Q: Great. Hello, this is Chris Mendez. I’m here with Irma Soto. We’re doing an interview for the Women Memoir project. It’s December 2, 2017. So do you want to just start by telling me how you got started in activism in Austin, and at UT, and kind of how you came to going there?

A: Okay. I can do that. I’m a little bit sick from cedar fever right now, so I’m going to be coughing and interrupting the interview with my coughs, and I apologize for that. Hopefully it won’t happen too often. But I’m from West Texas, I was born in West Texas, in Sonora, Texas. And I grew up in San Angelo, Texas. And my mother and my father were from there also. And they taught us -- I have one brother, older brother -- one older brother and one younger sister. And they taught us to never let people treat us badly. And so I grew up knowing that, always. And so even in grade school, I stood up to -- I went to school in grade school with all Mexicanos, all Chicanos. But when I went into the third grade, I was in a mixed school, Fort Concho Museum -- I mean, Fort Concho Elementary. We moved to that neighborhood, and so I went to school with that group of people. And so I started
putting up and feeling the negative effects of racism in West Texas. So I started feeling a little angry at what was going on, and how I would be talked to. The teachers were really good to me. They didn’t really do anything, except for my fourth-grade teacher. My fourth-grade teacher was a little bit under-the-covers racist. She would make fun of the Mexicanos. But she wasn’t too bad. She, one time, this will never -- how long do you want this to be?

Q: Like, two hours, I think, is the minimum. But it doesn’t have to be that long.

A: Oh, okay. She -- my teacher -- I can’t remember her name, but she was a young, white teacher who was getting -- had just gotten married. And I don’t know where she was from. I don’t know what her politics were. But she did not appreciate Mexicanos or Chicanos. So I remember one day, she was talking about -- she was talking to the class about the history of Texas. And she said, “Rio Grandee” instead of saying, “Rio Grande.” And I was in the third grade. I was only in the third grade. I shouldn’t have noticed it, but I did. I said, “Do you mean Rio Grande, teacher?” And she looked at me with this horrible look on her face, and she said to me, she said -- she said, “Tell me, how do you
prono\texttext{u}nc"e this word?" And she wrote on the chalkboard, she wrote the word -- it had a C-H in it. She said it -- was it church, or something like that? It had a C-H in it. And I said, and I said it without saying it properly. I said S-H instead of C-H, like we tend to do, like Mexicanos tend to do. She said, "No, that's not the way you say it." So she embarrassed me in front of the whole class. I hated her.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I went home and practiced, practiced, practiced, and I came back the next day, and I knew how to say it. You know, but it was because of her --

Q: Yeah.

A: -- you know, her attitude towards me. And then that happened, and then one time we were out on the playground, and there was this little white boy that was always picking on me and being mean to me. And so he said, "Hey, you can't be next. I'm next." And I said, "Hey, it's a free country," because that's what we were saying at that time. All the kids were saying, "Hey, it's a free country."

Q: Yeah.

A: And I said, "Hey, it's a free country." And he said, he said, "Not for Mexicans and niggers!" So --
Q: Yeah.

A: You know, like.

Q: Hmm. So that sort of -- that’s sort of the -- was that sort of like, I guess, the foundational, I guess, experience that you had that got you interested in doing --

A: Yeah.

Q: -- in activism?

A: And also, my mother became a nurse. She became a licensed vocational nurse. And she was always very smart, you know? She didn’t go to college, but she was always very smart. And she always counseled me to do the right thing and to not let the white people put me down. Because in San Angelo, I don’t know if you grew up with this, because it was years later that you grew up there. But in San Angelo it was very racist. What school did you go to?

Q: I went to Central High School.

A: And then the middle school?

Q: I went to Glenn Middle School.

A: Oh yeah, you went to that nice one. And elementary?

Q: I went to Belaire.

A: Oh, you didn’t face any of the obstacles that we faced.

Q: Yeah?
A: You know, but that’s good. Very, very good. You got a good education.

Q: Mm-hmm. What were the schools that you went to?

A: So I went to Rio Vista. Do you know where that is?

Q: Yeah, I think so.

A: It’s in the Mexican part of town. I started out there, and then I moved. My mom moved me to Fort Concho. And I went there and then -- for two years. And then she moved out of town and went to Lakeview District, and she moved me into the Lakeview District schools, which I hated, because they were such idiots. Those white people were so stupid, man, I couldn’t believe it. They couldn’t do math problems or anything.

Q: Yeah. My brother goes to that high school. We moved and then where we were living, I guess, was technically supposed to be the Lakeview District, so he ended up going there. But I was still going to Central, which was technically -- which was actually closer to where we lived.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, so we had different educations.

A: Did he get an education? He didn’t, did he?
Q: No, I mean, I think so. I mean, he’s different. He struggles more with school, and he is a little more unmotivated.

A: Well, they so do it because they treat them like that. That’s the way Lakeview is. Thank God I didn’t go to Lakeview, except for the sixth grade. And then when I was ready for junior high, my mom transferred me back into -- to --

Q: Was it predominantly Hispanic students there at Lakeview? Because that’s what I --

A: Nope.

Q: -- notice from now. But I don’t know how --

A: It was predominantly white, poor white. Poor whites that couldn’t read. It was horrible, horrible, horrible. They were country. They were country whites.

