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Sal Chavez

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
David Washburn
in 2002

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Discursive Table of Contents—Sal Chavez

Audiofile 1

Born in Richmond, raised in section housing—Sante Fe Railroad—everyone paid on credit at the company store—sexual politics were different, very few inter-racial couples back then—celebrations of Mexican holidays in section housing areas

Audiofile 2

Making their own tortillas and dairy—fear amongst Japanese Richmond residents during WWII—working in a cannery—discussion of working clothes, Levi's etc. —joins the Coast Guard, stationed all over the Bay Area—after Port Chicago explosion, many people supported the African-Americans in protest

Audiofile 3

Ned Duran, a friend of Chavez's, enters the conversation

Living in “la planta baja” in Richmond—less discrimination in CA than TX—remembering 4th of July parades in Richmond-p87

Interview with Sal Chávez
Interviewed by: David Washburn
Transcriber: Lea Barker
[Interview 1: October 21, 2002]
[Begin CD of Tape 1]

[Note: This is recorded in a barber's shop, and towards the end of the tape customers come in, some of them being included in the conversation. Some words/phrases are in Spanish. It's not always clear who is speaking once several customers join.]

00:01:20

Washburn:

We're just going to start with some easy questions, and hopefully you'll think of it as just a discussion between me and you. Don't feel uncomfortable answering the questions. So we're recording.

00:01:34

Chávez:

If I don't want to answer I'll just shut up.

00:01:40

Washburn:

Yeah, just say: I don't want to answer that. Forget that. Today is the twenty-first, right. And we're recording in Sal's Barber Shop in El Sobrante, California, with Sal Chávez and David Washburn is the interviewer. So, Sal, you told me you were born in Richmond, right?

00:01:57

Chávez:

Uh-huh. The old Sante Fe camp. My father was a railroad man. He worked in the section, so they had a section house where they kept all the workers, and I was born there. Room number seven.

00:02:12

Washburn:

What year?

00:02:16

Chávez:

1921.

00:02:20

Washburn:

1921. Tell me about the house you grew up in. You kind of described it a little bit to me.

00:02:21

Chávez:

It was a section house, made out of cement. The only thing that-- it had a tin roof. Of course, the doors were wood, but the walls and everything were made out of cement. The floors were cement. Then we had a wood stove, four burner. Just wood, you know, but it had four --

00:02:45

Washburn:

Four places for pots.

00:02:47

Chávez:

Uh-huh. And small. We managed to survive. Seven of us.

00:02:54

Washburn:

You said it was number seven, so how many units were there?

00:02:59

Chávez:

There must've been about fifty units.

00:03:06

Washburn:

In just one structure or in a bunch of structures?

00:03:11

Chávez:

No, no, it was like a square. One row and another row and another row. That's what it was. About that many.

00:03:19

Washburn:

Fifty units?

00:03:22

Chávez:

Uh-huh. That's quite a bit, huh?

00:03:24

Washburn:

Yeah, that's quite a bit. And you say you had seven in yours.

00:03:27

Chávez:

Number seven. Apartment seven.

00:03:29

Washburn:

How many people lived in your house?

00:03:33

Chávez:

There were seven of us. My dad, my mother, and my two--three brothers and my four sisters.

00:03:44

Washburn:

That's quite a bit. When did your Pop move into that place?

00:03:51

Chávez:

I've no idea. I don't know any dates.

00:03:59

Washburn:

That's okay. But you think --

00:04:03

Chávez:

I was born there.

00:04:04

Washburn:

You were born in '21, so when was the oldest of your siblings born? Are you, like in the middle?

00:04:12

Chávez:

1919.

00:04:14

Washburn:

1919's the oldest, so you're almost the oldest.

00:04:15

Chávez:

Uh-huh. No, no, I take it back. 1919 was my brother. Then my sister was the oldest, and she passed away here about five years ago. She was eighty-one.

00:04:36

Washburn:

So even before 1919. Were they both born in the section housing too?

00:04:39

Chávez:

No, not they. Mexico.

00:04:42

Washburn:

Oh, they were born in Mexico? So I guess it seems like your family moved to Richmond some time before 1920. Right about then.

00:04:50

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:04:54

Washburn:

And do you know how your dad got a job working for the Sante Fe railroad?

00:04:54

Chávez:

He worked for the railroad. Anybody could get a job working for the railroad. They hardly paid nothing. You got paid nothing at all. But before he came over here, he used to work in--They had, like these boxcars. They lived in the boxcars and they were pulling the rail, from New Mexico all the way down here.

00:05:21

Washburn:

So they'd stay in the boxcars?

00:05:22

Chávez:

Well, they lived in them. It had a great big commissary, you know. A boxcar like the Holmes Supply Company used to {call it?}.

00:05:30

Washburn:

So he worked for the railroad before he moved to Richmond.

00:05:35

Chávez:

Oh yeah. He used to work in a gang, see.

00:05:39

Washburn:

Would he tell you any stories about those gangs?

00:05:41

Chávez:

No. He'd just work, all the time. The wages weren't all that good either.

00:05:49

Washburn:

Yeah, I'm sure. How did he support such a big family if the wages weren't so good?

00:05:57

Chávez:

A hundred-pound sack of flour, a hundred-pound sack of beans, and a hundred-pound sack of rice. And chickens. After we moved to this other--we had chickens and rabbits. That's it.

00:06:14

Washburn:

In your yard? At the Sante Fe section housing?

00:06:16

Chávez:

Yeah, because we had a big yard. Now, you can't raise nothing. But at that time we had chickens, and goats, and cows.

00:06:24

Washburn:

Do you know when he met your Mom?

00:06:30

Chávez:

No, I have no idea. We didn't talk about that.

00:06:37

Washburn:

But she lived there with you in the section housing?

00:06:38

Chávez:

Yeah, uh-huh.

00:06:40

Washburn:

And did she work?

00:06:42

Chávez:

No. She never worked. None of my sisters worked either. My mother took care of the kids and all that. One check only. That's it. Then, I guess, we had free rent. Free rent, we had, and that was it. Because we had lanterns, coal-oil lanterns for light.

00:07:13

Washburn:

No electricity?

00:07:14

Chávez:

No electricity.

00:07:21

Washburn:

So, do you remember what the routine was for your Dad for his work?

00:07:30

Chávez:

He just had to go out there and fix the tracks. Sometimes a boxcar would derail or something. They'd call him at three or four o'clock in the morning and then they'd go to fix it or whatever they gotta do. They were on call 24 hours.

00:07:41

Washburn:

So would he get up some times in the middle of the night and go out?

00:07:44

Chávez:

Oh, many times. Raining like the dickens.

00:07:50

Washburn:

And would he sometimes stay away for more than 24 hours?

00:07:53

Chávez:

Oh, sometimes. He worked like the dickens, and that's it. See, they had section gangs all over the place. They had--where we lived, they used to call them section houses--ours was Section 35, and then they had--right down the line, they had them. They'd go so far, and then the other went so far, and the other one so far. You know what I mean?

00:08:26

Washburn:

Yeah. Why do you call it section housing? I've never heard that word before.

00:08:31

Chávez:

Section, sección. They called them {esparas sección?} so they were sections. That's it.

00:08:39

Washburn:

Tell me what it was like there, growing up in the section housing.

00:08:43

Chávez:

It was a lot of fun. A lot of fun. I got a job delivering papers and then played baseball, and we got our chores to do. We gotta take the goats out in the morning and stake them on the field. Cause they had plenty of fields then at that time. They had hardly no houses. Like, we lived across the street from Macdonald Avenue, and that was--what they have now Atcheson Village. All that was nothing but fields. We used to go out there. And the section houses on the this side. So we used to go out and take the cow, goats, and put them out there so they could eat grass. We'd just stake them out there with a chain.

00:09:26

Washburn:

Nobody would mess with them?

00:09:29

Chávez:

Nobody.

00:09:31

Washburn:

That's great.

00:09:34

Chávez:

And then night-time you came, and you'd bring them home. Just take the stake out and then run like a { ____?}. [chuckles] They'd run like a son-of-a-gun, you know! To the barn. Then they got milked.

00:09:53

Washburn:

Did you go to school there?

00:09:55

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Grammar school.

00:09:58

Washburn:

Where at?

00:09:59

Chávez:

Peres. That's one over on Pennsylvania. A, K street, I don't know what it is. Pennsylvania. And, I can't remember where it is, but it's over there by the railroad tracks. Then I went to Roosevelt. And then high school, Richmond High.

00:10:22

Washburn:

Did all the kids who grew up in the section housing go to school there at Peres?

00:10:30

Chávez:

Oh, yeah. That's it. That was a--you know how they have different places, different schools according to where you live.

00:10:41

Washburn:

So it seems like there was quite a bit of families there working for the same company.

00:10:52

Chávez:

A lot of them. A lot of families.

00:10:53

Washburn:

Were all of them Mexican families?

00:10:56

Chávez:

Just about. All of them were Mexicans. And then after a while, long after they had the war, then they had a lot of Indians from Arizona. They came to work.

00:11:10

Washburn:

I learned about that.

00:11:12

Chávez:

That was back in--After the war, or before the war.

00:11:17

Washburn:

So when you grew up there in the twenties, there weren't any Indians across the way there?

00:11:23

Chávez:

They've always lived across the tracks.

00:11:25

Washburn:

Were they there in the twenties?

00:11:27

Chávez:

I don't remember cause I was just a kid. No, by then there must have been, because I remember when I was going to school, when I was going to high school, there used to be some kids and they were going to high school too. We had Laguna Indians.

00:11:46

Washburn:

Laguna Indians, that's right. So when you were there in the section housing, do you remember there being any parties, birthday parties, or other festivities?

00:11:57

Chávez:

Oh yeah. It's hard to explain. We had a big patio, not a patio. These section houses were kind of low, but then they had a big long porch, and they'd bring out a phonograph and records and say let's play the heck out of them. They'd dance in the--you know what I'm talking about. You know, when you get out of the house, like a porch but it's a long one.

00:12:28

Washburn:

Was it wood, or was it cement? Or brick?

00:12:31

Chávez:

No, cement. Cement, cement, cement. Yeah, it was cement. And then after that was the dirt. Uh-huh. It's been a long time.

00:12:43

Washburn:

That's OK, your memory seems to be real good. When were those parties? Were they pretty often?

00:12:49

Chávez:

When you had a baptism. It would be something big. Like when you had a baptism, or somebody got married, you know. But mostly they'd have birthday parties. But when they had a big thing, sometimes they'd do it there, or sometimes they had a--There used to be a hall, used to call Winters Hall. They used to rent it and have parties. They'd have bands. Like, maybe somebody would play the guitar or clarinet, and they'd get together and play music.

00:13:24

Washburn:

Do you remember where Winters Hall was exactly? Do you remember what streets Winters Hall was on?

00:13:27

Chávez:

Macdonald Avenue. There was a florist, Winters Florist. And on top of the florist was the dance hall. Old Mr Winters owned the whole thing. So they had their dances there. And also when they had festivities like sixteenth of September or the fifth of May, they used to have the celebrations there.

00:14:05

Washburn:

Sounds like there was kind of a united--sounds like you knew everybody there at the section housing.

00:14:10

Chávez:

Oh, yeah. Everybody knew everybody. And then sometimes they'd leave, you know, they'd go some place else to make more money or for a reason or another. And they'd leave, and they always had somebody to come in.

00:14:27

Washburn:

Someone new.

00:14:30

Chávez:

They'd always be coming to look for a job. Right away they used to give them a job, and then they'd buy their groceries. They'd go out there and get their groceries from the company store supply. And then that's it. So they stayed there for a long time.

00:14:47

Washburn:

What was the turnover like there, in the section housing? Did people come in and out? How frequently did families come and go?

00:14:57

Chávez:

They stayed there for a long time. Yeah. Some were born there, like I was, and raised there. Till you grew up. I was growing up when I went in the service. After I got out of the service, then I got married. A lot of people lived there. In other words, it was their home. But then what happened was, later on, if you had people - some of them had money, saved their money, and then they would either buy or go rent a house, just to get out of the section house.

00:15:33

Washburn:

Where would they go buy or rent a house?

00:15:38

Chávez:

On First Street or Second Street. That area around there.

00:15:41

Washburn:

Right nearby.

00:15:44

Chávez:

Mm-mmm. In case they called, you know, emergency. To go out there for an emergency, like a train derailed or something like that.

00:15:55

Washburn:

Did your folks ever do that?

00:15:56

Chávez:

What's that?

00:16:00

Washburn:

How long did they stay in the section housing?

00:16:04

Chávez:

I stayed there--oh, man, I stayed there till I got married. I went in the service. I went in the service and then when I got out of the service--Yeah, I got out of the service, and I met my wife, and I got married.

00:16:23

Washburn:

I guess a better question is, when did your mom and pop move out of the section housing?

00:16:30

Chávez:

They died.

00:16:32

Washburn:

They died there?

00:16:33

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

00:16:34

Washburn:

In about what year?

00:16:36

Chávez:

My father died in '46, and my mother died when I was just eleven years old.

00:16:40

Washburn:

She died when you were really young.

00:16:42

Chávez:

Mm-mmm. Then I had my sisters, you know. Then he never married any more. He stayed single.

00:16:53

Washburn:

So it sounds like your sisters and you all had to pick up the slack when your Mom passed away.

00:17:03

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, you know, my sister was already grown up. And helped around the house quite a bit.

00:17:17

Washburn:

Did all your siblings work?

00:17:26

Chávez:

No, no. They never worked. They got married. But they never worked.

00:17:34

Washburn:

What jobs do you remember you had before you went off to the war?

00:17:38

Chávez:

Selling papers.

00:17:39

Washburn:

Newspapers?

00:17:41

Chávez:

After the war?

00:17:42

Washburn:

No, before the war.

00:17:43

Chávez:

Before the war, yeah, I used to sell papers. Delivering, delivering papers. And then when I was little then, I used to go to North Richmond. They had a lot of fields that farmers raised lettuce,

mostly lettuce. I'd go out there and help cut the lettuce and sometimes I used to help when they were just planting the lettuce. I've forgotten how to say it in English.

00:18:15

Washburn:

How do you say it in Spanish? Semiar?

00:18:17

Chávez:

[__} Cambiar is work.

00:18:19

Washburn:

Semiar. To plant seeds.

00:18:24

Chávez:

Semiar, no. When they planted, they plantar. O sembrar.

00:18:33

Washburn:

What did you say in Spanish?

Chávez:

Plantale. Plant.

00:18:35

Washburn:

I mean before that. You were saying something and you said you didn't know how to say it in English. And you said it in Spanish

00:18:41

Chávez:

I've forgotten.

00:18:42

Washburn:

That's OK.

00:18:43

Chávez:

But you see in Mexico they call it sembrar, [__], you know like a sembrar and [__} means they pull all the weeds out with a plough. And then pick.

00:18:59

Washburn:

Do you remember-- You said you delivered papers. In what neighborhood did you deliver papers?

00:19:04

Chávez:

Maravista. At the end of town. I had to wheel my bike all the way up there. Maravista, where all the rich people lived. I used to have my round - 60 papers. 64 papers. Chronicle.

00:19:19

Washburn:

San Francisco Chronicle?

00:19:20

Chávez:

Uh-huh. But they was only paying me, I think it was \$10 a month. And every month I had to buy a tire for the bike. I'd wear out one tire. Then when I put the new one, I'd put it on the front where it will wear out.

00:19:39

Washburn:

Rotate 'em.

00:19:41

Chávez:

I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. I had to get up early in the morning to fold the paper and then ride your bike. I got cold and everything but after a while, boy, you got to sweat like {__} that paper. And {__} Maravista coming up a lot of those hills.

00:19:55

Washburn:

On an old-style bike.

00:19:56

Chávez:

On a Roadmaster. That was the name of the bike. And I won that bike. Selling subscriptions for the Chronicle. I sold six 6-month subscriptions and I won that bike. And then they give me the job. I didn't have to ask them for anything. Delivering papers on a Roadmaster.

00:20:16

Washburn:

What can you tell me about the neighborhood down there by the section housing? You said, when people could save up some money they moved out there to the housing right there on First.

00:20:28

Chávez:

They wanted to get out of the sections.

00:20:30

Washburn:

Tell me about that community.

00:20:32

Chávez:

Because they wanted to have--Well, they stayed the same people. They moved out, and whether they had their old thing. They'd meet people as neighbors, then they moved out. But they still met each other. They still knew each other and run into each other and talked.

00:20:51

Washburn:

But was there a--Was that neighborhood down there by the section housing, did other Mexican folks live in housing down there?

00:21:00

Chávez:

Oh no. They had their own homes.

00:21:04

Washburn

No, that's what I mean, did rather have some folks own their own homes?

00:21:04

Chávez:

A Street, and B Street. Yeah there was quite a bit of them. They bought a house and that's it. We lived over there because we couldn't afford a house. As soon as they had a little money they'd buy a house. They got out of there. Cause you know, no electricity, so they got electricity and everything.

00:21:33

Washburn:

So did everybody speak Spanish in the section housing?

00:21:36

Chávez:

All the time. Once in a while we'd speak English, but most of the time Spanish. But a lot of them learned English. Like my father, he could speak it. Not good, but he'd understand and all that. And of course we went to school so we all knew how to speak English.

00:21:59

Washburn:

Would people speak Spanish there on the street down by-- if you was walking around the streets down by--

00:22:09

Chávez:

You'd hear them talking. Heck yeah. A and B Street, and C Street. All the people--they were all there. Some of them were people who'd lived in the section and then they bought a house. And then after a while, you know, after the war they all started to buy better homes, and they started to have all these different places, building homes, so they moved out.

00:22:43

Washburn:

Were there businesses there? You said there was a company store.

00:22:47

Chávez:

Yeah, Holmes Supply.

00:22:49

Washburn:

So did everybody who worked for the Sante Fe Railroad go and buy their stuff there?

00:22:53

Chávez:

Yeah, everybody did. Just about. But the fault was that--higher and the heck. A pair of shoes would cost you twice as much as if you went and bought them downtown. They were pretty high.

00:23:10

Washburn:

The company store. They charged a little bit more.

00:23:12

Chávez:

Yeah, the company store. They charged you double, or maybe--the store that's in the town would cost you more. No, I take it back. I'm talking about the Holmes Supply used to charge more than downtown.

00:23:28

Washburn:

It was called Sante Fe Holmes Supply or just Home Supply.

00:23:35

Chávez:

We used to call it the commissary.

00:23:36

Washburn:

So why did people shop there if it was more expensive than--

00:23:40

Chávez:

Cause they didn't have no money.

00:23:44

Washburn:

Weren't they working for the railroads?

00:23:46

Chávez:

Yeah, but everything was charged. They used to charge everything. My father used to--like I said, put everything on--charge everything. They'd charge everything, so they'd take so much out at the end of the--every payday, and he'd bring home maybe ten or fifteen dollars, maybe, or a buck. I got that check here. One dollar. The company store took the rest of it.

00:24:19

Washburn:

So you mean they wouldn't pay --

00:24:23

Chávez:

They wouldn't pay like they paid out downtown.

00:24:27

Washburn:

So you'd run a tab with the company.

00:24:29

Chávez:

Yeah, uh-huh. You ought to see, some of these people who had a tab, and I don't mean when they bought a grocery. It wasn't no ten or fifteen, it was always in the hundreds.

00:24:43

Washburn:

So did people get in debt to the company also?

00:24:48

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Some of them poor people bringing home a dollar. But then they'd go buy shoes from the store, groceries all the time. High. It really was high. So that's why a lot of people after they started saving their money, used to go downtown and buy their groceries. Go buy meat downtown. They always had neighborhood stores. But they never had the --

00:25:20

Washburn:

Tell me about the neighborhood stores.

00:25:23

Chávez:

I think it was the--I forgot the name of that store. Italian store. He could speak Spanish, and everybody went in there and bought groceries.

00:25:34

Washburn:

That was down there by the section housing?

00:25:39

Chávez:

It used to be on--what street was it? I can't remember. Between Third and Fourth, I think, or Second and First. I don't know, it's been a long time.

00:25:53

Washburn:

Can you tell me, how did you feel growing up in the section housing, or down there in that neighborhood, and then you'd go up and deliver papers in Maravista.

00:26:05

Chávez:

Maravista. All the rich people.

00:26:08

Washburn:

Tell me, did you ever feel out of place when you were up in Maravista?

00:26:12

Chávez:

No, it was just my job. I used to go there--as a matter of fact, at Christmas time they'd leave me a \$5 or a couple of bucks, tips and all that kind of stuff. A lot of times they'd give you a cake or something. So that's it. I liked it. I mean, we survived. Most of us that were living in the section housing had bikes so we were delivering papers most of the time, and some were walking the streets selling it. Three cents a paper. The Tribune. Three cents: you got one, and they got two.

00:26:53

Washburn:

You wouldn't deliver the Richmond Independent?

00:26:55

Chávez:

No, I never did. I just delivered the Chronicle. And then I sold the Tribune on a corner.

00:27:03

Washburn:

Where did some of the other Mexican folks who lived down there in that neighborhood, where else did they work other than the Sante Fe Railroad?

00:27:15

Chávez:

The Foundry. American Radiator. That was hard work. Boy, that foundry.

00:27:24

Washburn:

What did they do there at the foundry?

