

# Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978

## Fresno Historical Society

### Joe Ybanez

Joe Ybanez was interviewed on August 18, 1977 in Fresno, California. Ybanez was born on March 8, 1930 in Tulare, California. Ybanez attended Edison High School before he went into the armed services. He was discharged during the Korean conflict and resumed his education at Fresno State University. Due to hard times, Ybanez had to drop out of college in order to work. He passed the police examination and became a police officer for Fresno. Ybanez talks about Sergeant Sal Mosqueda and how he spent a lot of his time working with the youth of Fresno. He discusses the process of getting a community center named after Mosqueda after his death. Ybanez brings up the Latino Peace Officers' Association and how they encouraged Mexican-Americans and Latinos to enter the law enforcement field.

Ybanez recalls his young life during the depression, but says that his father always managed to have a job. Ybanez wants the younger generations to maintain the Mexican-American culture or else he believes that it will be lost. Ybanez says that when Mexican-American families in the valley started to grow up, they moved out to southern California. Ybanez discusses working at a raisin packing plant in high school where he would make \$1.20 an hour. Ybanez says that as a police officer, he stresses education to children by telling them that it will open many doors for them in the future.

Ybanez also discusses the Pachuco Movement in the 1940's and says that it was much more of a fashion in Fresno. While in Los Angeles, the movement was more related to gang activity. Ybanez talks about gang activity in the 1970's and says kids are only in gangs because "crime is profitable." Ybanez recalls being a part of the Catholic Youth Organization before he went into the service. Ybanez elaborates on what he thinks about the young Mexican gangs, and how they just need to apply themselves in order to accomplish big things. Ybanez also says that Mexican-American women are going through several changes as they become liberated.

Interviewer: Ben Garza  
Transcript: 22 pages  
Audio: 00:52:54  
OH-EOHP-MA17

FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOE YBANEZ

AUGUST 18, 1977

Today is August 18, 1977. I, Ben Garza, am interviewing Mr. Joe Ybanez who works in the Community Relations Office of the Fresno Police Department

GARZA: Mr. Ybanez, when and where were you born?

YBANEZ: I was born in the city of Tulare, Tulare County on March 8, 1930, some forty- seven years ago.

GARZA: So that means that you have lived in the valley for forty-seven years.

YBANEZ: That's correct. My father was a farm laborer in the Tulare area. There was a big ranch by the name of Tagus Ranch. He was an irrigator there in the late '30's. We left that area and bought property in Clovis, which is an outlying community of Fresno just ten miles from here. I've been here in the valley all of my life, as all our family has.

GARZA: What schools did you attend?

YBANEZ: I went to school in Clovis at Jefferson Elementary and shortly thereafter my father bought other properties in Fresno County, and I went to McKinley Elementary. In the late '40's, my father liquidated his properties and we moved into the city. We lived a very short distance from the building where I'm now employed. We lived on the corner of Tulare and Mayor. 809 Tulare was the address. The property was sold to a church

group, the Southern Baptist. There is now a church on the property where I spent a lot of my youthful days. The house was torn down and the church erected.

GARZA: Did you attend high school?

YBANEZ: Yes. As you well know, Edison High School is just down the street on California. That's the high school I went to. I had the opportunity to serve in the armed services. It was during the Korean conflict, and, upon being discharged from the service, I went to Fresno State. I was married while I was in the armed forces, and, shortly after I came back, I started a family. So things were a little tougher than they are now. So I had to drop out of school and go to work. I was fortunate enough to take the police examination and passed it, and got on the police department. I've been with the department ever since, I've been an officer for the city of Fresno some twenty years.

GARZA: Who were some of the first Mexican-Americans to serve on the Fresno Police Department?

YBANEZ: There was only a small percentage. There was only a total of five officers. At the present time, there are thirty-five Mexican-Americans on the police force. The names that come to mind are Frank Chavez, Henry Espinoza, Sal Mosqueda and Armando Palmiero. I had a brother that was in the police department prior to my coming on. He died of a heart attack at the age of thirty-two.

GARZA: Did he die as a result of his work or pressure from the outside?