Q: Yeah.

A: It was crazy. And it was really horrible, horrible, horrible, horrible. And it was poor. They didn’t have a lot of money. I couldn’t believe it. I had come from going to a beautiful school, Washington Junior High was my school.

Q: In San Angelo?

A: Uh-huh. And then Edison High School.
Q: Yeah, I think my parents mentioned that school before. They went there.

A: Yeah, your parents probably went there. And those schools -- do you know the history of Central High School? Has your mother ever told you that history?

Q: No. I don’t know if they even know, actually.

A: Then tell them this story. Central High School, I guess they built it in -- they built it in -- let’s see. I graduated in ’67.

Q: Mm-hmm. From high school?

A: Yeah. So they must have built it -- I went to it, my brother went to it. They must have built it in the ’60s. And I don’t know -- you know, did you go there to that school?

Q: Yes.

A: You didn’t appreciate, I’m sure, you did not appreciate the architecture of that school, because it’s probably run down by now.

Q: Yeah. They were actually doing construction on it while I was still going there.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, kind of re-renovating buildings and stuff.
A: Yeah. Yeah, because they did an amazing job. They built all these different buildings, and you would walk to your buildings. And then the auditorium had a zigzag roof. It had beautiful -- the inside of the auditorium was beautiful. And the swimming pool, they had an Olympic-size swimming pool in the gym. They had so many things. It was such a beautiful school. You know why?

Q: Because it was funded by white people?

A: Yes. Because the ranchers in Texas, in San Angelo, around San Angelo, those ranchers were super wealthy. They had lots of money. They put all their money into building the most beautiful school for the kids. And that’s what they did.

Q: Yeah. So at the time when you were going there, was it segregated, the school? Or it was integrate, like there were Mexican American students, white students and black students?

A: Yeah. Yeah. Except that it was just then starting to get Mexicanos would go to high school and blacks would go to high school. Before that, they didn’t really get into going to high school. They would drop out. There weren’t a lot of us there. So it was very interesting, dude. I need to write a book about it, but I’m so sick I can’t do
anything. I got diagnosed with cancer last year, and it’s kind of fogged my brain, so I have to -- yeah. Anyway, but so, yeah, we were integrated when -- but the reason I was integrated into the classes was because I was really good at school. I was good at math, I was good at science, I was good at reading. I played the oboe in the band, in the orchestra. I was -- oh, I don’t know why, but I always wanted to do the best that I could. So I got very, very good grades. And so I was always in the good classes. I took Latin for three years. I was always in the good classes. So I did well there. And so I was the only Mexican in most of my classes. There were other Mexicanas there, and Mexicanos.

Q: Yeah.

A: My brother was there, but they were in regular -- they didn’t go into the better classes. So they did respond to me. But you know what I’ve always hated about myself? I’m such a kiss-ass. (laughter) Not a kiss-ass, but I always knew how to act in front of the white people. I knew exactly how to act.

Q: Like, you couldn’t be too ethnic, or too different.

A: Yeah. I shied away from being too ethnic. I’m talking about, you know, from having an accent. I shied away from
all of that. So they put me in good classes and I stayed in good classes, and I graduated -- I was -- I graduated in the middle of my class, only because I wasn’t trying. But then when -- so when that happened -- and so I grew up. Oh, and so the same time, the other thing that was going on in politics was that Kennedy was running for office. And my mother was very involved in his campaign. She loved him, she thought he was great, and she wanted him to get elected. So she was out there walking the streets and organizing, to try to get him elected. So that happened at the same time.

And so then, after that, so I got interested in all of that. And I happened to have the luck to marry a Chicano that was very smart, and very supportive. And so we got married, and he was in the Air Force. We went to Oklahoma is where they stationed him. So we went to ugly Oklahoma and lived there, and I had a baby. My daughter is Sandy. So she was born in Oklahoma. And we lived there for two years. And then we got out of the Air Force and we moved to Houston, because I had an aunt in Houston. And Gene wanted to go -- my husband wanted to go to school there in Houston, U of H. So he signed up -- we moved over there,
and he signed up for school. And then I was going to work
and support the family while he went to school. Plus he
got the VA. That thing they gave the soldiers, VA benefits
-- and they paid for -- they got a big check every month,
and they paid for -- it would pay for the school --

Q: The G.I. Bill?

A: Yeah. Yeah, it was really a good thing that was going on.
But I think they cut it out. I’m not sure. I think they
cut it out. So then we did that, and then when he was
going to school, I saw him getting ready to go to school.
I said, “Wait a minute, I want to go to school, too.” You
know? And so I hurriedly went and took the SAT at school,
and I took the SAT and I passed. And I applied and they
accepted me at U of H. So I went to school at U of H with
Gene at the same time. We went in and we got our
undergraduate degree there. And he got it in psychology.
I don’t know why. I got -- I was doing it in sociology,
because I wanted to do more research on our people and what
had gone on with our people, and I wanted to try to change
things. So I did that. And I graduated and he graduated,
and we applied for graduate school. And he was accepted at
the University of Colorado in Boulder for a PhD program in
psychology. So he accepted it. And I was accepted at UT for sociology, and I accepted that.