00:27:27

Chávez:

Tubs. Bathtubs. They had the foundry there. Then they had the enamel room. And they had--As a matter of fact, I worked in the enamel room. It's where they put the enamel on the tub. They bring it in, you'd have to put it in a rail, like, and you'd put it in a furnace.

00:27:51

Washburn:

So people even then--so you're saying before the war people worked at the American Standard Foundry.

00:27:59

Chávez:

After I went out, they were still working.

00:28:04

Washburn:

But before the war, they worked there?

00:28:06

Chávez:

After the war, too.

00:28:08

Washburn:

Where was it?

00:28:09

Chávez:

That used to be on--North Richmond.

00:28:11

Washburn:

Remember where?

00:28:13

Chávez:

Seventh and--I can't remember the name of the street. Used to be on Seventh Street, but it was in North Richmond. I forgot the name of the street.

00:28:25

Washburn:

Chester?

00:28:28

Chávez:

I don't remember. I bet if that guy would have been here, he would have--

00:28:30

Washburn:

We can check on a map too and figure out where that was. So, as best as you can remember, people worked at the Sante Fe Railroad. They worked at the American Standard, and can you remember any other places?

00:28:47

Chávez:

Some of them worked in the fields and ranches. Lettuce or beets or something else. But also we used to work at American Radiator, and that's it. American Radiator and the Sante Fe, and they had Southern Pacific. That was the same as the Sante Fe. They had their section house, but not as big as the Sante Fe.

00:29:13

Washburn:

Where was that at?

00:29:17

Chávez:

They had them in San Pablo. Right there by the first crossing. What the hell's the name of that store? The Food Bowl? Is that the Food Bowl.

00:29:30

Washburn:

I read about one over by Cutting and San Pablo, used to be over there. Right nearby there.

00:29:39

Chávez:

No, this one's over there. The Food Bowl. That's where the Food Bowl is.

00:29:43

Washburn:

Food Max?

00:29:45

Chávez:

The Food Bowl.

00:29:45

Washburn:

OK. So did people who worked for the Sante Fe know people who worked for the Southern Pacific?

00:29:52

Chávez:

Well, yeah. They knew each other. But they even had small section houses for the Southern Pacific. But they did the same work. The Sante Fe gang used to be ten or fifteen guys going to a job.

00:30:28

Washburn:

Things seemed to change a lot when the war happened.

00:30:29

Chávez:

Oh, yeah. A lot of them that were working on the railroad went to work in the shipyard.

00:30:32

Washburn:

What do you remember about that?

00:30:34

Chávez:

Well, they quite their jobs and they went and worked for the shipyard. They got hired. A lot of guy who used to work for the American Radiator, same thing. They quit there and went to work for the shipyard. Make more money. Everybody worked for the shipyards.

00:30:56

Washburn:

It sounds like a lot of people did that. Your dad didn't do that though?

00:30:58

Chávez:

No, he was gone. He died. He died after Pearl Harbor. He died in '41.

00:31:10

Washburn:

Tell me how that community down there changed when the war came and all these people came to work in Richmond.

00:31:20

Chávez:

Mostly the same, because they never bothered us. You stayed in your own place. We never had any trouble at all, but we stayed in our--we stayed there. We didn't go around looking for trouble or--those days were altogether different. You didn't see it like you see now.

00:31:48

Washburn:

When you say "we", are you saying you and other Mexicans?

00:31:50

Chávez:

Yeah. At that time, you didn't see--no offence--you didn't see no mixing with American. You didn't see them. It was always Mexican-Mexican. Not that the--It was because you felt that they didn't like you. A lot of guys didn't give a damn.

00:32:10

Washburn:

Did you say it wasn't because you felt they didn't like you, or because you felt they didn't like you.

00:32:13

Chávez:

Well, they thought that they didn't like you, you see. But it was different. I don't know, you know, you felt kind of funny. But a lot of guys didn't give a damn.

00:32:23

Washburn:

Don't feel uncomfortable about it. I'd like to know how race relations maybe were different then.

00:32:29

Chávez:

There was only one guy that was married to an American girl. One guy. And that was it. But you never saw like now. Now you see everything mixing. At that time, you know--I dunno, maybe that's the way it was, but--heck, when I was going to high school, I had a lot of girlfriends, you know what I mean, and not all Mexican either. [laughs]

00:32:57

Washburn:

So you went out with women who weren't Mexican?

00:33:00

Chávez:

Yeah, I had two or three--you know. Portuguese or Italian.

00:33:10

Washburn:

On that note, do you ever remember-- I know in Richmond before the war, there were Greeks and Italians and Portuguese and Mexicans and some Japanese. Do you remember though that those people maybe dated - like you say, you dated a Portuguese and Italian - but you'd never date the white people in town who maybe weren't Portuguese or Italian? The more old-time folks.

00:33:39

Chávez:

Well, you dated them if they liked you. If you liked them, you dated them, you know. But most of the time--I don't know why you'd stick to your nationality. But after a while everybody was going out with Italians, Portuguese and all that kind of stuff. After a while. But before that, I don't know why it was. Because there was a lot of gals that used to like guys, you know, Mexicans and all that. But after awhile, they're all mixed.

00:34:21

Washburn:

Are talking about at Richmond High?

00:34:24

Chávez:

Richmond High School.

00:34:26

Washburn:

Do you remember if anybody used to tease you for being Mexican? Any of the other guys tease you?

00:34:32

Chávez:

No. Not that I remember.

00:34:37

Washburn:

Would they tease the black kids though?

00:34:41

Chávez:

Well, I don't remember. I don't remember that at all. You could hear, when you go to Peres School or grammar school, you know you {__}.

00:34:58

Washburn:

So you would hear it a little bit?

00:34:59

Chávez:

Yeah, but we didn't really care. We paid attention like--You know, "the dirty Mexican", or something like that. Well. But, you know, we got used to it.

00:35:14

Washburn:

Sure. I'm just trying to understand what you can share, because obviously things have changed since then. I'm just trying to understand what it was like then.

00:35:25

Chávez:

Now you see all nationalities mixed. All nationalities. It's not like before. If you like saw somebody with an American girl, oh, right away, "Look at that. So-and-so's got a girlfriend."

00:35:42

Washburn:

An American girl.

00:35:45

Chávez:

I had a lot of girls. Well, no, not too many.

00:35:48

Washburn:

Did you like dating the Portuguese and Italian girls more than the Mexican girls.

00:35:54

Chávez:

I didn't care what they were, really! [laughs] If you liked them, you know what I mean. If they liked you.

00:36:02

Washburn:

I'm just curious if there was a difference. What can you tell me about speaking Spanish in the schools. Did you and your friends ever speak Spanish in school?

00:36:10

Chávez:

All the time. All the time, we'd speak Spanish. In the room, in the class, it wasn't allowed for you to speak to somebody in Spanish and all that, but on the yard, the schoolyard or outside, that's all you'd do.

00:36:26

Washburn:

What would you talk about in class in Spanish?

00:36:29

Chávez:

Anything. In class, no. You'd talk English. But once in a while you'd have a conversation outside and you'd finish it in the room.

00:36:38

Washburn:

Do you remember hearing other languages at the school too?

00:36:44

Chávez:

Oh, Italian. No, not like the Mexicans. The Mexicans spoke all the time, but the Italian once in a while. Not too much. The Mexicans did all the talking, because the Italians were bashful. They all knew how to talk Italian. They all knew how to talk Portuguese. There was a family from Romania, they used to talk their nationality all the time. [Phone rings]

00:37:26

Washburn:

So tell me, why do you think if all those kids could speak another language, why do you think all the Mexican kids spoke Spanish and the Italian kids didn't want to speak Italian.

00:37:39

Chávez:

I don't know. Maybe they weren't--They didn't do it. There was only one guy {_____?} matter of fact he's the one that owns the--he's dead now, but he used to own that, in Pinole--a bar there.

[CUSTOMER comes in.]

00:38:06

Washburn:

We can stop while this guy comes in. I'm just interviewing Sal here about old times in Richmond. Did you grow up in Richmond too? Yeah? [tape pauses.] Maybe you can tell me about all the parties you guys used to have there.

00:38:50

Chávez:

{_____?} in the house. I said it was like a porch, but it was a portal. Era portal, luego y [__].

00:39:18

Washburn:

What kind of music was it?

00:39:23

Chávez:

Hubo Ranchera. Yeah, we'd party. We'd really have fun.

00:39:37

Washburn:

How long did it go on like that for? Did you guys--Did things change after a while? What happened?

00:39:43

Chávez:

We were--Some died, and then the amount of people didn't do that no more. We didn't go to any parties because sometimes there was no room. There would be no empty rooms.

00:40:07

Washburn:

You didn't tell me this time, but you said last time that you used to have parties in vacant rooms.

00:40:14

Chávez:

Yeah, in vacant rooms. Used to go out there and take the tables. Because, the Sante Fe furnished you with benches and {_____?} tables. They were big tables. They were not skinny little tables, they were big tables. Heavy ones. And then you'd have a bench. And that was it. You'd {_____?} on and dance. {___?} was a phonograph. And sometimes people would have records, you know.

00:41:06

Washburn:

Where did you guys buy your records of ranchera music?

00:41:09

Chávez:

The Holmes Supply Company used to have everything.

00:41:18

Washburn:

So the Holmes Supply Company Ranchera--?

00:41:20

Chávez:

Yeah. {___} No a radio is what we got. {___} Santa Fe, and it was a heck of a good one too.

00:41:34

Washburn:

So they sold ranchero music in the store?

00:41:38

Chávez:

Well, yeah, at that time, you didn't know anything about Pachanga. {_____} Then after a while, el mambo.

00:42:05

Washburn:

But Cumbia wasn't popular at that time.

00:42:07

Chávez:

No.

00:42:14

Washburn:

So, when you had these parties, how would you get into the empty houses?

00:42:22

Chávez:

You had a campero. You had a man called campero, who took care of the whole thing.

[Sal answers phone.]

00:42:47

Washburn:

He was like a manager of the place?

00:42:54

Chávez:

Yes, campero. He was the one who took care of the whole place. He used to always give us the key. We'd open {_____?} invited to the party.

00:43:07

Washburn:

He was a Mexican guy too?

00:43:09

Chávez:

Oh yeah.

00:43:11

Washburn:

He didn't mind you guys going into the empty house? He wouldn't say that's against the rules, you can't do that?

00:43:15

Chávez:

No. He worked for the railroad too, but he did that extra.

00:43:28

Washburn:

Do you think you were not supposed to be doing that?

00:43:31

Chávez:

No, no, no. He placed no restrictions.

00:43:35

Washburn:

Do you remember seeing in the section housing any of the officials for the Santa Fe Railroad?

00:43:48

Chávez:

Wheels? No.

00:43:51

Washburn:

No, officials. Who'd come in and say you can't do this, you can't do that.

00:43:52

Chávez:

No.

00:43:56

Washburn:

So you guys just kind of did as you pleased there?

00:44:02

Chávez:

We knew how far to go, you know. We never had no fights, nothing.

00:44:07

Washburn:

So during these parties did people bring drink and food?

00:44:17

Chávez:

Yes. They always had liquor stores.

00:44:25

Washburn:

So people would bring booze into the parties?

00:44:28

Chávez:

Yeah, but you never saw any--like now. Liquor all over. You had beer. [pauses.]

00:44:52

Washburn:

Sounds like a fun time. Did girls and boys dance? Did people meet their girlfriends and their boyfriends there?

00:45:00

Chávez:

No, it was just a family thing.

00:45:06

Washburn:

Oh it was a family thing. So the kids didn't --They had the parents watching?

00:45:14

Chávez:

Well, they had dancing. We had {_____?} like I said, Cinco de Mayo or Sixteenth of September. They used to have societies, you know, they used to run it, {La Munifica} and all that kind of stuff. They used to run--They'd have acts.

00:45:53

Washburn:

That was at Winters Hall?

00:45:55

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:45:57

Washburn:

So all those kind of things were at Winters Hall?

00:46:00

Chávez:

Well, it used to have a big hall. But then after a while we started having different things, like picnics and all that, after a while. We'd have picnics {____?} in Alvarado Park.

00:46:15

Washburn:

Where's Alvarado Park? Is it still there?

00:46:19

Chávez:

Yeah.

00:46:21

Washburn:

You said you remembered some stuff about the bullfighting.

00:46:36

Chávez:

One time they had--It wasn't allowed. They had it over here in San Pablo. As a matter of fact, we weren't supposed to do it. They did have it. I was just a kid. One time somebody started a fire and the people that were selling the tickets, they took off and left with the money and somebody went and cleaned them out.

00:47:12

Washburn:

They looted their take for the day!

00:47:18

Chávez:

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

00:47:21

Washburn:

Tell me, what about days like Dieciséis de Septiembre or Cinco de Mayo.

00:47:28

Chávez:

They're celebrations.

00:47:30

Washburn:

I know what they are, but what happened down there by the section housing? Did people dress differently and go out on the street?

00:47:37

Chávez:

No, no, no. Like I said. We had dancing then, and they had some guy went and danced {_____?} or singing. You know, acts and that's it. After that, they'd have a dance.

00:47:52

Washburn:

At Winters Hall?

00:47:54

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:48:00

Washburn:

Nowadays you can see people out in parks or something like that, having a big picnic or something like that, or cooking carne asadas--

00:48:09

Chávez:

Well, you see them now, over there at the Point. They've got that place out there like a park. They go out there every Sunday. They go out there and they barbecue and all that.

00:48:26

Washburn:

But do you remember doing that when you were younger?

00:48:39

Chávez:

Me, uh. No, at the time, when I was young they used to {_____?} barbacoa.

00:48:47

Washburn:

Barbecue.

00:48:49

Chávez:

No. When they killed the cow and {__} Barbecue it, right?

00:49:09

Washburn:

So you'd kill a cow right there, is that what you're saying? What are you trying to describe?

00:49:28

Chávez:

Well, they'd make a big hole, and then they cooked the meat in there.

00:49:33

Washburn:

A hole in the ground. Stick some wood in there?

00:49:37

Chávez:

No. I don't know how they do it. I know they used to do it at Pinole all the time for the fiesta for the Portuguese.

00:49:44

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand whether--you said you had lots of parties at Winters Hall --

00:49:58

Chávez:

Most of the time the parties you had there were like Cinco de Mayo and the Sixteenth of September. Then maybe a lot of societies, como La Munifica and others {Guadalupana} and sometimes they'd have a party and they used the hall. There's where you had the bands.

00:50:22

Washburn:

So what were those societies? Tell me about those.

00:50:29

Chávez:

Well, Guadalupana is like a religion, verdad?

00:50:35

Customer

Some church gathering.

00:50:43

Washburn:

Uh-huh, a church gathering. So those societies were religious-based. They weren't like the Elks Club or something like that. Did the Mexican folks down there ever had like a kind of an Elks Club or a fraternal society like that?

00:50:57

Chávez:

La Honorifica, verdad?

00:50:58

Washburn

La Honorifica?

00:51:00

Chávez:

[__]. Cual era la otra? That's all I remember now. La Honorifica. That's all I remember. Honorifica, uh-huh.

00:51:22

Washburn

Como se traduce eso en ingles?

00:51:27

Chávez:

Yo no sé.

00:51:27

Washburn

You don't know, that's okay. Is is Horifica o Honorifica?

00:51:32

Chávez:

La Comision de Honorifica.

00:51:43

Washburn:

Honorary commission?

00:51:46

Chávez:

Uh-huh. But I wasn't up to all that.

00:51:51

Washburn:

You weren't involved in that?

00:51:53

Chávez:

No, no.

00:51:58

Washburn:

So where did people go to church down there?

Chávez:

[__] que es Saint Marks, verdad? San Marco in San Pablo.

00:52:09

Washburn:

It's still there.

[Customer offers a name.]

00:52:13

Chávez:

Saint Joseph at Pinole. San Pablo's Saint Paul.

[Another customer comes in.]

00:52:49

Washburn:

I was talking with Josephina Ramirez and there's the Mexican Baptist church down there on Barrett and B Street.

00:53:00

Chávez:

I don't know. Now?

00:53:03

Washburn:

She said she went down there in the forties down there, to the Mexican Baptist church on B and Barrett. It's still there.

00:53:11

Chávez:

I don't know that. I haven't been towards that part of town in years.

00:53:23

Washburn:

Really? For reals? But your family used to go to Saint Marks, is that right?

00:53:26

Chávez:

Yeah. We lived in the Sante Fe camp so we used to go there to Saint Marks. Then after that you moved out, so now I go to Saint Joseph's, Pinole.

00:53:53

Washburn:

Did they give people Sunday off to go to church?

00:53:56

Chávez:

From work? No, everybody worked. I mean everybody--That was a day of worship.

00:54:04

Customer:

I remember.

00:54:06

Chávez:

Yeah, he's the old-timer.

00:54:10

Washburn:

Oh really? Let's talk to him. Sure.

00:54:14

Customer:

It was a long time ago.

[Another customer comes in.]

00:54:29

Washburn:

So tell me, is that where you got your baptism?

00:54:34

Chávez:

I got baptized, married and confirmation. At Saint Mark's.

00:54:42

Washburn:

Is that where all the folks--

Chávez:

They were close by, verdad? Saint Paul's. That's in San Pablo. That's been there a long time too?

00:54:57

Customer:

Oh yeah. He said, "If you put a dime in that basket, I'll chop your head off. {__}"

00:55:19

Washburn:

At Saint Mark's would they have--

00:55:22

Chávez:

I haven't been there in years.

00:55:25

Washburn:

But when you went there, was the service in Spanish?

00:55:30

Chávez:

No. I didn't hear any. Once in a while, they'd bring a missionary from Mexico for a week. And I used to go and listen. They used to be {__?} (sighs) I haven't been to Saint Mark's in years.

00:55:50

Washburn:

But other than that, there weren't services in Spanish. They were all in English?

00:55:56

Chávez:

I don't remember.

00:55:58

Customer:

No.

00:55:59

Washburn:

They were in Spanish too?

00:56:00

Customer:

They were in only in English. Fifteen years they were doing it in Spanish.

00:56:12

Washburn:

Only for fifteen years. For fifteen or fifty?

00:56:15

Customer:

Fifteen.

00:56:21

Washburn:

For fifteen, hmm. Wow. I'm doing a kind of a community project, a community history of Richmond.

[Discussion among customers.]

00:56:53

Washburn:

I don't understand the layout. The Sante Fe station's right there.

00:56:59

Chávez:

Yeah, the station was right there, on the corner.

00:57:00

Washburn:

So where was the ball park?

00:57:02

Chávez:

End of Macdonald Avenue. Garrard went this way, then they had the Sante Fe Depot over here and everything. But before then, they had the section houses on this side.

00:57:30

Washburn:

This side of Garrard? Yeah.

00:57:32

Chávez:

No, they had it--Explain to him; I've got a customer.

00:57:33

Washburn:

I can't tape this guy.

00:57:39

Customer:

They had a school there.

00:57:42

Washburn:

Do you need your glasses to see this, or can you see that right. I see Macdonald hits Garrard. Do you know where we're talking about?

00:57:52

Customer:

I used to. {__?} down by the railroad tracks. Down on the left-hand side, going from here to Macdonald on the left, so the houses were there. Because by now, everything has been changed.

00:58:21

Washburn:

Everything's ripped out.

00:58:25

Customer:

Oh yeah. There used to be, during the war, all the houses built around from Tenth Street, all the way down--Tenth and Ohio. Then Ohio to--They used to be over there all this homes for the military for the war, for all the bombs. In the fifties they was knocking down all that. Then they took down old Richmond.

00:59:10

Washburn:

So what went on at the baseball yards there? There was games? They had a team from Standard Oil, you said. Did different companies have different teams, or what was it?

00:59:21

Chávez:

You had your {__?} House, you had your {_____?} League, that's it. And then they used to have a lot of guys who'd come and they'd play a team. What was the name of that team with all the black guys? They were bearded. House of David. What a ball team. They used to have some nice baseball.

00:59:47

Washburn:

There were black guys with beards?

00:59:49

Chávez:

Yeah. The House of David. They were good ball players.

00:59:57

Washburn:

That was a baseball team, the House of David?

00:59:58

Chávez:

Yeah.

00:59:59

Washburn:

And it was an all black team, and they all had beards. That's interesting.

01:00:10

Customer:

During the war, those guys used to go to the show so they could get a seat to go to sleep. They used to sleep in the show.

01:00:18

Washburn:

In the shul?

01:00:21

Customer:

Yeah, during the war. There was not enough room. Didn't have enough housing. All these people from back east and Oklahoma and different--they all moved in here. Some of the guys, you didn't know what the heck--

01:00:35

Washburn:

Where was the shul in town?

01:00:36

Customer:

There was quite a few. Peres was one. There was one in Point Richmond. And Richmond High School was still in the same place. Another down on Fifth Street. Not enough housing for all those people.

01:01:07

Another customer:

Wards. Macy's. Penney's.

01:01:14

Customer:

Oh yeah. JC Penney's used to be down on Eighth Street.

01:01:17

Another customer:

Montgomery Ward used to be on K Street.

[Discussion among customers about where different stores were.]

01:01:32

Customer:

Saturdays and Sundays were like a fair.

01:01:39

Another customer:

In the fifties, '55, '58 since '58 they started pinching, closing stores business because there was so many--

01:01:59

Customer:

Banks, restaurants. Everything was on Macdonald.

01:02:04

Another customer:

A lot of people started coming in.

01:02:10

Washburn:

Do you guys remember how things changed once the top mall was built?

