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Edward Carrasco

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

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Interview #1: June 18, 2008
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Rigelhaupt: It is June 18, 2008. I am in Hayward California, doing an oral history interview with Edward Carrasco. This is tape number one. And if I could start by asking you to say your full name and the year you were born.

01-00:00:25

Carrasco: My name? My Spanish name is Eduardo Carrasco. Since I was born in Texas and I'm an American, I use Edward. And my guys call me Eddie My Boy. They call me Eddie, for Edward. And Eduardo, it's okay; I could go by both names. Eduardo Carrasco. And I was born September 4, 1924 in El Paso, Texas.

Rigelhaupt: And did you live in El Paso until you moved to the Bay Area?

01-00:01:04

Carrasco: I lived in El Paso. I went to high school there. My grammar school, my high school there. But I did not graduate from high school because it was during the war and there were a lot of dropouts of high school. And I went to El Paso Tech to be a machinist. I was only sixteen years old. I dropped out of high school to go to El Paso Tech with a friend of mine. And I went there for about a year and a half, El Paso Tech. And I was sixteen years old and I left El Paso in the summer time to come to Los Angeles. I'd like to talk about how I came to Los Angeles for the first time, from Texas, El Paso. I came by freight train. Not by bus, not by airplane, not by car or not by train, but from a freight train. This story, I love to tell the whole world. I was sixteen years old. And me and my buddy from school said, "Hey, let's go to Los Angeles." In those days there's no money; nobody can afford anything." So everybody, all the older guys, used to take the freight train—I mean on top of the train—and that's the way they went to Los Angeles, like hobos. And we were sixteen years old. Skinny kids with a lot of guts. I had eight dollars in my—No, two dollars in my pocket. Two dollars in my shoe. I put it in my shoe. And two pair of shirts, one for the outside, and two pair of pants; and no coat, no cap, nothing. And that was it. And my buddy, the same thing. So we traveled from El Paso to New Mexico at eleven o'clock at night, at midnight. Now, when we reached New Mexico—in about two minutes, we reached New Mexico—and it's all pitch dark. We're in the desert! On top of the train. And the train goes *cha-cha-cha-cha, cha-cha-cha*. And we're on top of the train. I look at myself and I says, you did something great, man. And I'm proud of that. So luckily, I survived that trip, me and my friend. We were on top of the train and just going *cha-cha-cha-cha-cha-cha*, and all the soot from the train was blowing in our faces. You can smell the train's—whatever smoke. And we were getting tired, being on top of the train for so long. So I told my friend, "Let's get a gondola." A gondola so we could get inside. A gondola is an open boxcar. So we went up and down, up and down on boxcars, till we finally found a gondola in about an hour or two hours later, about three-o'clock in the

morning. And so finally, we find a gondola, we dropped in. And in the morning, about six-thirty or so, we woke up and the gondola was *loaded* with hobos. Older men. *Loaded* with hobos. And they were nice people; they just didn't bother you in those days. And from then on, the hobos would teach us how to get the next train to go to Los Angeles. So that's the way we made the trip to LA, with a lot of help from the hobos and with no money at all. I would help them load and unload boxcars and they would give us maybe a sandwich or something to eat on the way. And so finally, we reached Los Angeles, downtown. And the hobos even taught us how to jump out of the train. And we jumped out of the train without breaking a leg. So that's the first time I came to Los Angeles. Then I went back to El Paso again because it was summertime.

01-00:05:06

But then when I was seventeen, I came back to Oakland. I had a job at the post office in Oakland, they gave me [at] the unemployment office. And this time I went in the train, inside the train. But I didn't stop in Oakland, the train kept going to Sacramento. And here I says, "What am I doing here in Sacramento?" I says, "Well, I'll go get a job." So I went to the Sacramento Hotel and applied for a job as a busboy. They hired me on the spot. They hired me right away. They liked me real good and all that. And I had ham and eggs every morning and all the juice I can drink. And my rent was only three dollars a week in Sacramento, on K Street. And I went to the Sacramento Hotel, and here I have breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, dinner at night, without having to pay anything. Plus twenty dollars a week they paid me. Twenty dollars a week. [laughs] But I could afford it because I had no habits and didn't smoke and drink, nothing. Just a kid. And in those days, the rent was only three dollars for me and some other guys that were together in the big room. And still, I had two or three dollars left to send to my mother. So that was fun. So I stayed there till I was almost eighteen. Can I continue saying more?

Rigelhaupt:

Well, actually, yes. But could we jump backwards before we get to—I wanted to ask you a few more questions about El Paso. Could you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in in El Paso?

01-00:06:45

Carrasco:

El Paso was *predominantly*, predominantly Hispanic. In Texas, since you're right on the border of Juarez, Mexico, our high school—a very proud high school that we had, {Bowie?} High School—was 100% Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans *born* in the United States. No immigrants. We were probably second generation, I guess. My mother did come from Chihuahua, Mexico. My mother came from Mexico during the Pancho Villa revolt, the revolution. So she came to Texas. And she married my father; he was a World War veteran, also born in Texas. My father {Marciano?} Carrasco, he went to war in the First World War. And so I grew up in {a predominantly?} neighborhood—el barrio, we call it, Second Ward. And everybody in El Paso would love to hear that because it was predominantly Mexican Americans.

And there was a whole neighborhood. And Spanish was our first language. Spanish was our first language for all of us, except when you go to high school. No speak-a the Spanish in high school. So we had to speak English, naturally, in high school. That's how we learned how to speak English, because we're Americans. And I loved my high school. I was in the ROTC. ROTC was to teach military stuff. And also I played football there and I played basketball, and I became a boxer there, too. I was very athletic in my days. When I was sixteen I fought in the Golden Gloves in El Paso, Texas. I was sixteen years old. I think it was a feather weight; he was a skinny guy. And I lost my first fight. I became an amateur boxer when I came to California. So I kept boxing because I loved—I still like boxing. And the reason for that is because I like to stay in shape. And that's what I did. But they didn't call me Eddie My Boy there. I didn't get my name there till I came to California, because I was a fighter there. And everybody says, hey, Eddie My Boy, Eddie My Boy. And I love that name. So I came to California when I was seventeen.

Rigelhaupt: Could you tell me a little bit about where your parents were born and grew up?

01-00:09:22
Carrasco:

Well, my mother was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, like I said, during the Pancho Villa revolt. I think she worked as a housekeeper for somebody when she was nineteen, and they brought her to Texas. And that's where she met my father, who was in the army. And my father died very young; I was only two years old when he passed away. So I don't know much about him. All I know, that he was a veteran and then he was a cab driver. That was his job. And that's all I know about him. They never did tell me too much about my father. So I grew up without a father. I never missed him. I'm married and I have two daughters and no sons, but I never missed a father. But I am a good father. I learned how to be a good father, raising my family. And so when a mother says, well, my kid didn't grow up so good because he didn't have a father, hey, those fathers were so strict with the kids that I'm glad I didn't have a father like that. So I was okay. I was fine.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have brothers or sisters?

01-00:10:44
Carrasco:

Then, I have two brothers, Frank and Alfred. And they were both in the army. They both went to ROTC. And my brother Fred was in the air corps. Very young, he was in the air corps. He was a navigator in the air corps. And my brother Frank, he graduated, but he came to Oakland to work in the shipyards, at Kaiser shipyards. And that's why I came back to work for the shipyards, to follow my brother, Frank Carrasco. He also was in the military.

Rigelhaupt: Well, staying when you were a little younger, say kindergarten age, what was a typical day like for your mother?

01-00:11:35

Carrasco: My typical?

Rigelhaupt:

When you were, say five years old, somewhere around there—

01-00:11:39

Carrasco: Oh, when I was a kid, yeah.

Rigelhaupt:

—what was a typical day like for your mother?