Q: For the PhD program?
A: Yeah. Plans were for me to move up to Colorado. I didn’t want to, but that’s what I was going to do. But so I started here at UT, and I was a TA for the sociology department. At first I was a TA for the Mexican American Studies department.

Q: So they did have one at that time that you were --
A: Oh, yeah.

Q: What time was that? Was that --
A: That was in ’74.

Q: Okay. So is that, like, when the Chicano studies had just started?
A: Yeah, probably.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I taught a class in -- and I don’t know if it was the first year or the second year, but I taught a class, and it was Chicano studies. And I talked about -- have you ever read Occupied America?

Q: Hm-mmm.

A: Dude! What’s your major, dude?

Q: English.
A: Dude!
Q: Yeah.
A: What am I going to do with you?
Q: Yeah. That’s how I grew up, just loving reading, and so that’s what I pursued.
A: Do you like Mexican writers?
Q: Some of them, yeah. Well, recently I just reread a novel by Benjamin Alire Sáenz, I don’t know if you’ve heard of him.
A: No.
Q: He’s an English professor at UT El Paso.
A: Oh, really?
Q: Yeah. And he writes young adult novels.
A: Is he Chicano?
Q: Yeah.
A: Oh.
Q: Yeah.
A: I’ll have to get his book. Can you write his name on one of your papers?
Q: Sure, I’ll write it down, yeah.
A: So I can get it.
Q: But yeah, I like him. Actually, just recently I was -- our -- I’m working on an undergraduate honors thesis right now.
And there’s a novel that I’m considering using in my thesis by Americo Paredes.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: And it’s called George Washington Gómez.

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So I’m going to be reading that over the break, over the winter break. I’m hoping to --

A: Americo was teaching here back then in the ’70s.

Q: Yeah, he was.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, I saw that on the biography that he was a UT professor, so --

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, that’s good, dude. But you’ve got to expand your horizons. I’m not telling you what to do, but --

Q: Yeah. I mean, that’s what I’m thinking about as I decide to go into -- because I also want to go into a PhD program in English. And so that’s what I’m thinking about doing more research in in grad school, because I didn’t really think as much, I guess, about my identity. In college, I sort of started to understand more like the issues of being oppressed, you know, for that.
A: Yeah.

Q: Because I always just felt more like, I don’t know, American, I guess. I didn’t think I was, like, vulnerable to those kinds of issues --

A: Yeah.

Q: Like racism, or, but, you know. I’m understanding that more now.

A: And you know, and you know what? You’re going to find -- and the reason I haven’t gotten there yet is because I’ve kind of stopped reading. But you’re going to find that the stuff that’s written by the Mexicans is beautiful.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know what? You could almost say that it’s as rich as the literature that we find in places like Spain, and you know, it’s awesome.

Q: Yeah.

A: I only just started reading too, but that’s good you’re doing that. That’s awesome. Very, very good.

Q: So you said you were teaching a Chicano studies course.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: And this is while you were at UT?

A: Yeah.
Q: At the same time, you were -- were you involved in the USARAT?
A: USARAT, yeah, we were involved. I was -- my best friend and my boyfriend, he was my boyfriend too, but I was still married, I hadn’t legally gotten my divorce --
Q: Oh, I see.
A: -- was John Herrera, you’re going to run into his name, probably, there. He was one of the organizers of the whole action, John Herrera. And he lives in San Antonio now. But he was always lived in Houston. And I don’t know why he moved to San Antonio. But he moved to San Antonio, I mean, he was one of the leads in doing what we were doing. But guess what happened right before we did it? We went into action. We, him and me and Cynthia Perez. You know Cynthia?
Q: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I interviewed her.
A: You did?
Q: Yeah.
A: So we went to -- I don’t know if she told you this. Did she tell you about the incident at the lake?
Q: The thing about him getting burned?
A: Yeah.
Q: Yeah, no, she didn’t mention that.
A: How did you know he had gotten burned?

Q: You told me when we did our preliminary on the phone interview.

A: He got burned. We went out to the lake. We were going out to the lake, the three of us. And my car stalled. It was a Volkswagen. And the Volkswagens had an engine in the back. And so John said, “Look, I’m going to go back there and pour -- I’m gonna pour some gasoline into the carburetor, and I want you to start up the car, and we’re going to get it running that way.” So I did. I did do that. And I started up the car. And the flames went up. And they burned him, and they burned, you know, his upper body. And he ran -- it was over here, one of the road over here going to the lake. He ran to the ground and got down and tried to put it out, and he couldn’t put it out. And it was crazy. And the ambulance, we had to call the ambulance, and the ambulance came and took him to the hospital. But that was, like, a couple of days before we did the action. And so he was kind of directing us from the phone in his hospital room at Breckenridge. And so but he wasn’t in the action; he’s not in the pictures or anything like that.
Q: Mm-hmm. So what was the -- how was it when the action started to come together? Because I understand that it was sort of this kind of coalition between the Chicano students, black students and white students?

A: Yeah.

Q: They were all -- what do you think were their sort of motivations for also being involved in the whole takeover?

A: Yeah. Well, the white students wanted to support the minority students. But they also were mad at UT for being racist. And so that’s why they were involved, and because they were familiar with racism. They were already involved in politics, see, belonged to Radical Student Union. Have you heard of that organization?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: That was one of the pivotal organizations throughout the nation of white students, leftists.

