that was good; but you can't say that it was any noticeable thing. It wasn't like we went out there to protest the situation. The legislature responded. I can't say that they responded to that march. They responded to the whole situation and reinstated the cuts that Reagan was about doing. So in that respect we made out fine. I can't exactly say that it was attributed to our effort. Our effort played a part in it. More than anything, the real benefit was the benefit to the Chicano community here on campus and in the community itself, in terms of building solidarity. It really left people very close, very tight. It built some real strong associations and it left the Chicano community here on campus very strong. There was a lot of activity going on from that point on for the next few years. A bunch of issues, almost every issue there were a lot of groups going on at that time.

INTERVIEWER      So what was your personal involvement after the Sacramento march? What developed after that?

GABE REYES      Well I was still involved with QUE TAL. That was my home base. We got involved with different things as they came along. With QUE TAL you had the opportunity to know about everything that's going on because you are writing about it. You get a little taste of everything. The Coors boycott comes up; you go over and attend those

meetings, participate in some of the picketing and stuff like that. So you're pretty well familiar with what's going on there. When the LA RAZA UNIDA party's activity is going on, you're involved in all the meetings and the structure of the organization; involved in the planning and politicking that went on. So you got a strong taste of that, just about everything. It was a real circus of meetings at that time. I mean I can remember when in one day you would go to five different meetings, one after the other and see 50% of the same people at each of them. So it was a real heavy political time. So much that my grades actually started to get real dangerous for a while. I was just barely doing enough work to get by OK you know. I was just barely hanging in there with getting decent grades. Then, the classes were kind of the same thing because the MAGS program was very heavy and a lot of people were taking those classes. So you weren't only getting the community and campus involvement, but you were actually getting the classroom. You would take POLITICS OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, the MEXICAN-AMERICAN FAMILY class, SOCIOLOGY OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN and MEXICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY class. It was a real nice balance because you were getting a whole bunch of book kind of learning, the opportunity to do research and study as well as getting involved in the actual practical things of the Chicano movement, Chicano politics that were going on in the community and campus.

INTERVIEWER So that was in 1971. Did you graduate then?

GABE REYES No, actually let me think, I graduated in '72. I was chairman of M.E.C.H.A. for that semester and then I didn't choose to run again. Then they changed the structure. They went to a five person, rotating chair. M.E.C.H.A. was still very active. M.E.C.H.A. meetings were pretty well attended, about fifty persons would attend meetings.

INTERVIEWER And QUE TAL, how did that go?

GABE REYES Well that went on publishing in fact for probably a few years because another group of people would come in and take it up. It was kind of an on-going thing for a good amount of time. It went on pretty strong.

INTERVIEWER Were you guys ever involved with the daily paper, the SPARTAN DAILY or was that pretty much closed off?

GABE REYES We had a lot of clashes with the SPARTAN DAILY. We didn't have anybody that I can recall in Journalism. We did a lot of our own kind of publications. Pete did a little thing that was called, THE CHICANO DAILY. Now why was that done? I can't remember, I guess it was just the need for a daily thing, a flash. Everybody was keeping in touch on a daily basis with what was happening. So he would do a little daily thing, type it up, ditto it up and send it out. We had a little thing we called the CHICANO TABLE over here in the Union and we all cover over and check in everyday during break or in the morning and pick up the paper there. Pete did a thing called MAND A MAND, which I guess was after the CHICANO DAILY. But I am not quite sure what the change was, what the need was that was being addressed at the time.

INTERVIEWER QUE TAL had poetry in it? Did it get out to the community?

GABE REYES Yeah, QUE TAL was a much bigger newsletter so it had a much broader area of coverage. A little, not much, only on a limited basis. There just wasn't the money to produce that much. It was all just donated paper and stuff.

INTERVIEWER How did you become part of EOP? You had been working on the screening committee and then the Sacramento march.

GABE REYES Well let me see. We did the march to Sacramento and I became EOP director in March of '72. I hadn't graduated. It was kind of an unusual situation. Well

Humberto was resigning, right. The way it worked was that there was a screening committee put together of about twelve organizations, Chicano student organizations. It was parallel to the university's thing, but in this case this one took precedence. A real unusual situation, in looking back I am really shocked that it happened that way. I still don't even remember how in the heck I applied, whether I filled out material. I guess I must have. It wasn't my intention to apply, but people asked me to apply, because my intention was to graduate because I had gotten married that summer. Then I was going to graduate and go to law school. I had taken my LSAT. I was really in the process of doing all that. I didn't really have any intention but people asked me to apply. My philosophy of the time was well if people want me to I am willing to be considered for it. But I wasn't into competing for it. My philosophy was that there will be three or four people that are going to be considered, reviewed by this group and depending upon what they want, what they feel is best for EOP they going to pick out the person whose skills best match that. If they select me, well fine I'll commit to two or three years. Basically that's what happened, they selected me.

INTERVIEWER      Who were the other candidates?

GABE REYES          Manuel Ramirez was one. Juan Anto was a candidate. Juan Anto was probably the other main candidate. Juan was Juan Oliveres's, they used to call them the two Juans, Juan Oliveres main sidekick. He'd been very involved. A very sharp individual, real amiable, real nice and friendly personality.

INTERVIEWER      Why do you think they selected you? Because of your involvement there?

GABE REYES          It may have been. I am sure some of it was who people knew. My own impression was that Juan was viewed as being too skewed to one group, to one side. I think he was

viewed as too much a part of one clique. That's my own guess, because he was very much a part of Juan O.'s group.

INTERVIEWER      So that was in '72 and now sixteen years later you're still in the same job.

GABE REYES      Don't ask me how that happened. It wasn't intentional and I am still in the same situation. I keep thinking, 'Gee I wonder if its too late to go to law school' or I like to do something else. But it hasn't been a stale situation. Up until the last few years there's been tremendous change in the program and even now again we are going through some more changes. There's been tremendous change, tremendous growth, tremendous challenge, tremendous need. So its been the kind of situation where I haven't had the time to think about leaving, certainly not in the first two or three years as I had expected. It was seven or eight years before I even caught my breath, stopped and looked around and said, 'What am I doing kind of thing?'.

INTERVIEWER      Well I want to thank you for doing the interview.