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Emily DeCory

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
Elizabeth Castle
in 2005

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Discursive Table of Contents—Emily DeCory

01:00:00:01

Born Dec—1939 Encenal, New Mexico—Native American: Pueblo of Laguna—parent’s migration to California—speaks only native tongue—learns English when brother goes to school—father’s job with Santa Fe Railroad—agreement between Pueblo of Laguna and Santa Fe Railroad—father’s occupation—both parents were Laguna from Encenal Village, New Mexico—recalls first home in California in converted passenger train car—discussion of men going ahead of the women to California and their living quarters.

01:00:10:01

Living accommodations in village of converted boxcars—Laguna and Acoma —living in village and working for Railroad—similarities in traditional ways between two tribes—description of Village lay-out—describes the once-a-year ceremonial dance; non Indians were not allowed to see.

01:00:20:01

Protecting the tribal dancers from the possible view of non Indians—recalls the “Mexicans” moving in—ceremony pertaining to tribal elections of officers—role of elected officers in Village—father was elected governor—Governor’s responsibilities—communication of tribal decisions from New Mexico and Richmond, California—Laguna women excluded from voting—in 1956 women were allowed to vote in general elections for Governor and tribal officials.

1:00:30:00

Younger people welcomed voting rights for women—younger generation does not speak language or preserve the traditions—family of origin all speak Laguna—she taught her children language and traditions—mother was first in Richmond to have traditional outdoor oven—description how the oven is constructed and how it is used—mother shared oven with other families—Laguna women were homemakers; they did not work for the railroad—recalls two single women who did work outside the home for the railroad.

01:00:40:00

Recalls bombing of Peal Harbor—relatives in the service—remembers rationing; adding food coloring to lard to make it look like butter—many of the men in the Richmond were above draft age—the young men in the Village in New Mexico signed up to go to war—men in the Bataan Death March—Laguna people did not believe they should have been over there—many Laguna men were drafted— Laguna soldiers on Treasure Island were invited to the Richmond Village—riding troop trains as a child.

01:00:50:04

Growing up in California unaware of any prejudice during school years—experienced prejudice on a trip in South Dakota as an adult—schools were melting pot of ethnic groups—children all played together—visiting in Nebraska in 1975, encountered prejudice: sign in restaurant “Indians and dogs please use back door”—memories of school life in Richmond.

02:00:00:00

Working at the Jack Pile Uranium Mine—story about uncle not knowing how to turn off television—describes environment in Richmond—adjacent to “Mexican colony—” childhood games, basketball, hopscotch, roller skating—played in the “swamp”, later found to be polluted—Village flooding from storms—homes safe because converted box cars were high off ground because the wheels were still on—concern about the smoke and particles that would come from Standard Oil Company—burning in throat from smoke—Standard Oil smoke puts holes in clothing.

02:00:10:00

Refinery torch burned day and night and smoke blowing towards her home—complained to her mother — mother complained to father about holes in clothes—bad smell of smoke signal to go inside—Describes a close-knit and safe community in the Richmond Santa Fe Yards—Village officers would question intruders—Acoma People stayed to themselves—Laguna invited Acoma to special events at the community building.

02:00:20:01

Acoma men work on railroad because of lack of Laguna men—Acoma had separate social hall—going to the movies in the town of Richmond—picnics at Nickel Park—leisure activities—father was big sports fan—story about watching a 49er game from a roof across from Kezar Stadium—reflects on the good that came from the right-away agreement: educated in the Richmond public school system—high school prepared her to work as a skilled secretary.

2:00:30:04

Felt cheated out of going to college—father chose son to go to college—education wasted on her because she would marry and have children—brother dies 2 months after finishing college—fond memories of special birthday outings with father – Cliff House; Seal Rock; Play Land—dinner in Chinatown—birthday outing instead of birthday gift—father dies in 1975.

02:00:40:00

Inseparable from her father—mother belonged to the Four Winds Club—after high school completion in 1956 lived with grandmother on reservation—returned to California to go to business school— San Francisco until marriage—attends dance at the San Francisco Indian Center—There were lots of pow-wows—mother and father participated in activities at Friendship House regularly—returns to Reservation after High school—describes working in the Jack Pile mine till the end of 1956—1962 layoffs, she chooses to go to school—returns to school through Indian Relocation Program—attends Dickenson Warren, private business school in Oakland, Ca—post graduation, passed Civil Service Examination, top five—worked for the Veterans’ Administration.

2:00:50:00

Mismanagement of Indian Relocation Program—living outside the Reservation in Richmond was good preparation for life—education on Reservation focused on religion—problems adjusting to urban life from Reservation life—maintained traditional ways through religion—baptized Catholic—hopes grandchildren learn traditional ways.

3:00:00:00

Catholic's pray with rosary beads—describes how Indians pray with cornmeal—takes grandson to Oakland A's game—speaks about the advantages the younger generation have—special food programs that she did not qualify for because her family made a nickel too much—comments on Head Start Program—involvement with the School Board—class action suits over out-of-date textbooks and unequal funds for Reservation School.

03:00:10:00

Teachers on reservation were not certified in subjects they taught—observations on progress made in Reservation education—examples of particular students' going to college and into the professions—veterinarian returns to the Reservation—her daughter's family is more traditional—two worlds similar in belief in Creator—compares Catholicism to Indian religion—husband divorces her and becomes ordained as lay minister in the catholic faith—describes her history with the catholic religion at Our Lady of Mercy Church, Richmond, CA—inclusion of Laguna ways into catholic masses on Reservation—incident of catholic priest condemning Indian religious ways.

03:00:30:01

Parents send children to catholic school to learn religion—discussion of how she combines and separated the two religions—reiterates the similarity of the two religion—opinion that Desert Storm and Iraq are “not our war”—recollections of reactions of Acoma and Laguna sons drafted to fight in WWII—sadness and indignation over fighting a war that wasn't their doing—Indians recruited in High School—military only opportunity available before the Casinos—son in military when Desert Storm began.

03:00:40:01

Distress over her son in Desert Storm.

Interview 1: April 13, 2005
Begin Audiofile 1

01:00:00:01

Castle:

Let's start by, if you could tell me your name—if we could just start, if you could tell me your name, where you were born, and the year you were born.

DeCory:

My name is Emily Ami DeCory. My maiden name is Ami. I was born on December 12, 1938. I was born here in the village of Encenal at my grandmother's house.

Castle:

And where is that?

DeCory:

It's just north east of here, right on the north side of the plaza that's over here.

Castle:

What nation are you from?

DeCory:

I'm Native American, the Pueblo of Laguna.

Castle:

Pueblo Laguna. When you were born, where did you spend your first few years? How long were you here before, and at what point did you—

DeCory:

My father went to California in search of a job. My mother—at that time it was just my brother and myself, two children, I spent, I guess, the first two years of my life here in New Mexico, here at Encenal. When I was probably like two or three years old my brother and I were taken by my mother out to California to join my father. He had found a job and he had found living quarters for us. So we went out there and at that time I was told that I did not speak any English, I spoke our native tongue. Same with my brother. I didn't learn English until my brother went to school in California. From him I learned the English language. My parents spoke English but that wasn't the main language. It wasn't until my brother started going to school, then I learned to speak English.

Castle:

How much older was your brother than you, and what's his name?

DeCory:

He was four years older than me, no, two years older than me. His name was Phillip. He passed away in 1981.

Castle:

It's right here. So tell me about how your father—tell me your father's name, and what brought him to California. What then brought you out there after he—what job did he get?

DeCory:

My father's name was Tom Lowell Ami. He got a job with the railroad, the Santa Fe railroad, Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe. The job that he got was because of an agreement between the pueblo of Laguna and the railroad. When the railroad came through the pueblo of Laguna lands there was an agreement. They approved the right of way but then the pueblo of Laguna also asked if the Laguna men could have jobs, that was part of the agreement because there were no jobs in this area. There were jobs in other areas, like in California, there were some in Barstow, and in Richmond, and I guess there were some in Chicago, or all along the Santa Fe railroad right of way. My father and several men went out to California. They got jobs with the railroad. My father's job was a blacksmith. Back in those days everything was 100 percent steel and if there was an accident, a train accident, they would bring him parts to straighten out, and that's how he got his job. There were other jobs, but he ended up being a blacksmith.

Castle:

I see. So did he learn that here from somebody in the family?

DeCory:

I believe he learned that on the job.

Castle:

Oh, okay.

DeCory:

I don't remember my father or my mother talking about how he learned the job, but I have always, I remember always that he was in that job.

Castle:

That's a pretty important job to have.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

I would imagine that would give him a certain priority.

DeCory:

I believe he was the main blacksmith, and I remember that he had a couple of helpers. He had helpers off and on, different men at different times.

Castle:

Do you remember, roughly, how old he was when you were born?

DeCory:

When my brother was born—I have a birth certificate of my brother. When my brother was born, he was thirty-three years old according to that. It's an old BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] form that they filled out. There was a registrar in each of the six villages and Encenal had a register and this person registered births and deaths. According to this form that was filled out, my father was thirty-three years old and my mother was, oh gosh, I don't even remember. But anyway, it has my mother's age on that birth certificate, but I just remember my father being thirty-three years old.

Castle:

Were both your parents Laguna?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

From which villages were they?

DeCory:

Both from Encenal.

Castle:

Okay. So you were saying, you were just a few years old—he's gone out to California, gotten a job, and he comes back to get the family.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

So you all move, and where do you move into?

DeCory:

The first place I remember moving into was—it was kind of like passenger train, passenger car. I remember windows being on both sides of our dwelling, and I remember my mother making curtains. That's all I remember about that until later—I don't really remember when those boxcars were turned into living quarters.

Castle:

So this is before even the boxcars?

DeCory:

Yes, before the boxcars.

Castle:

You lived in passenger trains.

DeCory:

Yes, I remember living in those, I just barely remember that. I remember more about the boxcars because they seemed like, just really, really neat places to live. The only other place I remember living in was a house like this one—mud and stone house. That was my grandmother's house. I had never lived any place else.

Castle:

Do you have any recollection of how long you lived in the passenger cars?

DeCory:

No, I don't. It wasn't very long. I don't believe it was very long. I don't really recall how long, but it wasn't very long. I remember my brother going to school and coming home to the house, the new house that we moved into.

Castle:

Oh, okay.

DeCory:

That's the only way I can remember that, when it was that we moved into those new homes.

Castle:

Do you recall, were there a lot of other families there?

DeCory:

Yes, there were quite a few families there.

Castle:

I just didn't know if it was kind of—if the passenger cars were prior to—it was kind of a transit place.