01-00:11:44

Carrasco: My mother? It was in the poor days, I remember that. And in those days, bootlegging was the only way you could make money. I read a story about this area, Hayward and Castro Valley—bootleggers *all over*. Because during the Depression, where can you get money? How can you get work? Everybody was in the same boat. Everybody was poor. So bootlegging. My mother started making wine, she started making beer and selling it. And I remember the high school kids. My mother would go to Juarez Mexico, buy some alcohol and mix it with something, and make a drink out of it for the high school kids, for twenty-five cents. So that was the way it was in El Paso. Almost every street had bootleggers in El Paso. Even Al Capone used to come to the Rio Grande. And there's a story about he went to Juarez to bring some alcohol from Mexico through the river, the Rio Grande. And they showed his car, Al Capone's car, full of bullet—bullets all over. That was a fun thing. But those were the days. It was the poor days. So I never missed being poor. When the Depression was here, the Mexican Americans says, what Depression? What Depression? We were always depressed. Because if you never had it, you never missed it. So not till Franklin Delano Roosevelt, our president, came in and he helped us and gave us food, gave us clothes and rationed meat—And he used to send us trucks of sugar, trucks of canned food, and nice clothes to wear. So Franklin Delano Roosevelt, we owe it to him that he helped the poor. And that was very good in those days. So we never missed not having anything. Because we always had something. Being Mexican Americans, Mexican food. So we always had beans. I'll tell you a good one. One time I was playing with my kids outside, playing marbles. And my mother says, "Come on in and eat your chicken." And the guy says, "Oh, you guys going to eat chicken?" So she says, "Come on in, eat your chicken." I said, "You want to come and eat with us?" "Yeah." So they sit down for dinner and all that, and my mother throws the beans in there. She said, "You want more chicken?" The guys says, "Is that chicken?" That's what my mother calls it. So that's the way it was in those days. But we lived in places where they had outhouses for the whole neighborhood. So we took our showers and baths outside. We'd just heat the water and go outside and take a bath. So we never missed that.

01-00:14:50

And games, how did we play games? Had no toys. Nobody gave you a toy. So we make our own toys. You get a can and kick the can. And you make balls out of—they're making footballs out of it. And tennis balls, oh, those were

good because tennis balls, we played with that. And marbles and tops and yo-yos. So we made our own toys in those days. So it was fun. We never missed having toys. And golf, I only had one club, a number five iron. And I learned how to play golf with just one club, and I'm still playing golf. And I was a caddy when I was thirteen years old. I became a caddy at the El Paso Municipal Golf Course over there. And I remember my caddy days. And a good one about being a caddy was, one time I was having a burrito in my pocket, and I was eating my burrito. And this Anglo American person that I was caddying to said, "What are you eating?" I says, "A burrito." He said, "What's that?" "A tortilla with beans." "Where'd you get it? Your mother made it to you?" "No, that lady in the caddy house. She was selling them for three cents." He says, "Yeah? Can you get me one?" So I said, "Yeah." So I got him one, he said, "Mm. Do they have one with chicken?" Said, "Yeah." They had one with meat, too, for five cents. So he said, "Get me a couple." And that's where Mexican American food started. And when people didn't know what Mexican American food was, they learned from us and they liked it. And in those days, the only place you could get Mexican food was in Mexican communities. No place else. No place else. When I came to Oakland, all the guys from Texas smelled the Mexican food in the Mexican communities, and that's the only place you could get Mexican food.

Rigelhaupt: How did you begin caddying? How did you get that job?

01-00:17:20
Carrasco:

In those days, you had to find a job. And all the kids were saying, well, why don't you be a caddy? What's a caddy? Well, you haul the golf clubs. And sometimes you have two bags. And they pay you fifty cents for a C caddy. They have B caddy and A caddy. An A caddy was one that had experience, and he would get more money. So you start with fifty cents for eighteen holes, and then later on you graduate to they pay you seventy-five cents for eighteen holes. And that's the way it is. But in those days, eighteen cents meant a lot of money. With a penny, you could buy things. You could buy things with a penny in those days. With a nickel, wow, watch out. Yeah. So we'd go to the golf course. And instead of taking a bus, we walked. We walked all the way from our neighborhood [to] where the golf course was. And that would take more than two hours, just to walk to the golf course, or maybe an hour and a half, and walk back, too. No buses, no cars, nothing. Everything was walking, walking, walking. But you get used to it. Yeah, in those days I remember my mother used to take a streetcar to go to work. And she paid six cents for the streetcar. And sometimes my mother says, "I can't afford it. I have to walk to work." She would walk blocks and blocks, as a housekeeper, just to save six cents in those days. But we never felt that we were poor. We didn't know anything. When you're poor you're poor; you don't feel it. You don't feel it at all. But you remember.

Rigelhaupt: So you said your mother was working as a housekeeper. Was she working at a hotel? For a family? What kind of different jobs did she have, in that sense?

01-00:19:34
Carrasco:

I think just cleaning houses. Even today, people are still cleaning houses today. Immigrants, as soon as they come to the United States, the first job they can get is cleaning houses. They're always available for that. Cleaning houses or yard work. Immigrants. And that's the way they get started. I never did that because I was very young. Like I said, at sixteen I was a busboy in Sacramento, eating three meals a day. And then I started working in the shipyards, and we're going to get through that. And I was eighteen years old when I started working the shipyards.

Rigelhaupt: Are both your brothers older than you are?

01-00:20:30
Carrasco:

They're dead now. They're both—yeah. My first brother was in World War II. And then when he came back home, he had three children. And then the Korean War came in, so he was also in that war. And then from then on, he became very depressed—two wars and the work he had to do—and he drank too much, and he died as an alcoholic at the age of forty, forty-two, forty-three. And he left three children. So that was it. And my other brother, he was in the military. He served in the Philippines. And he'd talk about fighting the Japanese. He brought a bayonet with him and told us about how he used to kill Japanese. He died at the age of sixty-five. He never got one check from Social Security. He died when he was sixty-five, of cancer, in Los Angeles, California. So those are the only two brothers I had. But I can tell you about another brother I had, half a brother. His father had two families. My father had two families. Yeah, that's what it was. So he was my half brother. But he was about twenty years older than me. And he served in the Philippines, and was captured by the Japanese and put in a concentration camp, in Bataan. He was a hero of Bataan. He spent three years in prison in Bataan, and he wrote a book. And the book was named *Americans, You Die*, because this is what the Japanese used to tell the Americans, "Americans, you die." And his name was—He went by Garcia, he went by Robert Garcia. Called him Bobby. He was my half brother.

Rigelhaupt: And did you have extended family in your neighborhood? Like cousins, aunts and uncles?

01-00:22:51
Carrasco:

Yes. In El Paso, I still have family over there. And they don't like California. They like Texas. I tell them, "How can you stand that heat?" "We like El Paso." And you know what? I've been reading about how people like their roots. They like their roots. And that's what keeps them there. When they go to another place and the roots are not there, they feel like strangers in a town. I don't care how much money they make, they don't like it. They want to go where your friends are your friends, your neighbors are your neighbors, where you grew up. And they live more comfortable that way.

Rigelhaupt: Did you have a favorite subject in elementary school?

01-00:23:50
Carrasco:

[My favorite] subject in elementary school, I think to me, was always singing. I was always singing. Every time I heard a song, boom! I knew it right away. Heard that song, boom! And I grew up with guitar players. In El Paso, who had a radio? Nobody had a radio. You couldn't afford a radio; you don't have radios. So you sing with the guitar players. And everybody in every corner had guitar players. And at night in the summertime, you open the windows up and you can hear guitar players singing from *far* away. And instead of music, radio, live guitar players singing in neighborhoods. It was so beautiful. And that's why I'm talking about where you grew up, you want to stay there, your neighborhood, your roots. Because you miss that when you go to a strange town. You don't have that. It's strange. See? And I know a lot of immigrants, even right now, wish they were in Mexico. They don't like it here. They're only here because they can make money. The Cubans don't like it here, either. They want to go back to Cuba. It's what you grow up with. The Chinese, the same way. They like China. But they miss all their roots. I still miss my roots. [laughs]

[Narrator Comment: I believe my favorite subject was learning English, speaking English—correcting my Spanish to interpret to English—at home we spoke nothing but Spanish—and not correctly. I never took Spanish to speak better; it was always Spanglish mixing English with Spanish, like saying, *carro* instead of *automobile*—*car* for English. I still talk that way with the family and Spanish friends.]

Rigelhaupt: Did you have a favorite subject in high school?

01-00:25:32
Carrasco:

Yeah, boxing. Boxing. I went out for football, they threw a pass at me and bam! I banged with another guy. They had to carry me out. That was the end of my football days. Basketball, I was too short. Track, I like it. Track, I like it, but I didn't have the wind to get in shape. But boxing, I used to love boxing.