YBANEZ: He died of a heart attack. He had heart trouble. As you know, this job has tremendous stress; it goes along with the job. It was very much job related. We made a lot of changes. Working conditions are so much better now. The stress is still there, however.

GARZA: An interesting name is Sal Mosqueda. There is a center named for him. Can you tell me a little about Officer Mosqueda?

YBANEZ: He was very much liked in both communities, the Anglo, as well as the Mexican-American. He spent a great deal of his time working with the youth of Fresno--white, brown and black. He was assigned for many years as a juvenile officer, and then he got elevated to the rank of sergeant. And then he went into the patrol division. He was a friend of mine, also of my family and a very dear friend of my brother that was on the department. His loss was a loss to the whole community, to his family and to all his friends who loved him dearly. He was a humanitarian, he did a lot for his fellow man.

GARZA: How did he die?

YBANEZ: Well, it happened several years ago, Ben. There was a report, a broadcast that there had been an armed robbery at the Safeway store on First Street

and Olive. Sergeant Mosqueda was in that immediate area. The ironic thing of the whole problem is that Sergeant Mosqueda was supposed to have been off that day. It was one of his normal days off. He volunteered to work his day off. We're always short of manpower in the department. Sergeant Mosqueda was asked if he would work his day off. He was in that immediate area when the broadcast was made that there had been an armed robbery, that the suspect was still in the store. Sal arrived at the area; he saw the suspect and made a broadcast. The suspect got into an automobile and was fleeing the scene. Sergeant Mosqueda gave chase. Subsequently, there was a gun battle a very short distance from the store. The suspect had barricaded himself in a house. The area was immediately surrounded by law enforcement personnel from our department, the Highway Patrol and the sheriff's office. In the confusion, Sergeant Mosqueda was apparently hit upon his arrival at the scene, but nobody was aware of it. The outcome was that the suspect was killed. There was a fire and he refused to flee the building. So he died in the blaze which led to the destruction of the house. Later on, when they started taking count of the people who were there, they saw this car that was out in the middle of the street, a black and white patrol car. They investigated and found Sergeant Mosqueda slumped over the seat. He had the microphone in his hand.

He had communicated with the dispatcher and had given his location and everything pertaining to the suspect. Apparently, shortly after that he was hit. Even in that, he made an effort to go for his mike. Because the way I was told--I was not there at the scene--but the way it was related to me, it appeared that he was going for the mike. He was trying to broadcast that he had been hit. He was very courageous, and, above all, he was well-liked in both communities.

GARZA: How old was he?

YBANEZ: Sal was in his fifties. He was very close to retirement. He left a family, he left a widow. It was very tragic.

GARZA: Was there a movement to dedicate a center to his name?

YBANEZ: Immediately the people came forth and expressed their concern and their hurt for what had happened. They commissioned an artist and made a beautiful memorial that sits in front of the police headquarters now. It was dedicated in the name of Sergeant Mosqueda and also in the name of other police officers that have been killed in the line of duty. There has been a number of police officers that have given their lives for the citizens of Fresno in the performance of their duties through the years. There was still a movement on to have something more permanent dedicated in his name. There is a junior high school, Tehipite, which is located

on Belmont and Augusta. There was a movement to re-name it after him. Finally, the city council came up with having the Sal Mosqueda Center, which is in southeast Fresno. It's a hub of activity. That community center is a hub of activity. I think that it was very appropriate.

GARZA: Was there any opposition to the center?

YBANEZ: There was some opposition, Ben. Why? I don't know, but there always is when something like this is started. There are people that come out of the woodwork that are opposed to things like this. Sal was a very dedicated human being. And I'm sure those differences have been reconciled and that the people are quite satisfied with the fact that the community center was named for Sal Mosqueda.

GARZA: What sort of forces would you say were opposed to the naming of a building in honor of Sal Mosqueda?

YBANEZ: I like to think that we're all above petty jealousies and bigotry, but apparently we're not. It was a racial thing. He was a Mexican-American. It's too bad. We have good in the anglo community, good in the Mexican-American community and bad in both. It's hard to say. It's too bad that we have to have problems like that or people who have that type of attitude. We have to be honest about it. It does exist. We have to be a little bigger than that

and try not to show those prejudices.