DeCory:

The passenger cars, I don't think there were too many families at that time. It wasn't until those new homes were ready for the families, and I think then more families moved out there. As more homes became available then more families moved out there.

Castle:

Was it the case—and this might be something that was told to you later on—that men went out first, groups of men working on the railroad—

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

And do you know how they were accommodated there, where they stayed?

DeCory:

No, I don't really remember. I've just been told that because they were all men, they lived in an area where it was like a bunkhouse maybe, there were several beds in one room, that they all

went to work and then went home, and then there were kitchens where they prepared their own food. I really don't remember that part but I do—I remember others telling me about that. My cousin Nelly just now told me about some of the places that the men lived. I do remember the places she mentioned, and when I left California, those places were still standing.

Castle:

So maybe we can move into that question. I'm interested, as you're growing older you're becoming more aware of your surroundings. What are some of your earliest memories of the village, in terms of—I guess you were talking about living in the boxcar and you were saying that—to you, was it an adventure because you were young? Was it a nice place to live? Was it comfortable?

01:00:10:01

DeCory:

Yes, yes, it had something that we didn't have here in Encenal at that time, we had running water inside the homes. We had showers and a little tub where I remember my mother doing the laundry. We had a sink with running water. We had to heat our water from the wood-burning stove, it was connected to a tank of water and when the fire was burning in the stove, that would heat up the water in the tank. From there we had hot water to do dishes and laundry and take showers.

Castle:

What do you remember about how the village was comprised, how it was put together? Did all the—from what I understand there were two different tribes working there.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Could you tell me a little bit about the set up of the village and were there main buildings that you used for recreation or other things? If you could paint a picture of it.

DeCory:

Well, I don't really know the direction of how the homes were set up, but it seemed like—I kind of remember the Acoma {?} people were living on the south side and the Laguna people were living on the north side. Our homes were different colors. I can remember the Acoma people had red homes.

Castle:

Oh really?

DeCory:

Painted red, not really bright red, but kind of burgundy. Our homes were painted kind of gray. Our homes were different colors, but we lived on the north side. But the whole village was connected. There was no gap in between, there were no fences to separate the homes, it was all one village. That's the way we were set up. The Acoma people and the Laguna people got along very well.

Castle:

There were no tensions that you recall?

DeCory:

Nothing major. Maybe there would be something between two families, but you never really heard of anything major. It was maybe a disagreement or something, or somebody was mad at somebody, but it didn't affect the whole village.

Castle:

Was that more on a personal level than a tribal level?

DeCory:

Yes, I think that's what it was. It was just like something personal. We never really had any major tribal disagreements. They had their traditional ways of doing things and then we had our traditional ways, but they were—in some ways they were similar.

Castle:

Were there other ways that you remember that they were different, that caused any—not conflict, necessarily, but just difference? Like, did you want to use a dance space at the same time or anything?

DeCory:

No, I don't believe that we had any—not while I was there—I don't believe that there were any real conflicts like that. Our recreation area was just an open space where all the kids played outside. We had a hall, everybody called it the meeting house, and it was an abandoned building that there were some Mexican workers living close by in that same area where we lived. The Mexican men lived on one side of the road and the Indian people lived on the other side of the road, and that building that was abandoned was used like a dining hall for those Mexican people. They were mostly—I think they were all men that lived there. They were railroad workers, I guess transient workers. Anyway, this building was used as a dining hall for them. After the men left, they took all those buildings out, their living quarters, they took them all out except for that main building. That main building I guess it was—I don't know who asked for that to remain because we used it as our recreation hall. There were dances there, like the teenagers would get together and have a record hop or, like, they'd have their parties there, like Halloween parties. Christmas parties, we put on Christmas plays. I remember some really disastrous ones, but they were fun. [laughter]

Castle:

Why were they disastrous?

DeCory:

Oh, they were just put together and it was just a fun thing for us. I remember some of the neighbor women getting together and putting on a Christmas play. I remember one year my sister was the virgin Mary. [laughter] We laugh about that even today. She was the virgin Mary and one of the neighbor boys was Saint Joseph. We put on these plays and that was—good memories. They were fun things to do. Every year our people would do their visiting of officers the way they do here. It's a ceremonial dance. The women would prepare the same way they do here. It was just our own thing that we did there to do—because we couldn't come home to take

part in the things that were going on here. The men and the women, the mothers and fathers would do the traditional things out there too.

Castle:

Are you able to give some details about what does this mean? Is this a ceremony?

DeCory:

It's a ceremony.

Castle:

And what is it for? And also you're referencing some council. If maybe you could describe the ceremony and then we could talk about it.

DeCory:

The ceremonies there were the kind that non-Indians could not see, so I can't really talk too much about that. But the traditional way that they visited the new officers—because here, the new officers come in each year at the beginning of the year and just to honor them—I shouldn't say just. But to honor them the village people would put on dances for them and they would bring them gifts of fruit baskets or gifts of food and stuff like that, and they would bring them to the new offices and give it to them. We would have our dances at night, and we didn't have a plaza the way we have here, or in each of the villages. We didn't have a plaza, an outdoor area where they could dance, so they danced in this abandoned dining hall which we called our dance hall, our meeting hall. Each family would either participate or they would go and watch the dances.

Castle:

I see. Is the meeting hall the same as the round house? Or is that something different?

DeCory:

No, the round house was where—there's one in Albuquerque, a round house—it's where they brought trains in for repair, engines, the engines—they would bring them in for repair. I remember seeing an engine being taken in, driven into this round house and the building is round, and the engine would go in and it would turn like on a turntable. I remember seeing that once. Then repairs were made on this engine, whatever needed to be done to maybe—I don't know, lube and oil job, whatever it is that they do to train engines. Anyway, they repaired those engines and then they turned them around and they would be driven out again. That was the round house for the train engines. Our dance hall, our meeting house was a different thing. It was just a big building where we had our activities, our village activities.

Castle:

So when you're talking about dances, the geography of—it's the company yard, right, is what you're in?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

There wasn't really room to do it outside, so most of the dances were held inside?

DeCory:

Well, according to our tradition, the non-Indians are not allowed to see our dances and we had no protective wall or anything.

Castle:

Is that what a kiva would be for?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

To a degree, in terms of blocking the view, so you could practice it for the tribe?

DeCory:

Yes. The dancers would stay in one area, in a house, and then they would walk over to the dance hall, to the recreation hall. There would always be people standing around outside so that the non-Indians couldn't come in.

Castle:

Okay. If somebody was dressed in regalia for a dance and had to go over to the meeting hall, did they need to be protected from view? If this was a particularly ceremonial—

01:00:20:01

DeCory:

They would walk over, but like I said, the men would be standing around outside to make sure that—

Castle:

That it was tribal space.

DeCory:

Yes. We were more or less on private property. There wasn't access to outsiders, people didn't always come through. They did on occasion but it was not something that they did on a regular basis.

Castle:

That's what—I did wonder. First of all, was there a fence around it that controlled it in any way? Did you have kind of what someone might call—I've had older people call them—looky-Lous, people wanted to come through and see—they maybe heard about an Indian village and they had certain stereotypes?

DeCory:

At one time. I think when those Mexicans were living on one side of the property, there was a wooden fence all the way up and down just to separate the Mexican people coming into and being with the Indian people. I don't know, Indian people at that time were kind of—they weren't outgoing, they were—strangers were kind of like not really welcomed. They just kept to their side and we kept to our side. Eventually they did move away, and I think once they did that fence was taken down so there was no longer a fence there. I remember my father—everybody

could take down the fence in front of their homes, and they were allowed to keep that wood, the planks of wood. They would keep those boards and stick them in the back yard to use as firewood, because everybody had wood-burning stoves.

Castle:

So there wasn't a fence that surrounded?

DeCory:

No, there was no—to keep us in or strangers out, it wasn't like that.

Castle:

When you were just talking about the officers and the ceremony, are you talking about the election of tribal--?

DeCory:

Yes, the tribal elections. Well, they have their governor and the secretary and treasurers here, the same thing as the village at Richmond. Every year the people of voting age would vote for one person for a governor, and then there was a secretary and there was a treasurer. Then there were village officers who took care of the chores that needed to be taken care of. I remember my father being governor one year—well, there were several years. But I remember this one particular year when my father was governor.

Castle:

What year was that.

DeCory:

Oh my goodness.

Castle:

You teased me with that by saying you remembered one year. [laughter]

DeCory:

[laughter] I was—

Castle:

Were you really young?

DeCory:

Yes, the first time I was very young. There were several times when my father was governor.

Castle:

Was it a one-year term?

DeCory:

They were one year terms.

Castle:

That picture in the book has him—that picture says 1942.

DeCory:
Okay.

Castle:
I don't know if that sounds—because then you would have been just five or six.

DeCory:
Yes, I was—I was born in 1938, so I was about four years old.

Castle:
What do you remember of—and how often was he—he was elected to the governor position a number of times? More than once?

DeCory:
Yes, at least three times during the time that I was out there.

Castle:
And what kind of duties do you recall? I mean, was he around a lot? Do you remember kind of what he was responsible for as governor?

DeCory:
He was responsible for the wellbeing of the people. And he was in contact with the home base here. Whenever the council met here there was a set of—a report, minutes of what the meeting was about, or the decisions that were made. They would send a copy out to Richmond, to the governor. I remember my father getting a big envelope like this every now and again. They were the minutes of the meetings held here and the decisions that were made here. This went back to the people out in California and they would have their meetings at the meeting house and all the men went to the meeting, and the minutes of the meetings that were held here were read to the people out there. Whatever decisions were made, they would announce them to the people in Richmond. The secretary there would make a note of the comments made at the meeting and those comments would be mailed back to the people here. So that, you know, the council, the tribal council here would know what the people in Richmond felt, or how they felt about the decisions that were being made. They would send back their comments. Or if we were asked to vote on some issue, the men in the village meeting would vote and they would send back the results of the vote.

Castle:
This might be a hard one, but do you remember any decisions or issues that the colony had to vote on that was important here, back at the pueblo?

DeCory:
I don't really remember any major issues.

Castle:
I'm just trying to get a sense of how—what was the inter-relationship? Because it's a rather remarkable thing, that a colony was set up and recognized off—that the reservation would do that and still maintain such a close political relationship between the two. Historically that's really—

DeCory:

I really don't remember, because my parents didn't really discuss those things with us. I just know that those things happened. I do know that there were decisions made about some of the rights of way, the right of ways that came through the tribal land. Some of those, there were decisions made, but I don't remember about—you know, oh, gosh, this is hard. I don't remember what kind of decisions were made or how the votes were or anything like that. Because like I said, my parents didn't discuss those things with the children.