[Narrator Comment: Two other favorite subjects I had were math and learning more English—I never had anybody in my family that had a good education—my mother spoke Spanish all the time—she had no education to speak English. My two sisters and two brothers were like me—just learning.]

Rigelhaupt: What did you think of LA when you first saw it, after you got there when you were sixteen years old?

01-00:26:06
Carrasco:

Los Angeles? When I jumped off the train and hit Los Angeles, me and my buddy, we looked at the buildings. I said, "Look at *this!*" Then we went downtown and looked at all the stores. Look at the stores, look at these buildings in here. *What a town!* That was three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning. And we took our clothes off, our outer clothes, and we left the

clothes, and we found some water and we just washed our faces, and we started looking. At four o'clock in the morning, we were out window shopping, looking at everything. And the policeman came over right away. "What are you kids doing here?" "Looking for a job." "Oh, yeah, you're looking for a job." And he says, "Come with us." So they took us to jail. But we loved it because they gave us all the food we wanted and we got to sleep in a couch, instead of sleeping in the train. We hadn't slept for a long time. So we loved it. And the prisoners gave us *more* food. And then in the morning, they says, "Now, I know you runaways, you came on the freight train." They knew that. He says, "If you don't find your family here, come back and we'll give you some money and we'll send you back to Texas *inside* a train." So the policemen were *very* nice to us. Very nice. And we got to rest and we got to eat all we wanted, and we were very happy about it. But that's what I like about Los Angeles, all the buildings and all that.

Rigelhaupt: And how long did you end up staying in LA that summer?

01-00:27:45

Carrasco: We only stayed there for the summertime, and then we went back to El Paso. And I worked in a bakery and I stayed with my aunt. My mother had a sister in Los Angeles, and that's where we went. And I stayed with them because they lived in Los Angeles, and I worked in the bakery. And from then, I went back to El Paso.

Rigelhaupt: Where did your aunt live in Los Angeles?

01-00:28:10

Carrasco: What's that?

Rigelhaupt: Where in Los Angeles did your aunt live?

01-00:28:12

Carrasco: Oh. Well, it's very famous now. East LA, they call it. East LA. And right on—What's the name of that street? It's Whittier, Whittier Boulevard. And we used to live next to a theater there. But it was East LA. But I remember my cousin was another boxer, and I used to box with him, a sparring partner. And he was so proud of me. He used to tell everybody, "Hey, look at my cousin. He came all the way from El Paso in a freight train! Sixteen years old and he's a boxer!" So he was real proud of me that I took up boxing, because he was a good boxer, too himself.

Rigelhaupt: So you were sixteen years old, you go back home. You do one or two more years of high school after being in LA?

01-00:29:16

Carrasco: No, when I went back to El Paso, I still wanted to come back to California. And I told my mother, "I can not stay in El Paso. I can't stay in El Paso

anymore because I want to go to California and work in the shipyards with my brother, Frank. He's working over there."

Rigelhaupt: [pause for ringing telephone] Okay, so you were saying you told your mom you wanted to come work with your brother in California.

01-00:29:59
Carrasco:

So my mother says, "Well, if you want to go to California with your brother, go ahead," because my mother didn't have a husband. She made a living, like I said, selling beer and booze and all that, and cleaning houses. So I had two sisters. I had two brothers and two sisters, two younger sisters. And they stayed in El Paso with my mother. Their names was Lucie and {Sulema?}. We used to call her {Meme?}. {Meme?} passed away from cancer, the breast cancer, two years back. But Lucy is on Melrose Avenue in Hollywood, with the best Mexican restaurant you've ever seen. Very famous Mexican, El Adobe. It's a political restaurant, where Jerry Brown got started as the governor. And he introduced Linda Ronstadt to Jerry Brown. And then Hubert Humphrey, when he was Vice President of the United States, he came there at Lucy's. And from then on, all the political people go there, and they still go there. For all the Mexican American political parties, they go there. Bobby Kennedy, Robert Kennedy was there a week before he got shot. And he was there. It's a very famous, popular hangout for politicians and movie stars. It's called El Adobe Café, in Hollywood, across the street from Paramount Studios. And Lucy Casado was one of the first ones to put a Mexican restaurant right in Hollywood. And it's the most famous Mexican restaurant in the United States. And I'm proud of her.

Rigelhaupt: How did she decide to open a restaurant there?

01-00:31:56
Carrasco:

She used to work in downtown Los Angeles as a—Well, she knew how to cook. She learned that in El Paso, from my mother and sister. And she said, "I want to get a Mexican restaurant." And somebody told her, a cousin of mine says, "There's a little store on Melrose, a mother and pop store that's for sale." She says, "I want it." She went over there and picked it up, and right away she made it, never dreaming that that little bitty restaurant would be so popular all over the world. World known restaurant. She made it because of politicians. A political restaurant, where the politicians can hang out. And she's got movie star pictures all over. You name any movie star, they've been there. They've all been there. And they know Lucy's. Lucy's El Adobe. That's where Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz used to be in production. They had Desilu there. And Lucy's name is Lucy. And she went by the name *I Love Lucy*. All those years, *I Love Lucy*. So now that got combined with Lucille Ball and her. So guess what the council did in Hollywood? They named that spot the Lucille Ball and Lucy Casado Square. And that's what it is now, the square. She's so popular with the Hollywood people there. They just love to

see Lucy. And Lucy just loves her restaurant. It's a very popular restaurant. And good food. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: So what brought your sister to Los Angeles?

01-00:33:39

Carrasco: The same thing that brought me. In Texas, there's nothing there. Lucy and I are like twins. She's only a year younger than I am. But we think the same, we act the same. And she opened up a restaurant and I opened a beauty shop. I still have a beauty shop in Castro Valley. I've been a hairdresser for over fifty years. And when Lucy saw that I could do that, she said, "If you can do it, I can do it, too." So we did it.

Rigelhaupt: Did your sister Lucy move to California as young as you moved to California? Or is she a little older?

01-00:34:25

Carrasco: Well, she's younger than I am. So when she went to Los Angeles, she worked in a restaurant, and she met her husband. He used to work for 7-Up, delivering 7-Up things. So together, they set up that Lucy's El Adobe. Together, they built it and built it and built it. His name was Frank Casado, and he passed away about ten years ago. And you'd think that Elvis passed away. His funeral was almost as big as Elvis'. He was well known, Frank Casado.

Rigelhaupt: Did your sister talk at all about what it was like moving out of the house and moving so far from home, to California, and how she felt about it?

01-00:35:21

Carrasco: She always says that I'll never go to Texas and she's never going back. She never went back. She put Texas away from here. She didn't want nothing to do with Texas. But she's proud. She's proud of telling people that she was born in El Paso, Texas. She's proud of that, because we have some good people from El Paso, Texas that became movie stars. And they're pioneers of the Mexican American Political Association that we started all this. That's why we had Bobby Kennedy that listened to us, and we had Cesar Chavez. We helped him with his movement. I don't want to go too much with that because I think that we were the pioneers of movements for the Latinos; but we don't call ourselves Latinos, we call ourselves Mexican Americans. Because nowadays, immigrants from every Latin country are here. But we were the pioneers, the Mexican American pioneers of moving things and having like Robert Kennedy listen to us. All the students from UCLA, they came over to talk to Bobby Kennedy. And Frank Casado and Edward Roybal—he was a congressman; he just passed away, Edward Roybal—they were all the leaders of the Mexican American Political Association. And Jerry Brown, boy, he got in with them, too. So they all supported the Mexican Americans. And I'm very proud of all that. But we were the ones with the stronghold. And we're still at it. And people are still listening to us, finally. And Jerry Brown gave a speech when my sister threw a party in the

Convention Center in Los Angeles. She threw a party [there] because it was the only place that was big enough to accommodate all these people that she invited. And Jerry Brown was governor and he told us, "You are the sleeping giant," he told all the Mexican Americans. And I knew what he meant by that, that someday the sleeping giant would wake. So now we have. So now we have. So the sleeping giant is wide awake now. And I'm proud of that.

Rigelhaupt: Well, maybe if you could actually say a few words about what similarities and differences that you saw between Mexican American communities in El Paso and when you first arrived in Los Angeles. Certainly, two centers of Mexican American life, LA and El Paso. How did you see similarities and differences when you first came to LA?