GARZA: When were the first Mexican-Americans hired by the Fresno Police Department? Do you know any history on that?

YBANEZ: I don't know. I wish I had an opportunity to research that area because my knowledge is very vague. However, it does date back to the 1800's. There was a man--he was a Mexican-American--that was on the police department.

GARZA: Isn't there an association of Mexican-American police officers?

YBANEZ: Yes, there is. It is the Latino Peace Officers' Association--LPOA. It is a state-wide organization. Its main concern is to upgrade the standards of the police departments and to encourage Mexican-Americans and Latinos to get into the field of law enforcement. It has a lot of credibility locally and at the state level. We have some excellent leaders from the state level, as well as from our local chapter, people who are dedicated to law enforcement and to the community to the betterment of society.

GARZA: Do you recall how the depression affected the Mexican community, your family in particular?

YBANEZ: I was born in 1930. We were a poor family. My dad was a hard working Christian. He always managed to have a job, he was a common laborer. It was very

important to him to have employment. It had to be tough, but what I can recall is that there were joyous days because we were a happy family. We were more together. I don't think monetary gain has anything to do with the success or attitude of a family, as long as you have a figurehead, somebody that you can look up to with pride and identify with. That's why we find ourselves having the problems that we have today. People are not together as people were in the '30's, '40's or '50's. People weren't as mobile. Television has had a tremendous impact in breaking up family units. Economics--It's almost a necessity that the woman leave the house and help maintain the family. People are involving themselves in a lot of activities outside the home. The father has meetings to go to; the mother has her meetings to go to. The family is left at home by themselves; nobody is concerned with what they're doing. I'm sure they are growing pains that we are experiencing right now. I'm sure that it will get better. It won't ever be the same as when we were children.

GARZA: What do you think will happen to the Mexican-American culture, say, thirty years from now?

YBANEZ: It's a tough question. I hope that we maintain it because it's something to be proud of. We should try to hold on to it. Every indication is that we

are losing it. Unless some of the young people start to recognize who they are and where they came from, we will lose that. There is a movement to retain the culture. There's a lot of kids going to school, involved in La Raza studies. That knowledge isn't going to hurt you. Lots of people are opposed to it. They say, "They're Americans and there's no need for that."

I disagree. I think that knowledge doesn't hurt you one bit. This is not to say that if you learn where you came from that you're going to be radical.

It's good to know who you are and where you came from. I certainly hope that we never lose our culture because it is something to be proud of. We have nothing to be ashamed of and certainly a whole lot to be proud of.

GARZA: When you were young, in Tulare, was there a large Mexican community? What has happened to the valley, say, from the '30's on up till now?

YBANEZ: Well, there has been tremendous change in all groups of society. The minute the family starts to grow up, they start to migrate. A lot of them have left the valley and they're going into southern California, into Los Angeles, which is very heavily populated with Mexican-Americans, on up North to the bay area. But, in the '30's, working on the Tagus Ranch, it was predominately Mexican-American. You had a lot of "Okies"--as you see in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath--in the

San Joaquin Valley. It was very much like that. You'd go into the labor camps and you'd find whites and browns. They lived near to each other and had no problems. They were all fighting one common enemy.

GARZA: Were there any trade union efforts in those days?

YBANEZ: I can recall one particular incident. It was totally foreign to me. I didn't understand it. I can recall men with rifles and guns, and they were trying to organize.

GARZA: Was that by any chance the IWW?

YBANEZ: It could have been. I don't remember, I was very young. I can recall that my mother would get extremely angry at us if we would get out of the house. She thought that we were going to get shot laughing. But I do remember it very vividly in my mind.

GARZA: Do you recall anything about the KKK in the '30's?

YBANEZ: No, I don't because in the '30's we were out in rural Fresno County. It wasn't until the '40's that we moved into the city. Being property owners and living out on a ranch, we didn't have any encounter with problems like that.