01:02:14

Another customer:

Yeah, before they opened Hilltop, they closed everything over there on Macdonald {_____?}

01:02:26

Washburn:

Everything closed on Macdonald.

01:02:30

Customer:

A few business guys, and they were waiting for them. They jack all those prices up, on southside, when they want to build the shopping center. They said, "To heck with you, so they moved up to Hilltop." They were going to move downtown. We had three politicians in Richmond, and they tie all those lots. So when they come in, the price went up. So they said to heck with it, and went to Hilltop.

01:03:06

Washburn:

So JC Penney moved from down on Macdonald up to Hilltop?

01:03:11

Customer:

Yeah, it was down on Eighth Street. JC Penney, Macy's

Interview 2: October 24, 2002

00:00:08

Washburn:

What I didn't get to ask you about last time, was-- and today. What's today? Today is Thursday, October 24.

00:00:22

Chávez:

That guy could have given you more information than I, because he was raised.

00:00:26

Washburn:

This guy right here? Sitting here? He said he went back to Arkansas though.

00:00:30

Chávez:

No. Who's that? Who are you talking about?

00:00:32

Washburn:

Which guy are you talking about?

00:00:33

Chávez:

The Mexican guy.

00:00:35

Washburn:

Oh. Ojeda?

00:00:34

Chávez:

Yeah.

00:00:39

Washburn:

Oh, I'm gonna go find him. I'm gonna talk to him.

00:00:41

Chávez:

He can give you all the information you want, more than I.

00:00:42

Washburn:

Think maybe I'll go over to the Capri Club today. We'll see--

00:00:44

Chávez:

Is he over there?

00:00:46

Washburn:

That's where he says he is. But I didn't get to ask you about where you were going to church when you lived down there.

00:00:55

Chávez:

St. Mark's.

00:01:00

Washburn:

At St. Mark's.

00:01:04

Chávez:

The let us used to come to have catechisms in one of those empty rooms. Are you doing this?

00:01:06

Washburn:

Yeah.

00:01:09

Chávez:

We used to have catechism on Saturdays and most time I went because they used to give you candy.

00:01:19

Washburn:

Was it a big--

00:01:24

Chávez:

And as you grew up then you went to St. Mark's that was the Catholic church. That was the only church in Richmond, Catholic. And then you almost got a Catholic in San Pablo, and that's it.

00:01:36

Washburn:

You had St. Mark's in Richmond and St. Paul's out there in San Pablo.

00:01:42

Chávez:

San Pablo. Uh-huh.

00:01:45

Washburn:

How big was-- Would you describe St. Mark's as being a big congregation? Was there a lot of folks that went there?

00:01:51

Chávez:

No. Mostly all Mexicans. But of course they had a lot of white people too. Italians. Mostly Italian. Italians and Mexicans. And that's what it was. On Sunday you'd see a lot of them

Mexicans in the morning. But now we have masses. You know, they have a ten o'clock mass for Mexicans and all that.

00:02:13

Washburn:

That they do in Spanish.

00:02:15

Chávez:

Yeah. Spanish.

00:02:18

Washburn:

But, like you said, was it in Spanish back in those days.

00:02:20

Chávez:

I don't know, but at that time the mass was said in Latin. It was said in Latin. Now it's said in English. It's all completely changed. Because I was an altar boy, and everything was Latin, and there was a priest praying in Latin, and then we had a Latin tutor. Being an altar boy, we had to respond to what he was saying. That was part of the mass.

00:02:55

Washburn:

So where did you learn Latin?

00:02:58

Chávez:

I just read it. From the tablet that you have to learn to answer the priest. Not that I learned Latin, but if you have to learn how to-- and the word's are right there, you just said it. That's it.

00:03:13

Washburn:

The responses.

00:03:16

Chávez:

To begin maybe about two or three times, and then towards the end, two or three times. That's it. And the rest of it is just serves. That's what they call us serving Mass.

00:03:27

Washburn:

So how long were you an altar boy for?

00:03:31

Chávez:

Oh, hell. I was kid then going to school. Till about-- Oh, well, I went to junior high, then you get older and then all of a sudden you decide to go out, you know, and go to mass, and that's it. That's all I used to do.

00:03:52

Washburn:

Let me ask you, on Sundays there in Richmond, St. Mark's wasn't too far from where you lived. You could walk, right?

00:03:59

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:04:03

Washburn:

What do you remember about Sundays and people walking on the street to church? Can you describe what it was like?

00:04:11

Chávez:

You could see, like, coming out--. A lot of them had cars, though. They had their cars, they used to drive in their car. And the people that didn't have any car, they used to walk. Used to walk from where you lived, Macdonald Avenue, then at Macdonald Avenue on Tenth Street, I mean on Ninth Street, you'd turn a corner and hit Nevin and that church is right there. Right on the corner of Nevin and Tenth. Between Tenth and Ninth.

00:04:42

Washburn:

Would you walk with just--with you and all your siblings, or would you walk alone?

00:04:47

Chávez:

No, well, walk alone sometimes. Or with your parents. Or with your brother or a sister or friends. It was like just a family. You mixed. You know, you knew each other. Maybe you'd be walking outside, you'd run into your friend: Are you going to mass? Yeah. So you'd both go to mass, like that.

00:05:08

Washburn:

So what about--you know, I've seen when the mass is over, everybody kind of files out and people kind of make plans to do something. What did you guys do once the mass--

00:05:25

Chávez:

Was over? Went home. We went home. Sometimes we had things to do, like chop wood, or--. There was always something to do. We'd stay home.

00:05:37

Washburn:

And you guys wouldn't go out and go get lunch together, or go over somebody's house for some lunch or something?

00:05:46

Chávez:

It was hard as heck because you didn't have any money. You couldn't, like you do now. You see now, everybody goes and gets a hamburger and all that. We didn't. I remember when hamburgers first came out, when they started making hamburgers, it was ten dollars, I mean ten cents, a hamburger. And it was hard to get ten cents. Really. Not like now. Man, kids go out there and buy eight or nine dollars like nothing. Hamburger, milkshake, and the whole ball of wax.

00:06:23

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand, you know, did you--. Before mass or after mass, did you ever eat, you know, traditional Mexican food. Did you ever have menudo in the morning? Did you ever eat tamales in the afternoon?

00:06:37

Chávez:

Really-- menudo once in a while. It was something that you'd--. Once in a while. You know. The same way with tamales. It was once in a while. You made that for maybe somebody's birthday or for some kind of gathering. But, like a lot of times, menudo, these people used to like to go dancing, and maybe have one too many, well, that menudo being it had that chili in it, it was really spicy. They eat that to kind of sober them up.

00:07:14

Washburn:

Right, right. After they drink a little too much. So, for you eating menudo and tamales was maybe like the same as having chicken mole or something like that?

00:07:24

Chávez:

Once in a while.

00:07:26

Washburn:

For special events.

00:07:28

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:07:29

Washburn:

Do you ever remember, though, down there by the section housing or anything, anybody--. Did they have a--selling tamales out of their house or anything like that, where you could walk by and buy a tamale or--

00:07:42

Chávez:

No, no.

00:07:44

Washburn:

Did people have--

00:07:46

Chávez:

No, they used to make it for their family, you know, and, like I said, for somebody's birthday. For their birthday, a family, a birthday and all that. And then the idea is that--it's hard to make tamales, you know. You've got to get that dough, you've got to put them in a--, and all that. It takes time. So, now, when I want to have tamales, I just go in and get one at the restaurant. They've always got them at the restaurant. There used to be a lady, a long time ago, used to live in the old Sante Fe camp, and every Saturday she'd go by and take orders. And the next day she'd deliver your tamales. That's how it was.

00:08:34

Washburn:

So you'd say, "I want so many tamales," and she'd bring them by.

00:08:35

Chávez:

Yeah, you'd say I want a dozen. Cheap, but a dozen and all that.

00:08:41

Washburn:

Where did she have the space to make all that food?

00:08:45

Chávez:

In her home. I mean, they didn't live in a section house. They had their own home. So they did it there.

00:08:52

Washburn:

About food, I think it's interesting to talk about food. When you're down in Mexico, you know, you send a kid over to somebody's house who makes--like this woman who makes tamales--but you send a kid over at lunchtime and say, "Go get me twenty tortillas," or something like that. Was it the same thing in the Sante Fe camps?

00:09:12

Chávez:

Yes. The same thing. They had kind of the same thing that I told you. That lady who would make the tomales, she used to make tortillas. They had a little store, and they used to sell cornmeal tortillas. No flour, just cornmeal.

00:09:26

Washburn:

Did she sell them out of her house, or was it a formal store?

00:09:28

Chávez:

No, out of her house. She had a regular machine and all that. And then later on, people started to make their own tortillas. One guy invented how to make that tortilla, to make the whole tortilla. And, hell, he was selling tortillas, and pretty soon tortilleria's came out.

00:09:51

Washburn:

Somebody told me about a tortilleria down there on--. Don something's Tortilleria. I'll point it out to you later. Somebody else pointed me out that there was a big tortilleria on Barrett, I think it was. Anyhow, that's interesting. So, the store at the Sante Fe railroad, the Sante Fe railroad store, they didn't sell tortillas or anything like that?

00:10:14

Chávez:

No, no. That was just a commissary where they had clothing and they had groceries. That's it. We had shoes there, clothing, and they also had groceries.

00:10:29

Washburn:

Why weren't their groceries--why didn't they have groceries that catered to the Mexican workers? Like tortillas, for instance.

00:10:40

Chávez:

Well, at that time, nobody made tortillas. Nobody made tortillas. Only the people, the families, they'd make tortillas. But nobody came out with a machine, or anything like that.

00:10:49

Washburn:

So at the commissary could you buy beans and rice?

00:10:54

Chávez:

That's where we got everything. Beans and rice, and vermicelli. Everything. And then the flour, that you bought because you gotta use it to make tortillas.

00:11:12

Washburn:

If you had the money, where would you buy milk and meat?

00:11:14

Chávez:

We had a goat. We had a goat and we used to milk the goat. We got milk from the goat. As a matter of fact, we even sold some once in a while. Some guy would come in there because his little boy couldn't drink cow milk, so I'd sell him a little bottle of goat milk. Ten cents a bottle. And that's it. I used to drink goat milk all the time. Then there was people who had cows and all that. You know, sometimes they'd--. And my sister used to make the cheese out of goat milk. Man, it was good. But I was satisfied with goat milk. I didn't have to buy the cow milk. Cause you get used to it.

00:12:01

Washburn:

Yeah. A little different taste, huh?

00:12:04

Chávez:

Yeah, it's got a funny different taste altogether. But what it is, after you drink it, it has that taste of goat.

00:12:16

Washburn:

That's funny. So what about meat? You said you also grew chickens.

00:12:23

Chávez:

Oh, we had chickens.

00:12:23

Washburn:

Did you use them for eggs or did you also--?

00:12:26

Chávez:

Well, they laid eggs and all that. And sometimes, you want to have chicken, you'd just go out there and get one from the shed--you know, wherever you got them. In the back. You'd go and get one.

00:12:43

Washburn:

And you'd pluck it and chop its head off.

00:12:46

Chávez:

You'd wring its neck and then put it in hot water and then start plucking. We used to make--. We never used them for fried chicken, like you do now. We used them for mole. To make mole.

00:13:03

Washburn:

So that was for special times?

00:13:04

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:13:06

Washburn:

Was there a carniceria around? Was there a butcher, a Mexican butcher?

00:13:11

Chávez:

No, they didn't have no Mexican butcher. They had the Fourth Street market, and I don't know what the heck--I can't remember the name--but it was {Equinero?} brothers, and it was a grocery store. They also had a meat department, where they used to get the meat from there.

00:13:35

Washburn:

And you told me, this was the Italian market there.

00:13:38

Chávez:

Everybody went over there. Yeah. Then you went there and you'd get credit. And a lot of people who could afford it would go out there and get credit. They wouldn't, you know, like the commissary you go there, they'd charge you double. It was a little high, but not as high as the commissary. And that's why, when you got a little money, then you'd start going up the street to the stores. It wasn't that expensive. But the Holmes Supply really got you, because when you went to work there, you know, you were desperate for a job and you had free room there and everything. And there you could go to the commissary right away and buy groceries. You could buy groceries and all that. And you needed a job, so that's it. They used to get you that way. And if you had a bunch of kids, you gotta buy them shoes. [small talk]

00:15:23

Washburn:

I'd like to talk to you about food, but I'd also like to talk to you about where people worked, and where you worked. You told me that you had a job delivering papers. What was your first formal job? I mean, delivering papers is kind of a formal job, but not the same as going to the foundry or something.

00:15:39

Chávez:

The first formal job that I had, was when I worked at American Radiator. That was hard work. That's where they make the tubs, bathtubs, and the sinks. I worked there. That was good money, and I worked there. But I worked there after I got out of the service. After I got out the service, I worked there for a while, and then after that, being that I got out of--I could get to school through being that I'd been in the service, under Public Law Sixteen, that's when I went to barber college, and I'd already got my apprentice license. So I was working at American Radiator, which paid good money, but also worked you to death and I said, "What am I doing here? I should be outside cutting hair." So that's when I went back to barber college. When I came out from that, I came here, and I've been here ever since. Not here in this spot. But I worked in different shops. If I walked in a shop and I saw that I wasn't going to learn, then I'd go some place else.

00:16:44

Washburn:

I want to talk to you about that. I think I got ahead too far. I thought maybe you had your first job before you went off to the service. But I guess you didn't.

00:16:54

Chávez:

No, no, no. When I--

00:16:57

Washburn:

You graduated; tell me about what happened after you left high school.

00:17:00

Chávez:

After I graduated from high school, I worked in a Sante Fe.

00:17:03

Washburn:

Tell me about that.

00:17:05

Chávez:

I worked in a Sante Fe. I worked there for about six or seven months and then I joined the service.

00:17:15

Washburn:

So you graduated in about what year, do you remember?

00:17:18

Chávez:

Forty-two.

00:17:22

Washburn:

Let me ask you , Sal, you were still in high school when the war broke out. What do you remember about--I'd like to get to asking you about what you did in the Sante Fe camp, but I want to try and keep things kind of in order. You told me a lot about the high school last time. So you were still in high school when Pearl Harbor happened in December 1941.

00:17:53

Chávez:

Yeah, I was there in high school.

00:17:57

Washburn:

Do you remember what people were thinking and what people were saying when that happened?

00:18:03

Chávez:

When that happened, well, we thought it was just going to be a little something, you know, a couple of months and all that. We didn't know it was going to be that long, how long it lasted. Four years, 'till '45. So it lasted that long, and after I got out of there, then I went to work in a cannery, and then I went to work at American Radiator, then I got married.

00:18:35

Washburn:

So you don't remember people being too scared about what happened at Pearl Harbor, that they thought maybe people could bomb San Francisco or something like that. Do you remember people saying that?

00:18:48

Chávez:

Well, actually, most of them knew that all the kids were grown up already, their children, and they were the draft age. So that's where most of them were--. Which they did. Some families two or three kids went in the service at the same time.

00:19:09

Washburn:

Did you have friends and family who went into the service too?

00:19:17

Chávez:

My brother went, and then my nephews, they all went. And a lot of my friends went. A lot of guys, my friends that were raised together, they went in the service. They were taking everybody.

00:19:35

Washburn:

Oh, for sure. Then, also, in Richmond there were some Japanese families. They were taken off, right?

00:19:45

Chávez:

Yeah, one of them owned a florist [shop]. And then another family we knew, they used to--these {_____?}, they used to own a florist, and then these other that we knew, they had hothouses in North Richmond and they grew the flowers. That was it.

00:20:07

Washburn:

And they were taken off?

00:20:09

Chávez:

Yeah, they had a--. Sent up to a camp. They went. The {_____?} had a nice store. Then these other people that we know, they also left too.

00:20:30

Washburn:

Do you remember being conscious, or knowing that they were taken off to the camp?

00:20:33

Chávez:

At that time we didn't know what was going on. I remember that when Pearl Harbor, we declared war, that there was a lot of Japanese families out here. And they were even afraid to get

in the bus. Because they were afraid that maybe they'd get hurt, kind of thing, with fighting against each other.

00:21:03

Washburn:

Do you remember seeing things in the paper about the Japanese going off to camp and stuff like that?

00:21:11

Chávez:

Yeah, they said they were taking them to camp.

00:21:13

Washburn:

So you knew it was going on?

00:21:15

Chávez:

Yeah, I knew about that. A lot of people, like the {____?}, they lost a store, they lost everything. And a lot of families, which now you could read in the paper, when they get money for all the time that they were in the camp.

00:21:35

Washburn:

Reparations.

00:21:36

Chávez:

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

00:21:41

Washburn:

So you graduated in '42, and then. You said something about a cannery and about the Sante Fe railroad.

00:21:49

Chávez:

A lot of people-- a lot of them--

00:21:51

Washburn:

What happened? Did you go to the Sante Fe railroad right after you graduated?

00:21:55

Chávez:

Yeah, I went to work there, and then I went to work in a cannery. Then I went in the service, and when I got out of the service I remember that I worked in a cannery. Then I was going to be a machinist, but being that I was service-connected, I went to barber college.

00:22:21

Washburn:

How did you get a job working at the Sante Fe railroad?

00:22:29

Chávez:

I just went and asked for a job.

00:22:31

Washburn:

So they had work.

00:22:34

Chávez:

Uh-huh. And I also worked at American Radiator.

00:22:36

Washburn:

And that was in '42?

00:22:37

Chávez:

Mm-hmm.

00:22:39

Washburn:

What was your job at the railroad?

00:22:41

Chávez:

I used to work for the section gang.

00:22:46

Washburn:

Like your Pop?

00:22:48

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Yeah. Same thing. Fixing rails if they gotta be straightened out, or some of the railroad ties were old, we gotta take them out and put new ones in there. Hard work.

00:22:59

Washburn:

Did you travel all over California, or did you stay mostly in the Bay Area?

00:23:05

Chávez:

No, just in Richmond. Section 53.

00:23:10

Washburn:

Were you one of the younger guys on the gang?

00:23:14

Chávez:

I was one of the young--. Well, I was young. I was a kid. All them other guys were already grown-up men. Strong, you know. I was out there trying to keep up. I did, but you know they take--. They see that you're a kid, so they kind of take it easy.

00:23:31

Washburn:

Cut you some slack?

00:23:33

Chávez:

Yeah, kind of give you some slack. They'd go to the toilet.

00:23:37

Washburn:

Did you know all the guys on the gang that you were working with already?

00:23:41

Chávez:

Oh yeah. They lived in the section.

00:23:42

Washburn:

So you knew them already.

00:23:45

Chávez:

They all lived in the section. See, whatever it was, they wanted all those people from the Sante Fe to live in those homes in case of an emergency; they could get you right there. But if you lived in a place where they had to look for you and all that--

00:24:02

Washburn:

They didn't want that?

00:24:04

Chávez:

No, cause if you were right there next door, the boss could knock on the door and say "Get ready". Right away you'd have to get up and get ready to go. I never had to do that. But I know my Dad did, a lot of times. Sound asleep and there goes that door---bang, bang, bang on the door.

00:24:22

Washburn:

Who bangs on the door?

00:24:24

Chávez:

The foreman. He used to come in there and bang on the door, "Let's go!" You knew right away there was an emergency, so you'd get ready to go. Rain or shine.

00:24:38

Washburn:

So you worked there for Sante Fe for, like, six months.

00:24:39

Chávez:

Then I went in the service.

00:24:42

Washburn:

When you worked there, were they still paying you, like your Pop, with--.

00:24:44

Chávez:

Yeah, I had regular wages.

00:24:47

Washburn:

They didn't cut you a check at the end of the week. You ran a tab with the company, or how did it work?

00:24:52

Chávez:

No, I didn't bother with--I just got a regular check, I didn't owe the company any money, so I got my full check.

00:25:01

Washburn:

How did you get a check and your Pop used to run a tab with the company?

00:25:05

Chávez:

I could buy anything in my name for the house, too, you know what I mean. But he'd buy the groceries and all that kind of stuff. He didn't want me to do that, so I didn't. The money I got, I bought clothes.

00:25:22

Washburn:

At the commissary?

00:25:24

Chávez:

No, I went to town.

00:25:26

Washburn:

So you got a check, right? Okay. He didn't want you to do that, so you made a choice not to do that.

00:25:29

Chávez:

Yes. We used to go out there, like, me buying clothes and shoes. I was helping him out. He didn't have to buy me anything.

00:25:37

Washburn:

So after working there for six months, you said--. Where did you work after that?

00:25:46

Chávez:

After that, I--

00:25:49

Washburn:

You said something about a cannery, or did you go in the Coast Guard.

00:25:52

Chávez:

I used to work in a cannery too, in the cannery season. They'd have the fruit season, they had the grapes, and they had the apricots, and I worked from the beginning till the end.

00:26:05

Washburn:

Was that before you went in the Coast Guard?

00:26:10

Chávez:

That was before and then after.

00:26:12

Washburn:

So you worked in the cannery before you went in the Coast Guard. Where was the cannery? Was it the F & P cannery?

00:26:20

Chávez:

F & P, Felice and Perelli.

00:26:22

Washburn:

And that was down by the Ford motor plant, down Tenth Street?

00:26:27

Chávez:

Yeah. End of Tenth and {Flint?} Street. That was before I went into the service. I worked in the cannery before I went in the service. And then after I got out of the service I also worked in the cannery. Then I went to school.