01-00:38:21
Carrasco:

I think that the Mexican Americans in Texas don't realize that there's opportunities in [the] diversity [of] people, meeting with them and talking to them. They don't know that. You come to California, go to San Francisco right now, diversity is all over there. You see now that Obama is half white and half black. There was an article in the paper today about skin color. Brown. [laughs] They're accepting brown now. So they're accepting diversity, they're accepting multi-multiculture now. But in those days, especially in Texas where there was a lot of discrimination against Mexican Americans, They fought it. But Texas is getting big with Mexican Americans. San Antonio is getting big. And Henry Cisneros, a big name in San Antonio Texas. But they still like their roots of Texas. But I like the idea of mixing ourselves with other people. I brought my children [up] like that. They don't even speak Spanish. They're learning a little Spanish, one of them, one of my daughters. But they were brought up to be Americans, speaking English. I kept my Spanish because I'm the second generation. And I'm proud of that. So I speak both languages.

Rigelhaupt: But you mentioned just now that there was discrimination in Texas and in El Paso. Would you say that when you first came to LA when you were sixteen, there was less discrimination than there was in Texas?

01-00:40:20
Carrasco:

There was less discrimination here. The discrimination was still here, but not like if you go to Texas. No. Because being diversity, you get other people here from other cultures. I grew up in Oakland. Oakland, we have different cultures. You had the Portuguese, you had the Italians, and then you had the African Americans there. So you grew up with people that are different in cultures and habits. But then you grow up, your kids grow up with it. They got to school with them. So pretty soon it's a mixture of people. So you notice a difference, but you keep yourself to yourself. But in Texas, El Paso, they only want to hang around with Mexican Americans. And I don't think that's a good idea.

Rigelhaupt: Where were you living when the attack at Pearl Harbor occurred?

01-00:41:38
Carrasco:

I was in Sacramento in 1942, so I guess in 1941, on December 8, 1941, I was still in Texas. I was still in Texas. I never felt it. I didn't even know that Pearl Harbor was part of the United States. I had no idea. But they just talked about it. I was a kid, didn't know nothing about politicians, nothing about the world. I was never brought up to talk about the world situations. So I never felt the war. I did feel that we were in war when President Roosevelt announced that we were at war, and then when my brothers went to war. And then I knew that as soon as I get eighteen, I will be drafted. So there was a lot of scare in my mother that I will also be drafted. But I did get drafted. You want me to tell you about that?

Rigelhaupt: Please.

01-00:42:53
Carrasco:

When I was working the shipyards, I was eighteen years old. My first day, on my birthday, I went to Kaiser shipyard and asked for a job. I was eighteen on September 4, 1942. I was eighteen years old. They gave me a job right away. And so I was there for a while, till I got drafted. But eight months later, I got my draft notice to go to El Paso, Fort Bliss Texas, for my examination. Well, I didn't pass my examination. Here I am, a husky guy, boxing in amateur boxing—I fought in San Francisco, I fought in Salinas—and I was boxing, and I did not pass the physical to go fight the war. I went to church and I asked God, I hear that the fear hurt a lot of people. I don't want to be one of those. I want to fight. I went to ROTC. I want a uniform, I want to go fight. And I'll be darned if they don't defer me. So they sent me back to work. I never realized it till later in life that the reason for that is that the good Lord probably said, your mother already has two sons there. She doesn't want you to go there. And so I think it was done so I could take care of my mother when she got older; and I did. And she wouldn't have to worry about another, third son being in the war. But let me tell you, a lot of guys don't realize how hard it is to be a 4F when every able-bodied man wears a uniform, and you're not wearing a uniform. All over Oakland, in Richmond, everywhere I went, uniformed guys. The only guys that didn't have a uniform were older men. And they asked me, "How come you're not in the military?" And I would get sad because I says, "I did want to go." So what happened? I joined the Coast Guard. I joined the Coast Guard because they wanted volunteers for the Coast Guard in Alameda. So I did. And then not only that, they says, "You have any training?" "Yes, I went to ROTC." "Well, you help me march all these people here." So I learned how to march them. So I had a uniform and they gave me a 38, and I went to Alameda. And that's where I worked, did the guarding Alameda for submarines that might come in from Russia or whatever, or sabotage people. And I always had my 38 with me, and I had the uniform, and I felt good about it. So that was it. I know that in those days, if you're an able-bodied-looking guy, you don't have a uniform, what are you? A traitor?

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned you went to church after you got the deferment. And if we could go backwards for a moment along those lines, was church life and religion a big part of your upbringing?

01-00:46:16

Carrasco: Very big. Very big. I went to Catholic school when I was young. I went to Catholic school, and my mother always taught me about being a Catholic person. And me, I got a lot of praying. I think praying has helped me all my life. I still pray. And I don't go to bed without praying, I don't get up out of bed without praying and thanking God for what I've got and what happened to me. And I've always said thank you, God, for deferring me not to go in the army, because all my friends from high school were wiped out. I went to Fort Bliss, Texas. And you see all the white crosses in Fort Bliss, Texas. Eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year-old kids from my high school. And I said, "I could've been one of those," because I was cocky and brave and I would've been one of those. So the good Lord saved me so I could have a good family, like I had; saved me so I could take care of my mother when she got old; and saved me for some reason. And I think I know the reason. And I won't tell you what it is, but I know what the reason is that I'm still here.

Rigelhaupt: Now, when you moved to Sacramento—And actually, let me clarify right there. You said you only lived in Sacramento a couple of months?

01-00:47:52

Carrasco: I was there for a little more than a couple of months. I was seventeen there. And then as soon as I was eighteen, I told my boss, "I'm leaving for Oakland." They didn't want me to leave. They said, "We like you here very much." I says, "But I'm going to go to Oakland and work with my brother in the shipyards." It was a mistake, I later realized, because like I said, roots gets into you. I started liking Sacramento, and that hotel loved me so much. All the people loved me there. And I had all three meals, and my rent was nothing. And then here I come to work in the shipyard, and what do I get? I have to pay rent over here, I have to make all these expenses. Sure, we make more money, but the work in the shipyards compared to working in the hotel was so different. Because I'm working at midnight. My shift was from twelve o'clock midnight to eight o'clock in the morning. But then the good Lord sent me there, because that's where I met my wife.

Rigelhaupt: Well, let's get there in one minute. The reason I asked about Sacramento was I was curious, did you join or find a church when you got to Sacramento?

01-00:49:20

Carrasco: When I got to Sacramento, did I go to church there? Would you believe that I never did? I just didn't. I don't remember ever going to church in Sacramento. No, because it was different. Different people, different friends. All I did was go to the gym. I used to go to the gym and work out with buckets of weights. Because in those days we didn't have barbells that we have now, they had buckets of cement. And then boxing was okay.

Rigelhaupt: Well, one of the things I've read about that started with the beginning of World War II was rationing.

01-00:50:04

Carrasco: Was what?

Rigelhaupt: Rationing. Like you could only get so much sugar, butter. Do you remember how that affected the restaurant at the hotel where you were working? Was food in short supply?

01-00:50:18

Carrasco: Well, we were in war now. It was 1942. So now they had money. They had money now. No more Depression. The Depression ended as soon as we went to war. Jobs all over. Jobs for the women, jobs for men and women. Everybody had a job then. So the economy went up right away. So people had money for everything now. So no, the Sacramento Hotel, they used to have brunch on Sundays and the place was packed. Oh, it was good food there. No more Depression.

Rigelhaupt: Now, so you came to California, Sacramento, early in 1942—which was also about the time that Japanese and Japanese Americans were interned. And I'm wondering what you remember about the evacuation of Japanese Americans—

01-00:51:27

Carrasco: Well, I'll tell you something about that. Recently, I gave a talk about my life at a high school here in Hayward, Tennyson High School, about my life in World War II, and about what I did in World War II. But I talked to the students about it. And I talked to the students, and they had a Japanese American lady, my age, talking about her internment. And she talked about it. And I told the lady, "I lived with my father-in-law and my mother-in-law in those days, when I got married. And they lived in a house that belonged to Japanese American people. And they still had the photographs and things that they had in that house." And she said, "That's right. When we got interned, we couldn't take anything but a suitcase full of clothes, and that's all. We had to leave all our belongings in the house." And I told her, "Well, I live in one of those houses. I live in one of those houses with the Japanese Americans." So I remember that one, my father-in-law rented that house, and there were still pictures of Mexican American[sic] people there, that they rented their house. So I believed her and I remember those days. And she gave a talk about those days, what happened with that. And that's her story about what happened over there. And I gave my story to the students. It was a history class for the students in high school. So I was glad to do it. They told me to do it again, and I sure will. I love to talk with the children about my days. And she did, too. She talked about it.