Castle:

Right. That really helps in terms of the railroad business and any issue related to it was obviously of great importance to the colony. You mentioned your mom, your mother, do you recall—did he share—how did the men then that were present at the meeting communicate with everyone else, or at least the women in the village?

DeCory:

Well, the men I think that went to the village meetings would go back to their homes and discuss this with the wives. I imagine that discussions were made and women would be allowed to have their say. At that time it was only the men's votes that were counted.

Castle:

Men were the only voting members at that time?

DeCory:

Yes, and the women—well, they had their opinions but they didn't count.

Castle:

Has that changed over time?

DeCory:

Yes, I think it has. Women are allowed to vote now in the general elections. We all vote for a governor, and the tribal officials. In the villages the women are allowed to vote for the representatives from their villages.

Castle:

Do you know how long ago that started?

DeCory:

No, I don't, I actually don't remember when that started. We're governed by a constitution, I think the first one came out in 1956. Do you remember that Ruth? I think the first constitution was in 1956. I think that's when the women were allowed to vote. Then it was revised in 1984. Those were big changes in our tribal way. The women were allowed to vote. I think anybody eighteen years of age and older then were allowed to vote.

Castle:

That would really reshape things quite a bit. In a way—what would you say was kind of the impact, from what you remember? I imagine you get positive and negative feedback on a change like that. Do you remember how that impacted the tribe?

DeCory:

Well, the traditional people didn't like it.

Castle:

Men and women?

DeCory:

They don't like change. But it was something that I guess needed to be done to join the twentieth century. [laughter] Eventually people accepted the changes. I think it was for the better.

01:00:30:00

Castle:

Do you?

DeCory:

Yes, because if I'm to be governed by what the constitution says then I want to have a say. I know a lot of the younger generation felt the same way too. But it was the traditionalists, the older people that have always lived here on the reservation, they really didn't like change—no matter what it was, they didn't like change. They wanted to keep it the old way, but they were outvoted. I could see, a lot of us, maybe my generation, could see the—could see why they didn't like change. They felt they were going to lose their identities, or lose the traditional ways. A lot of that is true today because the newer generations coming up, the younger generations coming up, a lot of them don't even speak the language, which is really hurtful. They don't speak the language and they haven't kept the traditions. Those of us, my generation, Ruth's generation, we've tried to teach our children the language. I speak to my granddaughter in our language and she understands, but she's a little bit embarrassed to respond in our language. She knows the language but she's just a little bit embarrassed because I think somebody laughed at her because she mispronounced something. I think that's where a lot of this not responding in the language comes from—they laugh at each other and make fun of each other. It's too bad that that's happened.

Castle:

Yes, it's often a product of certain ages.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

But it has a much bigger impact on them than it might normally have if it weren't the passing of a language which holds culture and meaning.

DeCory:

I've always kept the language because my parents always talked to me in our language. My younger sisters, I have three younger sisters, we all understand and we can all speak it. We've all tried to teach our children the language and the traditions. I think my daughter and her generation have kept some of the traditions. My daughter married into a very traditional family. Her father-in-law is a tribal leader, is a religious leader, so she more or less learned the traditional ways

from her mother-in-law, which is good, I appreciate that. I didn't teach her how to bake bread in an outdoor oven because I never had one, I didn't have access to one. My mother had one, it was kind of like a—do you remember that, Ruth? My mother was the first one out in Richmond to have an outdoor oven, what the white people call a horno—I think that's the way it's pronounced, isn't it? [laughter] Maybe I'm saying the wrong word.

Ruth:

Eskimo house.

Castle:

Can you describe what it looks like and how it's made?

DeCory:

It's built with mud and stone like our homes. It's kind of a round structure. There's a floor in there and it's just made round, with a hole on top, kind of like a vent. My mother would build a fire inside the oven with wood. The floor would get hot. She would take the ashes out, sweep it out with a wet mop, she would sweep it out. She would cool it down with the wet mop. She would cool it down. I remember her testing it. She threw a handful of oatmeal in it, and if it burned real quick it was still too hot. So she would take the wet mop and cool the floor down a little bit. She would take another handful of oatmeal in there and if it browned evenly over—just, in a little while, she would say the temperature was right and she would put her bread in there.

Castle:

So that's how you determine, oh, it's about 300, versus 350.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

And if you don't have someone to pass that—

DeCory:

Yes, and she would close the hole on the top to keep the heat in and she would peak in it at the bread every now and again. If they were getting too brown then that means the oven was still too hot, so she would open the covering on the top, she would open it a little bit to let a little more heat escape so that the temperature stayed approximately the same. Her bread turned out beautiful every time. A lot of the other women borrowed her oven.

Castle:

I was going to ask, was it an oven that was just hers?

DeCory:

Well, it was hers but she allowed other women to bake their bread in there. Eventually the other women had their own ovens built so that there were maybe, oh, I think about four ovens at that time. Then the Acoma people did the same thing too, they built their own ovens over there. It's a traditional kind of bread that we ate, and you know, it's just something that the women did.

Castle:

That was another thing that connected you to home, maybe.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

A different geographical space but you did a lot of the same things.

DeCory:

Yes, and Easter time too, my mother would make the Easter pudding that they make here. That's another thing that went into the oven. They would burn wood in there until the embers died down, and several of the women would make their pudding, and they made them out of, in the galvanized pails, buckets. They would line their buckets with cornhusk and pour their pudding in there. They would put them in the oven, there were maybe six, seven, I counted ten one time, buckets of pudding in the oven. Then they would seal it. They would close the door, and then put mud around to seal it, and they would seal that hole on top so that none of the heat escaped. They would cook all night. So all night, gradually the oven would cool down, and by Easter morning they would go over and unseal the door and take out their pails of pudding, and perfect every time. It's just another tradition that the women did out there.

Castle:

You were talking about, you brought us back to your mother. When you all moved up there, did your mother work for the railroad?

DeCory:

No. All women were homemakers. Back then women didn't work outside the home. They were homemakers, they took care of the families, they took care of the homes. I don't recall at that time the women—my mother didn't work outside the home. There were maybe two single women who worked at the railroad shops. I remember one—I can't remember. Do you remember Gerdie?

Ruth:

Yes.

DeCory:

She was one.

Castle:

She was a Laguna woman?

DeCory:

She was a Laguna woman, she's affiliated with the village of Siama. I remember the women wrapping their hair, their heads up in a bandana and tying it up front here. She walked by our house with a lunch pail every morning on her way to work. I remember her. I don't know what she did or how she—what her job was. I just remember her. There was another woman, but I don't recall her name. I don't recall her name, but they were two single women who did not have

families, well, a husband and children. I remember those two women going to work during that time.

Castle:

In terms of that time, we're moved into—you're up there just about when the war starts. Even though you're just a toddler basically.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Part of what you're saying is that it's a small community where women who had a husband working and certainly had small kids were unlikely to work, but maybe a single woman worked. Well, the railroad needed more people to work because of the transport issues involved in World War II.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Do you have any recollection, speaking about the war, even though you were just three years old, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

01:00:40:00

DeCory:

Yes I do.

Castle:

Will you describe that for me?

DeCory:

I remember people crying.

Castle:

Really?

DeCory:

My mother was crying, my father was very sad. Some of our relatives were in the service, in the military, the people here were in the military. I had uncles, my mother's cousins, and my father's cousins.

Castle:

They had signed up?

DeCory:

They were in the military and I know my mother and my father were very worried about our people being in the military and being over there. That's how they referred to it, was "over there." I remember a lot of people were crying. I didn't really know why.

Castle:

Did you know what to make of it? Did anybody say to you what it was?

DeCory:

Well, it had to do with the war. I remember a few things about the war. I remember the rationing that was going on. In particular I remember butter. My mother would get a ration of—she would get a block of what looked to me like lard or like a block of Crisco shortening and little envelope, a little packet of coloring, food coloring. I remember her mashing down that block of shortening or whatever it was—it looked like shortening to me—and she would add that little envelope of coloring and she would stir that and stir that until it was yellow.

Castle:

So it was yellow coloring?

DeCory:

It looked like butter. I don't know what it was, I never asked. It tasted like butter to me. I remember sugar, we could only get—and they used books of stamps.

Castle:

Oh really.

DeCory:

You could only purchase so much sugar and you had to have those stamps. I remember those stamps. I remember my mother not being able to buy or get nylon stockings. All the women wore those cotton, and they're real thick stockings, like old fashioned stockings. I remember my mother wearing those. I remember wearing those to school.

Castle:

Like tights or something? Thick.

DeCory:

They weren't all the way up, they were stockings, they only came up above the knee. I remember my mother making me little garters out of elastic.

Castle:

[laughter]

DeCory:

[laughter] I wore those things, and I hated them, I just didn't like them. They were warm in the winter. I remember wearing those little stockings with the garters. I think if my grandchildren heard about that they would just laugh. I remember those kinds of things. I don't really have too much to remember from those war years, but the things that really stood out, I remember those things. I remember our whole village was very sad, very sad, everybody was crying. That's something that really stuck out in my mind, that everybody was crying during that time, during that time when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, because a lot of our people were over there.

Castle:

What did you want to ask, Brendan?

Furey:

In 1942 and 1943 Kurtz's dissertation said that all but thirty of the men had returned here and gone into the service. So how did the village change when most of the men went away to the service? Was it mostly women and children at that point?

Castle:

Do you remember that as part of the village?

DeCory:

Where we lived I think the men were above, older than the draft age. So a lot of the fathers that were out there, didn't go into the war. It was mainly here at home where the younger men joined up in the service and were sent over there. So I don't remember really—

Castle:

Do you remember an exodus, you remember a number of people, men, leaving the village to go into the service? Do you recall that?

DeCory:

I don't recall because we lived out there and the men that were signing up were here. I don't really remember a lot of—well, I guess there were quite a few because I do remember some of the men, my mother's cousins who were over there. I remember Uncle Joe, he lived way over on the northwest side, he always walked real stiff. One time I asked, "Why does he walk so stiff?" And the reason why was he got shot in the war. There were men from—I don't recall who, but there were several that were in that Bataan Death March.

Castle:

Laguna men.

DeCory:

Laguna men. And when they came home, they were just welcomed home. It was just something that, our people didn't believe that our people should have been over there. It wasn't our war, it wasn't our fight. But because of maybe loyalty to the—you know, they signed up and they went over.

Castle:

That's very powerful, because part of one of the questions I wanted to ask was, was there discussion or feelings about, "This isn't our war."?