00:26:46

Washburn:

What was it like working in the cannery?

00:26:47

Chávez:

Hard work, but I enjoyed it. And they paid good money.

00:26:51

Washburn:

Why did you enjoy it?

00:26:54

Chávez:

Nice work. I mean, you'd want to work and make money. I didn't mind picking up those heavy lugs.

00:27:01

Washburn:

Your job was picking up boxes of fruit?

00:27:03

Chávez:

In other words, I used to work on the conveyor. I used to get the boxes full of peaches and then put them on the other conveyor. I used to give them to the ladies. I worked three tables, and each table had thirteen women on it. I had to furnish them with the fruit. They'd open up a bed, and then I'd give them a box of peaches, or whatever, and I also had a little wooden ball, and that was where, when the checker came, he'd pick up the little ball and check the card, which you got credit for.

00:27:41

Washburn:

So they'd know how many boxes?

00:27:42

Chávez:

Yeah, they'd know how many they did.

00:27:45

Washburn:

So you'd go up there, you'd pick up the big boxes of peaches. You'd just dump it?

00:27:48

Chávez:

Dump it. And then at the same time, I'd put a ball in there. So they'd get that little ball and they'd put it down. Sometimes they'd take two boxes. But they were fast. Oh, my!

00:27:58

Washburn:

What did the ladies do?

00:28:00

Chávez:

They used to cut. They were cutters. By hand. Now they've got a machine, but everything was done by hand. At the same time, they'd pull the pit out. They worked fast!

00:28:12

Washburn:

What did they do with the fruit once they'd cut it?

00:28:14

Chávez:

Throw it on the conveyor.

00:28:16

Washburn:

And then it would go get canned?

00:28:18

Chávez:

Uh-huh. It would go through a process. You know, lye.

00:28:25

Washburn:

I've heard that was a popular job for Mexican women to have, was working at the cannery.

00:28:31

Chávez:

Oh, a lot of them worked there.

00:28:33

Washburn:

You say there were three tables with thirteen women?

00:28:38

Chávez:

Yeah, thirteen women. Thirteen a table.

00:28:39

Washburn:

Thirteen a table.

00:28:41

Chávez:

Uh-huh, thirteen to a table. That was a long--. And then you had to dump the fruit. In other words, you had to keep the fruit there. The after that they took me from dumping, and put me on a jitney. So what I had to do, I used to bring the fruit from outside on a pallet and then place it right there, right next to the dumper. And that was my job. And take the empties out with a jitney.

00:29:06

Washburn:

Like a forklift.

00:29:11

Chávez:

Yeah, forklift.

00:29:14

Washburn:

What about the women? Were the thirteen women who worked on some of those tables, were they Mexican women?

00:29:21

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Italian. Mexican and Italian. That's right.

00:29:27

Washburn:

Were they speaking Italian and Spanish at the tables?

00:29:30

Chávez:

Oh, no. English. They could speak English. But then you know, when you get together with your own, you start talking your own language.

00:29:39

Washburn:

Like the Sante Fe railroad, did you know people who worked at the cannery from the neighborhood you lived in?

00:29:48

Chávez:

Oh yeah. A lot of mothers, you know, ladies, wives, and their kids would work. Seventeen, eighteen years old. Be out there working in the cannery. And some of the women--like, my wife - she worked there. She worked there when she was a girl. She used to work in the canning. She used to can the fruit. As a matter of fact, I think that's where I met her.

00:30:18

Washburn:

You said women and their daughters worked there. Do you remember--?

00:30:27

Chávez:

I knew families that had two or three daughters that were working there. They helped you out. Felice were nice people. They tried to help you, you know, cause you were a good worker and they tried to keep you together. You have a daughter, but you'd be working in the cannery, but maybe doing something else or doing the same thing that your parents are doing. Like my mother-in-law at one time she worked in the cannery, but then she got old and she didn't work any more. But she used to work in the cannery.

00:31:11

Washburn:

Do you ever remember seeing the mom and the daughter working side-by-side at the table?

00:31:16

Chávez:

Oh yeah. A lot of times. Canning or--. Working side by side. And at noon time you'd see them all eating together. It was hard work. The cannery's hard work.

00:31:34

Washburn:

So how old do you think the women's daughters would be? Would they be older than twelve or younger than eighteen? How old, do you think?

00:31:47

Chávez:

The {_____} ones were sixteen or seventeen. They'd lie about the age. You know, like me. I was sixteen and I told them I was eighteen. I don't remember, but I lied. But anyway they wanted an employee that did their work.

00:32:10

Washburn:

So, the women came with their daughters. Do you think they also--. Everybody was making money, of course, but do you think people also did it so they could watch over their daughters to make sure they weren't getting in no trouble or anything?

00:32:23

Chávez:

No, no. They did it because they wanted the daughter to make money too so she could buy clothes for herself. And they wanted to come to work, because that's what they wanted. They wanted to buy their own clothes. Yeah, everybody was out--. You should have seen how, in the mornings, you know, you'd be working but you'd see out there waiting to get a job. Lines of people waiting to get a job. A guy would come out and just pick you out, "Come on!" If somebody didn't show up and they needed somebody bad, then they'd just go outside and, you know--

00:32:55

Washburn:

Uh-huh. "Get in here, kid!"

00:32:57

Chávez:

They didn't give a damn if you were in the front. They'd look around and say "Come on."

00:33:01

Washburn:

Was that how you got a job there?

00:33:02

Chávez:

No. I told the guy I wanted a job and he said, "Well, we'll see." Okay. So when they needed another guy, he says, "Come on. I know you're young, but that's okay." But I was strong. I was a fruit dumper right away.

00:33:17

Washburn:

That's great. That was a lot further than going to work at the rail yards. How did you get down there to go to work down there?

00:33:27

Chávez:

Bicycle. My bike.

00:33:30

Washburn:

Oh, the Roadmaster.

00:33:31

Chávez:

Yeah, the Roadmaster. My little bicycle.

00:33:34

Washburn:

Is that how everybody got down there, on their bikes? Or how did they get there.

00:33:38

Chávez:

No. A lot of people had cars, you know, old cars. I used to have my bike. That's it. Or walk. At that time you had a lot of empty fields, you took shortcuts. In other words, you didn't have blocks. You took a shortcut. From Cutting, take a shortcut.

00:33:58

Washburn:

Through a field.

00:33:59

Chávez:

Uh-huh, a field.

00:34:02

Washburn:

And you could do that on your bike and walking.

00:34:04

Chávez:

No, no. But I rode the bike without any people. And then a lot of times I'd ride there because there'd be paths. A path on the road. Like a bat out of heck. Forgot about the paper routes when I first started making good money. And then we used to go buy clothes from a guy by the name of Jays. His store was-- Nice guy. You know, it's history. Honest. I tell you, that street used to be right on Seventh. On Seventh between Seventh and Eighth.

00:34:34

Washburn:

On Macdonald?

00:34:36

Chávez:

On Macdonald. And he had clothes. A clothing store, shoes, and up-to-date stuff, so naturally--. And he gave you credit. So all the kids that were in the cannery, you know, all of us that worked in the cannery, used to go there. Cashed our check and you'd pay so much on your bill. Maybe half of the check or all of it, but you didn't care, cause you were wearing good stuff. Levis.

00:35:05

Washburn:

Tell me, what clothes people wanted to buy. You wanted to buy Levis.

00:35:12

Chávez:

Levis. Everybody wanted Levis.

00:35:14

Washburn:

This was in the late Thirties and early Forties?

00:35:23

Chávez:

Mm-hmm. You had Levis. Then you had the shoes. Cordovan. That was the color of the shoe, cordovan. That's it. And then they used to have a thick sole and a high heel. Not really big, but, you know. It was a style. Guys with their Levis and a sweater.

00:35:42

Washburn:

Like a cardigan sweater?

00:35:44

Chávez:

Yeah. Cardigan jacket. But mostly jackets, they'd have like the pants and the jacket to match.

00:35:53

Washburn:

What did the women wear?

00:35:54

Chávez:

Women? Well, you know, they had dresses, I guess. I don't know. Bobby socks. And they used to wear shoes, crêpe. They'd have a crêpe sole.

00:36:08

Washburn:

Did you used to roll up your pants?

00:36:12

Chávez:

No, no, no. At the time you rolled them up. You'd have--what I mean, you'd roll them up. Like this. Fold them up nice, you know.

00:36:26

Washburn:

Jay's Store, huh?

00:36:29

Chávez:

And then after that came the corduroys. They used to have the corduroys with the { _____? } cords.

00:36:37

Washburn:

Yeah. I've got a pair of those. And were those Levis like the Levis--

00:36:40

Chávez:

Of now?

00:36:42

Washburn:

Well, now I can buy a pair, let's say I buy a pair of Wranglers and you can buy the pre-wash or the kind where you wash them twice or three times and they shrink up a bunch. Was that how those Levis were? They'd shrink up a bunch.

00:36:52

Chávez:

Yeah. They seemed to be--. They were stronger, heavier. The rivets were different. Now they have a few rivets, but before they [laughter] were all rivets.

00:37:06

Washburn:

They were sturdy pants?

00:37:09

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Oh, man! I don't remember how much they cost. Three-something.

00:37:13

Washburn:

Let me ask you, why do you think people wanted to buy Levis? Sometimes I think about Levis and I think that's more for workers, people want to buy workers. Why would a kid who wants to look nice buy pants that people use for work?

00:37:28

Chávez:

Well, they were good-looking pants. The Levis are good-looking pants. They'd use them for--not slacks, but they'd use them for all around, like going to school or some of that. And work. They were good working pants. Like, I had pants and they were good for work and to go out at the same time. You'd make sure you didn't dirty them.

00:37:47

Washburn:

What about for a-- When you went to a dance at Winter's Hall or something like that, would you wear Levis or would you wear slacks?

00:37:56

Chávez:

Oh, we had slacks. You wore your Levis, like all around. But when you went out to church or somewhere, you wore slacks.

00:38:10

Washburn:

You wore different clothes. Okay, that makes sense.

00:38:14

Chávez:

A sports coat, you know.

00:38:26

Washburn:

That makes sense. So tell me about how you went into the coast guard. Where were you working right before you went into the coast guard.

00:38:29

Chávez:

Sante Fe.

00:38:30

Washburn:

At the Sante Fe?

00:38:28

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

00:38:29

Washburn:

So let me get it straight. Did you work at the cannery before the Sante Fe or the Sante Fe before the cannery?

00:38:34

Chávez:

No, I worked in the cannery before the Sante Fe.

00:38:38

Washburn:

When you were in high school?

00:38:40

Chávez:

Everybody-- During high school I worked in a cannery too.

00:38:42

Washburn:

In the summer season, huh?

00:38:45

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Then after that I worked in the Sante Fe. Then after I was working at the Sante Fe-- The reason I went down to Sante Fe was because the cannery's only seasonal. And the Sante Fe was steady.

00:38:59

Washburn:

What's the season for the cannery?

00:39:04

Chávez:

I don't remember. About three months.

00:39:07

Washburn:

Starting in June or starting in July or something like that?

00:39:10

Chávez:

They used to start with the cherries, and they start in May don't they? The May cherries.

00:39:15

Washburn:

Cherries are the first summer fruit, right.

00:39:19

Chávez:

That's when it started. And then they used to end up with the peaches, and sometimes-- You had peach and you had pears, and they used to mix up and they'd make cocktail. What were we talking about?

00:39:36

Washburn:

Asking about going into the service.

00:39:40

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Well, I didn't want to go into the army. My first choice was air force. My second choice was the coast guard and that was it. After that, I'd go in the army. But what I did, I had to get three letters of recommendation. I got one from Miller--the superintendent, you know.

00:40:04

Washburn:

Of the school.

00:40:08

Chávez:

But when the time came for me, I took those letters--. Because you had to have three letters of recommendation, and I even had one from a supervisor from school, because I never got in trouble. But you have to know mathematics. And I didn't know mathematics.

00:40:24

Washburn:

For the air force.

00:40:25

Chávez:

For the air force. And the guy said, "Do you know algebra?" And I said, "No, I don't know nothing like that." I went like this. "Adding, subtract, multiply." Well, he said, "You have to know mathematics." But you can get in the army in the air force, work as a soldier. You know, army, not the pilot, learning to be a pilot. So I said No. My second choice was the coast guard, and that's when I--. When they told me that, then I went across the hall and there was the USCG, United States Coast Guard.

00:41:01

Washburn:

Across the hall in the high school?

00:41:03

Chávez:

Across the hall from the Post Office. That's where they had their draft office. Service. So I went and told them that I wanted to join the coast guard. "Oh sure, sit down." And I had everything with me--my diploma from high school and the letters of recommendation, I had them. He didn't even bother to ask me. So I said, "I've got this." "Oh thanks!" You know, he checked it out. "Well, we'll call you." But I was afraid because I really didn't want to get drafted. Because as long as you weren't sworn in, they could still grab you. You could have had the {_____?}. He told me himself, you know, "The army could still grab you because you haven't been sworn in, so we'll call you as soon possible, and when we need you." I waited one, two months, and nothing. That draft board was after us. So finally I got to go and get sworn in. And I went and got sworn in, and then I got my draft. I went to the draft office and I told them, I said, "I got this, but I'm already in the coast guard. I'm waiting to get called." "Have you been sworn in?" "Yes, I'm sworn in." And I showed them the card they give you. "Okay." So that's what it was. Then I went in to the service.

00:42:24

Washburn:

That was in what year? Was it in '42 that you went in the service?

00:42:32

Chávez:

Yeah, '42. End of '42 I went in and got out in '46.

00:42:41

Washburn:

That's a long. Four years. And where did you patrol?

00:42:43

Chávez:

San Francisco.

00:42:48

Washburn:

You were stationed in the Bay?

00:42:49

Chávez:

Yeah. I was one of the lucky ones. I got to stay over here in San Francisco, and Port Chicago, and around the beaches. Like Rockaway Beach, Half Moon Bay. What else did we have? Bodega Bay, and all those.

00:43:08

Washburn:

Why do you say you were lucky?

00:43:10

Chávez:

Cause I didn't go overseas.

00:43:11

Washburn:

Where would you have gone, if you went overseas?

00:43:15

Chávez:

Well, they could have-- Any place. Cause if you're in the coast guard, they can put you on a--. But you know what? I wanted sea duty, and they never gave me sea duty. What you want, they don't give you. I wanted sea duty. I wanted to get in a boat. On a cutter.

00:43:30

Washburn:

What did you do?

00:43:32

Chávez:

I never got it. They give me a dog. Dog patrol.

00:43:34

Washburn:

You patrolled the beaches?

00:43:38

Chávez:

The beach, uh-huh. With a dog. I liked that. After that we had horses, so we rode horseback, back and forth on the beach.

00:43:49

Washburn:

You got on a horse?

00:43:50

Chávez:

Oh yeah!

00:43:51

Washburn:

That sounds like fun.

00:43:53

Chávez:

They had Post Number 9 was {_____?} Zoo, and Post Number 10 was Playland. And then Post number 7 was Mussel Rock. That was the only bad one. All these hills and everything. Then, after that, I got stationed in {_____?} Then I got stationed in Port Chicago, right after it blew up.

00:44:26

Washburn:

I was going to ask you about that. What do you remember about the Port Chicago explosion?

00:44:28

Chávez:

It just blew up. We were in the service then. Uh-huh. Then it blew up and all the theaters that they put down came out a flash, "Servicemen, go back to your station. Any servicemen, go back to your station."

00:44:43

Washburn:

Is that how you heard about it?

00:44:45

Chávez:

No, I heard about it--. I don't even remember how the hell I heard about it. But at that time, you know, where I was stationed? Richmond. In Port Richmond. So, you know, when I went back to the base, what had happened and all that kind of stuff. They put you on alert. No liberty. No nothing. No leaves.

00:45:09

Washburn:

Do you remember feeling the explosion? Some people say you could feel it for miles around. Do you remember feeling it?

00:45:20

Chávez:

No, I don't remember feeling it. But I think I was in a show, in the movies when they said that "Go back to your base." I don't remember. It's been a while.

00:45:32

Washburn:

It was a pretty sad incident. A couple of hundred people died, right?

00:45:35

Chávez:

All them people getting killed. And then after that, being that I was in the coast guard, we had to stand watch on what happened in Port Chicago; we had to stand watch where the three ships were right there getting loaded with ammunition.

00:45:50

Washburn:

Were you scared about that then? Were you afraid you might get blown up then, the same accident might happen?

00:45:56

Chávez:

You'd have to go down in the hold. You'd have to watch them while they're putting the--. You know, before the accident, before the explosion, I was standing watch there. We were lucky, because they didn't have no watch at that time. No other coast guard, you see. So, we had to go out there and watch that they were putting the bombs, and that they don't use no--. Any kind of hammer, they had, had to be copper. No iron.

00:46:27

Washburn:

You're saying you were down in the hull of the ship making sure they were doing their job right.

00:46:31

Chávez:

Yeah, you'd look around. You'd keep looking around and they'd come back up and all that.

00:46:35

Washburn:

Let me get it straight. Were you in the boat or outside the boat.

00:46:41

Chávez:

Inside.

00:46:42

Washburn:

You were inside the boat.

00:46:44

Chávez:

On top. On the deck. We were on the ship. Once in a while, you had to come down in the hold, and we had to go up and then look around.

00:46:55

Washburn:

Why was the coast guard doing that and not somebody else?

00:46:57

Chávez:

I don't know. Coast guard was making sure that nothing would happen. But it was sad. Because even after it happened, and all the time they were still taking out bodies and all that. Months after.

00:47:08

Washburn:

Why months?

00:47:15

Chávez:

You know what I mean. Like, they were stuck down there. They had a lot of metal down there, and they were stuck down there.

00:47:26

Washburn:

They had to take the metal out of everything?

00:47:30

Chávez:

They had big chunks of steel. With a big old crane.

00:47:33

Washburn:

Some people say, when I've read about it, they say they had all the black soldiers loading the ammunition.

00:47:39

Chávez:

They did.

00:47:42

Washburn:

So you don't remember ever seeing any of the white soldiers loading ammunition?

00:47:48

Chávez:

You know, maybe I did see some. But they were mostly black. That's why they raised all kind of heck after, you know.

00:47:54

Washburn:

Why's that?

00:47:59

Chávez:

A lot of them guys, they wouldn't go back. They got court-martialed. They got court-martialed and after all these years, they finally--

00:48:05

Washburn:

Gave them amnesty, or something.

00:48:08

Chávez:

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

00:48:10

Washburn:

What were people saying about that whole incident? Do you remember people saying, "That's not fair, they're getting court-martialed", or "Yeah, they deserve getting court-martialed."

00:48:22

Chávez:

No, no, no. A lot of them were against it. Against getting court-martialed.

00:48:25

Washburn:

A lot of who?

00:48:26

Chávez:

A lot of people. Because, they figured, "Well, hell--." If I went back, I'd be a little scared. Even after I went back and we had to stand watch, you got a little afraid. But you get used to it, I guess.

00:48:47

Washburn:

Do you remember ever working with any black folks or have any black friends that you talked to about that?

00:48:50

Chávez:

No, they don't talk about it. They don't want to talk about it. But, you see, the deal was this: that they used to race against each other. The ships. Whoever put more dunnage. They'd bet on something. Money, I don't know what it was. And then whoever won, whoever got more dunnage for that day, they won. So they're out there going like a bat out of heck. Wanting to get more dunnage. You know, dunnage is the stuff they put in those bombs and all that kind of crap.

00:49:25

Washburn:

So it wasn't the most safest conditions?

00:49:28

Chávez:

Well, you should have seen some of them guys when they used to go down the ladder. Some guys would run.

00:49:41

Washburn:

How did you learn that they were doing that? That the boats were competing against each other?

00:49:44

Chávez:

Oh, you'd hear it. They'd tell you, "We're going against those other guys." They even { _____? } They would tell you themselves. After a while, nobody wanted to go back there.

00:49:59

Washburn:

I can understand why they wouldn't want to. So you worked in the coast guard until '46. In '46 the shipyards were closing down and not building as many ships, but I remember the first time we met, you said you worked in the shipyards.

00:50:17

Chávez:

I did.

00:50:21

Washburn:

When was that?

00:50:22

Chávez:

Right after I got out of school.

00:50:25

Washburn:

You had a bunch of jobs right after you got out of school.

00:50:27

Chávez:

See, but I didn't stay long. Because I knew I was going in the service. That's why I volunteered. So I worked on the Sante Fe for a while. Yeah I worked on the Sante Fe for a while, then I worked in a shipyards for a while, and then what else did I do after that? That was it. Then I went in the service.

00:50:54

Washburn:

Let's talk about the shipyard, because a lot of people--. That was a real big change for Richmond. One of the biggest, probably that took place in that time.

00:51:05

Chávez:

Yeah, when they started to build the shipyards, people were coming from all over. They had no place to stay. They were sleeping in a car, right on Macdonald Avenue. Boomtown.

00:51:19

Washburn:

Really changed.

00:51:21

Chávez:

Oh, yeah. And pretty soon all these bars were staying open all night. Dancing. Boy!

00:51:33

Washburn:

Did a lot of those changes take place down near your neighborhood, huh?

00:51:39

Chávez:

Where we lived?

00:51:40

Washburn:

Along Macdonald, a lot of things changed along Macdonald Avenue. Maybe not along your section.

