

Colorado State University-Pueblo  
University Archives and Special Collections

Voices of Protest Oral History Collection (EVOP)

Selena Herman

Interviewed by Kim [?]  
[date?]

**Interviewer:** This is Kim and I'm interviewing Selena Herman. This interview is taking place at Rawlings Library in Pueblo, Colorado. This interview is sponsored by CSU-Pueblo University Archives and Special Collections, and is part of the Southern Colorado Ethnic Heritage and Diversity Project. I wanted to confirm that Miss Selena Herman understands that this interview is being recorded and that this recording will be preserved at the CSU-Pueblo University Archives.

**S.H.:** Ok

**Interviewer:** Thank you, and Miss Selena, to begin, regarding the Chicano Movement and how you were involved as a child with your mom. Can you give me a little background regarding your childhood?

**S.H.:** Sure. First of all, I'm a native of Pueblo and I want to say that aside from the Chicano Movement, I am the product of a biracial marriage. My father is black, my mother is Hispanic. I was born in 1969 here in Pueblo, Colorado. From what I understand, it was a big controversy when my mother and father got married in 1968, 1969, because we were coming out of the Civil Rights Movement. There were still a lot of segregation issues and racial issues so I kind of was born into that tension, being the product of that biracial marriage. And as a child, being told that my mother's family was totally against that marriage. They actually made my mother move to California to live with an aunt to prevent her from marrying my father. That's how strongly they were against it. I remember hearing stories that my uncle, my oldest uncle, would threaten my mother that she better not marry that "n" word. Of course, now everybody was ok with it. Even though my mother and father separated when I was five years old, my mother's family is still close to my father. They moved past that. That's what I remember, as a child.

As far as the Chicano Movement goes, because I did identify more strongly with my Hispanic culture than the black culture, and I was raised, after my mother and father separated when I was five years old, mostly by my mother who was single and who was pursuing an education at the time. So she was very into education and somewhat of an activist.

I remember the Brown Berets, the Chicano Movement, going to rallies. Once my mother left Pueblo to pursue her education at Boulder, at CU, I remember her being very involved, and getting to skip school and go on marches and rallies with her on campus for organizations like UMAS. I really don't remember now what that stood for but I remember the chants and stuff, holding the banners, just, you know, feeling a really strong community with that community on campus and of the strong voice that they had. I remember boycotting grapes Cesar Chavez and the grapes. For some reason we boycotted grapes and

the Nestle Quik was boycotted because of what was going on with the Nestle Quik. They were wanting mothers to stop nursing and breastfeeding their babies and wanting to sell their product for baby formula. So those are things that stick out in my mind.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell us a little more regarding the Nestle, how your mom strongly believed in breastfeeding?

**S.H.:** Yeah, well, my mother was pursuing a nursing degree at that time. So it was a healthy thing to do and from my recollection, it was more important to nurse a child and breastfeed a child. She felt so strongly about that--that that was important and that mothers should nurse their children. And Nestle was coming in and wanting to push their formula, which would prevent mothers from breastfeeding their children. She felt so strongly about it that I remember [when] my younger sister was born and my mother being a student still was nursing and a friend of hers was nursing. So they would swap nursing times, and [if] my mother couldn't be around to nurse my sister she would allow this friend of hers who was also lactating, to nurse my sister. And my mother would nurse her child as well, just to make sure that they didn't have to get formula, because that's how strongly they believed in that. The Nestle protest was a really big issue at that time because of that fact. It really sticks out in my mind because I did have a sister who was nursing at the time, my mother was nursing her. So it just kind of was something that I really remembered.

**Interviewer:** And it made a big impact because Nestle was motivated by money?

**S.H.:** Motivated by money, and not only within the Chicano Movement, but also in third world countries where mothers didn't know any other way of feeding their children and it was killing babies. I remember that was the big thing, that Nestle kills babies, because they are not pushing what's best for the baby. They were just motivated by money and selling their formula.

**Interviewer:** And, you said that, what was going through in your mind, because you were probably seven or nine during the period of your mom protesting and having biracial parents. How did that impact you in school, in the public as well?