DeCory:

A lot of our men were drafted. I don't really know too much about that, but I think they were drafted and they were sent over there. A lot of our men came back and some didn't come back. That was—I guess that's something we didn't want to happen but that's how it happened. In the later years, the later wars, the Korean War, I remember my cousin going over there and being in the Korean War. His name was Ray Cohimi, he was in the marine corps. A lot of the younger men joined up voluntarily. Some of them were drafted.

Castle:

Do you recall if that time—was the village a place for—you're at a space where there's a lot of docking spaces, if you will, for military coming through. The ports, maybe Treasure Island, for example. Did Laguna men, or maybe from other pueblos ever come to the village at all that you remember?

DeCory:

Yes, I remember some of the sailors that were stationed at Treasure Island, I remember this one man, his name was John Beecher, he invited the Laguna boys over to the Laguna village. I remember having dinners at this meeting house, this place that we used as a recreation. I remember. Do you remember that, Ruth? The people of the village, the women, would get together and cook and bring the food together and they would have like a celebration. We had dances for them. Back in those days I think they called them American dances as opposed to our Laguna Indian traditional dances. American dancers were the rock and roll music, the modern music. That was called American dances. We would have dances for them and celebrations. The ones that were over in the Treasure Island area. I remember riding troop trains when we were little kids.

Castle:

Really?

DeCory:

Well, see, all the people, the men that worked for the railroad, they were eligible for a pass to ride the trains free of charge from Richmond back home. At that time there was a train station over here at New Laguna where we got off, and we got back on to go back to California. During the war years I remember riding what were known as troop trains, because they were taking soldiers, the military, from one point in California back East to wherever. They were just filled with soldiers. I remember as little kids we were like little novelties to the troops, because we were cute little Indian kids. [laughter] They would buy us snacks, and they would talk to us. I remember that these soldiers were real nice. I remember one particular time when my mother got on the train with five kids.

01:00:50:04

There were five of us. We got on the train, and there were five kids and one sat over here, one sat over here—we didn't sit all together. Those soldiers got up and they moved so that my mother could sit together with her children. I thought that was really neat. That's something that stood out in my memory for all these years. Riding the troop trains, it was so neat. We were always treated so well by the soldiers.

Castle:

These were soldiers from all different backgrounds?

DeCory:

Yes. Well, we grew up in California. We went to a public school. I didn't know prejudice until I went back to South Dakota as a grown, as an adult, as a mother with children. I didn't know prejudice until then. Because where we grew up and the school that we went to, we went to school with all kinds of kids. Back in those days there were colored kids and Mexican kids, and of course us, the Indian kids along with white people. There were Chinese people, all kinds of

kids in our school. We never really saw the difference. We all played together, we got along together. I didn't know those kinds of things until I moved back—real out and out prejudice. I walked down the street in Valentine, Nebraska one time with my husband and my father in law, and I saw a sign there on the front of a restaurant, "Indians and dogs please use the back door." That really surprised me. I took my kids away from that because I didn't want them to see that.

Castle:

What year was that?

DeCory:

Let's see, we moved back there in 1975.

Castle:

I want to come back to that, but you actually just moved into the next question I wanted to ask you about, which was where you went to school, and kind of talk about school life in Richmond.

DeCory:

The schools I went to were, I think basically, we all went to the same schools. Peres Elementary School, it was kindergarten through sixth grade. I still remember my kindergarten teacher, she stood out all these years.

Castle:

In what ways?

DeCory:

Well, basically because she was the very first teacher I had in elementary school. She was an older woman, and her name was Gladys O'Hara.

Castle:

That's a good memory, I do have to point that out. [laughter]

Ruth:

We had the same teacher.

DeCory:

Did you? And my sixth grade teacher was Mr. Ed Watson. And in between there was Mrs. Dean, Mrs. Sacher, Mrs. Westenberg. I remember her, she was really a nice teacher. But Ms. O'Hara, she just stood out in my mind because she was just, just a really nice person. When you did something wrong, all she had to do was look at you.

Castle:

That was it? Is that the face she made?

DeCory:

Yes. I'm surprised at you. [laughter] Boy, you never did it again.

Castle:

It was that guilt factor.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Was she a white woman?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Were most of your teachers white?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Were you bilingual at that time? Did you speak English when you went to school?

DeCory:

Yes, I was learning English. I think I was pretty good in English by then, by the time I went to kindergarten.

Castle:

Were there others—first of all, did you walk there? Did you walk to school with other kids from the village? And do you recall in class whether other students had problems who didn't speak—did you have any advantage or help kids who didn't speak English yet? What do you remember about that?

DeCory:

We walked to school. At that time I don't think we had busses. We walked to school, which was quite a distance. For me it was. My mother used to walk me to school in kindergarten. After that we were on our own. We walked with other kids, maybe in the same age group. We always all walked to school. There was kids, the older kids.

Castle:

So were together, you could protect—

DeCory:

The older kids as well as the kindergarteners. I don't think we ever had really big problems. I don't know about the other kids, but I know for myself and my sisters and my brother, we got along fairly well. There didn't seem to be any language barriers. Everybody that I knew in my class spoke English. The Spanish kids, the Mexican kids, everybody spoke English. I don't believe the teacher ever really had a hard time talking to any of us. [phone rings] Excuse me. [pause for phone]

Begin Audiofile 2

02:00:00:00

DeCory:

I remember I was working at the mine, the Jack Pile mine, the uranium mine. Anyway, I was home sick and Uncle Charlie was sitting there watching TV. I guess he didn't want to disturb me to turn the TV off. He didn't know how to turn the TV off. My aunt had taken her sheep and goats out and they were grazing across the way there. He didn't know how to turn the TV off, so he went all the way over to get her and he brought her back, all because he didn't know how to turn the TV off. She came in, and she said in Laguna, "All you had to do was this!" And she yanked the cord out of the outlet. [laughter]

Castle:

That was here?

DeCory:

That was right here in this room.

Castle:

So we were—we were in school. We were determining that Mrs. O'Hara was a nice lady.

DeCory:

She was Miss O'Hara.

Castle:

Okay. You were describing the relations with other kids in school, that they were good. So you don't remember any points of conflict in particular, in your experience?

DeCory:

No I don't.

Castle:

This is Peres School?

DeCory:

Peres. I guess it's a French word, but we just called it Peres. I don't know who it's named after.

Castle:

Back in the village, what are the sort of things you did for fun at this age that you remember? This is kind of like first through fifth grade? You played outside a lot?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

Is it dirt? What's the ground like in that area and what kind of trouble could you get into?

DeCory:

The area that's right in front of the homes, that was paved, wasn't it?

Ruth:

Yes.

DeCory:

I remember it was paved. The rest of it was just dirt. I remember we played out in the open. There was an area—I mentioned earlier that there was this Mexican colony that was there. When they abandoned that dining hall and they had asked for that to remain, there was an area too that was used, I believe, as a shower area. It was a building and I believe it was a shower area. When they took that building away there was a cement slab maybe a little bit bigger than this room, it would extend all the way to that other room. There was a cement slab that was left there. Somebody somewhere along the way set up a basketball goal. All the kids would play and play basketball there. We drew hopscotch outlines on the cement there and we played hopscotch on that cement area there. That was kind of like a play area for us, besides the meeting hall being used for our dances and parties and activities. The kids would use this area as a basketball court. Anything else that the kids—some kids skated on that little area.

Castle:

Roller skated?

DeCory:

Roller skates. We just made do with what there was. I don't think we ever really went out and bought a whole lot of games and toys and things. I think most of our games and toys and things were made up or homemade.

Castle:

Do you remember what I've heard called the swamp?

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

What was that?

DeCory:

[laughter] That was fun at that time. It wasn't until years later that I found out that that was a place where bacteria and all kinds of disease—it would overflow during the rainy season.

Castle:

Where did the water come from?

DeCory:

It would overflow. It was like a sewer area.

Castle:

[laughter] Kids always play in that stuff.

Furey:

There was a swamp.

DeCory:

There was always water in it, I don't know where the water came from. But the water was always there.

Castle:

Was this in the village or on the edge of the village?

DeCory:

It was on the edge of the village, it was kind of off to one side. It was just a corner of our area where we lived. Anyway, that area, when it rained really, really hard, and it was always raining, that area would overflow and we were flooded. But our homes were up high enough so that the water didn't go into our homes. That area was maybe a foot deep. Of course all the kids would get out there and wade around in the water and that was fun to us. [laughter] But strangely we never got sick. Nobody ever got sick from the swamp.

Castle:

You didn't actually swim in it though, did you?

DeCory:

There were kids that would try to get down into the water. It wasn't deep enough to swim actually.

Castle:

When you said flooding, what did that come from? Was there a time when the village actually flooded? And Brendan, you were looking this up, what year was that?

Furey:

In the winter of '42-'43 there were a couple of bad storms and it flooded more than usual.

Castle:

So it's flooding that came from storms.

Furey:

Do you remember when you were about five years old it being a particularly bad flood?

DeCory:

Probably, probably around that age. I'm not really sure about how old I was. I just still remember that we did have some floods there. It didn't really do any harm or damage it was just something that happened, and being kids, that wasn't our concern! [laughter]

Castle:

It sounds like it was more just something to play in than it was trauma.

DeCory:

It was, and I think the parents were a little concerned.

Castle:

But it didn't go into the boxcars, you're saying?

DeCory:

No, because our homes were built up.

Castle:

Were they on cement block?

DeCory:

No, they were built up higher. Because at that time the wheels were still on the trains. So what they did was just build underneath the trains.

Castle:

While the wheels were on?

DeCory:

While the wheels were on, and they took the wheels out and then they lowered the homes onto the foundation, or a base. You could crawl under the homes, you could crawl under the homes. They were built up on stilts or what looked like to me.

Castle:

So even after the wheels were taken off and you built the base on you could still crawl under them?

DeCory:

Yes. A lot of people used that as storage area.

Castle:

Could you use that to hide from your parents?

DeCory:

Yes, good hide and seek places.

Castle:

[laughter] So you remember, when you first moved into the boxcar, were the wheels still on it? Do you remember?

DeCory:

I think I do remember. Yes, the wheels were still—some of them were already, the wheels were removed. And then there were—they weren't quite finished. I don't remember what year that was or how old I was or anything.

Castle:

Just the image of your house on wheels.

DeCory:

Yes. I just kind of got a flashback. Things are coming to mind now because— [laughter]

Ruth:

I think it was like '46 because my sister was still little and some of the houses were still on the wheels. By that time I guess my mom was pregnant and came home and had me.

Furey:

There was no concern about earthquake safety?

DeCory:

No.

Furey:

You never remember anyone mentioning that?