00:51:46

Chávez:

No.

00:51:51

Washburn:

Let me ask you, where did you notice most of the change.

00:51:53

Chávez:

Downtown.

00:51:55

Washburn:

Where?

00:51:57

Chávez:

All these people were coming from all over. And they started working in the shipyard, and you'd see a lot of guys wearing their nice-looking suits. With their hard hat on. They had their tie on, and then they had their big badge here with their picture on it. To tell you the truth, I didn't go out much, you know.

00:52:24

Washburn:

Let me ask you how you got your job there at the shipyards.

00:52:29

Chávez:

I just signed up.

00:52:30

Washburn:

You just walked on over there?

00:52:32

Chávez:

I just walked in and said I wanted to work. "Okay, fine." But I didn't last long at the shipyards, because that's when I got the hell out to go in the service.

00:52:40

Washburn:

That's okay. You still did work there for a little while and you probably have some good memories about it. Did you work at Shipyard 1? Which shipyard?

00:52:49

Chávez:

I worked at Shipyard-- The one that was right on Fourth Street, all the way. The first or second one. I think it was the first one that I worked on. When they were building it, you know that.

00:53:00

Washburn:

What was your job?

00:53:02

Chávez:

I was out there with a cart, and they'd say, "Take these plates to--". I forgot so much--the number of the ship. So we'd have to take the parts--me and another guy--had to push this cart with parts that was going to go on the ship and put them down there, and all that kind of thing. That's how they had me sweeping. Sweeping the streets there, you know. The inside of the shipyard. With grass. I used to go out there with a can and go out there and roll it and fill it up. Then another guy would take it off and empty it. He'd come back and I'd just keep, with a broom.

00:53:48

Washburn:

So how well did that pay compared to the rail yards and the cannery?

00:53:54

Chávez:

More. They paid you more. Over on the railroad you worked all the time. Over here you could sit down and BS. Or go to the toilet, BS, and come back.

Interview 3: October 25, 2002

00:00:15

Washburn:

Yesterday we stopped when we were talking about when you first started working on the shipyards. You said you only worked there for a month, but people are real interested in it because it was such a big event for Richmond.

00:00:35

Chávez:

I worked there for about three months, then I went into the service. I joined the service because I knew that eventually I was going to get drafted. So I said, Well, what pay do you want, the army or the coast guard? I said I want to sign up for the coast guard. So I signed up and I didn't have to go in the army. I went in '42 and I got out in '46.

00:00:59

Washburn:

You told me that yesterday; I remember that. What we didn't get to talk about is you said you knew people from down the neighborhood and Richmond where you lived who worked at American Standard, who worked at Santa Fe Railroad. Worked at the Pullman.

00:01:15

Chávez:

Most of them were from North Richmond. Most of them were from Richmond that worked in the Santa Fe.

00:01:21

Washburn:

Did you know folks that also worked in the shipyards?

00:01:22

Chávez:

No. Well, I know a lot of girls that went and worked as welders. But I don't know them by name, it's been so long.

00:01:41

Washburn:

You said that working at the Santa Fe and American Standard you knew a lot of folks from your neighborhood. How would you compare that to working at the shipyards?

00:01:55

Chávez:

Well, when you worked for American Standard you had three shifts. You were working around the clock. And you didn't have the chance to talk to nobody. You used to go in at five o'clock in the morning and get out at eleven, went to bed, sleep. It wasn't that you think, "Oh, they've got a lot of people." Everybody went home. We were tired. Maybe to the store, but you never had gatherings all the time. You know what I mean? Cause half of the time a lot of guys worked and all that. The only time, maybe like if somebody had a baptism, and then they have a little party and that's it. Then those dances, it was that they had—like I told you—for the September 16 and the May 5.

00:02:53

Washburn:

Oh, I understand all that. What I'm trying to get at, is how many people you knew who worked at the shipyards. Like, when you arrived there, did you have friends?

00:03:11

Chávez:

No, you had them from all over. The friends you had went to work. A lot of guys were going to school, then went to work. Just like me. I don't know how you've got it figured, but we didn't see too many guys. Maybe you saw guys that you went to school with or around your neighborhood, but the rest of the guys were from Richmond, but la planta baja. You know what I mean? [laughs]

00:03:42

Washburn:

That's where you lived, it was called la planta baja?

00:03:46

Chávez:

That's where we lived. We all lived out there, from Second Street down.

00:03:54

Washburn:

How do you translate la planta baja? That's "the plant below?"

00:03:56

Chávez:

La planta baja means that you're down. Down at the bottom of the totem pole. La planta baja means you're down. It was just a slang word.

00:04:05

Washburn:

Was it down meaning the neighborhood was down by the tracks or meaning that the neighborhood was poor?

00:04:12

Chávez:

No, no. You were down by the tracks. Most of the Mexican people lived at Eighth Street, Second Street because they worked on the railroad and some of them worked in the foundry, like I said. So that was it. Then some later on got the good jobs. Like when the war broke out, a lot of them went to work for Standard Oil. They quit the Santa Fe and went to work for the Standard Oil, which paid them more money. That's what they did.

00:04:48

Washburn:

That's also when the war broke out. They went to Kaiser and to Standard Oil?

00:04:51

Chávez:

Standard Oil.

00:04:54

Washburn:

Just Standard?

00:04:53

Chávez:

Mm-hmm. That's their name. That's what it was before. Standard Oil. I know what you're thinking about. You're thinking about the American Standard. The American Standard was a foundry.

00:05:02

Washburn:

Right, that's what you called the foundry. [tape interruption] I'm not quite following you. You said that folks worked at the Santa Fe railroad and at the foundry.

00:05:57

Chávez:

No, at the railroads. They're called Ned Duran. You can keep on talking.

00:06:06

Washburn:

When the war broke out, you told me, people quit their jobs at the Santa Fe railroad and at the foundry and went to work at the shipyards.

00:06:15

Chávez:

Yeah, for more money.

00:06:16

Washburn:

For money.

00:06:17

Chávez:

That's right.

00:06:17

Washburn:

So, what are you now telling me about the Standard Oil?

00:06:20

Chávez:

Standard Oil didn't hire Mexicans, but then when the war broke out they hired everything.

00:06:27

Washburn:

So how do you know they didn't hire Mexicans? People tried to get jobs there and they—

00:06:30

Chávez:

Guys went to work out there my age, you know, at that time. I used to go out there and try to get a job at Standard Oil and they wouldn't look at you. They wanted blacks or whites. But then

during the war, they were hiring everybody, kind of. We're talking about the Standard Oil. They didn't hire—. The only time they hired was when the war broke out, then they hired everybody.

00:06:55

Washburn:

And that includes blacks?

[At this point, someone else in the barbershop contributes to the discussion.]

00:07:01

Durán:

They didn't hire me, even after I got discharged I couldn't—.

00:07:03

Chávez:

Even some of the persons that worked on the railroad, they quit the railroad to work for the Standard Oil.

00:07:09

Durán:

You know why they didn't hire me?

00:07:10

Chávez:

Why?

00:07:11

Durán:

Because of my disability.

00:07:13

Chávez:

Really?

00:07:16

Washburn:

Hmmm.

00:07:17

Chávez:

I met him in the army hospital.

00:07:18

Washburn:

How are you doing? I'm David. Nice to meet you.

00:07:22

Durán:

Pleasure. Ned Durán.

00:07:21

Washburn:

Nice to meet you, Ned. David.

00:07:22

Durán:

David?

00:07:30

Washburn:

Yeah. Just interviewing him about Richmond and some history. He knows a lot about the--

00:07:32

Durán:

Oh, he was born and raised here. I've been here since '45 only.

00:07:35

Chávez:

He knows quite a bit about Richmond too.

00:07:37

Washburn:

You know quite a bit too? Where did you move to when you moved into Richmond.

00:07:42

Durán:

I came from Colorado. I got discharged from Fitzsimmons Hospital and I came over here. I lived--was raised and born--in Colorado.

00:07:53

Washburn:

Was your family in sugar beets over there?

00:07:57

Durán:

No, my mother was a clerk. She worked at the--She was a postmistress when I was born. First one in a little town, and she worked at the department store. She graduated from some school in Albuquerque, because when she passed away-- She was 104 years old in 1986 when she passed away.

00:08:27

Washburn:

Wow! Good genes, strong genes.

00:08:28

Durán:

My Dad was-- I was five years old when he passed away. He passed away in 1919. I was born in 1917.

00:08:40

Washburn:

That's great. I'm asking him about the Mexican-American community in Richmond, and he was just saying people called that area "la planta baja."

00:08:51

Chávez:

La planta baja was at the end of town. They used to call the—I told you, "section house", they called that section house, but then they nicknamed it—

00:09:12

Durán:

Santa Fe yards.

00:09:14

Chávez:

No, no.

00:09:13

Durán:

Those homes there. Started working there. Then I told my wife, I'll get a part-time job for Christmas help. Cause I already knew about it. So they gave me a part-time. Then it started raining like hell, so my job as a carpenter was gone. So the only one had was the \$1.71 I had since then as a Christmas help. I told my wife, "No, I'm going to go back to the post office. It might be a little check, but it's steady, you know." So, I went back.

00:09:49

Chávez:

People that lived in the town—

00:09:51

Washburn:

That's what I'm finding out. I'm trying to write a little history of the—

00:09:55

Chávez:

The guy started working for the city. It was hard, because they wouldn't hire you. I'm being honest. Because you were Mexican. That's why they wouldn't hire you.

00:10:05

Washburn:

Who wouldn't hire you?

00:10:07

Chávez:

The Standard Oil wouldn't even hire you either.

00:10:15

Durán:

During that time, I think, the city council was run by Standard Oil.

00:10:17

Chávez:

Oh, really?

00:10:19

Durán:

Sure. The city council was full of Standard Oil people. Politics. But you know, there was Barrett and all them guys that were deal there. They didn't hire— Fact is, they didn't even hire blacks.

00:10:32

Chávez:

Didn't hire anybody. During the war— As soon as the war broke out, they hired even the Indians that came from New Mexico. They brought them in boxcars.

00:10:41

Durán:

That was Kaiser made of Richmond. Kaiser made Richmond. He was hiring everybody. The shipyards were hiring everybody. Kaiser hired all of them guys from Oklahoma and everything that came here and worked. Blacks, everybody. Women.

00:11:05

Chávez:

Women welders.

00:11:07

Durán:

Sure, welders, burners, and everything they had there. My wife worked at the gas rationing board in the Yard Two.

00:11:17

Chávez:

Rationing?

00:11:19

Washburn:

That's interesting. You said that Standard Oil wouldn't hire Mexican people before the war.

00:11:26

Chávez:

Honest. Ask anyone. You can ask anybody, old-timers.

00:11:30

Washburn:

Were there any other businesses that wouldn't hire Mexicans either? Like Pullman or something like that.

00:11:38

Chávez:

No, Pullman hired. They had a lot of Mexicans.

00:11:43

Durán:

I think so. I don't know a thing about that though.

00:11:43

Chávez:

Like the Sante Fe hired them, and everything.

00:11:43

Washburn:

And the foundry hired too?

00:11:46

Chávez:

Oh, yeah! That was hard labor. Nobody wanted to go out there and work.

00:11:51

Durán:

I tell you something else. When I joined the army in 1940, I joined the First Cavalry Division, and they come and said, "Oh, look at the shit-eaters coming in." That's what they used to call us. And they used to go to Texas, like that, and you could see on the restaurants, "No dogs or Mexicans allowed." And we were in the army, man! So I told one kid, I says, "How long you been in the army?" He says, "About three or four years." "Couple of years they're going to take orders from us. We're going to show you how to ride horses and stuff like that." And it's true. A bunch of us made corporals. We overlooked, you know.

00:12:34

Chávez:

They didn't let you in. [people talk over each other]

00:12:32

Durán:

They saw that you was a better soldier than anybody else there.

00:12:45

Chávez:

I went to Mexico when I was just a kid. I was going to grammar school, Peres School, and I remember that we had a stop in Texas, El Paso, and then wait--my father worked for the railroad, so they give you a pass--passage for the whole family--but you had to be there ten years before you could be eligible.

00:13:08

Durán:

See, back home, there wasn't anything like that.

00:13:10

Washburn:

What were you going to say about Texas?

00:13:13

Chávez:

So then what happened was that you had a sign in the toilet, and I went in there, and when I got out, everybody kept looking at me because what it said was, “No blacks or Mexicans.” I didn’t give a shit because when you gotta pee you gotta pee. [laughs]

00:13:28

Durán:

That’s right. One time I went to CC camps—

00:13:36

Chávez:

You went to CC camps too. So was my brother.

00:13:38

Durán:

I was at CC camps at Estes Park in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, north of Denver. This kid and I decided to go in to Denver, so we started hitchhiking, and we stopped in Longmont. That’s where I was born, Longmont, Colorado. We went to this restaurant and we had dinner. So we rented a room, and next morning we got up and went to have breakfast. We walked in there and the waitress said, “Sorry, we can’t serve you.” We say, “Why?” “Cause you’re Mexicans.” I said, “You served us last time. What do you mean ‘Mexican’? We were born and raised here. I was born here in this town.” Then she called the manager. I told the manager, “You know something, I was born in Longmont, but if that’s the way you treat people, I condemn this damn place.” They served us. But there were a lot of things. In northern Colorado especially because we were from southwestern Colorado. That’s where all the Hispanics are from.

00:14:53

Chávez:

You’ve got a big sheep ranch. How many sheep?

00:14:56

Durán:

My stepdad’s brother had ten thousand head. So, when I was a kid, I spend most of my time in the mountains during, after shearing time.

00:15:09

Washburn:

What kind of sheep?

00:15:11

Durán:

Regular. Rambouillet. Mixture—rambouillet and the regular sheep.

00:15:16

Washburn:

It’s interesting that you guys say that. From what you’re saying, there was a lot more racism in Texas and Colorado.

00:15:27

Durán:

Oh, yeah. You bet there is! You know the reason why? Because all them people are fighting the Alamo yet.

00:15:33

Washburn:

You mean they're still fighting it. They're still bitter.

00:15:36

Chávez:

[laughs] Are they?

00:15:38

Durán:

Sure, that's the whole thing there. That's why the Mexicans—

00:15:42

Washburn:

It's deep in the—

00:15:44

Durán:

Well, they were raised to hate Mexicans like that. Especially the old-timers. You know, what they—

00:15:53

Washburn:

So how would you compare those times in Texas, to what it was like in Richmond? What was the discrimination like in Richmond?

00:16:05

Durán:

I didn't—I haven't—had no discrimination.

00:16:11

Chávez:

We didn't have no discrimination. But, you know, even though you didn't have any, but you stuck to yourselves.

00:16:14

Durán:

Oh, yeah, we stuck to ourselves. Especially in the post office. You mix with people, you know.

00:16:17

Washburn:

You did mix?

00:16:21

Chávez:

That was in the later years.

00:16:24

Durán:

In later years.

00:16:25

Washburn:

Yeah, I'm talking about in the forties and fifties and stuff like that. So you're saying in Richmond you never saw those kind of signs, like "No Mexicans in here," "No blacks in here" and stuff like that?

00:16:42

Chávez:

A lot of guys said that they were over in Georgia and in the line that says "No dogs or Mexicans."

00:16:53

Washburn:

It's kind of a simple question, but why do you think it was different here in Richmond here than in Texas? I mean, they were raised to hate people in Texas, like you said, but why don't you think there was any of that stuff. There was more discrimination—

00:17:07

Durán:

I don't know. There was less discrimination here, I think, than in Texas. But a lot of places, like Colorado, the discrimination is mostly northern Colorado. Not in southwestern Colorado where all the Hispanics and people were there. Cause most of these people, their ancestors migrated from Florida down the peninsula, like— Remember, the guy that was looking for the seven cities of Cibola. Migrated from Florida over there to—. Fact is, they were Spanish, Portuguese, and everything. Where I come from, I think, most of the—because my mother was half-Portuguese, half-Spanish. So most of the people, like from where we're from, I think, were mostly Portuguese. Because we don't—like me, "Do you have any relatives in Mexico?" "No." Not that I know of.

00:18:04

Chávez:

My relatives are all dead. On my father's side, they're all dead. My mother's are all dead. I went to Mexico three or four times when I was growing up. My brother-in-law's family. I went there three or four times so they got to know me, so that if his parents already gone—. But, the kids, they knew me.

00:18:31

Durán:

Sure. Like, I dunno. I was at the Melody Bar one time, when I got out of the post office, some guy was saying about Mexicans, you know. I says, "Hey, what nationality are you?" "Oh, I'm Scotch." I said, "Well you're a mexican. That's what 'mexico' means—'mixed blood.' You're a mexican." "No, I'm not." "Yes you are. You're mixed blood. What do you think 'mexico' means? "Mesclado" All right? 'Mexico' means 'mixed blood.' [chuckles] I tell him about it. Gave him a history of Mexico, the little bit I know.

00:19:13

Washburn:

So there wasn't the kind of outright, the signs that you saw in Texas—

00:19:16

Durán:

Oh, no, no.

00:19:23

Washburn:

—but still people like Standard Oil wouldn't hire Mexicans, though.

00:19:25

Chávez:

No.

00:19:27

Durán:

Underneath. Very quiet-like, you know.

00:19:30

Washburn:

What?

00:19:32

Durán:

Like they smile at you and underneath they—

00:19:33

Washburn:

But in Texas they won't even smile?

00:19:34

Durán:

They don't even smile. They just come out with it: there are no dogs or soldiers allowed.

00:19:38

Chávez:

Soldiers? You say, "I'm fighting for your country."

00:19:40

Durán:

Mexicans. No Mexicans or dogs allowed.

00:19:43

Chávez:

Then after, now, they don't give a shit, huh.

00:19:44

Durán:

After the war broke out, man, we were the most popular people in Texas and all over the place. Soldiers. Look at the 36th Infantry Division. All the Mexican people got most of the valor medals. Silver Star. That's the big one. Medal of Honor. The 36th Infantry Division and the 45th

Infantry Division were all Texans and Okies. Oklahoma and Colorado and all them places. Another example is the 445th Regimental Combat Team. You don't know what that is.

00:20:30

Washburn:

No, I don't know.

00:20:31

Durán:

That's Japanese.

00:20:34

Washburn:

Oh, four-four-two. Yeah, I know about them. Served in Italy, right?

00:20:38

Durán:

What did they do? They served in Italy. Tops.

00:20:41

Washburn:

They came out and saved some whole infantry by doing some real brave acts.

00:20:48

Durán:

Sure, what did they do here? Some of them kids joined the army from the encampment. That's the one thing—

00:21:02

Chávez:

They took them out of the camp.

00:21:04

Durán:

Yeah, they joined.

00:21:06

Washburn:

That was wrong.

00:21:08

Durán:

That was wrong, very wrong.

00:21:11

Chávez:

They shouldn't have taken them, huh.

00:21:13

Durán:

Do you know why they took them? The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, they call it the “Purple Heart Team.” That was the most decorated regimental combat team in the army. And they’re all Japanese.

00:21:33

Washburn:

They were real brave.

00:21:36

Durán:

Sure, they exhausted the people. And [Daniel] Inouye is a senator from Hawaii. A lot of guys from Hawaii that are senators now. Look at another thing. Look at the Apaches. Arizona and all them guys. In the South Pacific. You know what they did?

00:21:55

Washburn:

There’s a movie about this, right?

00:22:01

Durán:

They had their code. That’s why the Japanese and people didn’t understand the American code. Private code. The Apaches were using their own language. They didn’t know what the hell was going on. You read the thing about that?

00:22:15

Washburn:

I’ve heard about that. Actually, there’s a movie that just came out about that. I thought it was the Navajo.

00:22:18

Durán:

“Whispering Sands.” They’re Indians, that’s right. Southwest Indians.

00:22:22

Washburn:

Southwest Indians, yeah. That’s interesting. But why do you think, I mean, Standard Oil started hiring Mexicans during the war, but what changed after the war?

00:22:35

Chávez:

Well, they just kept on hiring.

00:22:39

Washburn:

So that’s when it started.

00:22:42

Chávez:

They kept on hiring everybody. That’s it.

00:22:45

Durán:

They were short, too.

00:22:46

Washburn:

They were short.

00:22:47

Chávez:

We did a lot of hiring at Santa Fe. A lot of hiring. They wouldn't let nobody—. They even brought those Indians, from where? Remember they had that old Santa Fe camp?

00:23:01

Washburn:

New Mexico.

[everyone talks over each other]

00:23:06

Chávez:

They had God Darn hair in a bun. You know how they usually have it. I thought, “Jeez, what’s that?” They all lived in the Santa Fe camp.

00:23:13

Durán:

I think those were a bunch of—. They were different Indians, maybe Hopi Indians.

00:23:19

Washburn:

I actually read something about it, Laguna Pueblo.

00:23:21

Chávez:

They lived across the tracks. Old {Chiteewa?} was a good friend of mine.

00:23:31

Washburn:

An Indian guy or gal? Was it a guy?

00:23:41

Chávez:

It was a girl.

00:23:43

Washburn:

That’s nice.

00:23:44

Chávez:

Jesus Christ, man. They had the Indian camp. You should have seen when they had their parades in Richmond. Man, they got on all their war robes, and man they could—. Especially, one of them

was a chief. Man, he'd do the Indian war dance up and down the avenue. Man! The guys would say, "Slow down." He was getting too—

00:24:05

Washburn:

Too animated or too excited?