Rigelhaupt: So the house you were renting, was this in Richmond, your father-in-law's house?

01-00:53:27

Carrasco: No, it was in Oakland.

Rigelhaupt: In Oakland. And so you said that a Japanese American family had lived there.

01-00:53:34

Carrasco: In Oakland, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Now, did they move back into the house after they came home from the internment camps?

01-00:53:40

Carrasco: Well, not to that house, because by that time, after the war, we moved out of the house and they moved out, too. We moved from Oakland to East Oakland. Then from East Oakland, we moved to the Bay Area, San Lorenzo, where I bought a home. So that was past. So we don't know what happened to that house, if they went back or not.

Rigelhaupt: Now, do you remember any discussions you had with friends or your family members about how you felt about the fact Japanese Americans were being evacuated?

01-00:54:20

Carrasco: Yeah, we talked about it. And we felt that the government was right because the Japanese, what they did. But then after years, as I got older, I found out that they didn't do that to the Italians when Mussolini got there. They didn't do it to the Italians, and they didn't do it to the German people when Hitler was there. But I guess it was different because the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. So it was different. And I remember in my high school, we used to go to a store that was owned by Japanese people. And everybody went there to eat. It was a store that they sell sandwiches. Everybody went there. But as soon as that happened, nobody went to the store anymore. Nobody went to the store because it was owned by Japanese people. And pretty soon, they took the Japanese store away from them. So from right on we turned our back to Japanese people because a lot of people thought they would be spies. And they said, "We don't want to have nothing to do with them." So we didn't trust the Japanese people then. We didn't trust them. But as you get older, it's different now. It's different now, we see things like that, that the government shouldn't have done that, or they could've found another way to do it. But they were Americans first. And boy, they fought for the United States, too. I remember some Japan kid, born in Los Angeles with the Mexican immigrants, with the Mexican Americans. He grew up with them. And he fought in the war, in World War II. And he became a hero because he went to war and he captured a lot of Japanese because he knew how to speak Japanese. And he was an American. And we remember him very well because he was born in the United States and hung around with all the Mexican American here. But he learned his language good, and when he went to the Philippines he caught a lot of Japanese. So you hear a lot of stories like that.

Rigelhaupt: I'm going to pause right here and change tapes.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 06-18-2008.mp3

Rigelhaupt: Okay, I'm on tape number two with Edward Carrasco. I wonder if you could describe your first impressions of Oakland when you moved there from Sacramento, and where you moved to in Oakland.

02-00:00:21

Carrasco:

Yeah, I think when I moved to Oakland, we went to this area where only predominantly Hispanic community was. That's where all the Mexican restaurants were, all the Mexican bars where there, the pool halls, the church. And St. Mary's Church is still there. And you go there, and only Mexican Americans go to that church, in those days. Mostly. I don't say only, but mostly. And so it became like another barrio for me, like another predominantly Mexican place, because like I said, all the Mexican restaurants were there. And they're still there. And about that, that I was one of those people from there that knew everybody in those days, and I did. And I remember that during the war, the streetcars were there. The buses and the streetcars were there. We didn't have that many cars in those days. We had the A train that used to go to San Francisco, we had another train that went to Richmond where all the shipyard workers used to go, to Richmond. But we lived in Oakland. And Oakland was the predominantly Mexican American community in those days. In the pool hall that I used to work, there were all Mexican Americans. We'd all get together and talk about the fights there, and all the boxers were Mexican American. So it was a predominantly Mexican American community in those days. So that's where I grew up. I grew up with that. Till I find out that San Lorenzo was building homes cheaper. No, we went to East Oakland from then on. We went to East Oakland, because I had no money at that time; I worked in a cannery. It was after the war. After the war. I remember in 1945 when the work broke out[sic], I had a '34 Studebaker with a rumble seat. And my sister was in the back, in the rumble seat with my sister-in-law, and I was driving the car, with my wife pregnant. And the war was over. And I told my wife, I patted her on the stomach and said, "Our daughter is going to be born during peacetime." During peace time. Because she was due any day. So our daughter was born in August, right after the war. So she grew up in peacetime. And we were happy about that. And I had my '34 Studebaker. Sheesh. I sold it for \$350. I could get 3,000, 5,000, 10,000 for it now. But I didn't know the value of cars in those days. So that's what it was. And I used to hang around in Oakland all the time.

Rigelhaupt: Now, one of the things I've read about is that lots of people were moving to the Bay Area for jobs in the war industries and jobs that were becoming prevalent in the area. And people from the South, people from the Midwest,

all over. And I'm wondering, in the neighborhood you were living in—What would you call the neighborhood you were living in in Oakland?

02-00:04:03

Carrasco: I think it was just called a Mexican community. Because all the restaurants, Mexican restaurants were there. But that's the only place you could get Mexican food.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember what street you lived on?

02-00:04:21

Carrasco: Yes. We lived on Linden Street. It's not there anymore because they built condominiums now. And all West Oakland—that was West Oakland—they remodeled it. Then the African Americans, they lived way back, back there, where the bridge—when we had the earthquake in '89, that's where they live, over there. And then they started moving forward more toward the Mexican American place because we had theaters that showed only Mexican movies and all that. So they started moving. And then the Mexican Americans started moving more to East Oakland. We didn't have no African Americans in East Oakland in those days. 98th Avenue, we lived there, too. There were no African Americans living there. So they took over all of Oakland, all the way to San Leandro. So we saw them moving, and that's what happened in those days.

Rigelhaupt: So in the community you were living in in West Oakland, was it hard for people to find places to live? Was it that so many people were coming to the Bay Area? If you could talk about what it was like for newcomers coming to your neighborhood.

02-00:05:43

Carrasco: Well, it was after the war now. After the war now. So now people didn't have jobs anymore. Right after World War II, no jobs. I happened to have a job in Alameda building ships. Bethlehem Steel was the big company. Bethlehem Steel. *Big* in the United States. They built two ships in Alameda, the President Lines, the President Wilson and the President Cleveland. And I was there from the beginning to the launching. Right there where the tunnel is in Oakland, to the left, the shipyards were there. Now it's a community for older people there. And a Mexican restaurant is next door. It's right across from Oakland square, Jack London Square. You can see it.

Rigelhaupt: Did you know other people that had moved to your neighborhood in Oakland from El Paso or other parts of Texas? Did you have friends and stuff?

02-00:07:04

Carrasco: Yes. The people from El Paso, we didn't have that many. But they came from other places of Texas. They came from other places of Texas, and they were called Mexican Americans, too. But I've got to tell you something. In those days, people liked to wear zoot suits. And we used to go to dance studios to go

dancing. The big bands. The *big bands*. I'm talking about Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, all those big stars. And they used to go to Sweet's Ballroom in Oakland. There was the Sweet's Ballroom, the Ali Baba, the Sands Ballroom, were all the ballrooms where people'd go dancing. It was great. I wish they had it now, but they don't. And the reason they don't have it, because they have to pay too much money to all the big bands. So they started getting small bands now, little, little bands. But I keep records of all the big bands. I have a collection of records. And we used to go to the Sweet's Ballroom, all the Mexican Americans, go there for the big band sounds, and wear a zoot suit with a hat on with a feather on top, and long coats and then— We used to go there. That was after the war, the zoot suit. And then the zoot suits became something else in Los Angeles. The zoot suit riot. Have you ever heard about zoot suit riot? The zoot suit riot was in Los Angeles. When I read that in the paper, that a friend of mine from my high school, they cut his clothes off and left him naked on the street, I says, "Man, oh man. I'm going to go after them." I was twenty years old. No, I was nineteen because I wasn't married. I didn't get married till I was twenty. I was about eighteen and a half, I guess, to nineteen, and I was boxing in the amateur boxing. I says, "Boy, look what they did to my friend." I got the Greyhound and went all the way to Los Angeles to fight the sailors that were picking on Mexican Americans over there because of the riot. But the people stopped me as soon as I got on Olvera Street. Olvera Street's where the railroad station is. As soon as I got out there, the people saw me, a young kid. I wasn't wearing a zoot suit, but I was Mexican American wearing drapes. Drapes is those pants that you go—It's like a zoot suit. But it was summertime, so I wasn't wearing any zoot suit. But they says, "Don't go any further, because they're going to take your clothes off and cut your hair off and all that." I said, "That's what I came here for." He says, "Get out of my way." They made a wall of people, of Mexican American people, so I wouldn't move, so I couldn't go through. I couldn't make it because they stopped me and said, "No, don't go anymore." So I took the Greyhound back to Oakland. Then there was a movie of it, with James Olmos, about the zoot suit riot. And I talked to James Olmos about it. I says, "I was there, but they wouldn't let me fight." That was it. But I still wear a zoot suit.