DeCory:

No. We felt safe where we were. The only concern I think was because Standard Oil was right in our backyard practically, the Standard Oil company, the refinery was back there, a lot of their emissions, the smoke and stuff like that would blow in our direction. I remember throat irritation from breathing in some of that smoke.

Castle:

Really.

DeCory:

It was a burning feeling in your throat, I remember that. The other thing I remember was my mother complaining about whenever that smoke came over, whatever was in that smoke would put holes in our clothes. Because she had her laundry hanging out.

Castle:

Really? Wow.

02:00:10:00

DeCory:

Whenever that smoke blew our way and she had her clothes hanging out it would burn like little holes in the clothes. Back then nobody thought about it.

Castle:

The environment or hazards.

DeCory:

The hazards or anything like that. I just remember that smoke, breathing in that smoke kind of irritated your throat.

Castle:

So it was when the winds blew the smoke. Was it black?

DeCory:

In our direction. It was white smoke.

Castle:

It was white, ok.

DeCory:

I remember they had this—do you remember that torch burning all the time?

Ruth:

Yes.

Castle:

Describe that. Where was that?

DeCory:

At the refinery. It burned day and night, every day. I remember that smoke blowing toward our homes.

Castle:

And there was nothing you could do about.

DeCory:

I don't think anybody ever thought to do anything about it.

Ruth:

It hit Atcherson Village and they let them know.

DeCory:

It was irritating. Actually, after a while, maybe the Laguna people did say something about it. I don't remember, I actually don't remember about the complaints were made. I just know I complained to my parents. I don't know if my mother ever complained to anybody beyond my father about what it was doing to our clothes.

Castle:

Right. Or your health.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

I wonder if there has been any health problems that those of you, that you could locate, that were tied to that experience of living in there, especially because—

Ruth:

I think we were all pretty healthy.

DeCory:

I think most of the elders now are gone, so I wouldn't know if that had anything to do with their deaths.

Ruth:

They did live a long time.

DeCory:

I don't remember.

Castle:

It's just an important kind of historical piece because Richmond is one of the most well—let's put it this way, is notorious across the country for environmental racism in terms of the idea that tremendous amount of polluting factories are located there especially because it's primarily black now. Well, Latino too. That's really an interesting testimony. Often people can't so immediately attach their health problems. But here you're watching little holes form in your clothes when the smoke blows by. Standard Oil is, mm, well.

Ruth:

I remember when you'd first smell it, everybody would shut their windows and tell you to stay inside.

Castle:

So as kids would you get called in because the smoke was blowing from Standard Oil?

DeCory:

Yes, because of the smoke. Some of us didn't listen, we played outside anyway. [laughter]

Castle:

I was interested—you said the word safe, so it seems like some of the only things that were unsafe which were of course governmental or corporate invasions into the space, like the smoke blowing. One of my questions was were you kind of safe playing in the village and what was the feeling like? We were talking briefly earlier about the communal nature of it—could you describe that?

DeCory:

It was a close-knit community. Everybody more or less watched out for each other. The children played outside after dark. I won't even let my granddaughter play out after dark in Albuquerque. I bring her in when the sun is setting. Out there, we played out till what, nine, ten at night? Nobody ever seemed really concerned about—the only concern was you had to get to bed because you have to go to school tomorrow morning. That was basically the main concern. But as far as like people coming in, snatching children, or someone coming around and doing something mean and ugly to kids, nobody ever worried about that. In this day and age, oh my god, you could have a predator next door to you—but out there it was just nothing. Everything was open. All the parents watched out for all the children. It was like, if they were playing in front of your house, as long as they didn't break your windows playing baseball—we were just allowed to play. As I said earlier, that Hillary Clinton's quote on that, "It takes a village to raise a child," to raise children. That really hit home here a few years ago when she made that statement, because it just seemed like it just described how we were out in California. It took a whole village to watch out for the children that were there. We never had anything, any major injuries. Kids fell down, they got into fights, but it was because of some little disagreement. It wasn't like

somebody coming by, a drive-by shooting, people coming in, sex predators and all that you read about now.

Furey:

Was the safety in the yards at all connected to the fact that it was a private—private property? Ian was telling me that when they'd get into trouble, often what they would do is, they would get into trouble in Richmond and then run back to the Santa Fe yards and it was kind of a sanctuary from the police even. Was the fact that it was its own private space, that helps assure safety?

DeCory:

I think yes in a way, because it was private property. It was Santa Fe property. If outsiders came in they were trespassing. But if they were your guests in your home then no one said anything about it. As far as people coming in from the outside, that really wasn't allowed. If anybody came in one of the village officers would get out there and ask, "What business do you have here? You really shouldn't be here because this is private property." What he probably told you about was what happened with another generation. That generation probably did get in trouble in Richmond and then ran back to the village. But with us I never heard of anything like that, in Ruth's and my generation, we never heard of anything like that.

Castle:

That's an important generational shift to talk about.

DeCory:

It is.

Castle:

Because you're talking—I mean, one of the questions I had tied to that was maybe the difference between what might have been life in the pueblo here versus there, is that you—and this is a double-edged sword in a way, you're very close in proximity. So even here, kids can play kind of in a village, but it's a rather smaller group of families. Whereas there you've got quite a number of families in the boxcars and there isn't—you're close enough that you can yell to a certain degree and keep people kind of under control. Could, at the same time, that close knit-ness be a little bit stifling? Was there ever a time where it was—it also means you know everybody's business, right?

DeCory:

Mm-hmm.

Castle:

Is that a good thing? I mean, we don't have to put a value judgement on it, but is that something that you noticed?

DeCory:

I never really noticed at my age back then. I never really felt stifled, or I don't know if my parents did. There probably was kind of that feeling because each family was on their own. Each family was its own family. If they wanted to share something with someone else then they could do that, but there was a lot of gossip. There was a lot of, oh, this woman over here and this woman over here got along better than they did with this woman over here, those kinds of things.

There was the rivalry, there was, you know, you just couldn't avoid that. But in general everybody got along pretty much really well. It's something you couldn't avoid either, because of maybe the relationship with the children. Because everyone was friends. The children were all friends.

Castle:

Did the Acoma stay more to themselves and the Laguna stay more—

DeCory:

I think they did. I think they stayed more or less to themselves. Until there was something going on at the community building that the recreation hall—they would get invited to come over, or the tribal—the officials would go to see their governor and say, “We’re going to do this and you’re welcome to come if you want.” They got invited.

Castle:

There weren't as many Acoma there, were there?

DeCory:

No, I don't believe there were that many. Not as many as the Laguna people.

Castle:

Okay. So they had their own system, tribal officer system set up within the village?

DeCory:

Yes, I think they did. I don't really remember.

02:00:20:01

Do you remember any of their visiting officers? I don't remember if they visited officers.

Ruth:

It was later, because after the Laguna picked their officers they created their officers also. As far as I know they don't have an agreement with the railroad. {?}

DeCory:

Like the Lagunas.

Ruth:

So they kind of like said, “Oh, they’re doing it, let’s do it,” kind of thing.

DeCory:

We would have celebrations, like New Years Eve. We would have our celebration in that dance hall, in that meeting house and the Acomas always came over to dance. Sometimes we played records. Like her dad, Grandpa Sandy always had his accordion, and there was other people that played different instruments. They would get together and they formed a little band. We would have our little New Years Eve celebrations. It was just like any place else.

Castle:

I was trying to get a sense—it will be interesting to see if we have a change to talk to some people from Acoma because the history of the agreement being that it was kind of the Laguna invited in, or allowed the Acoma to be, and the railroad invited in the Acoma also on the agreement when there weren't enough Laguna men. From what I understand?

Ruth:

The railroad during that time came to Laguna and said, "Okay, now we need you to come," so they went. They didn't have enough then so the Laguna governor let the Acoma governor know that if they would like to go—so they invited them. They don't have an agreement.

Castle:

I see.

Ruth:

They invited them in, so I guess that's why there's just a few in that village that were Acoma. Then the last ones that leave were very small numbers. They were a large community. {?} They had a rec hall, remember their rec hall? On this side of the Garcia's, right across. I guess someone left, so they used to use that old red building there, for their little hall?

DeCory:

Oh yes, that's right.

Castle:

So they had a separate social space?

DeCory:

Yes, I remember that now.

Castle:

We were talking about things we do for fun. We've talked about a lot of the things you did in the village. What did you do leaving the village? Where are the places that you went to, both maybe with your parents or with other kids, in the Bay Area? Whether it was a recreation site or maybe an Indian center? Could you talk about what you remember there?

DeCory:

Well, one of the things that I think we did were go to movies right in the town of Richmond. We went on picnics to the park. I remember Nickel Park.

Castle:

How far away was that?

DeCory:

It would have to be a drive away, you know, because it was a little distance away from our home. We would drive to the park. There were baseball games and all kinds of activities going on there. There was a playground, and of course wide open spaces where you could have a picnic, have a little volleyball game or something going on. We went to—my father always took us to Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Of course, he was a big, dyed in the wool 49ers fan. I mean, he

wouldn't miss a game if they were there. I've got to tell you one story too, about my father. My father was a really sports fan, every kind. He would listen to the Friday night fights on radio. Back then we didn't have television. He would listen to Friday night fights. He would listen to the World Series on the radio, all these things. My father was a football fan. I mean, 49ers all the way.

Furey:

Why not the Raiders?

DeCory:

Well, Raiders weren't there at that time. 49ers was the team. Every time the Rams—

Castle:

This explains a lot.

DeCory:

The Los Angeles Rams came up to San Francisco to play, I mean, there was a big rivalry between the two teams, the Rams and the 49ers. My father would never fail to go to a Rams, 49ers game.

Furey:

At the Kezar Stadium?

DeCory:

Yes, at the old Kezar Stadium. It was so funny, I laugh at it now because it was so funny. My father took our family to that game and just before the game started we would always go to Golden Gate Park and have a big picnic lunch. My mom would just pack up all kinds of food. We'd go there and play in the park and have our picnic lunch and then we would go to the football game. My father said, "It's time to go get in line to get tickets for the game," so he went and got in line. There were about four or five people in front of him and the game was sold out. Oh! My father was fit to be tied. He paced up and down. He said, "What are we going to do? I have to see that game?" He looked across the street. Across the street from Kezar Stadium there's these apartment buildings that are high. He ran across the street, gave the guy five dollars. "Can we watch the game from your roof?" The guys said, "Yes, I guess you could," and he took the five dollars and allowed us to go up to the roof. We watched the 49er game from that roof across the street from Kezar.

Furey:

It's right next to the Polytechnic High School?

DeCory:

I think so.

Furey:

On Frederick Street?