Q: What was it called?

A: The Radical Student Union, RSU.

Q: Radical Student Union. Okay.

A: They’re the ones that were, you know, Marxist, and they fought, and they did demonstrations. And they were amazing students; smart, very smart. So some of them were involved with us, they became involved in planning the thing, and
they would come to the meetings. We would have the meetings over at people’s apartments, and they would come. We invited a couple of lawyers to our meetings, so that -- did Cynthia mention that? The lawyers?

Q: Maybe. I don’t remember.

A: No? Anyway, we invited a couple of lawyers who were also leftists who would come over, and we would say, “What do you think we should do if this happens?” And they would tell us, “Do this, do that, do that.” And so they gave us legal advice on how to carry this out so that we don’t do anything wrong. And they said you need to not -- you know, if someone’s in the office, you need to try to get them out of the office so you won’t be charged with kidnapping, or something like that. So we did do that. And finally, the day came, and there was just a handful of us that got together. And we met on the West Mall. And we said, “Are you all ready?” “Yeah, we’re ready.” And so we went up the stairs. There’s a stairway that goes up to the president’s office. I don’t know if they still have it or not, they probably don’t. But we went up that stairway to their office. And we went -- it was so much fun, oh my God. We went up to her office, and we knocked on it. And she said, “Come in?” And I opened the door, and I said,
“You need to leave. We’re taking over the president’s office.” Oh, my God, do you know how that felt to be telling the secretary of the president of the UT to get out?

Q: Yeah. And there was 10 of you all?

A: Yeah, something like that.

Q: Yeah. Hmm.

A: So she got out. She grabbed her handbag and left. And Lorene Rogers wasn’t there, she had called in sick. I think she had heard that we were going to do that, and that’s why she called in sick. So she wasn’t there. So we didn’t have to worry about her. So we all went in.

Q: Do you remember the date of this? It’s March, 1975? The –

A: I can’t remember the date. It’s in the article, so I’ll go look again.

Q: I think it’s the 13th.

A: Okay.

Q: Because I’ve been looking at some articles that were published the week after, talking about that. It was, like, the protest was on that day, and then the next day was the Board of Regents meeting, I guess, on the 14th? Does that sound right?
A: Yeah. It was -- I don’t know if it was that soon afterwards that we went to the Board of Regents. But maybe it was. You know, it could have been.

Q: Yeah. So you all took over the office, and --

A: We took over the office. And we started communicating on the phone with all the Board of Regents people. And Shriver’s -- Shriver? What’s his name? Shriver, or Shivers? Shriver was there. He was -- what was he? He was head of the -- he was on the Board of Regents, but he was also -- he became -- he become the governor? I don’t know. [Editor’s note: Allan Shivers was governor of Texas from 1949 to 1957. He sat on the UT Board of Regents from 1973-1979, serving as chairman from 1975-1979.] Anyway, he was there. Lady Bird Johnson was there. She was on the Board of Regents. And some other people. And so they met with us, and they listened to what we had to say. And they were -- needless to say, they were very upset with us.

Q: Yeah.

A: So that’s what happened there. And --

Q: And could you talk a little bit about what you all’s demands were, and what you all -- was it -- was the black students and the Latino students, were they sort of in
agreement about the things that they wanted to ask for? Or was there any kind of disagreement about certain things?

A: Well, the thing that didn’t make me feel very happy was the fact that the black students didn’t go up there with us. And it kind of pissed me off.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know? But, you know, I can understand. You know, they’ve had a harder time than Mexicans have, you know. Of course, the Mexicans, the deportation issue is scary. But they didn’t come up there. But they were there when we met with the Board of Regents, they were there. The Black Student Union was there, represented -- what’s-his-name was there. What was his name? I can’t think of his name. But he was there. And he was very good. He made his demands that he wanted, you know, more inclusion of black students, and --

Q: So this was a separate organization at UT that was just African American students?

A: Yeah. They were supporting us in what we did, but they did not come -- they came to our meetings, but they didn’t really take a more active part. And that was kind of weird. And you know, it pisses me off, because I used to think that they were not very active, that they were not
very militant. But they were. They were very militant. They were just very thoughtful. They didn’t want to make problems for the black students. They didn’t want to cause problems with a UT administration for black students, you know? And so they had a very good teacher that was working at the time. He was a poet. And he was very active with us. He didn’t go up to take over the president’s office because he was a professor. But he was amazing. And so, we had the support of the black students and we had the support of the Chicanos. And we had the support of the white people. So we had a good support, dude. It felt really good.

Q: Yeah.

A: And you’d walk around campus, and people would ask you, “How’s going? Can we do anything?” It was really good. Very, very good. Oh, there’s a deer down there.

Q: I was going to say, was MAYO, was that group also active at UT at this time?

A: At the time that I went to school at UT, at the time that we became part of UT, me and John, because John went to U of H, too, and Cynthia did, too, so the three of us transferred to UT. So at that time, when we did that —

Q: And why did you all decide to transfer for?
A: Well, I was -- I got accepted into the graduate school.

Q: All right, so you did all your undergrad at U of H, and then you decided to apply to the graduate school there?

A: And I graduated, and I decided to apply to graduate school, and they accepted me.

Q: Okay.