00:24:07

Chávez:

He was real fit, boy.

00:24:09

Durán:

In Colorado the Indian was Comanches. Prairie Indians. That's it.

00:24:19

Washburn:

What parade was that you're talking about?

00:24:23

Chávez:

They had their parades, a long time ago. They had the memorial parade, Fourth of July, all that kind of thing.

00:24:29

Washburn:

Those Indians would participate?

00:24:31

Chávez:

They all used to go out there and they'd participate. They came out there, especially that chief.

00:24:37

Durán:

They still do.

00:24:39

Chávez:

He had on the God-darned feathers. But he got carried away and then I guess he thought he was ready to go on the warpath. [laughs] I guess he got carried away, you know.

00:24:52

Washburn:

So did any of the Mexican folks participate in the parade too?

00:24:56

Chávez:

Yeah, they were in the parade. I used to be one of them who used to be in the parade. I had a beautiful horse. I owned two horses in my life, and they were both stallions. I used to love stallions. I used to love to ride horses. Both my horses were top of the line. They used to pick up their legs and, I mean—. Studs, you know what I mean, you could see the big balls hanging on them.

00:25:18

Washburn:

And you used to ride that in the parade?

00:25:22

Chávez:

Oh, yeah, I used to ride them in the parade. I used to hear, “Don’t get that stallion close to me.” I said, “He ain’t gonna do nothing to you.” They’d be afraid of the stallion. He’d be so proud, big old eyes.

00:25:36

Washburn:

So why would they have you ride the horse in the parade rather than somebody else?

00:25:38

Chávez:

Because I asked if I could ride. I asked if I could ride, and they said, “Sure, come on!” But that’s lately, here. It wasn’t like before. You know, before, you had a lot of the American Legion or—. That’s all you saw, Mexican guys in the American Legion.

00:25:58

Washburn:

So when are you talking about when you used to ride the horse?

00:26:00

Chávez:

Oh, that was so long ago. Ned? Twenty years ago or more?

00:26:03

Washburn:

Seventies and eighties and such?

00:26:06

Durán:

Seventies.

00:26:08

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Used to go out there with a charro, and all that.

00:26:14

Durán:

Dress up like a Mexican charro—

00:26:15

Chávez:

I have over 300 trophies that I won.

00:26:16

Durán:

—in a big old hat.

00:26:18

Chávez:

I used to compete over there in Half Moon Bay, Redwood City. I bring my horse way out there.

00:26:30

Washburn:

Compete at doing what? High step? My mom has some horses, so I know those—

00:26:33

Chávez:

They had classes. And you went to the class and the horse, you know. Parade class. Ninety-one. I didn't want to be in a group. If I got the trophy, I wanted it for me.

00:26:47

Durán:

In the First Cavalry Division during peacetime, they used to have horse shows. Equestrian riding. And I won a regimental— I used to ride horses when I was seven years old. Used to ride them bareback, you know. I won a regimental ribbon, and then I went to division, and I won a division ribbon. I've got them at the house. I had third prize. First prize was red—

00:27:23

Chávez:

Blue.

00:27:25

Durán:

I mean blue. And second prize, red. White was the third prize one. The judges were looking at me like that, see, and I had my horse going on around the circle. And all of a sudden, I saw him and I started trotting and that put me out. Used to ride bareback. I broke horses in remounts.

00:27:42

Chávez:

In the course, you used to have to have a lot of remounts. They come from—

00:27:44

Durán:

Nineteen forty, nineteen forty-one. From Reno they used to ride them a little bit.

00:27:51

Chávez:

We used to have them in a corral. They were delivered from New Mexico, and they were—. You know, we used to jump on them Indian style and sometimes they started bucking. Sometimes you'd run and get with the rest of the horses.

00:28:04

Washburn:

I understand why he rode horses, because he grew up on kind of a ranch in Colorado, but why did you ride horses if you grew up here?

00:28:20

Chávez:

There used to be a guy—a Mexican—{Nica Norvega} and he had two work horses and then he had cows. He had them out in the old—where they had that paint shop over there in North Richmond. He had them way out there, in the fields. I used to go out there and help him. They used to have a regular {more} with the horses. I used to go with him and help him. So what he used to do after he come back from, you know, when he came back from where we were at to the barn, he'd let me ride the horse with a harness and all that while he was pulling the thing. So when I got out there he says, "Fine, take the harness off. And just the bridle. And bareback."

00:29:11

Durán:

That's right. I used to ride bareback.

00:29:13

Washburn:

So how old were you when you started riding?

00:29:15

Chávez:

I was just a kid. Just a kid.

00:29:17

Durán:

I was seven years old.

00:29:18

Washburn:

So you were riding horses from seven?

00:29:23

Chávez:

I was even riding one in the service. I was in the coast guard mounted patrol. I rode horses for about three or four years. No, three years.

00:29:33

Durán:

Yeah, when the war broke out, the First Cavalry Division was border patrol in Mexico. We were right in Columbus, New Mexico.

00:29:41

Washburn:

When the First World War broke out?

00:29:46

Durán:

Second.

00:29:49

Chávez:

I used to ride on the beach. Sometimes some of the girls, "Can I ride the horse?" I said, "I can't let you ride," but I'd put her on the back, on the rump of the horse.

00:30:03

Washburn:

So, Sal, when did you buy your first horse, then?

00:30:06

Chávez:

I bought my first horse when I was just married. Fifty-some odd years ago.

00:30:10

Washburn:

So in the late forties, huh?

00:30:12

Chávez:

I bought that horse. I used to feed it myself, and then I bought—. I used to feed it myself. Used to buy the hay and all that, then I got to know this guy—he's a rancher, Tony {Forium?}. I used to go out and feed his cows and all that kind of stuff. When I ran out of hay, I used to take a cord of bales. But I used to help them every day, every day. So my horse had plenty of alfalfa. And then, when he broke his neck, he was twenty-some odd years old. He broke his neck. He still stood. I had him out here. He was out here and the end of the {__} road. What happened was, he tried to jump a fence, or something, he broke his neck. He was killed. I was without a horse for a long time, then I bought another one, and I had him till he was fifteen, and then I sold him. I still got my tack, I still got my saddle. Good bridles. Good bits. I also have a nice Mexican saddle, which I'm going to donate to the museum. [laughs]

00:31:15

Washburn:

What museum?

00:31:19

Chávez:

I was just kidding!

00:31:22

Washburn:

[laughs] That's all right. When you first got here, did you look to find some horses to ride when you first got here? No?

00:31:30

Durán:

I couldn't ride any more because I had a brace on my leg, you see. I enjoyed them. I enjoyed the cavalry. Because in 1942, they took our horses off, away from us, and they sent us 1,000. They transferred a thousand of us cavalymen to activate the 91st Infantry Division in Medford, Oregon. I was one of them. After I was breaking horses, they made a corporal out of me, you know. I was corporal and I jumped to staff sergeant. So we were in the 91st Division, that's where I hurt my—I tore my ligaments. My leg went over the wall on the obstacle course. I still went overseas. I went to North Africa, and all around Africa. That's where I got hurt again. Then from there they sent me back to the States and they told me, "You'll catch up with your outfit in Adriatic Coast of Italy, eastern Italy." They sent me out there. They sent me to Fitzsimmons, not

Fitzsimmons, but Brigham City, Utah hospital. From there I got a transfer to Fitzsimmons. Home town.

00:33:05

Chávez:

Where's that? In Washington.

00:33:06

Washburn:

No, that's in Colorado, huh?

00:33:08

Durán:

Fitzsimmons? Denver. Brigham City was in Utah. So they told me, "Sign here." By that time, I was already a platoon sergeant. I was already Sergeant First Class. They used to call them technical soldiers. I didn't want to get out. I wanted to make it my army. I'm glad I didn't, in a way, stay twenty years.

00:33:41

Washburn:

Glad you didn't?

00:33:48

Durán:

Anyway, so I kind of told them there once. "Sign here." I said, "What's that?" "Your discharge papers, and this is your 30 percent disability." "Okay." So ever since then, I had—

00:34:00

Chávez:

You got disability, 30 percent?

00:34:01

Durán:

Yeah, first. Right off the bat. I was only drawing sixty dollars a month then. And they gave me that brace, and I still had—. I had some operations on my knee here in Oakland, where I met him, at the VA [Veterans Administration] Hospital. That's where I had more operations, there.

00:34:24

Chávez:

Yeah, I saw him all the time. You and that blonde. Who was that girl used to have—?

00:34:29

Durán:

And then I was doing the post office and I was carrying mail, and I got hurt again. Cartilage got out of it again.

00:34:45

Washburn:

I've got a problem with my knee too. You get a re-occurring problem.

00:34:50

Durán:

So anyway, I had about nine operations on it. The postmaster told me the doctor at the Fitzsimmons hospital, at the VA hospital, told him, "He can't carry mail any more, it's too much on the knee." "Well, all right. Write a letter to the postmaster and tell him to change me to clerking inside." So he did. I was a clerk at Richmond, then I went to El Cerrito, and I worked at the El Cerrito post office, window clerk. Fairmont, that's where I retired.

00:35:36

Washburn:

So you guys met in a VA hospital?

00:35:37

Durán:

Yeah.

00:35:38

Washburn:

In Oakland?

00:35:40

Durán:

In Oakland.

00:35:42

Washburn:

That's where the big one was?

00:35:43

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Kind of hard.

00:35:45

Durán:

He had a beard like, you know, Barabas. Have you seen Barabas. A beard like that.

00:35:44

Washburn:

I could tell. He seems like he can grow facial hair pretty well. Sal, what were you doing in the hospital?

00:36:00

Chávez:

Kidney.

00:36:00

Washburn:

You had kidney problems? Hmm. So you guys stayed in contact after being in hospital.

00:36:09

Durán:

We stayed in contact after that, all the time.

00:36:13

Chávez:

When I was there, remember that time they came in there for over a year because they wanted to make sure that whatever I had wasn't going to go to the kidney. Eighteen months.

00:36:24

Durán:

I met you the first time I went up there. When I went the second time, you were still there. I said, "What are you doing here? Still here." And the third time, there he was again.

00:36:34

Chávez:

But, you know, I'd get a pass every weekend. But then you know my paycheck went up to 100 percent straight away. And do you know what 100 percent was at that time? A hundred and thirty-eight bucks.

00:36:45

Washburn:

That's a lot of money then.

00:36:47

Durán:

I tried to get more than 100 percent. They gave me 40 percent. In 1989 I finally had to have an artificial knee put in. So I have an artificial knee. Then, ten years later, they had to do it again because a cushion in there wore out. So I had to go through it again.

00:37:13

Washburn:

When you lived in Richmond where did you live?

00:37:20

Durán:

I lived right off San Pablo Avenue, called Huber Avenue.

00:37:32

Washburn:

Did you ever know Polly Russell and MaryLou—no, MaryLou and Polly? There were some sisters; they lived on Hubert too. I met some gals—she's a Mexican-American woman from New Mexico. She married a guy name Russell. But I don't know, what was her original—? Maybe it was Diaz.

00:37:57

Durán:

Yeah, we lived at 52nd Huber Avenue, 5200.

00:38:05

Washburn:

So, you lived in government housing?

00:38:06

Durán:

Yeah, that's all there was there. Fact is, on Cutting Boulevard, right there where that station is at now, there was a grocery store there. Lucky's grocery store.

00:38:20

Washburn:

I passed by it, yeah. So, how did you find housing there?

00:38:25

Durán:

Well, I met my wife there. She used to live there with her cousins. I came and stayed with my brother, and my brother lived in 4900 Cutting Boulevard. He was working in the shipyards.

00:38:45

Washburn:

Okay, so you came first to live with your brother?

00:38:47

Durán:

And I came first to live with brother. Then, in the CC camps, when we were young, I met a kid from Alamosa, Colorado, and I met him at the bar, Luiz Club, you know.

00:38:59

Washburn:

At Luiz Club? Where was that?

00:39:01

Durán:

Right there, where Target is at. Right around there. Anyway, so I met my wife through him.

00:39:16

Washburn:

And then moved into her house?

00:39:19

Durán:

I went around. I didn't care I wasn't married, anyway. But I saw her, and I liked her. So I told her, "Well, this friend of mine and I went to see the priest, so you better come-." She was Catholic and I'm not, see. She went up there, and I told her, "Well, we already saw the priest going to marry us." She's being alone. We've been married 57 years. But damn priest, do you know what he said? "Being that you're Protestant, and she's Catholic, your marriage is not going to last a long time." But the other priest said, "Send you back to Mexico where you belong."

00:40:07

Washburn:

He said that to you?

00:40:08

Durán:

Irishman.

00:40:10

Washburn:

The Irish guy said you should go back to Mexico?

00:40:11

Durán:

Yeah. His name was McCarthy, Father McCarthy. From El Cerrito. Saint John's.

00:40:16

Washburn:

Where did you guys get married?

00:40:18

Durán:

Saint John's, right there. I says, "What you want to marry for me?" I said, "I want to marry right here in your study, that's all. I don't want no church wedding." Because you had to take lessons and all that, marriage lessons. I wanted to marry her, so I said might as well take anything. You know what he told us? "Better send you back to Mexico, where you belong." "Well," I said, "I'm more American than you ever will be." And then my friend told him, "Hey, he just discharged from the army. What do you think?" So, anyway he wanted to just beat him up.

00:41:10

Washburn:

But he's a priest.

00:41:13

Durán:

Yeah. He wanted to beat the hell out of us. So, anyway, we got married and he said, "Well, your marriage is not going to last." I says, "Okay." Fifty-seven years we've been married.

00:41:27

Washburn:

Did you ever go to church in Richmond?

00:41:30

Durán:

Yeah.

00:41:31

Washburn:

Where did you go?

00:41:33

Durán:

We used to go to that little Perspiration church that used to be on Cutting. Where was it? At Stockton? I think Episcopalian or Methodist. We used to Methodist Church most of the time. She used to go with me, and I used to go with her, you know.

00:41:54

Washburn:

Where did she go?

00:41:56

Durán:

She went to Saint John's. Catholic.

00:42:00

Washburn:

Your brother came out here from Colorado too? How did he manage to make his way out here?

00:42:11

Durán:

My brother in my home town, he was a county assessor. And my other brother was a policeman. And they both came over here after they--wait, let's see, my brother wasn't county assessor. After he left here, he went as county assessor. My oldest brother. And my younger brother, he was here, and he was a guard in Yard Three.

00:42:44

Washburn:

Security guard?

00:42:47

Durán:

Yeah. So, when they went back home, my older brother got into politics and got to county assessor, and my other brother, he was a policeman in my home town. That was it.

00:42:58

Washburn:

But how did your brother make his way out here to work in the shipyards?

00:43:03

Durán:

Worked in the shipyards. I was in the army, so I don't know. They were here, when I got out, already. They just migrated over here, I guess, because of the jobs. My brothers, they worked in the mine up there. My hometown's in mining country. Coal mining. They worked in the coal mine. They both did. They even got that black lung. You've heard of that?

00:43:30

Washburn:

Oh yeah.

00:43:33

Durán:

He got that.

00:43:34

Washburn:

He was sick for a while?

00:43:36

Durán:

Yeah. And he lived to be 92 years old.

00:43:39

Washburn:

You've got some strong genes in your family. A hundred and four. And ninety-something.

00:43:43

Durán:

Oh, we have. On my mother's side. On my father's side, he was 47 when he passed away.

00:43:46

Washburn:

Your brother came out here to work in the shipyards.

00:43:53

Durán:

Yeah, he worked in the shipyards.

00:43:54

Washburn:

In what year, do you remember, when he came out here?

00:44:00

Durán:

Nineteen forty-four, I think. Forty-three or forty-four.

00:44:02

Washburn:

I was talking to Sal. Sal worked in the shipyards, but only for couple of months. I was trying to figure out if-. I mean, I know the shipyards were so big and there were so many, so many-

00:44:16

Durán:

There were three shipyards, weren't there?

00:44:17

Washburn:

Four, by the end. And there were so many employees there, but I was trying to figure out whether- I mean, you met Sal at the VA hospital, but if you were at the shipyards, would people be speaking Spanish? Would you hear Spanish being spoken?

00:44:38

Durán:

We'd speak Spanish and English, naturally.

00:44:41

Washburn:

In the shipyards?

00:44:42

Durán:

Yeah. See, our Spanish back home is way different from the Spanish-. Fact is, I even took it in high school. I took Castillian Spanish. Because our Spanish is not like Mexican Spanish. Castillian Spanish was always, what do you call it, slang. Cause we used a lot of English words

in our Spanish. Like we say, “the bus” - we say “el bus”. Like we say, “the track”, “el tracque”, or the train, “el train”. We didn’t understand what it was. Ferrocarril and all that. Automovile. Carro, we used to call them. And trucks we used to call truck.

00:45:37

Washburn:

They do that still today, though. That’s common here now too. People say truque instead of truck. They don’t have a word in Spanish. Do you guys ever remember meeting other Mexican folks at the shipyards.

00:45:53

Durán:

Oh, yeah, sure. Used to be a lot of them there. From New Mexico. See, New Mexico and Colorado, they’re so close together they’re about the same. Same, what do you say—?

00:46:13

Washburn:

Culture? Same kind of culture?

00:46:16

Durán:

Yeah! That’s it. Culture. You see the culture’s the same.

00:46:22

Washburn:

Sal, you told me once that you remember when Frank González came out here for the first time.

00:46:27

Chávez:

Oh yeah.

00:46:30

Washburn:

Where did you meet him for the first time?

00:46:34

Chávez:

It was a large family. They came from—. I don’t know where the hell they came from.

00:46:38

Washburn:

He said Arizona.

00:46:43

Chávez:

He came down here. He had a brother was a minister.

00:46:45

Washburn:

For the Mexican Baptist Church, right?

00:46:47

Durán:

Yeah, that's right.

00:46:48

Chávez:

I knew him, but he always was-. Matter of fact, I remember when he first opened up his restaurant-

00:46:56

Durán:

That's on Tenth Street.

00:47:00

Chávez:

-he wanted me to go and work, washing dishes. I said, "Bullshit. I've got a barber's chair. I don't want to be washing-. I'm not a {_____?} guy.

00:47:09

Durán:

He used to have a little, like one of those Pullman cars, in it. That's what he opened his Mexican place right there on Tenth Street.

00:47:19

Washburn:

Yeah, he told me about that. So where did you meet him for the first time, Sal?

00:47:23

Chávez:

I met him at-. Where the hell did I meet him? I don't remember. Like I said, he had that store that he had. There used to be a hospital there a long time ago, on Bird Avenue, where we have what it was at. He wanted me to go out there and wash dishes. I said, "No thank you." He said, "We'll teach you how to cook." And I said, "Uh-uh. I'm a barber." He got that place.

00:48:00

Washburn:

That's one of the questions I had for you, Sal. You kind of have a unique kind of past because you've been living here this whole time. And all these people moved here and the town grew from small town to a city. What was it like for you to see all these people come into your town - like Frank González, and like Mr. Durán.

00:48:26

Chávez:

Well, I mean, you know, you didn't think nothing of it because they moved into town and you got to be friends. But, I mean, there was never any grudges because they were here. It was: "Oh, we're the new neighbor." "Oh, hi, how are you." That was it.

00:48:39

Washburn:

Mm-hmm. It was real friendly.

00:48:41

Durán:

I followed him—. When I knew he was a barber, I've been following him all over hell just to get a haircut.

00:48:51

Washburn:

Just to get yourself a haircut?

00:48:53

Durán:

We're very good friends, him and I.

00:48:56

Washburn:

That's nice.

00:48:58

Chávez:

We've known each other for years now.

00:49:01

Durán:

Ever since hospital days.

00:49:03

Washburn:

So for you—. You came here in—

00:49:09

Durán:

'45.

00:49:09

Washburn:

You lived in '45. I remember asking Polly Russell what it was like to live out there on Hubert, and she says that—

00:49:17

Durán:

It was a nice neighborhood.

00:49:19

Washburn:

It was a nice neighborhood, but there weren't many Mexican folks who lived out that way.

00:49:22

Durán:

Oh yeah. No, there weren't. I agree with you. There weren't. We used to have friends that I made there, neighbors, you know. Cash.

00:49:35

Washburn:

Cashes, like Johnny Cash.

00:49:41

Durán:

Like Johnny Cash, yeah. And I used to have Sisks.

00:49:48

Washburn:

But when you guys were friends, did you ever go down to Barrett Avenue and go visit him down there?

00:49:55

Durán:

When he was in Barrett?

00:49:57

Washburn:

Yeah.

00:49:58

Durán:

At the barbershop? No.

00:50:01

Chávez:

Definitely you'd always see him at the barbershop.

00:50:04

Durán:

I knew where he lived though. Your sister. I used to go down the barbershop.

00:50:12

Washburn:

What I'm trying to understand is how much people went back and forth across town. And how much would you go over to Frank González's restaurant or something like that.

00:50:20

Durán:

I went there because I knew Frank González real good, and the minister. I knew them all. Fact is, you used to go to González restaurant, George Miller, the senator. The old man.

00:50:36

Washburn:

George who?

00:50:37

Durán:

Miller. He was a senator and he used to see my girls and he used to give them money and give them candy, you know, buy them candy. George Miller, the old man.

00:50:52

Washburn:

So he used to go over there to Frank González's restaurant?