DeCory:

I think so. Anyway, we watched the game from that roof and we always teased my mother. My mother was heavy-set at that time, and we had to go through this trap door in this—[laughter]—we always teased my mother. When she went up the steps and she went through that trap door it went [pop]. [laughter] We would always tease my mother about that. “Oh shut up!” Wasn’t that bad? Oh my father, he would not miss that game.

Castle:

He was an addict.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

It sounds like he was having withdrawal.

DeCory:

That stands out in my mind to this day. It was funny.

Castle:

Could you see the game from there pretty well?

DeCory:

Yes. Well, we couldn’t see one end zone but most of it we could see. That satisfied my father’s addiction. That was funny. Every year after that we would go. I remember the last time, in 1962, when my father was getting ready to come home. My sister and I lived in San Francisco, we shared an apartment. I told Sue, I mean, Liz. Sue is my daughter. I told Liz, my sister, I told her, “You know what we should do, since Papa’s going to go home? He’ll probably never see another 49ers game. We should take him to the 49er game this coming weekend.” So that’s what we did. We took him to the very last game that he would see.

Castle:

Oh wow.

DeCory:

It was kind of a sentimental journey for all of us. I remember my father—this was in 1962—my father bought my sister a stocking cap and it had the 49—it was the 49er color, red and gold, and it had the 49er emblem on the front. He bought me a pennant and I still have that pennant. It’s up on my wall in my bedroom, I still have it. I keep telling my kids, “That thing is older than you are.” Those are souvenirs from the good old days.

Castle:

That’s a really powerful journey, because if you think about, what, that’s like twenty years, marking for you from ’42 to ’62 and how does he go from Encenal—was he from Encenal?

DeCory:

Encenal, yes.

Castle:

From one of the villages of Laguna Pueblo all the way to the Richmond Indian village from an agreement made, a very strategic agreement made by the Pueblos when tribes were just being run over so much by the federal government and right of way. The journey ends with a pennant.

DeCory:

A lot of good came out of that, we got an education. I'm not college-educated. A lot of good came out of that. I think the kids were educated through the California education system which at that time, I don't know how it is now, but at that time the standards were pretty high. We went through the school system there. I went to Roosevelt Junior High School from seventh grade to ninth grade, and then to the senior high school, which is Richmond Union High School. I graduated from Richmond High School. I felt I got a good enough education through that system. When I graduated from high school I knew enough of the business world where I got good jobs. I have never been without a job. I was in secretarial area, I was always in some clerical work, secretary or some clerk somewhere. I felt that the education that I got was enough to get me through my life.

02:00:30:04

I did want to go to college at that time. This is the one and only thing that I always felt maybe cheated out of. My father was responsible for that. That was the one thing that my father did that really hurt me was that he prevented me from going to college. My brother at that time was going to a local junior college, Contra Costa Junior College. He was going to school there. I wanted to go when I graduated, and my father didn't allow me. Because back then, money—we didn't have a lot of money. We just barely made ends meet. In those days there weren't the scholarships that there are now. So my father told me, "I can't afford to send you, I can't let you go to college." He said, "Besides, if I let you go to college and you end up getting married, having kids, staying home, then your education is wasted." He allowed my brother to go to the two-year college. Then my brother came back to New Mexico and then he finished his education in Albuquerque at the old Albuquerque—what was it called? College of Albuquerque or something like that.

Furey:

State college?

DeCory:

It was a two-year college. Anyway, he finished over there. Two months after my brother graduated from college, he died. I'm still here with no college education. That's one thing that hurt me really bad. Especially after my brother passed away. I got so angry at my brother. I said, "You were allowed to go to college, you were allowed to do this, you were allowed to do that. But I didn't and I'm still here. Why?" That's all water under the bridge now and I've forgotten about it. There were times when I guess I could have put myself back into college and gone back to school but I just didn't, mainly because I had four children and I was a single mother at that time. Those things happen. I think that was the one and only time that I remember that my father disappointed me. Other than that I love my father dearly.

Castle:

You were talking about what you used to do on your birthday and I thought that ties in, especially with a sense of how much there was to do around there for you, both in Richmond—could you describe what you would do?

DeCory:

My father, every year on my birthday, I don't remember the first time he took me but it seemed like maybe five years old, until I was about eleven or twelve years old. Every year my father would take me on a special birthday trip. We went to, by choice we went to San Francisco every year. It was my choice. We went back to the same places every year, we did the same things every year. It was just something that I wanted to do because my father was there with me. We did this, we would get in his car, drive over across the Bay Bridge. We would go to Fisherman's Warf and we'd walk around there. We'd buy things, little souvenirs. We'd buy food and then we went over to the ocean area. We would go to the Cliff House, that's before it was burned and rebuilt. This was a long time ago. We went to the Cliff House, we would look out at Seal Rock, see all the seals and everything. Then we would walk down the beach, all the way down to the beach. Then we would go across the highway to Playland. He put me on all the rides. The one ride I remember was the merry-go-rounds. I just love merry-go-rounds. Even to this day, I'll get on with my grandchildren. And the Ferris wheel. Anyway, my father would get sick in the merry-go-round. As a young child he didn't want me to get on by myself. He would be standing beside me holding me onto the horse that I was riding, and it would go up and down, up and down. My father would get sick. [laughter] After we'd leave the Playland area. There was, going our or coming in, right at the entrance way there was this glass cage—there was a woman standing in the cage. It was a mechanical thing, all dressed up in old fashioned clothes and she'd be standing there laughing, heh heh heh! She'd be laughing like that. [DeCory references Laughing Sal?] My father and I used to tease each other about that mechanical woman. Any time he would laugh, he would do this just like that mechanical woman. Anyway, that was part of the birthday trip. Then going home we would go back to Chinatown and we would eat at the same restaurant. I don't think it's there anymore. We would eat at the same restaurant, eat the same kind of food. I just love Chinese food. I think that's where I acquired my taste for Chinese food. We went to the same restaurant. Then we would come home. We would get back to the house late in the evening.

Furey:

Would you take the streetcar? The streetcar used to run down Geary, right? Our to the Cliff House?

DeCory:

Yes, well, he had his car, so we would drive around. But we would ride the cable cars and that was my birthday treat. Anything that I wanted to do that day. That was my birthday treat. Instead of a birthday present. I think, instead of a birthday present—excuse me [weeps] that was his gift to me, the memories. Those were his gift to me and I still remember them.

Castle:

Those are very powerful.

DeCory:

I loved my father so much. But that was his gift to me, the memory that came from those trips. And I still carry them with me. I still carry those memories with me. I still have his gift with me. I get very emotional and sentimental when I talk about my father.

Castle:

Thank you for sharing the memories. I hope that what it's bringing up is at least, they're sweet memories.

DeCory:

Yes.

Castle:

They just make you miss him.

DeCory:

I just miss my father, and he died in 1975 and still to this day I miss my father. I miss my mother too. I love my mother just as much. The things that my father and I did together, I remember the first time my father left me home and he took my brother. I cried and cried and screamed and yelled and kicked! I wanted to go with him. He and my brother were going to a baseball game. I remember my brother carrying his baseball glove and he was taking my brother. I usually went along with them but this time it was just father and son. He left me home, and oh, I was fit to be tied. My mother told me, she said, "You don't have to go with your father every time." I said, "Yes I do! I want my daddy!" That was when I learned to bake cake. [laughter] My mother bribed me and she told me, she said, "You can bake a cake for Dad when they come home." We had the wood-burning stove. So we put fire in the stove and heated up the oven, and that was before we had mixers and things. There I was, stirring up a storm and baking a cake, the first cake I ever baked, and it was because I was left home. [laughter]

Castle:

It sounds like—Ruth and I were talking about it, I call it daddy's girls, and the things you learn or engage in when you don't get to spend constant time with your dad. I think Ruth said that's when she started learning to cook and take care of some other things.

DeCory:

I remember because we had wood-burning stoves, my father would go over and get some old lumber from the wood yard that we had. My father would bring that, haul it back to the back of our house. He had built a wood shed there. He had this great big long saw and it had handles on both ends. I used to help him saw the wood. I would split the wood into bite sized pieces for the stove. I would be over there with the axe, splitting the wood. After we got through sawing the wood and splitting the wood we'd take it in the wood shed and we'd stack it in there so that it was convenient for my mother just to go out there and get the wood and bring it into the house all ready to burn. I did all kinds of things with my father. Well, my brother was always there too.

02:00:40:00

But of the girls I was always the one that was—we only had one brother and there were four of us girls. I was the one that was always with my father. I think that's the way Ruth was too, she was always with her father.

Castle:

You described this tremendous day that was your birthday experience. Did you go with him or with others to other places in the Bay? Like do you remember the intertribal Friendship House at all?

DeCory:

I think that came after I left home.

Castle:

Okay.

Furey:

The Four Winds Club at the YWCA?

DeCory:

Excuse me?

Furey:

The Four Winds Club?

DeCory:

Yes, that was something that my mother belonged to. Well, they all went to the Friendship House but that wasn't until after I left home. That was—well, I finished high school in 1956. At that time I came home and I lived with my grandparents for a while before I moved over here. I lived with my grandparents for about maybe three years. Maybe two years. Then I lived here for like maybe a year. Then I went back to California to go back to—I went to a business school. I got a job in San Francisco and I just stayed out there until I got married, until after I got married.

Castle:

Okay, let me just do a few more questions before you graduated. Then we can kind of catch up on that quick chronology that we just covered. Before, as you described, chronologically, the Intertribal Friendship House hadn't really fully established itself in terms of your age to relate to it.

DeCory:

Mm-hmm.

Castle:

Do you remember the Indian Center? The San Francisco Indian Center at all?

DeCory:

Yes, I do remember that, but that didn't start until after I left also. I remember when I went out there on vacation, I was working with the Jackpile mine over here with the Anaconda Company. I went back out to California on a vacation one year. My sisters were all excited about going to the dance. I said, "Where do you guys go dance?" And she says, "Daddy takes us to San Francisco to the Indian Center." I said, "Oh wow, that's interesting." So we all went, we all got dressed up and we went over there. Pop believed in getting your money's worth, so he would

take us even before the place opened up, so we could go in there and start dancing right now.
[laughter]

Castle:

So much for waiting until the scene is set and making a late entrance.

DeCory:

That was Pop. Anyway, he would take us over to that Indian Center, and they had a lot of friends over there because they did a lot of pow-wows. My father liked to go to participate in the pow-wows. My sisters would dance at the pow-wows. That's something I never did.

Castle:

You never danced?

DeCory:

I didn't go to the pow-wows out there in California, unless I was, you know, out there for one reason or another. I never participated in the dancing itself because I just was never part of that. Those things started up I think after I left.