A: And Cynthia and John, I think, wanted to transfer just because we were leaving. I don’t know, you’d have to ask them. Maybe that’s why. So then, what happened -- look at the deer. See him?

Q: Yeah.

A: So then, so then John was out. He was in the hospital in his room. They wouldn’t let him out, so he couldn’t come. And it was really funny, because when we finally got out, and he was having a big -- we called a big rally, and invited people from all over Texas. We invited U of H, we invited UT El Paso. We invited San Antonio, we invited Dallas, we invited all the universities to come to this big rally. And they all came, dude. It was awesome.

Q: When was this?

A: Like a year later -- no, in the same year that that happened.

Q: Okay, so 1975?
A: I’ll look at the articles and see. Yeah, and they came. So they came and --

Q: And this was for another rally?

A: It was for a big rally to push the regents into doing more, and to push the state into doing more for the Latinos. And it was pretty successful. The only thing is that -- oh, so you asked me about MAYO and MEChA?

Q: Yes.

A: So MAYO was in existence when we came over to Austin. And we were going to the meetings, and we were trying to work with MAYO. And then we noticed that MAYO was very, very conventional. They were not very -- they were not fighters, they were not trying to change things. They were just going along with it. I think MEChA had been there for a while. And so we decided to look into what else there was out there that we could maybe attract. And we looked at California, because back when I was a young girl, California was a place to go to get to talk to people who were progressive. Because it’s militant. California is militant. It’s always been that way. I don’t know if it still us, but they always want it -- are the mosquitoes biting you?

Q: Maybe, yeah.
A: Let’s go inside, dude.
Q: Okay, let me stop the --

END OF Soto. Irma part 1

Soto. Irma part 2

A: Okay, you can --
Q: Okay.
A: I’ll give you time to turn it on.
Q: I started it already.
A: Oh.
Q: So you said that MAYO was -- they were not, I guess, militant enough?
A: They were not militant. They were not radical. And so John and I, John was a -- this is -- who’s going to see all this?
Q: Well, I mean, I might share it with other students in my class if it’s helpful for their paper. But other than that, well, it could go into the Briscoe Center, if you want. You know.
A: Yeah.
Q: There’s a form you can fill out and stuff.
A: Yeah.

Q: But, yeah.

A: Because John, he was about my age, but he became militant in Houston when he was in high school. And he went to New York to study with the W. E. B. Du Bois Club in New York. And that was a very radical organization that would radicalize young people, and they radicalized him. So he was very knowledgeable in politics. And so he knew what to do. He knew what to ask for, and all that. So he knew, when we were in MAYO, and MAYO wasn’t doing very much of anything, he knew that there was something better out there. So he looked into California students, and asked around about them. And they told him that MEChA was a better organization.

Q: What is the MEChA?

A: Mexican Americano, Chicano, something like that. [Editor’s note: “Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán”] It was more radical. And so we started a MEChA chapter at UT. And we had--

Q: Do you know when that was?

A: That was about the same time. I think it was about the same time.

Q: Yeah?
A: And we started doing that, and that was kind of -- we were having so much fun, dude, doing stuff that we -- today we would never be allowed to do.

Q: Mm-hmm. Like what kind of things?

A: Like starting a radical student organization that today, they would say, “Ah, no, you can’t have an organization like that. That goes against what we stand for.” You know, things like that, like the way we talked about Marxism, Leninism, you know, they wouldn’t allow that today. And you know, the Radical Student Union, it’s not even here, is it?

Q: I don’t think so.

A: It doesn’t meet? Did those things -- they bit you, dude?

Q: Yeah.

A: You need this. With this -- when they bite me --

END OF Soto. Irma part 2

Soto. Irma part 3

A: So that’s what was happening. And now it’s so -- so that was in spring that we took over the president’s office.
And then, so I was going to be around for -- my husband was
at the University of Colorado in Boulder. And so he would -- he knew what was going on, he would come to visit. And you know, he knew. He stayed in touch with my daughter, Sandy. And Sandy would stay up there with him for a while and then come back. And then finally, he decided to get out of school. He decided to go back to Houston and get his old job back. And so he came back. And he’s -- and Sandy moved in with him. And so I was sort of free to do anything I wanted to, because Sandy was not my big responsibility. So I did do that. And John put all his efforts into doing that, too. And then -- I don’t know how much I should tell you. I think I’ll just wait and see -- I think I’ll talk to John and ask him what I should do. But so we changed the organization to MEChA. And so that went okay. And I think -- is it still MEChA?

Q: I actually have never heard of that group before.

A: What’s there, MAYO?

Q: MAYO, LULAC --

A: LULAC is there? Oh, my God.

Q: Well, that’s just one that I’ve come across in my readings of the Chicano movement. LULAC, MAYO, I don’t remember if there were any other ones. I can’t remember any other
ones. But those two were the ones that I have been looking at.

A: Yeah.

Q: MESA, maybe? Maybe was one? Or MESO, maybe? M-E-S-O?

A: Maybe.

Q: Yeah.

A: So then that’s what happened. And then we negotiated and negotiated our demands, were that they don’t -- that they not file charges against us, that they name a student building after a Latino educator, that they’d go out and recruit more minority students to the UT, and that they -- what else? I used to have those -- I used to have the list of demands, and then my babysitter threw it away. But they’re somewhere to be found, I’m sure, in the papers, or whatever.