**S.H.:** Well, growing up and being biracial. I mean by appearance I'd been told that a lot of people would never guess that I had the black culture, you know, African American characteristics. I've always truly identified more with my Hispanic culture, and it was quite difficult trying to find a place to fit in to growing up. Especially in places like Boulder or Denver, where I also received part of my elementary and early childhood education because those were predominantly white communities. I can remember as a child when I did spend time with my father being embarrassed almost in certain places, especially here in Pueblo, where I grew up in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood where they were still very racial. You didn't see many black people at that time. Hispanics lived in one neighborhood. Blacks lived in another neighborhood. Whites lived in another neighborhood. So, when I was spending time with my father, it was very difficult in a public place to even be associated with him. I feared if somebody were to see me with him..."what are you doing with that black man?" and little did they know, that's my father. It was really hard to find that identity and be proud of that identity because of the times that I was born in, coming right out of that Civil Rights Movement. That was still so fresh, and then moving right into

the Chicano Movement and everybody just trying to find a voice. It made it very difficult for me to have an identity there.

**Interviewer:** Miss Herman, do you feel that what you experienced and your children experienced and what the movements have made any impact for today?

**S.H.:** I think that things have improved, somewhat, over the years. Regarding discrimination, though, and feeling that targeted at specific groups. For example my daughter, me being the product of a biracial [marriage] my daughter then is also. Her father is Puerto Rican, so she still tends to...looking at me you wouldn't necessarily guess that I had that African American culture. Looking at my daughter because her father is Puerto Rican and she has such dark skin and going to school at a predominantly Hispanic school and a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, [she] is teased quite often and called blackie or the "n" word, you know, just because of her physical appearance. So, that lets me know that although [progress] has been made in that area, that people still have very strong views regarding discrimination.

**Interviewer:** And we recently had the election. [Muffled- audio completely goes out]

**S.H.:** For example, my grandfather would go to pick up my daughter from school, and she was so embarrassed to be seen with my grandfather being black, or have her friends, who were mostly Hispanic see her with a black man, that she would have my grandfather pick her up three blocks away from the school and still, kind of, duck down in the car, so that nobody would see her. I think that that's sad, that she has to feel that pressure, that her peers would make her feel so pressured that, you know, you don't associate with those people, because they're not your kind. Little did they know, it was her kind. But because we so strongly associate with our Hispanic culture that we can't be proud of our African-American culture because our Hispanic counterparts won't accept that.

**Interviewer:** And we recently had the election and we had the first black president of the United States ever. Do you think that he will make some changes for the minority groups?

**S.H.:** I'd like to think so. We'd like to think that a lot of things have changed, [that] we have made a lot of progress. Me personally, I'd like to see him make better changes for the economy. The economy is the first thing that comes to my mind when changes are concerned. But as far as minorities are concerned, I think it's great. I think that he will open doors for a lot of minorities, being a minority himself, in that position of presidency.

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**Interviewer:** Ok, so regarding the president fixing, or hopefully fixing the economy, do you think this will have more jobs for the lower income [muffled]?

**S.H.:** Well, one of the things, if I remember correctly, that Obama did promise, was to put an end to outsourcing jobs, companies going overseas or to third world countries to find cheaper labor, to provide profit to their companies. If that's the case then a lot of those jobs will come back to people who desperately need them in this country. Even people who are already working, and most of those lower

class, lower economic people, happen to be minorities, Hispanics or blacks in this country. I think that would help those people to climb up that economic ladder and close the gap between lower and middle class.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned earlier that your uncle was against the biracial marriage of your parents. Are your family more accepting today?

**S.H.:** Absolutely, I think, you know, within my family. Even within the community itself, things are more accepted in that area, as far as racial issues go. It's not a racial issue within our family; it's just a family issue. He's my father and he's accepted as that now.

**Interviewer:** How about education? Has that opened doors for minority groups?

**S.H.:** Has what opened doors?

**Interviewer:** Education?

**S.H.:** Based on my?

**Interviewer:** Well, your mom put herself through school.

**S.H.:** Oh absolutely, I think my mother was a role model, and being minorities, both my mother and my father, education was one thing that was always stressed. Even though we're kind of at the bottom of the ladder. We're looked at in our country as minorities. This is how you're going to get ahead. This is how you're going to speak your voice. This is how you can be heard and get ahead, and be who you want to be is by being educated. And so education was always stressed. And, you know, it inspired me to want to continue my education. Even though, being a minority, being a woman in high school and becoming pregnant at the age of 18, I was told, I was a good student, but was told because I made the choice to become pregnant that I had ruined my life. But because of what was instilled in me and being willing to work with those obstacles and still continue my education, going to summer school and continuing college to receive that degree and hopefully, one day, pursue a master's or even a PhD.