Castle:

Brendan did just mention the Four Winds Club. Do you remember that? Or were you or any member of your family involved in that?

DeCory:

I remember that, and I know Nellie was a big part of that. She was really an active member. My mother and my father went to the Friendship House. I don't know if they were—were they members? Maybe they were after I left, but I don't remember.

Ruth:

Yes, they were.

DeCory:

But Mom and Pop were always over to the Friendship House on Saturdays, I think, were the times when they really had their activities going. Then there were other times like Christmas and Easter and those kinds of things that they participated in, but I was never really a part of that because I was here and those things happened in Richmond.

Castle:

So you finished, you graduated from—just tell me again the schools you went to after elementary you went—

DeCory:

To Roosevelt Junior High School.

Castle:

And then on to Richmond.

DeCory:

Then on to Richmond Union High School.

Castle:

Then you graduated from there in 195—

DeCory:

'56

Castle:

'56. Then where did you go after that?

DeCory:

After high school I came back to Encinal, here in Encinal. I lived with my grandparents. I was with them for maybe a month and one of the relatives came over and asked me what I was doing. Was I active in anything? I said, "No, I want to look for a job." The person that was telling me this, "There's a job opening over at the Jackpile Mine but it's a temporary job, if you want to take it." She said, "I can take you over." So I did. I went over and I got the job. It was inventorying the warehouse. That was my first job there. I gradually went on to another job and I stayed until 1962 I think it was. I started working there I think in like 1956, the end of 1956.

Castle:

So it hadn't been open that long? It had been open like five years maybe?

DeCory:

Yes. They had the mine going pretty good. I started working in the office, in the payroll office. I worked with—well, she was the office manager. There were about three or four women that were working there, along with the engineers and the geologists and the surveyors. We did all the office work for them. The superintendent, the assistant superintendent, and the surveyors and the geologists, and all the engineers. There were about four engineers there. We all—the women did the office work for them, the payroll and everything. It was a small office. Then in 1962 when the first layoffs—they were doing a layoff because they thought the mine was going to shut down. Instead of being laid off I signed up to go back to school. It was through that relocation program that they had in Albuquerque, all the Indians, all the people around here in different villages, different tribes went back to school through that relocation program. It was paid for I guess through the government. They wanted to send me to Chicago. I said, "But I don't know anybody in Chicago." They said, "Well, where do you want to go?" They gave me a choice, I think, of Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco. So I chose Oakland because it was closest to home, well, to my parents. I chose Oakland and I went to business school. I finished a two-year course in nine months. The reason for that, it wasn't because I was so smart, it was because everything that was being offered in that school I had already taken in high school. That's why I said that school, the high school that taught me was such a good school, that even this business school couldn't offer me anything more than what I learned in high school. I took shorthand, all the business-type things, typing, bookkeeping and accounting systems, things like that. I learned all that in high school. Then when I went to this business school it was more or less a refresher course.

Castle:

Do you remember the name of the school?

DeCory:

Dickenson Warren. It was a private school where a woman ran the school for some well-to-do people. I just happened to get into that school because the school that I wanted to go to, Healds College in Oakland, didn't have any more room, didn't have another space for me. So they offered me this and I took it.

Castle:

It was paid for through the relocation program?

DeCory:

Yes, it paid for the program. Then up until, oh, just before I finished that course, I went out to look for a job. Actually, I did, I started looking for a job, looking into here and there. I was told by the relocation office that I couldn't do that. I had to go finish the whole course and then go to their office and they would let me know when there was an opening somewhere. I did that for like a week. I went to and sat in the relocation office, did nothing, and nothing was coming in. So I went out and I got my own job. I worked, I got a job at the Veterans' Administration in the regional office in San Francisco when it was still on—I think on Fourth Street. Fourth or Eighth Street. Something like that. Anyway, I went to work there. I was offered jobs at different places. I went to take a civil service test first. I did that on my own. I went to take a civil service test and I passed. They took the top five people that passed the test and sent them out on different interviews. I went to—

Castle:

So you were one of the top five?

DeCory:

Yes. I went to the Atomic Energy Commission, I went to the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, I went to the Veterans' Administration. And there was one other, I can't remember what it was. Of all of them, VA had the best benefits so I went with VA. That's how I started working at the Veterans' Administration.

02:00:50:00

Castle:

It's interesting, what you're describing about—even though there was a real, you definitely benefited from the business program through the relocation program, if you hadn't gone out and taken the initiative to get your own job—it sounds like it might be another example of kind of some of the mismanagement that was involved with relocation, where they had things set up a certain way and you had to go through that but you couldn't wait around for that.

DeCory:

I had a friend, her name was Regina Grayhair. She was from Winnebago, Minnesota. I think she was Winnebago. But anyway, she worked in the relocation office, in San Francisco. I went through the Oakland office. I just met her by accident through another friend. She was telling me about a lot of the mismanagement and she said, "You got out just in time, before all this started." Eventually, she quit. She quit working for them, quit working for that office. It was fun living in

San Francisco, being young, single, and didn't really know too much. I lived with three other girls. We had a two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco. That was fun, that was a lot of fun for me.

Castle:

Would you say that having had the experience of the village prepared you for living in the Bay Area to a certain degree? In a way others may not have that came out of the relocation program?

DeCory:

Well, you know, it's kind of—I don't know how to describe it. Those of us who lived in Richmond were like far ahead of the ones, the teenagers our age, we were so far ahead of them, than the ones who lived here at home, because I remember coming home from Richmond to my grandmother's house. We brought the latest fashions, and we brought home those records, the latest songs that were on the hit parade and the charts and things like that. [phone interruption]

Richmond and the people here, the kids here. We would bring home the latest records and the teenagers over at my grandmother's house would listen to them. We would just give it to them and they would take it back, because at that time they were going to the Albuquerque Indian School, that's a boarding school. They stayed there. We would just bring things home that they thought were more modern than what they had here at home. Even in the education, I think we were like at least two grades ahead of them. Not that they were dumb or anything, but we just told them what we learned out there. I don't think the education system at the Indian School was anywhere near what the standards in California. So we knew a little bit more than what they were learning here. I just always felt that I learned a lot through that system. That's what I want for my grandchildren, to learn as much as they can. I try to interest them in all kinds of things, not just—well, religion here is a big part of the traditions here. I want them to learn that as well as everything else on the outside.

Castle:

This fits really well with the last few questions. I was interested to know how, for example, you—kind of the legacy of your experience. What is it—because at certain points in our lives we think about how we've been impacted by things. For a lot of people—with relocation, a lot of native people were moved off reservations and chose to go, and there were a lot of problems adjusting to urban life. They didn't have culture, security, family, in ways that seemed to be very unique to the Richmond experience. Does that sound—does that make sense to you? How would you analyze that for me?

DeCory:

Yes, it does make sense to me in a lot of ways. I think because we grew up with all races of people, I think we were better prepared to go out and meet the world, meet different people. Maybe get jobs. Here, they're so close that even now, even in this day and age a lot of the kids that graduate from the local high school here, they want to go to college, but when they get to that college it's a whole new world for them. Mommy and Daddy aren't there, parents aren't there, they don't know how to manage money, they don't know how to manage their time. I think that because we grew up out there it was just totally different from growing up here. I think I was a whole lot better prepared than, say, my cousin, who is about the same age. When she graduated from high school she stayed home for quite a while until she decided to go on and do

something. She went to a nursing school. After she got over the initial shock of being away from the reservation she did really really well.

Castle:

Would you say—I guess the thing that’s really interesting to know in connection to that is by your experience in the village did you feel that there was any disconnection with being Laguna or any loss of tradition that is often associated with people leaving, kind of traditional reservations?

DeCory:

No, with me, with my generation I don’t think there was any. Because my parents kept up with the same kinds of traditions that were going on at home. They carried them out there and we went through the traditional ways of the Indian people, the Laguna people.

Castle:

What were some of those things that you did? Was it through religions?

DeCory:

Yes, a lot of it was through religion. Well, we were also baptized Catholic and we went to a Catholic church. I made my first holy communion, I was confirmed, I went through the whole nine yards with the Catholic religion.

Castle:

In Richmond?

DeCory:

In Richmond. Same way with the Indian religion. I respect the religion, I participate in the—even out there away from the traditional home we participated in the traditional ways. The Easter thing with the puddings, the dances, and with our prayers, our feeding of the spirits. All of those things, we’ve always kept them in our families. Every family has their own way of doing things, but generally they’re basically all the same way. We feed out spirits, we respect the religion, we respect the elders. Oh, back then, there was respect coming out of our ears. This day and age now, even the little kids, they come up and tell you the F word. Back in those days even if you said “darn it” or something like that—I remember getting my mouth washed out with soap. And all it took was one time, and I never repeated that word again. I got stood in the corner a few times because of misbehavior and it only took a few times. Back then you learned. Back then, when you got spanked, it was discipline. Nowadays when you get spanked it’s abuse. Something was taken away from the parents.

Castle:

So if you had to pass on from your experience, this dual world of opportunity that you had, you were saying that what you want for your grandchildren—what was it that you were just saying? You really want this open mind or this open world or curiosity? Are those some of the things?

DeCory:

Well, first of all, my grandchildren, I want to teach them our way, our traditional ways. That’s foremost in my mind. Everything else they learn anyplace else. In school, in college. I have two grandsons that live here on the reservation and they’re traditional.

Castle:

I'm sorry, the tape's ending.

DeCory:

I talked too long.

Castle:

No, we have two minutes left. This was my last question. [tech interruption not transcribed]

02:01:00:07

Anyway, you were saying that you want to pass on traditional ways.

DeCory:

I want to pass the traditional ways on, but then it depends on where the child is growing up. The two grandsons that I have here are traditional. They've grown up the traditional way, plus going to the state-run public schools. I have another grandson who is going to school in Boston right now. He's in college right now. He graduated from a school in Portland, Maine. My daughter lives there because she took her internship or whatever in a hospital back there and she just decided to stay there. So he's not in the traditional way. I didn't have a chance to teach him our traditional way. He's Jewish, well, half Jewish, and I do want him to learn their traditional ways too, the way the Jewish people do their traditional ceremonies. I want him to learn our traditional ways, but because he went to school away from the reservation, he's grown up like a white person. I mean, he's half. It depends on where they grow up. He does want to come home and learn the traditional ways. He wants to make a recording of it. He's in college of music, he's learning all the different ways to make music, to record music. He's going to Berklee—

Furey:

Berklee School of Music?

DeCory:

He's going to school there in Boston. What he wants to do with that education is come back and try to record and try to do something with that education here on the reservation. Like I said, it depends on where they grow up. To me, it's my own personal feeling that I want my grandchildren to learn the traditional ways and not forget the traditional ways, to carry them on to their next generation.