GARZA: You said you worked at Rosenberg Packing Company?

YBANEZ: Yeah, when I was a student at Edison High School. During the summer, it was the thing to do. The minute you got out of school, you hustled for a job. There was a packing plant out on south Broadway, and it employed

a tremendous work force. From three to four to five hundred people. It was a raisin producing packing plant. They would bring in raisins, buy other ripe fruit. They would process them, box them, and ship them out. I worked there. I have some good memories working as a youth.

GARZA: Was there any effort on the part of trade unions there?

YBANEZ: No, no there wasn't.

GARZA: How much did they pay you?

YBANEZ: I was working there in the late '40's. We would receive about \$1.20 an hour.

GARZA: Those were good wages.

YBANEZ: They were for that time of the year and that time of our lives.

GARZA: What was the experience of the Chicano soldier in the war?

YBANEZ: That was a different experience completely. In looking back and making comparisons between the two wars--the Korean conflict and the Vietnam situation--it was totally different as it was presented to us. It was the same, but it was sold to the American people under different pretenses. Everyone was happy to go and fight. They didn't question it. It was something that had to be done. I was very happy to serve my country. I did it with no bad feelings or any hesitations.

GARZA: Why do you think that the Mexican-American soldier started to rebel?

YBANEZ: I don't think that he was the only one. I think that the anglo, the black and everyone who was involved rebelled because they did not believe what the government was saying to them, and rightly so. They were trying to paint a different picture than it really was. The minute that the people start lying to one another, they lose faith in each other. I think basically that's what happened. I think we, the Mexican-American community, have a lot to be proud of. I think that we're Americans first, then we're Mexicans. I'm very proud to be a Mexican-American.

GARZA: Was there a large number of Mexican-American soldiers in the Korean war?

YBANEZ: I'm sure there was. I personally had to be drafted before I went in. When I was inducted into the service, there must have been about seven Mexican-American kids that I'd grown up with. There were Italians, Anglos, blacks and mixtures.

GARZA: You have served on the police force for twenty years. What are some of the constant problems you see in the Mexican-American community?

YBANEZ: I kind of see an unrest and uneasiness in the community. There's a lot of kids going to school. Any time I get an opportunity to talk to any group of young Mexican-Americans, I try to stress that an education

opens doors and that it is the only solution to a lot of our problems. What hurts me is to see these young rebels without a cause. Things aren't that bad. They could be better, but they aren't that bad. You can do just about anything with your life. You can do it. You have nobody to blame but yourself. If you want to do something, attain certain goals, certain objectives, you can reach those goals and objectives, if you apply yourself. It hurts me to see these kids asking for something for nothing. They think that someone owes them something. I don't see that. I think you can stand up and be counted and you can be proud, but you have to get out and earn it. You'll appreciate something you've earned a lot more than something that is handed to you. We're having a lot of problems at present with young Mexican-American gangs. There's so much good that these kids could be doing, but what are they doing? They're getting involved in criminal activity, things that are against the law. Well, that reflects on all of us. That's not good. Those things trouble me a great deal.

GARZA: Were there Mexican gangs in the '30's? Did the pachuco exist in Fresno in the '40's?

YBANEZ: Oh, yeah. I think the way it hit Fresno, I think it was more of a fashion, a fad. In east Los Angeles, there were actually organized gangs that used to take

care of their barrios or turfs. Here in Fresno, it's more of an agricultural type community; we saw it more like a fashion, a fad. People would dress in that long coat, the bif hat and the zoot suit trousers. But I don't think that they were organized to the extent that they were in Los Angeles. My understanding was that they organized out of necessity. They had to take care of their barrio. This is one reason why they banded together and formed themselves. We didn't have that here in Fresno.

GARZA: When the pachuco was organizing to protect his barrio, what was he protecting it against?

YBANEZ: There were other barrios that had other groups. It was fashionable to go in and try to sway some of the girls to come over. There were attractive girls and guys would try to go over and date them. The guys felt they had to protect the girls and their turf.

GARZA: Today we have gangs.