**Interviewer:** So you have overcome much adversity. What do you hope to be as a legacy for your children and for future generations as well?

**S.H.:** Just that there is a voice to be heard. One thing that I got growing up in this generation, being born back then, coming out of the Civil Rights Movement, or even the hippie movement, or the women's liberation, cause I kind of got a taste of all of that and watched you know, my parents and mother go through that era, I honestly believe that education is everything and it's so important. Acceptance of diversity, yes we're all different, but that's the beauty of our country. We're the melting pot, and we need to accept each other. And I think, on the surface it has changed, but we can go much deeper, much deeper in our level of acceptance, because, depending on where you are in the country and who you're speaking with, there's still a lot of work to be done.

**Interviewer:** Right, so there's always [muffled]

**S.H.:** Always room for change and improvement, yes. We've come a long way, I believe, but I also believe we've got a long way to go.

**Interviewer:** Do you feel that the United States is the best place for that?

**S.H.:** I honestly believe that. I don't believe that I want to be anywhere else in the world at this time.

**Interviewer:** So even though there are some things that oppress a group in the United States, they still want to be here [more] than anywhere else?

**S.H.:** Because we have that voice, because we can speak, for change and work for change. In other countries they might not have that opportunity to do so.

**Interviewer:** And, so you're hoping that your children will carry on this?

**S.H.:** Absolutely, yes. I'd like to think that they can carry on the legacy and be proud of who they are, and coming through a lot of the Chicano movement, that's what I got out of it, is, yes we are minorities, other people look at us as lower, but no, be proud of who you are, regardless, and be able to hold your head up high. Be proud.

**Interviewer:** And how are you instilling that in them?

**S.H.:** How am I doing that? I don't know how I'm doing it exactly.

**Interviewer:** Is it through your example?

**S.H.:** I guess leading by example, yes. It's not so much of an issue right now. I mean, the racial thing is not so much of an issue, but just to be proud of who you are and what your heritage is, and be the best that you can be, regardless of what anybody else thinks of you. Because there is always somebody who is going to discriminate or put you down for one reason or the next. Whether it's the color of your skin or the color of your shoes, it's the wrong color to them so they're going to discriminate against you. And just to be educated, to always strive to be the best that you can be.

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**Interviewer:** Miss Selena Herman, I wanted to ask you, because you experienced the oppression, that you had to overcome much adversity, do you think that slowly, society is becoming more acceptable?

**S.H.:** I think in some ways yes and in some ways no. Going back to my childhood, going from being involved and having my mother as an example of an activist in the Chicano Movement, and being proud and working towards changing things for our people. And then going from me trying to receive an education in a predominantly white neighborhood. As a child, [I] remember being called a stupid spic, you know, those things, but I would like for my children to be proud of who [they] are. And you're not necessarily a label, not to be defined by labels of either, Hispanic or... but being exposed to diversity, and just whoever you are, whatever place you find in this world, being proud of that, and not having to be defined by what other people define you as.

**Interviewer:** Right, and because of your mom attending the protests, by doing something that was positive.

**S.H.:** Positive, and I think just knowing that you have a voice. After being oppressed for so long, demanding the opportunity to voice what you feel is right, and knowing that you can have that voice, rather than having to just sit silently and allow things to happen. That there is the opportunity for changing and you can make it happen, and when you come together for a common cause, it is possible.

**Interviewer:** So slowly we're making the changes, positive changes?

**S.H.:** I believe so.

**Interviewer:** For the future?

**S.H.:** Absolutely, yes. You know, I think I was happy to have the opportunity to be a part. I didn't realize growing up, how much that would have impacted me but when I think about it now, part of history, part of the evolutionary process, and I was part of that.

**Interviewer:** So it enriched you and also your character?

**S.H.:** Absolutely, it changed who I am today, yes.

**Interviewer:** And, Miss Selena, I want to thank you for agreeing to this interview.

**S.H.:** You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** I'm sorry, Miss Selena Herman, and know that future generations will be able to understand first hand somebody that's been there, so I want to thank you.

**S.H.:** You're welcome, my pleasure.