Q: Mm-hmm. Yeah, they’re listed in the -- I found it in the Texan and The Rag too, I think.

A: Oh, okay. And so that’s what we did. And we went to the Board of Regents and I read our demands to them. And I said, “This is what we want.”

Q: One of the demands, I think, was about the SAT, GRE, LSAT -- I guess those standardized tests, and not
eliminating those? Was that because you thought that it was sort of discriminatory against Latinos?

A: Yeah. I believe we did it. I don’t remember making that a demand. But if we did make it a demand, it would be because of that, because those tests test what -- the things that we don’t get taught, really. I mean, we do if we go to a good white school, we’ll get taught that. But, you know, you don’t get taught that stuff if you’re a Mexican, and (inaudible).

Q: Yeah.

A: Can you imagine in South Texas, them teaching kids? “Oh, Jose, can you tell me what the” -- I don’t know. You know? They don’t teach us, dude.

Q: Yeah. Hmm.

A: So you have to try harder. My daughter, well, one good thing that happened because of all this stuff that was going on, my daughter was always around. She was born in ’68. So she was there always for the protests, and all that. One good thing that happened to her was, she went to graduate school here at UT and got her English degree. And she became an English professor. She’s tenured now. She’s at the University of Arizona. So she’s -- she shouldn’t have any problems with her job, but she’ll always have her
job. She’s tenured. But she’ll be here in December. She’s coming in to visit.

Q: Yeah, for Christmas?

A: Yeah.

A: I’ve got a -- you know, they diagnosed me with cancer, and so I have to go back to the M.D. Anderson all the time, and so she’s going to go with me.

Q: Yeah.

A: It’s weird, because you take on these fights and they’re from the outside. And you can fight those entities that are out there in the ethos, you know? You don’t have to fight them inside you. And then you get old, and then you have a fight inside you. And this fight is inside me, and there’s nothing I can do to fight it. You know? Because, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: And so it’s interesting to have that happen, because it makes me see things a little bit differently now. You know, I still would do it -- I still would take over the president’s office. I still would do that.

Q: Yeah.
A: I would probably be even more radical if I knew that I was going to get cancer. So do you go -- are you going to go home for Christmas?

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: In San Angelo?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: What do you do in San Angelo?

Q: What do you mean? Well, we go to the -- they have like a trail of lights every year, so we’ll drive through that. And we’ll celebrate Christmas Eve, on Christmas Eve at my house. And our family will come over, and we’ll eat and open presents and stuff. So, you know, that’s usually what we do.

A: You have lots of family?

Q: I do. I have uncles that live in other states, and cousins. I don’t see them as often.

A: Yeah.

Q: I really mainly see my more immediate family, because like I said, both my grandparents live in San Angelo.

A: Yeah. Bobby, he’s from San Angelo.

A2: Oh, wow.

A: His family has been there all his -- for generations.

A2: Like right now, or --
A: Right now, Bobby.

A2: What’s it like over there now? Is there water in the reservoir?

Q: I think -- yeah, we had droughts recently.

A2: We worry about that, because we’ve driven by that big reservoir, and it’s, like, empty.

Q: Yeah.

A: It gets empty all the time, pobrecitos.

Q: Yeah.

A: And now that they’re drilling, dude, it must be bad.

Q: I don’t -- I guess because I’ve lived here now for almost four years, I’m kind of used to being in a big city. And so when I go back every time, it’s like those memories return, but, like, at the same time, I kind of -- it seems kind of unfamiliar to me, because I’ve sort of already outgrown it in a way.

A: Yeah.

Q: But yeah, it’s always going to be my home, so --

A: Yeah.

Q: You know?

A: Have you done that stupid Ancestry DNA thing?

Q: No.

A: I did it.
Q: Yeah?
A: It came back that I was something like 40-percent American Indian.
Q: Hmm. Yeah, I have not done that.
A: I don’t know how true it is.
Q: Yeah. Let’s see, what I was going --
A: Well, that’s so cool, dude, that you’re -- you come from a good town. That’s a good town.
Q: I think it was good for me growing up there, because maybe it grounded me a little bit.
A: Yeah.
Q: Or more than people maybe who grew up in, like, a big city.
A: Yeah. Where do you live? What neighborhood is that?
Q: I live -- I don’t know what side of town it is. Let me think.
A: That’s okay.
Q: I guess we live in, like --
A: Is it near the high school?
Q: It’s near Alta Loma Elementary School.
A: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know where that is.
Q: Somewhere there. Then like I say, we’re not too far from Central, but my brother goes to Lakeview, which is further away. You know? So I wanted to ask also about my
professor, she was saying something about how there was the Mexican American generation and the Chicano generation. And they sort of had different goals, I guess, for achieving certain things that they wanted, I guess, in regards to race. Like they were sort of -- one group was maybe a little more okay with identifying as, like, an ethnic group, whereas another was more not trying to -- like, associate with African Americans, because they didn’t want to sort of take on that same discrimination for race. So I don’t know, do you unders-- do you have a sense of --