00:50:54

Durán:

Yeah, he used to go down there. This one here goes down there too, I think. I don't know. I get a Christmas card from George Miller every year.

00:51:03

Washburn:

Oh, you do?

00:51:05

Durán:

Mm-hmm. I knew him pretty good. Another guy I knew too, that I've got a picture of him. Senator Nejedly. I've got a picture of him, cause we were in the {__} and we took a picture. {Nella Bianco} introduced me to him.

00:51:23

Washburn:

Sounds like you know some neat people.

00:51:27

Durán:

First time I went to the hospital, Nello came up and told him, and then I got a card from Washington DC from Nejedly. "Ned, hope you get better." Stuff like that.

00:51:42

Washburn:

So, do you remember-. Franklin's always said he was a leaderman, a foreman at the shipyards before he opened the-.

00:51:51

Durán:

I don't remember him. I was in the outfitting dock. I was in the boilermaking.

00:52:01

Chávez:

It was a large family.

00:52:05

Washburn:

What, the Gonzálezes?

00:52:07

Durán:

Oh yeah. Fact is, one of his sons is a principal in the school right there. Chávez? Yeah, his name is González.

00:52:17

Chávez:

He had a sister that went in the airforce, huh.

00:52:22

Washburn:

Oh really? Who? Rose?

00:52:24

Chávez:

I dunno.

00:52:25

Washburn:

I know Rose. I know Evelyn.

00:52:27

Durán:

The one that worked at the--what's the name of that restaurant out there? She used to work there. On San Pablo, by Lucky's. What was the name of that restaurant? That Mexican restaurant at San Pablo. Right across from Safeway. Remember the name of it? She used to work there. His sister.

00:52:55

Washburn:

It wasn't González's restaurant?

00:52:57

Durán:

No. What was the name of it.

00:53:01

Chávez:

Oh, I know what you're talking about. It served both American and Mexican food. It was right on the corner. What the hell was the name of it? You can't miss it, it's by Safeway. What the hell. I got the name--The owner of the place is Portuguese.

00:53:17

Washburn:

Think of something else and it will come back to you. That's how memory works.

00:53:19

Durán:

I think her name was Rosa, used to work there.

00:53:32

Washburn:

I know a Rose that's in that family. She worked in the shipyards too for a while. But, you know, it's interesting. I've talked to Frank a little bit, but not as much as I like, and he said he used to work as a leaderman. He said he worked in the shipyards from '43 so he was there quite a while. But, do you ever remember what it was like to work there and get promotions and stuff like that? I guess him working there for a while helped him out.

00:54:11

Durán:

I'll tell you one thing. There were a lot of people. Fact is, Kaiser wasn't, what you call it? Used to promote people regardless of nationality.

00:54:27

Washburn:

He didn't discriminate?

00:54:28

Durán:

He wasn't discriminating. He had no bias against anything. They used to have leadermen blacks. All mixed, right there. He didn't care. He had the people working, and—let's face it—he done a good job. I think he's the one that had a lot to do with Richmond being what it is now, very liberal. As far as discrimination is concerned.

00:55:02

Washburn:

That's interesting. You say that because he promoted a lot of people?

00:55:09

Durán:

That's right. See, a lot of these companies, they didn't promote minorities like that for a big job. You know. Just the big one, that's all, see. Regardless if they knew what they were doing or not. That's true.

00:55:34

Washburn:

I've read, though, that the black leadermen were only allowed to be leadermen for a black crew.

00:55:37

Durán:

Oh no, no, no.

00:55:42

Washburn:

That's not true? So tell me, who was your leaderman?

00:55:45

Durán:

My leaderman was a Portuguese guy. I had one that was the boss—. Gee, it's such a long time ago. He was pretty good too. The foreman, you know. Cause the leaderman was something like an NCO [non-commissioned officer] in the army. The captain was commander, then you had the second in command was the NCO, let's face it. That's what the leaderman was.

00:56:28

Washburn:

The foreman was below the leaderman?

00:56:30

Durán:

No, he was above the leaderman.

00:56:35

Washburn:

Oh, the foreman was above the leaderman, yes. Well, it seems different about Frank González is—. Like, when I go over to his house now, we still speak Spanish together. He doesn't want to—

00:56:45

Chávez:

He speaks in Spanish

00:56:46

Durán:

Oh, yeah?

00:56:48

Washburn:

Yeah, he doesn't want to speak English. He can, but he just feels more comfortable speaking Spanish.

00:56:52

Durán:

I imagine so, yeah.

00:56:53

Washburn:

But that seems kind of strange. That they promoted him to a leaderman, even though his English wasn't so good.

00:57:01

Durán:

That's it, see. He was taking care of the Spanish-speaking people, I guess. Sal? They appointed him as a leaderman because he talked to the people who didn't know how to speak English? I remember, see. But I tell you, Richmond has a very historical {__} after World War Second. To me.

00:57:33

Washburn:

A historical what?

00:57:35

Durán:

History.

00:57:36

Chávez:

It was just a little town, a quiet little town—.

00:57:38

Durán:

Then all of a sudden, it became a metropolis now. Let's face it. All these people that came from—

00:57:44

Chávez:

Oklahoma.

00:57:46

Durán:

Oklahoma and all that.

00:57:48

Chávez:

Arkansas.

00:57:50

Durán:

All of them. That's what makes a good country, you know. Mixed. Come on, let's face it.

00:57:59

Washburn:

Why do you think that makes a good country?

00:58:00

Durán:

Because they know each other, they learn their ways, you know. The ways of living from different nationalities.

00:58:13

Washburn:

Traditions.

00:58:15

Durán:

Different traditions, see. That's what makes the United States the strongest, to tell you the truth. That's what makes it strong. Different traditions, different views, like that, you know. Different people, they come from other cities or other states, and you learn their ways of living, and they learn our ways--the way of living in the West, in the South, and all over. North. That's what makes it such a boiling point in this country.

00:58:57

Washburn:

Boiling pot, yeah. A unique spot.

00:58:58

Durán:

Yes. I don't understand-. Oh, there's a lot of dissension or something, but what the heck. You always find that.

00:59:05

Washburn:

But some people say about Richmond's history--I've read this in some books--that they think Richmond kind of went downhill after the war.

00:59:20

Durán:

A lot of people say that.

00:59:25

Washburn:

They kind of sum it up that a bunch of black people moved into Richmond and it kind of got ruined.

00:59:29

Durán:

That's what they say, sure.

00:59:31

Washburn:

What do you guys think about that?

00:59:33

Durán:

I don't know. I wasn't here then. I've been here since they were all here. I worked with some black people There's a couple I worked for in the post office. And I know of some people that they treated me damn good. Policemen, black policemen, treated me good. It all depends how you treat yourself among people, I guess. Like El Cerrito; I know a lot of people in El Cerrito that I always meet them and they talk to me real nice. They thought that I was postmaster up there one time. Take care of them, you know. But still, if you get along with people, you're going to have friends. Which I do. I have friends, blacks, Italians, you know, different. El Cerrito, I've got a bunch of friends there. I know the chief of police in El Cerrito when he was just a cop.

01:00:29

Washburn:

You know a lot of people. What do you think about that, Sal? You heard that too? That people talk that way, that Richmond kinda went downhill after the war because all these people came in and they didn't contribute to the town, or they kinda brought it downhill.

01:00:46

Chávez:

To tell you the truth, I didn't pay any attention. I didn't pay any attention. Just kept on living.

01:00:55

Washburn:

That's good.

01:00:56

Durán:

Just like I said, see. When I was here the city council was mostly people that worked or retired from Standard Oil, see.

01:01:08

Washburn:

So they were set in their ways, kinda, huh?

01:01:12

Durán:

Sure they were set. They used to say Standard Oil was running Richmond.

01:01:17

Chávez:

They wouldn't hire anybody. But soon as the war broke out, man! They even took guys that worked in the Sante Fe camp. They worked in the section houses. They couldn't work in the section, they went to work in the Standard Oil, they started to make good money, so they didn't go back.

01:01:35

Durán:

Yeah, but they treated them in Standard Oil to do the manual work. Laborers.

01:01:43

Washburn:

That's the thing. As pipefitters, right? Doing pipefitting and stuff like that.

01:01:47

Durán:

No, regular laborers.

01:01:50

Chávez:

They were putting tracks in the refinery to bring trains, boxcars and everything. So they hired all them guys.

01:02:00

Durán:

The Mexicans.

01:02:02

Washburn:

So they didn't contract Santa Fe? They did it themselves?

01:02:08

Chávez:

If you get the trains or something, pull them out of the refinery, or whatever, you know.

01:02:21

Washburn:

Standard Oil started hiring Mexicans during the war because they needed them, not because they wanted to change their ways. But because they needed them.

01:02:29

Durán:

There you go. You're right.

01:02:32

Chávez:

They had no choice. Either hire or whatever.

01:02:40

Washburn:

So, why didn't they go back to their old hiring ways after the war? When all the soldiers came back and there were more people to work the jobs?

01:02:47

Durán:

Too many people. I think too many people. Too many voters all got politics, I guess.

01:02:55

Washburn:

Political?

01:02:55

Durán:

It was political, you know? I think that's the deal there. I don't know, it might not-. Maybe I'm wrong.

01:03:02

Washburn:

What do you mean by "it got political"?

01:03:07

Durán:

That's the time when the people started to vote, and they started to vote for people that they wanted to get in. Get these people out of there that's running the-. The way they were running Richmond.

01:03:18

Washburn:

The old-style folks.

01:03:20

Durán:

The old-style, sure.

01:03:23

Washburn:

That makes sense.

01:03:24

Durán:

There still is a lot of politics going on, anyway.

01:03:27

Washburn:

Everywhere there's a lot of politics, sure.

01:03:29

Durán:

I remember one time when Richmond didn't have a black councilor at all during that time. All of a sudden, look at it. Even the mayor.

01:03:40

Chávez:

[chuckles] That's it, see! I can't believe it.

01:03:43

Durán:

This one they have in Richmond–Anderson–I used to know her husband. He was a reverend. Reverend Anderson. Wonderful guy. He used to go to El Cerrito post office and talk to me. Give me advice and all that. Real nice guy. You know the councilman Bates? Well, Bates and I worked together in the post office in Richmond. He worked in the post office with me. He was a clerk. But the trouble is, see–. One time there was no Mexican descent in the city council.

01:04:32

Washburn:

No Mexican descent?

01:04:33

Durán:

Yeah. So we finally put in–. What was his name, on the city council?

01:04:48

Chávez:

The Mexican guy?

01:04:52

Durán:

I know him good. His wife–. John, John Marquez.

01:04:58

Washburn:

When was that?

01:05:06

Durán:

That was in the last ten years, five years.

01:05:07

Washburn:

That's quite a long time for there not to be–.

01:05:10

Durán:

Vera Montes is there. But the trouble is, it's up to the Mexican people. About six of them were running at one time. That throws the Mexican vote all to hell. One guy, a guy named Bustos, he was running, you know.

01:05:32

Chávez:

He died, huh?

01:05:33

Durán:

Yeah. And I told him, “What’s the matter with you guys? Why six guys running? Put one guy at a time. And then everybody will vote. This way you’ve broken the Mexican vote all to hell, you know.”

01:05:46

Washburn:

Yeah. That makes sense.

01:05:52

Durán:

It does, you know. Cause with six, you can’t–. I don’t know, the voting–. Politics and religion don’t mix.

01:06:14

Chávez:

It’s \$1.41 for gas across the street.

01:06:17

Washburn:

That’s not bad.

01:06:19

Chávez:

I want to fill it up. Look, that’s why I put my glasses. So I could see. A dollar forty-one.

01:06:24

Durán:

I paid a dollar forty-seven. That’s not bad. At that place over there by San Pablo. Is that it?

01:06:38

Chávez:

Yeah.

01:06:42

Durán:

And don’t send it back.

01:06:52

Chávez:

Sit down and rest a while. Talk to the man about–.

01:06:57

Washburn:

It’s real nice to know–. I’m doing some history on the Mexican community in Richmond. Do you mind if I give you a call some time if I have any other questions?

01:07:00

Durán:

Why, sure. Any time.

01:07:02

Washburn:

Yeah? That would be real swell. You know, Frank González is helping me out cause he's been around a real long time.

01:07:08

Durán:

Like I say, I don't know-. I've been here since '45 so the only thing I know is-.

01:07:12

Washburn:

That's all right. That's what Sal's here for - to tell me everything before '45, right?

01:07:19

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:07:20

Durán:

He was born and raised here.

01:07:31

Washburn:

I mean, Sal, I'm surprised that you weren't more uneasy about all the new folks that came into town.

01:07:39

Chávez:

Well, the new folks that came into town, they landed in-. They went and got a job in the section. Right away they got a job there, and man right off the bat you go to the commissary. You know, the Holmes Supply. They used to buy groceries and, boy, they used to-. They'd buy food. And before you knew it they were up to here in the bill. So they had to pay.

01:08:07

Washburn:

You sound like you were used to seeing people coming in and out of the section houses.

01:08:12

Chávez:

Yeah, but then some of them lasted a long time. Some of them did last a long time. I was born in the Santa Fe camp.

01:08:23

Durán:

When I was 17 and 18, I worked in the section. I took the old track from--

01:08:31

Washburn:

Where did you work in the section?

01:08:33

Durán:

That was back home. I was 17 or 18. They were taking an old track in Walsenberg, Colorado, and that's where I got my social security number.

01:08:47

Washburn:

That's interesting. Let me write down your first name here. I got your last name, but what's your first name?

01:09:00

Durán:

Ernesto or Ned. I'm known as Ned.

01:09:06

Washburn:

Okay. I'll put down Ned. What's your phone number?

01:09:20

Durán:

2-3-4 8-4-9-9

01:09:22

Washburn:

Yeah, it's a pleasure talking to you.

01:09:28

Durán:

Same here. What's your name?

01:09:29

Washburn:

David, David Washburn.

01:09:30

Durán:

Same here, Mr. Washburn. Take care.

01:09:32

Washburn:

Good-looking haircut.

01:09:33

Durán:

He's a good barber.

01:09:34

Washburn:

Yeah, he is.

01:09:36

Durán:

One of the best.

01:09:39

Chávez:

Oh, come on!

01:09:40

Durán:

I'll see you, huh.

01:09:41

Washburn:

All right. Have a good day, goodbye.

[Conversation in Spanish between Chávez and another client.]

01:11:35

Washburn:

All right, Sal. I'm going to get some lunch. Get a bite to eat.

01:11:37

Chávez:

Go ahead. I'll be here till 5. No, I'm going to go home at 4:30. Today's Friday. I'll be here.

[tape interruption]

01:11:45

Washburn:

Here we go. [tests and adjusts record level]

01:12:16

Chávez:

Buy groceries or whatever.

01:12:23

Washburn:

Let's talk for half an hour more, then I'm outta here.

01:12:25

Chávez:

Oh, it's all right. It's not going to make any difference.

01:12:29

Washburn:

Again, I really appreciate how lenient you've been, how nice you've been with letting me come in here.

01:12:34

Chávez:

Durán, you see.

01:12:36

Washburn:

Oh yeah. I'm gonna meet him. Great guy.

01:12:44

Chávez:

He knows a lot. He knows all about the army regiments and so and so.

01:12:48

Washburn:

And politics and everything like that. Can I turn this down a tiny bit here. I won't turn it down all the way, just turn it down like that. [turns down radio in the background] So, I talked to you about pretty much everything, except for everything after the war, so it'll be easy just to talk about that stuff. One thing I never talked to you about was where you met your wife.

01:13:15

Chávez:

In a cannery.

01:13:20

Washburn:

You met her at the F&P?

01:13:22

Chávez:

At F&P, uh-huh. I mean, I just saw her there, and I kind of took a liking to her, you know? And then my brother-in-law, at that time he was going around with her sister. He's a real good friend of mine—we went to school together and all that—so I asked him, you know, “How about me coming down with you some time?” And I did, and I met her. Then we started to go back and all that. Five years.

01:13:53

Washburn:

You met her before the war? You said you worked in F&P before the war, right?

01:13:55

Chávez:

I worked before and after.

01:13:58

Washburn:

So did you met her before the war?

01:14:01

Chávez:

No, I met her after the war.

01:14:10

Washburn:

So after you got out of the coast guard, let's go from there. After you got out of the coast guard, what was your first job?

01:14:14

Chávez:

I went to work in the cannery.

01:14:16

Washburn:

Okay. So you went to work in the cannery. Doing the same thing you did?

01:14:19

Chávez:

The same thing as before I went in. I used to drive, you know, a forklift, and then after I'd finished the forklift, I used to go out in the summertime, the season was over, and we'd stay there and fix boxes. Fix the boxes that were broken and everything. And that's it. And then I met my wife, like I said, I saw her and on my break I used out there and talk to her, cause she was working in the canning department. Then, like I said, my brother-in-law at that time, he was going with her sister. So I asked him, I said, "Take me down sometime." The father knew me from way back, her mother knew me from way back, knew my family and everything, and then after I got acquainted with her I used to go and visit her. One time, my sisters, they both went up there to listen to her mother and talk to her and all that kind of thing. That's when we were getting, you know. So, we got married. We got married in '48. June 20th.

01:15:37

Washburn:

June 20th, 1948. So where did her family live, then, in Richmond?

01:15:42

Chávez:

She lived on First Street. And then at the old Santa Fe camp. That was right close by.

01:15:55

Washburn:

That brings up something I wanted to ask. You said that there were about fifty families that lived in the Santa Fe camp.

01:16:11

Chávez:

I don't think there was that many. I think there was only 30-some odd rooms, that's all.

01:16:13

Washburn:

Thirty-some odd units?

01:16:14

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:16:16

Washburn:

So maybe thirty families.

01:16:18

Chávez:

Some guys lived by themselves. Some guys weren't married. They were single, so they lived alone.

01:16:25

Washburn:

Lived in the room by themselves. That's a good description. How many families lived outside in the houses around the camp as best you can estimate?

01:16:39

Chávez:

Well, maybe one or two. They saved their money and then they'd buy a house, but they wouldn't buy—. The furthest they would be was First Street, because they had to be by the—. In case of an emergency.

01:16:58

Washburn:

What I'm asking is—. You said that there were about thirty units in the Santa Fe.

01:17:03

Chávez:

But they weren't full all the time. There were some times guys would quit. Nobody got laid off, they just quit. They didn't want to work any more or they got a better job that paid more money.

01:17:20

Washburn:

You said you're wife's family lived there on First Street, and your family knew each other from way back when. As best you can estimate, how many Mexican families do you think lived in that part of town? As best you could estimate.

01:17:41

Chávez:

I couldn't—. About twenty families or more. They lived around A, B, C Street, First Street, Second Street. Close to the section house. But most of them didn't work on the railroad. Some of them had jobs out there, different places.

01:18:00

Washburn:

At the foundry and such.

01:18:02

Chávez:

Uh-huh, uh-huh.

01:18:06

Washburn:

So you maybe say twenty families or so? You can't estimate?

01:18:07

Chávez:

About fifteen. But they had thirty-seven—

01:18:10

Washburn:

How about this: would you say few enough that you felt like you knew all of them?

01:18:15

Chávez:

Oh yeah.

01:18:17

Washburn:

Few of them, like you knew all of them.

01:18:20

Chávez:

Yeah. Uh-huh. You got to know the husbands and all that, and the families, you know. The kids.

01:18:29

Washburn:

Well, that's a good way to ask it. So, before the war, did you feel like you pretty much knew all the Mexican families that lived in Richmond.

01:18:38

Chávez:

Oh, yeah. Some of them who lived over there on Second Street-. Yeah, we knew them all. Either you knew them because you saw them in church and talked to them, or in school, or you bumped into them.

01:18:57

Washburn:

But after the war that's not necessarily the case, huh?

01:18:59

Chávez:

No. After the war everything was different, you know what I mean. Even a lot of the kids we went around with, you know, went in the service and when they got out of the service their attitude changed sometimes. One, my brother-in-law, his attitude changed. He used to be serious as all heck, old Frank. Nice guy. He's got two. His kids are big.

01:19:30

Washburn:

I guess I'm trying to ask--families like Ned Durán and Frank González came into town, and so how were you able to keep track of all the new Mexican families that came into town?

01:19:50

Chávez:

Oh you wouldn't know. Like there was a lot of Mexican families that have moved over here or arrive. I don't know them any more. You don't know them because, some of the kids, they've already grown up. They have their families and everything, see. And most of the people my age are gone.

01:20:08

Washburn:

But it sounds like you knew everybody down there on A and B Street and such, but people like Ned Durán, who moved over to Huber-

01:20:19

Chávez:

Moved out here in a different--

01:20:23

Washburn:

So how would you have known him?

01:20:25

Chávez:

They were grown up. You met them when they were already grown men, married and all that.

01:20:32

Washburn:

I guess I'm just trying to get at--. You know, people talk about how many folks came to Richmond and how it increased in such a big way. The best example of that is how many black people came to Richmond. I guess I'm just trying to understand because, you know, you've lived so long in Richmond, how big the Mexican-American community got because of all the people that came to Richmond. Like Frank González, like Ned.

01:20:59

Chávez:

They had a lot that came from different parts, Arizona. They came down here to work, to get a job out here in the Bay Area, and most of them did. But, like I say, Arizona, New Mexico, and all that they came over here and then they settled over here.

01:21:18

Washburn:

But would you say there were so many there was no way you could get to know all of them?