YBANEZ: It's a different kind of gang that we're confronted with today. These young people realize that crime is profitable. They are committing crime. Like I stated before, they were organized to protect their turf, to care for their own. Now they're organized to commit crime.

GARZA: By crime, you mean?

YBANEZ: We have a lot of armed robberies, a lot of

assaults, purse snatches, a lot of beatings, burglaries. A lot of this activity is committed by the youth gangs.

GARZA: Is this activity bigger than the drug activities?

YBANEZ: Those are two very alarming problems which we police officers have to address ourselves to. They do exist. We do have a big traffic problem here in Fresno. The young, youthful gang problem is very real. Also, we have a big problem in alcoholism, especially with the Mexican-American. It's a big, big problem.

GARZA: Is alcoholism a recent problem or is it that we never paid attention to it?

YBANEZ: It's a problem that has been with us for a very long time, and it is just something that has been accepted by society. It is so fashionable to have liquor in your home when you're home and you have friends over. It's part of society to invite them to a drink. I think that we have had it all along. In recent years, we're admitting that it has become a problem that has elevated to magnitude. It has ruined families and has for many years. We're finally addressing the problem as it is.

GARZA: Is the alcoholism problem as serious? This is looking from a historical point of view. Is it more serious than the gang problem or the drug problem?

YBANEZ

Have drugs, for example, consistently been a problem for the Mexican-American community as opposed to alcohol?

YBANEZ: I don't know that I'm qualified to answer that. The only way I can answer that is from my personal experience. I can remember back in the '40's where people would say "That guy is a doper; he smokes marijuana, or "That guy is always drunk; he's an alki." I think they have pretty much been with us. I don't know how to weigh one against the other, to say one is worse or one has been with us longer.

GARZA: Today the kind of picture we're looking at is perhaps more complex. You say that because the Mexican people want to organize themselves that this has created the situation?

YBANEZ: There's always constant change. People are beginning to grow up. They're doing away with their fears. When you have ignorance, you have a lot of fear, merely because you don't understand something. I think this is the situation the Mexican-American found himself in. He came into an Anglo society. The Anglo did not know him or understand him; so consequently it created a lot of problems for the Mexican-American. The Anglo is becoming more sensitive to the Mexicans and to the culture. I think things will get better. Maybe we won't see it, but our children

YBANEZ

and grandchildren will see it, where we can live in harmony and mutual respect for one another. We are moving in that direction.

GARZA: What were some of the very first Mexican-American organizations in Fresno that you remember?

YBANEZ: Being a Catholic, I can remember the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). I remember involving myself in the CYO. There was the Goana Club which was very political, but it disbanded in the late '40's. If you have an opportunity, interview Judge Armando Rodriguez. Judge Rodriguez comes from a large family. He had older brothers that were very active in the Goana organization. They used to put on dances and it was a very, very political organization for that period in our life, and it speaks very highly of them. It used to speak out when injustices surfaced. I don't know why it disbanded or what caused it to fall apart. People went in different directions. A lot of those people who were very active members are still around.

GARZA: Who were some of those people?

YBANEZ: Mainly the Rodriguezs. There were a lot of people, but the only ones that come to mind are the Rodriguezs.

GARZA: Did they ever print any material regarding their political stands?

YBANEZ: Yes, I'm sure they did.

GARZA: How long did that organization exist?

YBANEZ: I know it disbanded in the late '40's. It had to be in existence at least ten to possibly fifteen years, and that's going back into the '30's.

GARZA: Was there any other Mexican organization that you knew of in Fresno, cultural or political?

YBANEZ: No, not really. I was in my teens in the '40's. The only two that are very prominent in my mind are the CYO and the Goana Club.

GARZA: This is in the '40's. Do you recall anything in the '50's?

YBANEZ: No, in the '50's, I was away in the service. When I came back, there had been some changes made. The only thing that we had in the form of an organization was Veterans of Foreign Wars 509 and 8900. That's the only one that I can recall.

GARZA: When you came back from the war did you see big or small changes in the community?