A: Well, I’m not in touch with a lot of Chicanos that are your age. I would do work at a clinic, and a lot of the Chicanos that work there are -- think more like me. So I have something in common with them. We get mad at the way we’re treated, and we want things to change. And they’re all Democrats. I don’t know a single Chicano that’s Republican. I mean, I shouldn’t even be concerned with politics, because that’s not going to change anything. If you elect a Mexican governor, that’s not going to change anything. The economy has to change. And that ain’t going to happen. So that’s why, you know, being communist is more relevant then, but you can’t tell people that. People get freaked out. They say, “What? You’re a communist?”
You know? And so the friends that I had back then, the '70s, like John, he’s in San Antonio now. He’s married and has kids. He -- they kind of stepped out of the limelight. They don’t really do too much. They sometimes come to meetings at La Piña. But those meetings are not anything activist. They’re, like, meetings to go see paintings, like that, you know? And Cynthia’s a good friend, you know? She’s a good friend of my daughter’s.

Q: Yeah, that’s one of the reasons she told me to reach out to you, is because she’s an English professor, and I was telling her that’s kind of what I want to do as well.

A: Yeah. So, you know, but I’m glad you’re doing it. I hope it helps, something happens. I mean, I’m sure nothing will happen. (laughs) Maybe it will. People have forgotten about the takeover. They don’t remember it. You know, I have the pictures in my office at work, of the tower, and all of that. And I tell people, they say, “What is that?” And I say, “That’s the UT tower.” They say, “What are you doing there?” And I tell them, and they say, “What?” People don’t remember. It’s too long ago. It’s forgotten, you know?

Q: Yeah? So the USARAT, the -- what does the A and T stand for?
A: Against Texas.
Q: Against Texas, okay.
A: United Students United Against Texas [Editor’s note: United Students Against Racism at Texas] --
Q: Okay.
A: Let me see if I have some of those pictures. My back hurts when I sit too long. That’s me when we were in the Board of Regents meeting.
Q: Oh, wow.
A: See? And that’s Paula, she went up there with us. She was one of the white -- I think that was the only white woman that went up with us.
Q: To the Board of Regents?
A: No, to the tower. And then to the Board of Regents.
Q: Okay.
A: That’s Tim, that’s a black guy that was head of the Black Student Union.
Q: Student Union?
A: And he was awesome. He was really awesome. And that’s Shivers. He’s the one that became -- I can’t remember if he became governor of Texas, or what. But he was an important politician.
Q: There was an article or a quote from the governor. It might have been him.
A: Yeah.
Q: In the article that I read from The Rag that said that he didn’t want to integrate the law school, or something?
A: He said that?
Q: Yeah, it was, like, 1960-something, I think. [Editor’s note: The takeover took place in 1975.]
A: Can you believe that?
Q: Yeah.
A: They didn’t let blacks into the law school, or Mexicans into the law school until recently?
Q: Mm-hmm.
A: And this is what’s-his-name. He was a representative, Texas representative. And he was very, very intelligent. Very, very good. And he was on his way up. Unfortunately, he was flying a plane, or he wasn’t, but someone was flying him in Africa. He went to visit Africa. And the plane ran into a mountainside, and so he died. So he’s no longer around. He was an amazing man.
Q: Hmm. What was his name?
A: And his name was -- look, this is -- this is before Marriott. I hate that man. I hate Marriott.
Q: What is this group?
A: That’s the workers of the Las Manitas.
Q: Yeah, so that was Cynthia also worked there?
A: Yeah. Yeah. She owned it.
Q: Found it, yeah.
A: Yeah.
Q: She -- which one is she in here? Is she in this picture?
A: Let me see. Yeah, she should be. I think that’s Libby right here, her sister. Where is she? Maybe she’s taking the picture. I don’t know. And this is inside the president’s office. And that’s Baulor, and that’s Paula and that’s Paul. And that’s one of the administration people. Another one of the administration people.
Q: So that’s (inaudible) in the office?
A: Yeah. And here’s someone sending some food and cigarettes up to us. We had to have our cigs. But that’s it, dude. I don’t know -- I think that what resulted from it was UT understood that we were not going to go away, that we were going to be demanding that they recruit more Latino students and more Latino faculty.
Q: Do you think that worked?
A: And that they make their subjects -- their classes more relevant to the Latinos. But you know what’s happened?
What’s happened is that they’ve opened it up to Latinos from all over. It’s no longer just Mexicanos. They want all Latinos to be treated right, which is the right thing to say, and the right thing to do. But still, it pisses me off. I want the Chicanos to be treated differently, because we’ve suffered the most, the Chicanos here. Because, you know, it’s different for the people from Nicaragua, or Uruguay, or Chile. It’s different for them, because they’re in another country, far away, you know? And you know, we are not in another country far away. We were always here.

Q: Yeah. So do you think that there were significant progress made, after you all made those demands, or --

A: Yeah, I think that there was progress made, because just psychologically, I think it had an impact on students and teachers. I think that things got better after we took over. I think that people were more respectful of us, and the administration was more cautious about what they said, and about minorities. And they were more likely to start recruiting Latino and black professors. And even to this day, my daughter tells me that they are going out of their way to hire Latinos to teach there, and, God, I wish she could get a job there. Oh, my God, that would be so
perfect if she could get a job there and finish off here, you know. That would be the perfect end to my life. But she’s going back to Arizona.

Q: Yeah?