Rigelhaupt: Certainly, a central part of the zoot suit riots was racism and prejudice against Mexican Americans in LA. Now, do you think something like that would've ever been possible in Oakland, in the Bay Area? Or was that something that was different here than it was in LA?

02-00:11:13
Carrasco:

Everybody has a version on how it happened. And I *know* that I know the reason for it. Like I said before, if you were not in uniform, what are you? You're not a citizen? Some of the Pachucos—they call them Pachucos—they were not old enough to be in the military. Some of them were only fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. Eighteen, maybe. So they were not ready. So they wore a zoot suit. The sailors that came from east United States, they have

never seen so many brown skinned Mexican Americans in their life, because they weren't brought up there. They came here to get the girls. They came here to get the girls. So what did they do? They think the Mexican American girls go for them, so they crash into these dances. The Pachucos had dances with the Mexican women. And the Mexican Americans with the zoot suits says, "No way, Jose. You're not going to fool around with my girl." So that's the way the gig started. Because I know that. I'm a fighter and I used to fight in dancehalls. I saw a few fights in the dancehalls, dancing with somebody else's girlfriend. See? So those people non-Mexican came over, trying to pick up on the girls. So what happened? There were only a few sailors and a lot of Mexican Americans. So they beat them up. They beat them up good. Get out of our neighborhood. So they went back to the ship and told them, "All the Mexican Americans are crazy and they beat us up." So what happened? They brought *lots* of sailors. And more sailors and more sailors. So they started beating up all those young kids. They were young kids! So now anybody that was brown skinned, they'd go to the buses and pick them out of the buses and the streetcars and. And that lasted for ten days, till the movie stars got in there. Movie stars like Anthony Quinn, that was Mexican American, Rita Hayward was Spanish; and other movie stars got into it, and they said, "You leave those people alone."

Rigelhaupt: Let's switch gears to your work at Kaiser. If you could talk about your first day at work, what it was like walking onto the shipyards, and then what you did.

02-00:14:05
Carrasco:

When I got my first job at Kaiser, they asked me, "What experience do you have here?" I says, "I went to El Paso Tech to become a machinist, to work with tools." They said, "Oh, good. You worked with tools? Your job is to work in the tool house." And what do you do there? Well, you give tools to the workers. So I worked in the tool house. And I met a lot of people. They want a tool, all the riveters, the welders, the drillers; people that want a tool, I hand it to them. Because I worked with the other tool workers. So I hand them tools and I got to meet a lot of people. I even met—not my wife yet. I haven't met her yet, but I met other people. And then I got tired of that and I says, "I want to build ships." They said, "You want to get inside there and build ships?" Said, "Yes." They says, "You want to be a driller?" I said, "Yes." Because I can drill because that's what I used to do as a machinist. Lathes and all that. He says, "Yeah, teach me how to—" He says, "Well, you got big drills here. And you're going to be working with the welders, you're going to be working with the riveters." I said, "That's what I'm here for." So I started working as a driller. And I worked with the drillers and I started drilling holes. And boy, did I get husky. Those drills and those machines were high and higher and higher. And I had a helper, drilling from midnight until eight o'clock in the morning. And that was my job. But I felt good. When the ships were done, I said, "Hey, I helped build a ship. I helped build this ship." So I says I was always part of it. So I felt very good about it. And then one day, at

lunch time, I saw this pretty girl from far away. And she was wearing this metal hat. We all wore a hat because of the welders around us, so you have to wear a hat. And she was wearing jeans and boots. And you could not tell a guy from a girl in those days because they all wore the same clothes. And they wore dark glasses because the welders were all around us. But she was getting her lunch, and then she took her hat off and all her beautiful hair came down. And I tell my buddy, "It's a girl." He said, "You know her?" I said, "No, but I'm going to get to know her." So I went up there to her. And she was wearing dark glasses. And I took her dark glasses off. I took her glasses, without even saying hi to her. I took them off and then I noticed that she looked Spanish to me, and she had brown skin and she had beautiful eyes. And I said, "Why do you want to hide those beautiful eyes for?" Whew. What a line. "Why do you want to hide those beautiful eyes for?" And that did it. She became my girl, and she became my wife. And that's how I met my wife. But that line, I'll never forget it. "Why do you want to hide those beautiful eyes for?" I wish I could get something for that, for that line. It's a good line.

Rigelhaupt: How was dating different? What was it like between you two, compared to now? What was the courtship like?

02-00:17:54
Carrasco:

I think it's hard for people to meet other people nowadays. You almost have to work together. Men and women have to work together to make contact. As a hairdresser, I get to meet a lot of women. But I'm married, so it didn't do me any good. Now that I'm a widower, I did meet a girl there. I cut her hair and she became my girl for seven years. See? But I think the only way to really meet somebody there, to really care for, to get to know each other, is to work together. I have a picture of me with four girls around me in the ringside. And I hired these girls to hold the cards—round one, round two, round three and our. And I would sing the national anthem in those days right here. And I have the picture in a sports bar in San Leandro, Ricky's Sports Bar. And people say, how did you meet those girls? Then I tell them, "Well, I did their hair. They came to my shop and I gave them a job. I saw how beautiful they were, I said, "You could get good money just holding the cards." He says, "Wow. That easy?" Not that easy, but I told this guy, "If you ever want to meet women get a job where you can meet women, and then you'll meet somebody. Go sell shoes for women. Go sell brassieres, if you want to, for women. Be an Avon lady if you want to. Be around women and that's when you'll meet your spouse." And I think it's true. That's where you're going to meet them. But you have to be around them so they can see you, you can see them. Because women don't meet you unless you work together. And that's the way it is.

Rigelhaupt: Well, what did you and your wife do before you were married, for dates? Did you go to the movies? Did you go bowling? What were some of the things you guys did when you first met?

02-00:20:11

Carrasco:

Well, when I met my wife I already had a girlfriend. This restaurant in Oakland, [there] was this Swedish girl—her parents were from Sweden—and that's where she became my girl. And when I met my wife, I'm sorry, but I dropped her. And she didn't like it. She pinched me real hard. And I still think about it. If I'd have stayed with the Swedish girl, I would have Swedish children. [laughs] Nowadays, it's acceptable now. But I dropped her. And she was a beautiful Swedish girl, and she took it hard. And when I hear stories about those things, I say oh. But then my wife had a boyfriend, too. My wife had a boyfriend she was going to married. And she dropped him for me and I dropped the girl for her, so we met. So that's the way life is. So I never dated anybody. Once I met my wife, that was it. I didn't date nobody but her till I got married.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, what did you and your wife do on dates? Did you go out to dinner? Did you go to the movies? What did you do when you first met each other, for fun?

02-00:21:36

Carrasco:

Right away, went dancing. Right away, we went dancing. And we went to a dancehall, Sweet's Ballroom. We'd go dancing there. But she got pregnant right away, so we had one child after another. We had two in a row. So we just became married. So all I knew about life was married life, no dating.

Rigelhaupt:

Did she stop working at the shipyards immediately after she was pregnant?

02-00:22:09

Carrasco:

She had to stop working. She was very intelligent. She got a job working in clothing stores, because she looked like a model and she wore clothes like a model. And she was petite. Weighed 105 pounds. And she was beautiful. She liked to dress good so she worked in places like I. Magnin's and Joseph Magnin's in San Francisco and here. She was very well known for that because she became that kind of a wife. Very classy lady I had.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, I read, going back to your work at Kaiser, that you worked in prefab. And I don't know exactly what that means, and I'm wondering if you could explain that to me.