01:21:22

Chávez:

No. Most of the time you'd meet them in church. The new people, you'd meet them in church. When they have some kind of a function, and then you'd meet them there and they'd start talking. You know, you'd get acquainted and then you'd know each other. And also, in church there'd be a lot of people. You have different masses that you go to, and sometimes you go to a different mass and you run into somebody, "How are you doing?" and you get acquainted and all that. That's it.

01:21:52

Washburn:

Someone new. For instance, Frank González, he went over there to the Mexican Baptist Church and you never went there.

01:21:56

Chávez:

No. That's right. But I didn't know Frank that well. I knew when he came over here, and I think his brother played ball. They were good ball players and all that. He had a grocery store, on Second and Barrett right on the corner. La {Maravilla}

01:22:16

Washburn:

What side of Barrett? On the west side or the east side of Barrett?

01:22:30

Chávez:

On the west side. He wanted me to go work in the restaurant washing dishes. I said I'm not going to wash dishes.

01:22:39

Washburn:

Yeah, you told me that. So you worked the cannery for a while, you met your wife there, and then would you say your first job after the war was working at the foundry.

01:22:55

Chávez:

Yeah, I did work at the foundry. But see, also I went to barber college, and I had my apprenticeship license. You've got to work eighteen months apprentice, then you go for a journeyman. But I didn't have eighteen months; I only had maybe six or seven months because I wasn't making any money. I'm learning how to cut hair. At the time I think haircuts were a buck and a quarter, or something. I wasn't making any money, so I went to work. That's when I got the job in the foundry. Then after that, I said, "Heck, I'm going to be a barber so I'm going to go to barber college." So I went and got my license. Then I worked. Then I worked, and I said, "What the hell am I doing here, busting my back? I'm gonna go cut hair." So I started to cut hair, and I worked at a store on Second and Macdonald. I started there. That's it. I've been barbering since 1948.

01:24:12

Washburn:

You didn't have many jobs after you got out of the service, until you started entering the barber business, huh?

01:24:21

Chávez:

I had jobs I used to go and work on the ranches and all that sort of stuff.

01:24:24

Washburn:

Right after the war?

01:24:26

Chávez:

Yeah, but not steady. Maybe one day.

01:24:31

Washburn:

What would you do?

01:24:33

Chávez:

Go out there and cut the lettuce and all that kind of stuff. And then, like I said, “What the heck,” I said. I got my Public Law 16 that was {high up?} and I went to school. Then after that I said, “Lord knows, I’m going to stick to it,” and then I got cutting hair. And I’ve been cutting hair ever since. So I guess I’ve cut many heads, huh?

01:24:59

Washburn:

Tons! So you said you worked at the foundry for how long?

01:25:04

Chávez:

Not too long, because I got sick. For about six months.

01:25:09

Washburn:

Tell me what it was like, working at the foundry.

01:25:11

Chávez:

Too hot. You know, you work in a foundry, it’s nothing but a furnace. And I was forklift, and that means you stick the tub inside of the furnace, and every time you open up the door to put the tub in there, boy, that heat would hit your face. My God! You know, I used to wear a little medallion? That little medallion would get red.

01:25:30

Washburn:

Wow!

01:25:33

Chávez:

You get out there—hot! You got to push. One guy would be on one side and the other side, and when the guy pushes the buttons, and that opens the door and you stick the tub in there. You have like railroad, you know, iron things to here, and you put the tub on that. Sometimes it sticks and you have a hellish of a time. Out there on there on that fork, is a long ways. You’ve got to {__} the other guy. And then after that then you find it breaking loose and you’ve gotta put it in the cradle—that’s that little thing.

01:26:05

Washburn:

It’s tough work.

01:26:07

Chávez:

Then the guy would enamel it fast. They were six hour shifts, but I used to make good money.

01:26:10

Washburn:

They paid pretty well?

01:26:12

Chávez:

Oh yeah. I was making good money. I didn't have no lunch. I had no break time. I just hit and run. You know. You want to go and get a candy bar, a sandwich. You never had a chance to eat a sandwich. But always, what I used to do—. I used to take oranges. They'd be cut, you know. And then we had a drinking fountain. They had a lot of ice out there. That's where I used to put my bag with the oranges in there. So every while I'd go out there and get me an orange.

01:26:38

Washburn:

Nice and cool.

01:26:39

Chávez:

Oh yeah, that's it.

01:26:47

Washburn:

Did that pay as well as the shipyards?

01:26:49

Chávez:

Better.

01:26:50

Washburn:

It paid better?

01:26:55

Chávez:

It paid better than the shipyards. See, they were six-hour shifts, like I said. I don't remember, but I was making good wages.

01:26:59

Washburn:

Over a dollar an hour?

01:27:02

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Way over a dollar. And then you'd by the tubs. Six hours. I don't know how many tubs we used to put out. When you got that run you don't even—you go to the toilet and you hurry right back.

01:27:16

Washburn:

Did you get paid by the hour or by the tub? Did you get piecework?

01:27:21

Chávez:

We used to get piecework. Yeah, it was piecework. So naturally when you got the piecework, you've got the reamer and everybody you got to make the money so you don't kill yourself, but you work in rhythm.

01:27:39

Washburn:

So how long did you work there for?

01:27:43

Chávez:

For about six months or more, then I got sick.

01:27:47

Washburn:

What did you get sick with? Did you get something in your lungs?

01:27:49

Chávez:

No. I just had a stomach trouble and all that kind of stuff. Every week you'd change the shift. They were six hour shifts; you go in like, say, six hours around the clock.

01:28:06

Washburn:

Were a lot of folks getting sick working there?

01:28:11

Chávez:

A lot of guys can't stand the heat. That thing is hot in there. The only thing I liked about that job was after, you'd go and take your shower. I used to stay in that shower. Take my clothes off and put them on hangers, you know, cause they're all wet. Next thing you'd go to them, they'd be stiff as heck. You could see right here on the creases of the shirt—salt. That's why they have salt pills. When I got sick, I was taking too many salt pills. And then drinking water.

01:28:40

Washburn:

You told me you lived in the Santa Fe camp up until you got married.

01:28:49

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:28:51

Washburn:

But you said your pop died before you got married.

01:28:55

Chávez:

Yeah, he did. He died before I got married.

01:28:58

Washburn:

So how did you guys stay in that house unless you guys were working for the railroad?

01:29:01

Chávez:

I still had my brother-in-law.

01:29:03

Washburn:

He was working for the railroad?

01:29:05

Chávez:

Yeah, he was a foreman, there, working there. So I had a room there, and any time they wanted the room they could take it, but in the meantime, you know what I mean, I was there. And I met my wife and then got married. Then after I got married, I rented a house. No I went in the housing there.

01:29:24

Washburn:

Where did you guys move?

01:29:26

Chávez:

To the housing authority.

01:29:27

Washburn:

You moved in the housing authority? Tell me about that.

01:29:29

Chávez:

Uh-huh. I didn't last there too long because, my brother-in-law, he owned three houses. He owned three homes, and so what happened was that I only lived about a month there in one of the housings, and then he got a vacancy and said okay, so I moved in there. And I stayed there until I had enough money and we bought a house.

01:29:51

Washburn:

Where was that house that he had?

01:29:57

Chávez:

It was 106 Chancellor. First Street.

01:30:05

Washburn:

One-oh-six First Street or 106 Chancellor?

01:30:09

Chávez:

One-oh-six Chancellor. Right there.

01:30:11

Washburn:

Where was that housing authority that you lived in?

01:30:13

Chávez:

The housing. Right by there. See, he lived on Chancellor at the end of town, and at the end of town was where the housing started. You know what I mean? At Sixth and Chancellor—. It would be, I think it was First Street over here and also over here, and then over here was—.

01:30:34

Washburn:

Is that Atchison Village?

01:30:35

Chávez:

Yeah, that's the village.

01:30:37

Washburn:

So you lived there for a while?

01:30:38

Chávez:

No.

01:30:34

Washburn:

You didn't live there?

01:30:38

Chávez:

No, uh-uh.

01:30:44

Washburn:

Do you remember Atchison Village being built, or were you in the service when that happened?

01:30:45

Chávez:

When they had that, it was hard to get in. They had a list a mile long. Then you had to wait, wait, wait. So, I put my name in there, but I had a long time to wait. In the meantime, my brother-in-law got a vacancy so I rented from him and then from there I bought a house.

01:31:08

Washburn:

I've read about Atchison Village, that it was mostly white people who lived Atchison Village. Is that true?

01:31:12

Chávez:

I don't know.

01:31:15

Washburn:

You don't know?

01:31:17

Chávez:

Uh-uh. So then when I moved to 106 Chancellor—. I was still on Chancellor, it was six-thirty, six-something, 636 or something. Then after that I said as soon as I've got enough money, we bought a house. So from there, I went to my house, and I've been there ever since. Twenty-eight years.

01:31:33

Washburn:

Where did you buy a house?

01:31:37

Chávez:

On Tara Hills.

01:31:39

Washburn:

Is that out here in El Sobrante?

01:31:41

Chávez:

No, no. That's over there on Tara Hills.

01:31:42

Washburn:

In Richmond? Tara Hills in Richmond?

01:31:44

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:31:47

Washburn:

If you were just starting out barbering, how did you get the money to buy that house?

01:31:49

Chávez:

I had money.

01:31:51

Washburn:

You had some money?

01:31:52

Chávez:

Yeah, I had money.

01:31:53

Washburn:

That's good. Did you get a loan?

01:31:55

Chávez:

No, I didn't get no loan. I didn't buy it cash. I don't think I—. No, no. We didn't get—. No, I don't remember. But I know that—. My wife took care of all that. I said, "I ain't gonna be paying rent."

01:32:19

Washburn:

Tara Hills. Is that down there by A and B and all that, or that's farther away?

01:32:24

Chávez:

No that's over here in San Pablo.

01:32:27

Washburn:

That's over in San Pablo?

01:32:29

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:32:30

Washburn:

Is that where you still live now?

01:32:32

Chávez:

I still live there, yeah. Over here, it's a nice area. I like Tara Hills.

01:32:38

Washburn:

So what was that like, then, moving from where you had grown up your whole life to out there in Tara Hills?

01:32:46

Chávez:

I liked it. Better. Liked it better. More privacy, and more room, and quiet, and everything. Course, you know, you're older then. By then you've settled down and then married, so—. We raised a family. They lived here. And each one of them got their own house now.

01:33:06

Washburn:

How many rooms is in that place?

01:33:07

Chávez:

Right now?

01:33:08

Washburn:

Then, when you bought it.

01:33:09

Chávez:

Where I live?

01:33:10

Washburn:

Yeah.

[mail carrier comes in]

01:33:37

Washburn:

I'm interested in how many rooms.

01:33:39

Chávez:

In my house?

01:33:40

Washburn:

Yeah.

01:33:41

Chávez:

Well, let's see. Two bedroom. No, no, no. Three bedroom. Three bedroom home. It was pretty big, and then I got a pretty big yard. Big yard. Then I have eight big-. I got a helluva nice looking house.

01:34:05

Washburn:

So what was that like compared to the place down there in the camp? How many rooms were in your place in the section house?

01:34:10

Chávez:

You had two rooms. It was like every room was a room, you know. You had a double and you had over here one room and two rooms, that's it. When you walked in there was a kitchen, and then over here was the bedrooms.

01:34:35

Washburn:

To the right.

01:34:38

Chávez:

That's it.

01:34:39

Washburn:

So there was a main room for the kitchen and then off that there were two bedrooms or one bedroom? Two bedrooms?

01:34:41

Chávez:

Two bedrooms, yeah. But in the same room.

01:34:45

Washburn:

It was all one?

01:34:47

Chávez:

It was all one room, uh-huh.

01:34:48

Washburn:

So, one room. So you had your kitchen table and everything, and your beds all in that same room.

01:34:55

Chávez:

And then you had—. The stove wasn't any bigger than that chair, there. Small. Small burners. Wood.

01:35:03

Washburn:

So that place was a lot smaller than where you moved into out here in Tara Hills

01:35:06

Chávez:

Oh yeah. Like my house, plenty of room. Double garage.

01:35:15

Washburn:

Do you ever think back, thinking about growing up in that room and think "How did we ever do it?"

01:35:20

Chávez:

Yeah, but everybody usually went through that. Like I was talking to my friend this morning, saying, "Remember back in Louisiana?" Like I used to live in Santa Fe camp, we had coal-oil lamps at nighttime and all. He started laughing. "Well," he said, "same thing in Louisiana."

01:35:37

Washburn:

Yeah, I know. Well, I don't know, but I can imagine what that was like. It must've been different. I asked that because, you know, Frank González lived down there by the--I only have a few more questions and then we'll finish up. [tape interruption and conversation about someone who came into the shop] What I'm asking though is, Frank González lived down there down off Tenth Street, and you lived down there. And I was talking to Josephina Ramírez, some other woman who went to the Mexican Baptist Church, also lived down there. Now she lives out here in El Cerrito, Frank lives up here in El Sobrante, you live out there in San Pablo. Seems like lots of people lived down there, moved out.

01:36:53

Chávez:

But you'd be surprised how many Mexican people have got a lot of money now. You know what I mean? Oh, sheesh.

01:36:59

Washburn:

Why do you think everybody moved out of down there? I don't want to say "everybody"–.

01:37:03

Chávez:

They wanted to improve themselves. When you got out of the planta baja you want to get out. You want to get, you know–. That's why, when I–. Renting, then when I found this–. My daughter called me because she got married, "There's a house out here, right by me." Bought it right away.

01:37:23

Washburn:

House by who?

01:37:26

Chávez:

By my daughter's. {_____?} Street. Tara Hills. Nice place. Got nice neighbors.

01:37:32

Washburn:

That's interesting. But when you first moved there, you didn't miss living down there?

01:37:45

Chávez:

The other place?

01:37:46

Washburn:

Yeah, where you had friends. Where you could speak Spanish more often.

01:37:48

Chávez:

Yeah, it was too quiet.

01:37:50

Washburn:

What was too quiet?

01:37:52

Chávez:

Where we moved to. Way too quiet. Cause over there was a lot of talking, a lot of baloney.

01:37:59

Washburn:

Down there by the camp housing?

01:38:01

Chávez:

Yeah. It was nice and quiet.

01:38:07

Washburn:

But you say it was too quiet. What do you mean by “too quiet”?

01:38:09

Chávez:

It was nice. Nice and quiet. Before you’d be out there and there’d be screeching of cars going like a bat out of hell. Then there was a big old din where we lived by, because they slowed-- airborne. They used to hit that deck and they’d slide.

01:38:35

Washburn:

So you didn’t miss it too much though, not being down there.

01:38:37

Chávez:

Not now. You go out there and, heck, you wonder how come I stayed out there. You know, all the problems they’re having out there, all the robberies and things like that. Is it four o’clock already? Geesh, it’s late. I wish I could do a couple more haircuts. Aah, tomorrow’s Saturday.

01:38:59

Washburn:

Thanks so much for letting me interview you. It’s been fantastic.

01:39:01

Chávez:

Okay. Stop by any time you wish.

01:39:03

Washburn:

I will. I really appreciate it Sal. It’s been a pleasure coming by here and meeting people, and maybe I’ll call you with a few more questions.

01:39:13

Chávez:

Any time. Call these guys, there. They’ll give you—. Fact, that kid that was here that lives in North Richmond, he’d give you a lot of information.

01:39:23

Washburn:

I will.

01:39:25

Chávez:

You know, Ojeida.

01:39:29

Washburn:

I will. What was his first name? Joe?

01:39:32

Chávez:

I don't know, but he's got a large family.

01:39:33

Washburn:

Last question. You and Frank and all these other people moved out. Did you know a lot of other people who moved out of la planta baja?

01:39:42

Chávez:

No. See a lot of them, they—. What the hell happened? I tell you what it was, everybody moved out because something happened. I don't know what the hell it was. But everybody had to move out of there.

01:40:03

Washburn:

Out of the section housing?

01:40:05

Chávez:

Out of the section house.

01:40:06

Washburn:

Did they rip it down?

01:40:08

Chávez:

Yeah, they did. And so, my sister moved to Second Street. Yeah, Second and Barrett. The house is still there. That's it. Then I went in the service, and after I went in the service, I got out of the service, and I still stayed in one of the rooms there, like I said, in the section house. Then I used to work in a cannery, like I said. Then I met my wife and then I got married and got the hell out of there. No more section.

01:40:44

Washburn:

I don't mean how people got out of the section housing. I mean how people moved from maybe their house down on Second and Barrett to a house in, you know, El Sobrante or something like that. Did you know a lot of people who moved from a house that they were renting to a house—?

01:41:00

Chávez:

Oh yeah, to different houses, yeah. Like, a lot of people moved over here to El Sobrante. When they said they was going to build that house here, where they put that Fry's, he was living out there.

01:41:10

Washburn:

Why did they do that? When you say they wanted to improve what was going on.

01:41:20

Chávez:

They wanted to get out of there, because—. You should have seen the section housing. It was cement. Like a motel.

01:41:23

Washburn:

But I've seen some of those houses nearby on Second Street, those don't look so bad.

01:41:30

Chávez:

They were houses, but those weren't the section house. The section house was cement. Then they got out of there. What happened, like my sister at 427 C Street, right by there. But then they wanted to get out of there and buy a better house. So they bought a better house.

01:41:49

Washburn:

Where at?

01:41:52

Chávez:

They bought a house on Sixth Street.

01:41:54

Washburn:

Kind of nearby.

01:41:58

Chávez:

Uh-huh.

01:41:59

Washburn:

Did the crime rate go up over the years? Was that the reason?

01:42:03

Chávez:

They didn't have no crime rate. You could go out at nighttime and come late, nobody would bother you. Like a lot of times, you'd have your bicycle or something like that and leave it outside. Nobody would take it. Now you leave it outside and it's gone.

01:42:16

Washburn:

Sure. Are you talking about before the war or after the war too?

01:42:22

Chávez:

That was before the war. They stole them any time. Before the war or after the war. You know what I mean. I can't remember all that.

01:42:31

Washburn:

But you don't remember it being too dangerous when you lived down there?

01:42:35

Chávez:

No.

01:42:36

Washburn:

Any shootings or anything like that. Any stabbings at bars or anything?

01:42:40

Chávez:

Only after. Shootings and fights and a lot of stuff.

01:42:50

Washburn:

Yeah, it doesn't sound so good now.

01:42:56

Chávez:

Well, I hope I helped you.

01:42:58

Washburn:

You definitely helped me. You helped me a lot. And now I can be more informed than I was before.

01:43:08

Chávez:

A lot of things I've forgotten, it's been so long.

01:43:19

Washburn:

I believe you. Can you show me one thing real quick though on this map. Cause I tried to go down there the other day and figure out where everything was and I couldn't really. It's kind of a confusing map, but you can see, here's Barrett right here, and here's Macdonald, here's Garrard. Where was the section housing?

01:43:44

Chávez:

It gotta be on Macdonald Avenue, and the end of Macdonald Avenue. At the end of Macdonald Avenue, that's where it was.

01:43:51

Washburn:

Was it on the other side of Garrard?

01:43:54

Chávez:

No, on this side. It went right by it.

01:43:56

Washburn:

Was it below Garrard or right above it?

01:44:00

Chávez:

Let's see. No, it was--.

01:44:03

Washburn:

In between Macdonald and Nevin?

01:44:05

Chávez:

Yeah, that's what it was. Uh-huh.

01:44:12

Washburn:

So, right there. In between Macdonald and Nevin, and bordering on Garrard.

01:44:14

Chávez:

My friend, old Frank, he lived on 420 Garrard Boulevard.

01:44:20

Washburn:

Now they've blocked it off. They have some kind of wall. How many buildings were there, right on that site?

01:44:33

Chávez:

Let's see. There was one, two, three, four, five.

01:44:35

Washburn:

Five complexes?

01:44:38

Chávez:

Uh-huh. No, houses.

01:44:40

Washburn:

Two stories?

01:44:44

Chávez:

No, {one of them?} was two-story, but then there was regular houses. Is that what you asked me?

01:44:47

Washburn:

Yeah, I'm just trying to figure out if it was like long rectangular apartment kind of style things.

01:44:53

Chávez:

No. They were houses. They were homes. Small homes.

01:44:58

Washburn:

With pitched roofs?

01:45:00

Chávez:

Mm-mm.

01:45:02

Washburn:

But they were connected, right?

01:45:03

Chávez:

Yeah. No, no. They were close but spaced. They weren't connected.

01:45:13

Washburn:

So your place that you lived in was totally separate from the next person's place?

01:45:15

Chávez:

At the section house?

01:45:17

Washburn:

Yeah.

01:45:18

Chávez:

No, no. Cement. It was all one unit. They had the room.

01:45:24

Washburn:

So it was one long unit with thirty rooms in it?

01:45:25

Chávez:

Uh-huh. Then another one was over here, and another one's over here. That was one of the biggest ones.

01:45:27

Washburn:

Okay. You said there were five houses.

01:45:36

Chávez:

I thought you meant the houses that were by there.

01:45:40

Washburn:

So there was just one long one there. That's what I want to know.

[end of interview]

This tape was recorded again with Sal Chávez and a second person was heard on there for about half an hour. That was Ned Durán. Again, the interviewer was David Washburn, and it was recorded in El Sobrante, California, on Friday October 25, at Sal's Barbershop.