A: She would like to teach in California, but I don’t think that’s going to happen. Maybe San Antonio, I don’t know. So I hope that in your career you kind of don’t -- I know it’s easy to forgive and forget what’s going on with this. I know it’s easy, and it feels better to just let it go. It feels better. That’s what I teach, and doing counseling. Let it go. But no, dude, you can’t let it go.

Q: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I think that’s part of the impetus for this project, is to not let people -- to uncover a history that people don’t know about, but also to keep it in the public conscious so that people understand the history.

A: Yeah. Yeah. You know, if you want, you know, when you write up your paper, I can look over it.

Q: Yeah, sure. I’ll send it to you.

A: You know, I want to see what you wrote.

Q: Probably I should send it to Cynthia too, so you can make sure I didn’t misquote, or anything.

A: Yeah, because, you know, it’s -- yeah. If you want to do that, I’d be happy to read it.
Q: Yeah. Yeah, and I can send you the forms, the ones that Professor Green had us give to the interviewees. Basically one is a deed of gift, so that way you’re consenting to having your interview on their database, or basically the database they’re going to make of all the interviews from all the women who we’re interviewing. And then also, the other form is, like, the consent to the interview, which I should have already had you sign beforehand, but I forgot.

A: That’s all right. So where is this going to be? At the main library?

Q: At the Briscoe.

A: At the Briscoe Library?

Q: The Briscoe Center for American History.

A: Oh, okay.

Q: It’s an archive at UT.

A: Okay.

Q: Yeah.

A: You think that you might want to talk to my daughter?

Q: For this project, or --

A: Yeah. To get more information? No.

Q: I think I have enough with what you and Cynthia talked to me about.

Q: Yeah.
A: All right.

Q: I think we’re on the end of the questions. So you said that John Herrera was the one who started USARAT at UT?
A: He and I.

Q: Together?
A: Yeah.

Q: And that was in the ’70s, like, 19— do you know the exact date, or --
A: It was in -- we moved over here. We moved in together, and when we moved over here in ’74. In ’74, the fall of ’74, that whole semester, we were active in politics and I was in school. And he was in school. He was taking Chicano studies. And then in December, we started becoming more political. And then in March, this happened. And so --

Q: So maybe it was started in, like, fall 1974?
A: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Q: Or so?
A: Yeah.

Q: Okay.
A: And so the one good thing about our organizations, you know, like you say, there’s no more MEChA. And so--

Q: Yeah, I don’t know about that one.
A: -- I wonder what’s going on there at UT, you know? I should become a student again. But, you know, I don’t know if -- what’s going on there now. I mean, I go to UT for meetings for work, because we’re in close relation with UT, with the social work school. And we go to their meetings. Like just yesterday, I went to a meeting on opioid abuse. So we do that stuff. And so I keep up with what’s going on there. You know, it’s nothing militant. It ain’t no militancy over there.

Q: Did you -- you talked a little bit about this, but can you talk more about the sort of joint efforts between black and Chicano students? Like other times that they were working together?

A: Yeah, we tried to work together. And we used to have meetings together. And that went well, when we could get together and talk about the common struggle that we faced. But there’s a little bit of difference between the struggle of the black student and the struggle of the Mexican student. So that kind of always was between the grooves. And I think that, you know -- the fact is that the poor black people brought over here from Africa were treated like fucking animals, man. That’s horrible. And so
they’re very angry. Nothing you do now will make up for what happened to them. So they’re at a different level.

Q: Yeah.
A: So they don’t -- you know, I wouldn’t trust other people, either.

Q: Mm-hmm. So you think that your fellow Chicano students understood that difference, I guess --
A: No, they didn’t.
Q: No?
A: No. No, they didn’t.

Q: They felt like they were more important, or, like, more --
A: Yeah. More important, or that they didn’t think that the blacks had suffered more than we had.

Q: Okay. Hmm. So that just made it harder for you all to work together?
A: Yeah.

Q: Even though -- and I guess like you’re talking about with the takeover, they didn’t actually go up with you all to the office, so that’s another one of those instance of some kind of difference between them, the two?
A: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And if Mickey Leland -- Mickey Leland, that was his name -- if Mickey Leland hadn’t been killed in that plane crash, Mickey Leland, I think, would have made
things better for black people. I think that he would have been -- because he came along at the same time that people, like -- well, what’s his name, the reverend, what’s his name?

Q: Martin Luther King?

A: Martin Luther King came around at the same time. And he was saying the things that he was saying. And if you look on the surface of his speeches, you say, oh, he’s just, you know, buying into the system. But he wasn’t. He was really talking about how horrible everything was. And so that’s another thing that happened. You had Mickey Leland, and then you had Martin Luther King, and then you had what’s his name, the real militant dude?

Q: Oh, Malcolm X?

A: Malcolm X, dude. He’s another amazing man. He was amazing. He did so much, and he got killed, dude. If we hadn’t lost him, if we hadn’t lost -- you know, Mickey Leland, if we hadn’t lost -- who else did they kill? Martin Luther King, you know, Malcolm X, if we hadn’t lost all those people, dude, can you imagine where we’d be right now?

Q: Yeah.
A: There would be no, no president like the one we have now. He would not be there.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know? But anyway, there's something to eat. What do you want?

END OF AUDIO FILE