02-00:23:06

Carrasco:

They had Yard One, Yard Two, Yard Three. Prefab is where they built the walls, the ground, then they lift them up, then they put them together. They could build a ship a day. Every day, a new ship. A lot of ships were built there. And they built them prefab, like they could build a house. They could find a house and put a wall, another wall, and put all the four walls together and then you've got a house. So the shipyards were all identical on something like that. They will build them like that and then they weld them. It was fast because it was a fast way to build ships. And President Roosevelt says, "We want ships built every day. And the men can not build them, so you women,

the job is open for you women to build it.” And so women came from all over to build ships. The first time that African American women and white women worked together. The first time in history. And they worked together and they made good money together. And that’s when diversity started, getting together in those days. I had a helper. He was African American, he was an older man. And they said, “This is your helper.” I looked at him. And I was a young kid, and I got more money than he did because he was a helper and I wasn’t. So that’s the way it worked.

Rigelhaupt: Did you have other family members? You said your older brother worked at the shipyards—

02-00:24:57

Carrasco: Yeah, one older brother, Frank worked with me. And that’s about it. But then in the shipyards, we found out other Mexican Americans [were] working. So at lunch time, what did we do? We’d all get together and eat Mexican food. And speak Spanish. So it’s like you get together. Well, the African Americans do the same thing, they get together.

Rigelhaupt: Now, when you say you were a driller, and you were describing the big drills, were you working on the outside of the ship? Or were you working inside for different levels? Or what different parts were you drilling as you were working on the ships?

02-00:25:41

Carrasco: Sometimes I would drill down, sometimes when they were up there. And sometimes way up there where the—I don’t know what you call them. Potholes? Where the ship has—Way up there. What do you call those things? I don’t know what it is.

Rigelhaupt: Smokestacks?

02-00:26:09

Carrasco: Smokestacks. Sometimes I’d be up there in the smokestacks looking down. Whoa! You don’t want to down. But I never had a fear then. But there were a lot of men that had fear. And as soon as they’d look down they’d grasp something, and they had to have a crane to get them out of there and get their hands out because they froze. So it was a dangerous job, working way up there on top and looking down. It was dangerous for people that can’t stand the height like that.

Rigelhaupt: Now, you say that parts of the job were dangerous. Did you ever see coworkers who got injured on the job?

02-00:26:55

Carrasco: Yeah. Henry J. Kaiser built the Kaiser hospital close to the shipyards, just for the employees, because they were always getting hurt. I got hurt many times with my hands grabbing like this, back and forth, and with drilling. And my

neck back here, my back. So it was always something that would injure you. And one time I had a ring on and it got caught. And I'm hanging there with my ring. Hanging there. [makes a groaning sound] So almost cut my finger off. So there was always something. And people getting flashes from the welders and they'd have to go to the hospital right away. And it took months to get back their eyesight in shape again. So there was a lot of danger there. A lot of danger.

Rigelhaupt: Did you join a union while you were working at the shipyards?

02-00:28:04

Carrasco: Union? Yeah. We were union people. You have to join the union. I forgot what union that is. But I knew that I had to go to the union hall to get a job. And then when the war was over, I still went to the union hall to see if there're any—That's how I got the work at Bethlehem Steel, because I belonged to the union. And I got more money because I belonged to the union. Yeah, the unions were strong in those days. And they still are.

Rigelhaupt: How did you feel about the unions? Do you think they were good for the workers?

02-00:28:46

Carrasco: The only way you could get a job was to belong to the union, to get a job in those days. So I guess the trouble with the union people, they used to steal the money from the pensions from the union workers. And that's what happened to that guy—I forgot his last name. He got caught and sent to prison. They don't know what happened to him, but a lot of people think he's dumped somewhere down and people threw cement over him. Because they used the money like in Las Vegas. I read the story. He's one of the guys that used the pension money from the workers to build hotels in Las Vegas, gambling and all that. So he lost a lot of money, pension money.

Rigelhaupt: Now, were you still living in Oakland in 1946?

02-00:29:51

Carrasco: In 1946, that was right after the war. Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: So you were still in Oakland.

02-00:29:58

Carrasco: 1946? I think yes, because I didn't buy my house in San Lorenzo—I came to San Lorenzo and I bought a house in San Lorenzo, must've been—Gee. I don't know what year that was. I think it was in the later part of the sixties—'68, '69.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I was going to ask what you remember about the general strike in Oakland in 1946, that started in downtown Oakland with the employees at—I think it was Emporium. Or was it Capwell's? One of the department stores.

They were on strike, and then it became a general strike, and the city shut down for a few days. And I'm wondering what you remember about the general strike in Oakland in 1946.

02-00:30:57

Carrasco: Well, I think my wife, she worked at I. Magnin's. But that was in Hayward where she worked at I. Magnin's, so I think we were out of Oakland by that time. You said 1946? Because we were married in 1945. No, we were still in Oakland. We got married in 1945, '46 we're still in Oakland. But she worked in a jewelry store, at Zales jewelry store, and I worked in the shipyards and Bethlehem Steel. So it didn't affect us at all.

Rigelhaupt: Did you participate in any of the social activities at Kaiser? I know they had a baseball team, things like that.

02-00:31:53

Carrasco: No, because I only went to Richmond to work. But as soon as the war was over, goodbye Richmond. Goodbye, Richmond. Oakland was my hometown. That was just where I'd hang out with all the guys there.

Rigelhaupt: Did you drive to work at Richmond, or how did you get to work?

02-00:32:16

Carrasco: We'd take the train. They had a train straight to Richmond. And I can tell you stories about that. In the train, they always had African Americans having a dice game going on. Every day, a dice game would be there. And those guys were hustlers. They hustled everybody that had money, and that's how they made their living. And I lost money there because I used to play dice and used to play poker. And boy, oh boy. One time I was playing dice with them and I saw a third dice that came out. And I put my foot on his hand. He got a third dice. And the guy says, "Shut up." And so he gave me a lot of money so I could keep my mouth shut. So I got the money and I ran out. But there was a lot of hustling there. Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember anything you saw outside the windows, what it was like taking the train up to the shipyards, the different neighborhoods you went through?

02-00:33:25

Carrasco: No, I think we were too much into watching these people playing dice. That was a big thing. Because I was a gambler and I liked to—Even if I didn't have the money, I liked to just watch the guys play dice.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember the explosion at Port Chicago?

02-00:33:46

Carrasco: Well, I heard about it and read about Port Chicago. Yeah, the explosion. Was that a lot of African Americans that got killed?

Rigelhaupt: Yes.

02-00:34:01

Carrasco: Yes, I heard about that. They refused to work with all those—Well, what are they? Explosive stuff? That they might explode or something. So it was dangerous and they didn't want to. Then they got caught, and that's what happened. And I think that's terrible, that they made them—not made them but sort of intimidated them that they would get fired if they don't work there. A lot of things happened in my life. I'm eighty-three years old, and I remember a lot of things that were done and shouldn't have been done. But it all comes back to us. It's coming back, how we tolerated a lot of stuff like that. And if you ask me if the world's getting better, in some ways it is; in some other ways, no. And the other ways is that we've got too many people. That's why the economy is bad, because too many people. My business is down. Why? Too many people. They build barbershops all over, they build beauty shops all over. It's too much. There's too many people. So I think the world's just getting too big, and that's about it. Too many people.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned that it was predominantly African American sailors that were loading and unloading at Port Chicago. And the military itself was segregated during World War II. And I'm wondering if you or your brothers, both of whom were in the military, ever talked about how you felt about the fact that the military was segregated during World War II.

02-00:36:13

Carrasco: Well, I think that the military itself welcomed segregation because to be patriotic—You were born here, you've got to mix with people and you've got to tolerate each other and get to know each other. And in that respect, I think it's good to let people get together so they can understand each other's feelings about life. And I think that 9/11 that we had was something that President Bush and a lot of United States people should know that there are other people that don't look like you. But they still belong to this world, but they don't have to look like you, see? So we have to know that there are other people. Like Fidel Castro, Latin American people, leave them alone. And all the people that are different than us and different cultures, the Arabs and Afghanistan and Iran and Iraq—they're different, but they're still entitled to this world. So we just have to get along together with them.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember learning about what was going on in the war during World War II? Did you read the newspaper? Did you listen to the radio? Did you see newsreels before movies? Where did you get your information?