YBANEZ: I can't recall seeing any big changes. What I saw was a change in myself. I left Fresno a young teenager and came back as a man. I'm sure that war has a way of transforming your whole attitude and being. I never had any problems; I never encountered any prejudice.

GARZA: How does a Mexican-American police officer look at the gangs in relationship to, say, the KKK?

YBANEZ

YBANEZ: Well, I can't understand the KKK. I can't understand people hating that much. In regards to the young Mexican gangs, I understand some of their frustrations and attitudes, their feelings of how society has failed them. I don't think that that is true. I think that they have failed themselves. Being a Mexican-American, I can see how they think they can make demands on society because they have been discriminated against. That can apply to the browns as well as the blacks. It's very easy to say, "Hey, I was cheated, I was dealt a bad hand." That is not true. You can do just about anything. We can see that. It's very apparent if we just look around. We have Joe Williams, who sits on our city council. He's a black. We have Judge Hugh Goodwin who is a black. We have Judge Rodriguez and Judge Al Villa who are Mexican-Americans. We have a lot of people in high offices at State and in Washington. I think it's very easy to form these attitudes of dislike and discontent. But if a person applies himself, there is nothing that he can't accomplish. If he just applies himself.

GARZA: In the early '60's, I recall very well, I was a youth. There used to be gangs and the whole question of gangs arose. It seems to me that gangs were an indication of bigger things to come. Later on, they

turned into political things like the Brown Berets.  
Did you ever think about that?

YBANEZ: Well, yeah. I think that it all depends on the interpretation of a gang. To a lot of people, a group of young people might be a gang, but they're just a lot of people who hang around together. They're not necessarily out to do good or bad, they're just a group. I can recall as a young person the guys I used to hang around with. There were maybe ten or twelve of us. To other people who weren't part of our group, we were probably called a gang. But we never tried to go out to do evil or to do good. I guess, as we grow up, we start with our peers. You go to elementary school, and there's a group that you become involved with, and, as you get older, your attitudes change. If you start out in a youthful gang, I can see where it could turn into something political later on in your life. If you still maintain that same friendship and organization, it could.

GARZA: How do you see the Mexican-American woman, the Chicana, in Fresno County? Do you see her going through a lot of changes?

YBANEZ: I certainly do, Ben. I'm sure that the Mexican-American woman had to really go through a lot of self-examination because our culture dictates that she is to be in the home to care for her family and her man.

It must have been extremely difficult for her to be liberated, before she could feel on an even keel with a man, her counterpart. She's supposed to be almost to the point of subservience. I remember very vividly that my mother waited on my dad hand and foot. She worshipped the ground he stood on, and she loved it. But those were years back and times have changed. The Mexican-American female had contributed a lot to the growth of the Mexican community. There's a lot of excellent educators that are Mexican-American females. In all areas of the professional fields, doctors, lawyers, etc., there are Mexican-American females.

GARZA: Does Fresno have any Mexican-American women's organizations?

YBANEZ: Yeah, but don't ask me to name them because I don't know them. But I do know several women who belong to these organizations?

GARZA: What about the league?

YBANEZ: The Mexican-American League is a very active political club. It seems to me that we're gearing ourselves more politically. I think that everything is more political. Maybe that is the answer, depending on which party you believe in.

GARZA: Would you like to tell us anything else about the past that I may not have covered?

YBANEZ: Just some parting words. They would have to be, "let's try to get along." We're here a very short time, and we should make the best of it. We are brothers and sisters. When it's all over we've only two places to go; we either go up or down, depending on what we do here.

GARZA: What would you like to see happen to this material that we are accumulating about the community?

YBANEZ: I know that you're going to be reaching people who are very precise and very articulate, people who have a lot to say about where we came from and where we are going. I hope that that material can be compiled into something in a form of a book or information put out so that people who are yet to come will know what we were trying to do and where we were coming from.

GARZA: Thank you very much, Mr. Ybanez.

YBANEZ: Thank you.

"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES."

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MR. JOE YBANEZ, NARRATOR

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(DATE)

\_\_\_\_\_  
BEN GARZA, INTERVIEWER

\_\_\_\_\_  
(DATE)