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Voices of Protest Oral History Collection (EVOP)  
Catherine Magel

Interviewed July 17<sup>th</sup> 2008  
By Ruth Soto et al

**Interviewer:** My name is Ruth Soto and I will be interviewing, please state your name.

**C.M.:** Catherine Magel

**Interviewer:** We will be talking about the Chicano Movement on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. My first question for Catherine is - do you believe your active participation in the movement helped others? Why or why not?

**C.M.:** At the time, I believe it was for the people because where I lived, worked [unintelligible] Oklahoma. At that point I had just returned from the Philippines and I was really dark-skinned, which normally I'm not; and I was really dark, almost like a black woman. It was the first time I experienced open discrimination. When I went to get the house, the people were white; they were all for military retirees, but none the less they saw me and said the house wasn't available. So I sent my white husband to get the house and we got it. That was open discrimination, and they were pretty shocked to see me coming along with a white husband. That was my first impact of [unintelligible] Oklahoma. A lot of white people didn't want people of color, and it was sad because it's an Air Force town and I'm not used to being treated with open discrimination. I heard people talk about Mexicans around me because they didn't know I was Mexican-American so I heard a lot of things throughout about the Mexicans. Then after I got to be a participant in the city and looked around, when I went to the stores, I saw Indians, blacks and Mexicans may be the first in the store, but they're the last to get waited on, another act of open discrimination.

**Interviewer:** And how did you change that?

**C.M.:** Immediately I didn't do anything because I was just in there observing. But then as I observed more and I wanted a job, I found out about this job as a social outreach worker. I wanted that job because I wanted something to do to help people in that field, but one of the requirement was to speak Spanish, which I did not at the time. [Unintelligible] but that's about it, and I said "yes, I speak Spanish." Now I have a problem because I have to discuss things with the group in Spanish and write reports in Spanish. I got around it. I got people to help me with it. They could write my reports and I could read

them in Spanish and turn them in, so I got around that part. My problem, it wasn't a problem...the job mission was to go to these migrant families to make them more stable. All these families had children that were working the fields. That's what they did. They moved; some of these kids had been in twenty schools. This was a time when there was money for a lot of programs to help the poor. Some of these programs were money for water where these groups would get together and plant gardens. Other programs were going to learn English. I got to do that; that was the work part. The volunteer part to help the movement was in [unintelligible] Oklahoma. On your driver's license, if you were Mexican-American, a *mojado*, an illegal or whatever, Mexican was on your driver's license, which was the protest. If you're a white American, do you have Caucasian or white on your driver's license? No, so why do you want to put Mexican on ours? We got that cleared up. The next protest, it was actually a movement, [was] to get people who weren't registered to vote registered. I took a group of people to the courthouse to get them registered. I did this because I was never openly discriminated against. I'd never worked or lived around migrants and it was really sad.

**Interviewer:** Are you a first generation Mexican-American?

**C.M.:** Fourth.

**Interviewer:** Fourth? Okay, so where was your family from originally?

**C.M.:** On the paternal side, Mexico.

**Interviewer:** Which part of Mexico? Do you know?

**C.M.:** No I don't. My paternal grandfather got killed in a mining accident in Pueblo. We have a lot of history here, it's really cool. My mother's people were probably from Europe, maybe from Spain, who knows? The men on both sides married Indian women, so there's white European, Indian, more Indian and Mexican; it's like we're a mixture. My mother spoke Spanish fluently. My mother was really white [unintelligible]

**Interviewer:** Do you still see yourself as a protester?

**C.M.:** Oh definitely.

**Interviewer:** And what do you protest against?

**C.M.:** Anything that's injustice to the people who are unaware or uneducated about school, laws, anything that people are unaware of that I'm aware of. I give you a good example of a protest. I'm probably the only person in Pueblo who did this. When Pueblo had their new system on computers, a lot of people got overpaid; I was one of them. Well, I don't want to pay for your mistakes even though I spent the money. I did, but it's still your mistake, why should I be penalized? That was my thought, so I wrote an appeal letter saying I don't think I want to pay for your error. Yes I spent the money, but it's

your error. I'm poor enough. I don't think I should be penalized. Guess what? I won. It's only 130 bucks, but hey, that was 130 bucks spent and I didn't have to pay it back.

Our people are in welfare systems for generations; generations don't get college educated. Pueblo's statistics for people with a college degree is 15%, that's really low. The reason why is people don't know. My degree in mass communications is because I'd like to be a recruiter. I'd like to go out and solicit people to go to college so they won't be in this situation until they die.

Protesting has its moments and one of my moments was when people from the Fort Worth, Dallas area and Oklahoma City started calling me and saying "Catherine, we've been hearing about your work and keep up the good work." I was really astounded, because I didn't think people would pay attention to my little [unintelligible] Oklahoma.