02-00:38:06

Carrasco: Well, when Hitler was over there killing, the holocaust and all that, well, it's in the papers. Of course, in those days we didn't have TVs, like we have television now. They started with little TVs, black and white TVs, but it was the radio most of the time. Radio. So you have to listen to the radio, and then you have to believe them. Of course, we've got Orson Welles, that he scared

the hell out of people, saying that Mars was going to attack us. The Martians are coming! It's make believe. And till this day, my wife told me that we never went to the moon. "We didn't go to the moon, they made it up." A lot of people don't believe that, either. The thing could be looking like it's real. Even George Lucas made a movie, says, don't believe that. So we don't know sometimes if it's true that we went to the moon or not. Was there a holocaust or not? So what do we do? Just listen to Larry King, and he tells us all.

Rigelhaupt: Could you describe what it was like after everyone heard that the war was over?

02-00:39:28

Carrasco: When the war was over, like I said, I had my Studebaker and we went out to the street. It was such a relief because we thought we were going to get killed. During the war, we always lived in fear that we might get attacked and that somebody will throw a bomb at us, too, the atomic bomb. And especially San Francisco and all this area. So we always lived with that kind of fear that maybe something bad would happen. So when the war was over, we thought that would be the end of all the world wars, till now we've got this war going on. You know how I feel about this war? I say that if you went to hell and want to make angels out of those devils, you think you can do that? You think you can make angels out of devils? After you went to hell, they killed each other and do crazy things. Leave them alone! Leave them alone! Let them do what they want to do. See? I believe the Iraqis want to kill each other and have a terrible government. Leave them alone. Leave them alone, let them do whatever they want. But don't go there to try to put democracy on them when they don't want it. Don't try this on them. They don't want it. Why do they leave Fidel Castro alone? He's no threat to nobody. They leave Mexico alone, too. No threat to nobody. I think the oil, that's what they went for. The oil, that oil. Now, look at the oil going four dollars. Pretty soon it'll be five and six and seven. Geez!

Rigelhaupt: Well, if we jump backwards to the end of World War II again, what was your reaction to the use of atomic weapons and the atomic bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

02-00:41:53

Carrasco: Well, we thought that maybe United States is the power of all, that don't mess around with us because we've got the power to blow you. Of course, we didn't like killing innocent people. But it was just a way to show Japan to surrender. And they did surrender, boy. Now, why didn't they do that to Hitler? Why didn't they throw the bomb at Hitler? So I don't know. It's just sometimes you don't understand the government. So I don't believe in killing civilians; nobody does. But then wars are wars. We had the Civil War here, killing each other. Oh, brother. Terrible.

Rigelhaupt: Actually, I was just going to say that those are largely the questions I had prepared. And the way I like to end is to ask you, one, was there anything I should've asked and I didn't. And two, is there anything you'd like to add?

02-00:43:15

Carrasco: I think asking me about what I feel about the war, I already told you that. I think that we need more information. Like we have CNN, I think we should have another CNN. Information. Also, being of Latin American, I think we have it in Spanish on the TV, we have that. So that's okay. So we don't have to have it in English. Because anything you see in English, we see in Spanish. Everything. So that's good.

[Narrator Comment: I think that you cover the important things very well and what I'd like to add is that I'm very fortunate to be interviewed by you and I feel important. It's a great feeling to me that I'm leaving something to heritage. I am proud of that.]

Rigelhaupt: So we paused, and you wanted to conclude with a few words about getting older.

02-00:44:25

Carrasco: About getting older, I think that one should be thankful that you have reached my age, that you've reached eighty. A lot of people that I've talked to say, I'll never make it to eighty. I'll never make it to sixty, never make it to seventy. I think you should be thankful when you reach eighty. They says, "Wow, I made it to eighty." You should be very grateful. Be grateful that you made it to eighty. Why? Because at eighty, you see people different. To me, I've been here before you. I know this. I know something you don't know. And I think I do have a mission to accomplish, the reason they kept me here to be this old. Getting older, just make sure that—Well, there's no way to say make sure to stay healthy, but do whatever possible thing that you can to stay healthy. I have a saying about a diet. I said, "You can eat for the hell of it, if you can live for the health of it." You can do both. One day you can eat for the hell of it; but balance it with living for the health of it, too. So you can do that. But I think it's boring just to live for the health of it. Well, you're not going to enjoy a hotdog someday? [laughs] Enjoy a hotdog. Enjoy a donut. Enjoy some ice cream. So enjoy this, but make sure you put up again next day, make up for it. Make up for it. And learn from your experience. You've been there, you've done this and you've done that, you've been there; learn from it. Because people are watching you, because you have to be somebody that they look up to. What you do is maybe because an older person is wiser. Am I wiser in this? Am I wiser in that? Well, when they see you do wiser things, you become aware of those things and you want to be that kind of a person when you get old. So to be wiser and to get older, it's good. So I've always said I would like to get wiser. I'd like to get wiser every day about different things. Learning this, I've been there, I've done that. I don't need it anymore. I used to play eighteen holes, I used to play thirty-six holes, I used to play fifty-four

holes in one day. I played fifty-four holes in one day one time. That's three times around—eighteen, eighteen, eighteen. And I played it. Now I'm satisfied with nine holes and that's all I want to play. I've been there. I don't drink; I gave that up, but I used to drink. I gave up smoking, but I used to smoke. So I gave that up. So the reason I'm giving up now is not watching too much TV. Read. It's better than watching TV. Read, read, read, read, read. And then let your children and your grandchildren and great-[grand]-children look up to you, that you're doing the right thing so they can also do the right thing when they grow up. And that's part of getting old, that you become a wiser person and people are watching you. And so you know that you have to do the right thing for them. If not for you, for them. But you have to do it for you, so that could be your mission. And that's a good mission that I think I have, to do things for other people and for my children and great-great. I'm a great-grandpop now, and I love it. And I'd like to live longer, if God's willing, because I want to see what else I can do. And my kids are watching me. And of course, if I get sick, they'll be right here in a moment. But then since I gave up smoking and drinking, I think I recuperate better because you quit that. So you have to learn that, about exercise every day, too. Exercise your mind. Exercise yourself. And be happy. And a lot of humor. I like humor. And I like singing.

Rigelhaupt: Are there things you learned being on the home front during World War II that you think were very important, that have helped shape who you are?

02-00:49:17

Carrasco: I believe that by not going to war that I didn't suffer all those things, tolerate all those things in the military that they do—to wash the floors and get up early in the morning, and do this and do that—and tolerate all those things that you have to do and salute people and all those things. I didn't go through none of that. And I think that's healthy to be the person. That's why wars are no good for us. And when I see all those people saluting everybody, and every time boom, boom, boom, saluting, I would say. Because I never went through that. I didn't have to get up early in the morning and all that discipline. All that discipline, and some people—Because it works on your mind. Discipline for this. I remember a man who says he always has to wear a tie. Why? He says, “Well, I, wear a tie even to throw the garbage cans,” his wife said. He had to wear a tie to go to throw the garbage out. Why? He always had to be super-clean and all that. So there's a lot of things. But then of course, different beliefs and different religions and different Gods. You do what you want and just tolerate it, and that's about all you can do. I'm not going to call them crazy. They could call me crazy, but I don't want to call them crazy. And I still enjoy my life as being a hair stylist. I think I've done better as a hair stylist than ever. I've been doing hair for over fifty years. I haven't lost my touch yet. People still want me to do it. And I'll be doing that. I like what you're doing, I like photography. My hobby is recording. I'm always recording good movies or recording music. And I go to bed at night every time with my earphones, and music I put on and go to sleep with my

earphones, listening to good music that I recorded from albums that I collect. I have a lot of albums in my garage that I collect. So it's a hobby. Get yourself a hobby, a hobby that you like. And that keeps you busy and you can sleep with it. And I putt around here all the time with my putter here in the carpet. And then I go play golf when I get a chance. And those are the things that I like. Staying busy. So I wish all of you luck. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: Thank you. I think that's a very nice place to end. Thank you very much.

02-00:52:11

Carrasco: I thank you. And it's time for me to get ready and go to work.

[End of Interview]