**Interviewer:** Do you believe your experiences differed more than people in more of a rural location?

**C.M.:** Well [unintelligible] Oklahoma; many people would call it rural. You can compare [unintelligible] Oklahoma to my hometown, Trinidad, Colorado or Walsenburg, Colorado. But the difference between [unintelligible] Oklahoma and Trinidad is there was an Air Force base there. Air Force brings money into your town. Air Force has all kinds of people of color so why does your town want to treat people of color like they don't exist or don't matter. That was my gripe.

**Interviewer:** Were your family or friends involved in the movement with you?

**C.M.:** No, just me.

**Interviewer:** What kind of resistance did you encounter?

**C.M.:** Closing down the courthouse, that was some pretty good resistance, not being waited on, not getting the house we wanted; that's resistance. That's individual, but that's the point, to change the individual's way of thinking about us, that we're not to be judged by the color of our skin. That the whole idea of a protest to change people's attitudes and sometimes laws.

**Interviewer:** [changes tape] My name's Ruth Soto and I'm interviewing, state your name please.

**C.M.:** Catherine Magel

**Interviewer:** About her participation in the Chicano Movement of the 1970's.

**Interviewer:** My name's Ruth Soto and I'm interviewing Catherine Magel; I'm interviewing her about the 1970's and working with migrants.

**Interviewer:** What was your biggest hurdle to overcome?

**C.M.:** Actually, I think the biggest hurdle is coming from a poor country like the Philippines and coming from my country and seeing the same thing.

**Interviewer:** If you describe everything in a picture, they say a picture's worth a thousand words.

**C.M.:** If you see a lot of people in stores not being waited on or treated properly because they're not white it's pretty shocking. It was shocking to me because I'd read about it and I've seen it, but I was never really part of it. [So when they] did the same thing to me, I was pretty upset about it. A lot of people don't get upset because they are used to being called names or being categorized. Some people are pro white trash or dumb Mexicans; they're used to it and don't do anything about it. I have a bad temper, so of course that was probably part of it. I don't like to sit back and take it, especially when I know better. I know you should not treat me differently because I'm browner than you are; you're not supposed to tell me I can't have a house because I'm not white. I know that's why. I didn't like it, so what I did because it was an Air Force town, I went to the mayor who was an arrogant man and I said, "look, you have a problem in this town, a big problem in this town. I'm sure you're aware of this big problem and you need to do something about it because you have the power, you can. Do it like most government agencies, have a committee, form a committee, drag people from all walks of your town and form a committee, and I want to be on your committee." He did form a committee, and I thought [unintelligible] changed, not that big of a change, but it was working because people were facing up to it. The Mayor had his committee. You don't like to be embarrassed if you're a public official. People were saying, "hey we're not going to your store because you don't want to wait on us first when we're here first. You want to put us in the back and wait on others when we're here first." Yeah, it has changed, it's like that now. I haven't been back in 30 years [unintelligible] is still there [unintelligible] That's the other things that's sorry about protest, you can protest a thing and maybe they're done for a bit and they're good for a little bit, like you have an open wound that heals up and you forget it, because it's healed. If someone pokes or jabs you again and opens up the wound and it's all over again, it's the same going over and over. I think people have let down a little bit because the laws have been changed, the civil rights law, the EEO laws, the affirmative action. A lot of those things have come into effect that helped keep the movement on an even keel, but then there are things like in politics, Jesse Jackson making his horrible remark against the nominees for the presidential candidate. I mean, these things really hurt me. I don't like people in a position saying terrible things about their own people. It's still an ongoing problem, and people are still doing these horrible things to each other whether they are Mexican, or black or whatever.

**Interviewer:** My name is Tina Marie Romero/Rivero/Rivera? With the continuation of the interview with Catherine. Catherine, are you from Pueblo?

**C.M.:** No, I'm not. I'm from Trinidad, Colorado.

**Interviewer:** Okay, when did you come back to Pueblo?

**C.M.:** About ten years ago.

**Interviewer:** And after being here, what kind of differences and similarities to the 1970's do you feel here now?

**C.M.:** I still find oppression. I still find poverty, and I still find a lack of education. It's really sad that in 30 years I haven't seen any progress.

**Interviewer:** What do you think should be done in order to make progress?

**C.M.:** More jobs, better jobs.

**Interviewer:** If there was one specific thing you could do, what would you do?

**C.M.:** I'd create a cooking school in Pueblo to take care of the homeless, that's what I would do.

**Interviewer:** All right, we want to thank you for your time with our class project interview, with our group. Thank you for sharing your information with us.

**C.M.:** You're welcome.