Begin Audiofile 3

03:00:00:00

DeCory:

--Believe that anywhere in this world there could be so much water. He just stood there. I mean, he was speechless. Being the traditional person that he is, being traditional, our way of praying is with cornmeal. I don't know if you were told that. That's the way we pray. Some people pray with rosary beads. As Catholics we prayed with rosary beads, but a traditional Indian will pray with cornmeal, giving it to the four directions. When my grandson, when we went up there, he remembered. He was mindful to take his pouch of cornmeal, because his grandfather told him, "When you see the ocean, feed the spirits." And that's what he did. He took a handful of cornmeal—he had his bathing suit on, he was rushing down to the water—he just stood there in

awe. I mean, he just stood there. He just prayed to the four directions, and he went over and put the cornmeal in the water. In our traditional way, I don't know if anybody told you, but in our traditional way, when a baby gets the first haircut, it's traditional to take that hair and put it in the nearest river to carry it away. That's to signify a long life. When he went out there to the ocean, he just put the cornmeal out there and fed the spirits. That was such an experience for him, personally, because he had never seen anything like that. Those are some of the kinds of things that the kids here—they don't experience those kinds of things. Living out there where we were close to a lot of things, like the football games, the baseball games, when I took my grandson out there he experienced his first professional baseball game. The Oakland A's were playing the Minnesota Twins. He was just telling everybody.

Castle:

It was like the biggest thing.

DeCory:

It was a big thing to him. And the same way—I used to hear the World Series on the radio when my father was listening to those games. I thought to myself one time, “I'm going to go to a World Series Game.” And I did, I went to two World Series games, when Oakland A's were in it. That's just something—

Castle:

That's a real sense of adventure that you gained.

DeCory:

I think living out there was just—I think we just took it for granted too. Looking back now I felt like maybe I did take it for granted, all the things that were available to us, all the different experiences that were available to us, growing up with all races of people. Here we're exposed to mainly Indians and other Indians—Laguna people and other tribes. It isn't until they graduate from high school, if they went to school here, and they went on to college in Albuquerque or anyplace else, that's kind of a cultural shock, because that's the first time they've left home without parents. Like I've said, a lot of them don't know how to manage money and time, and that's where they get in trouble. They start partying, they start spending their money for other things, other than their education. Before you know it they're kicked out of school because they can't pay their tuition, they're nuisances in the apartment buildings where they live, because they're partying all the time. Then they go home, all rejected and dejected. They don't know what to do with their lives. I think a lot of the things that we grew up with were to our advantage and I see that now. Back then—and I keep telling my kids, “I wish we had the advantages that you kids have now.” Even the generation my children grew up in, they had the scholarship programs that we didn't have back then, out in California. They have the Head Start programs, where little kids, three years old, can go to school. Out there we didn't have those kinds of things. They had the different kinds of food programs, but we always made a nickel too much on our income so we didn't qualify for those. And the housing programs, we always made a nickel too much. So we didn't qualify for those programs, but everybody else did here on the reservation.

Furey:

How do you think those programs have played out? Has Head Start made a big impact?

DeCory:

Yes it did. It was a really good thing, because a lot of the kids here, they start at a very young age, and they've been going to school. The only disadvantage I see is that they just teach here. They don't take them out to different areas where they could really see. They had to revise their tests because in some of those—like, what do you call those—the national education tests—some of those questions were geared for city life, even for little kids. “Do you wait for a green light or do you cross the street when it's a red light?” The kids here didn't know what a street light was. Because they had never been exposed to something like that. It wasn't until just recently where those kinds of things changed.

I mean, I was on the school board—it wasn't because of me or anything like that, but you know, we tried to instigate a lot of the programs and different kinds of, different ways of doing things. Gradually they came about. It wasn't until maybe years later, down the road, then things were finally happening. The school down here, I couldn't believe how that school was run. Up until 1963. Those kids down here were using cast-off books—no, not '63, that was when the school was built. '73 I guess it was. They were using cast-off books that Grants High School was using, because we're all in the same school district. Everything new that Grants High School was getting, the old stuff was being sent down here to the LA High School. We didn't see that until years later. Me, and some of the loudmouths who can't keep still because our kids are being—they're not getting educating enough, they're not getting educated as well as the other school is—we finally said something about it. We put in a class action suit against the school district, against the state because of the kinds of things that Laguna Acoma High School was getting or not getting. They settled that suit out of court. We went to Los Lunas, where the county seat was at that time, because we were all Valencia County at that time. Anyway, we went to Las Lunas, and we went to court. The judge there told us, “You two are going to have to try to come to some kind of agreement, otherwise, I'll make the decision.” So we met and we talked about it, and they agreed to 51-49 agreement. Of course we got 49, we got 51, but it was still something that was in the works. When we finally got through with all of that, we got a new chemistry building, a science building, we got an extension to the library, we got a new shower room for the gym, and new girls and boys shower areas. And we got all brand new books. They threw out all the old textbooks. We got all brand new books, up-to-date things. We felt like we made a dent in the school system.

I just didn't feel that our kids were getting the kind of education—and we put a stop to teachers coming in, like student teachers, teachers that had just finished their first year and they were going to continue teaching. We put a stop to teachers coming in and teaching the students. I found out that a French teacher, a teacher that taught French was trying to teach another kind of—what was it? Math. She was trying to teach a math class. There were teachers coming in that went to school for something totally different, teaching over here, teaching something that was foreign to them, even them. I found out through my son who was going to school there. I said, “Well, who's your teacher? Why are you getting grades like this?”

03:00:10:00

I went up to the school and that's how I found out that teachers being certified, but weren't certified to teach the subjects that they were teaching. That really surprised me. I said, “If my child is going to be in a math class, I want a teacher that knows about math teaching that classroom.”

Furey:

Have you noticed progress in this area?

DeCory:

Yes. There was a big change after that. A lot of parents were complaining about the kids not graduating.

Ruth:

Especially when they took the ACT's and their scores were so low.

DeCory

Yes. A lot of kids failed those tests. A lot of kids didn't go to college. I used to say, "Well, you know, it doesn't matter what school your kid goes to, it's how much you put into that school. If your student is interested in learning then they'll learn." Then my daughter, she started school in California, all my kids started school in California. One of my daughters started elementary school, she started in kindergarten. She spent two weeks in kindergarten and then she went into first grade. She's always been above her classmates in age and in grade. When she got to Laguna Acoma my kids were all smarter than the average bear. They were so smart because everything they were learning in the school, they already had it. The things that they were learning in sixth grade they learned in fourth grade over here, in California. It went like that all along. You know, I got concerned. Two of my kids, well, Yvonne and Kevin, they graduated with honors and my daughter went on to be a doctor. She's a doctor in Portland, Maine. That was because I pushed her, her science teacher pushed her, and her math teacher pushed her. They weren't even offering physics over here at the high school. They didn't offer physics. One of the requirements to get into a school, into the college where Yvonne was going to go to school, you had to have at least a year of advanced math. She had had calculus and trigonometry and all those other kinds of things, but they didn't have physics, and she had to learn physics. So she and maybe eight other kids, nine other kids, who wanted to go to college, they hired a tutor. They hired somebody to teach them physics. And they were using the high school. Grants found out that this teacher was teaching them physics, Grants put a stop to that because they were saying, "Mr. Aragon isn't certified to teach physics." It just happened that the kids learned just enough to get into the colleges that they chose. They passed the tests to get into those colleges. She just barely got in, by the skin of her teeth, just learning enough physics to get in. But she's gone from there.

Furey:

How did most of those students—obviously your daughter became a doctor—how did the other students who went away do?

DeCory:

One is a teacher. Well, his name is—oh, what is his name? Saracino, Chris. He went on to be a teacher. He's a high school teacher. He was a physical education teacher down here at the school. He doesn't teach that anymore, I don't know what area he's into. Another one is a veterinarian. I don't know what Madonna does. She went on to college, finished or—she ended up having a family and I don't know if she went back. Then the other kids who were involved in that little circle, they're from the Acoma pueblo, I don't know about them. But I know three of them, Yvonne and Chris and Talani, they went on into professions. I think some of them are teachers.

Furey:

Have they returned to the pueblo?

DeCory:

Talani, she has her own office, her own veterinarian business and she works with the pueblo. Chris, he came back to and he worked at the LA High School. Yvonne stayed away. Mainly because her husband at the time—she's divorced now—her husband is from the Boston area. So when she graduated from the University of Nebraska she went to Portland, Maine. That was the closest hospital she could get into, because they wanted to go back and be with the—the parents were elderly and Mark wanted to be with his parents. But they're still pretty active, the parents are. After she got divorced she just decided to stay there. She has a real nice condominium. She's with somebody now, they're planning to get married soon. They had one son, Yvonne and Mark had one son and he graduated this past June from a high school in Portland, Maine. He went on to—he got a scholarship to go to that music school, that school of music, college of music.

Furey:

Berklee school?

DeCory:

Berklee. You know, when he first told me that he got in at Berklee—oh my god! I thought, Oh! Great! Great!

Furey:

Berklee with two E's.

DeCory:

He says, "No Grandma, I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said, "but this is not Berkeley in California, this is Berklee in Boston." I thought I would have at least closer contact with my grandson. He's doing pretty good. When he was {?} he and some of his friends formed a little group. They called themselves the "Leftovers." He plays a couple of instruments. He plays a guitar and drums and I don't know, something else. In the basement of their home they put a little recording studio in there. They did a cd, and my granddaughter has that cd. It sold pretty good in the Boston area. I found out that they cut another one, did another cd. They're on their way. They got hired to do a gig here or there. My grandson and his language. [laughter] Oh, okay, whatever that is. But he's doing pretty good. They got hired to do bar mitzvahs and retirements parties.

Furey:

So your grandson's Jewish?

DeCory:

Yes.

Furey:

His father is Jewish and his mother is Native?

DeCory:

Yes. He went on to do all the Jewish things. Well, I guess, his grandparents are making sure that he learns the Jewish way, which is fine with me, because I want him to learn our traditional ways too. He's doing pretty good. He's a smart kid, really a smart kid.

Castle:

It sounds like as his grandma, you have intergenerationally passed on—it sounds like the Richmond experience or Santa Fe or however you look at it, there's a savvy and knowledge, a critical edge that you developed there it sounds like.

DeCory:

I think all of us that grew up out there have that same way. Some are, some became more traditional than others. I think I'm somewhere in the middle of the road. I never had anyone to actually go into the kiva and take part in the true traditional way. Like some of the others, my daughter, her two sons, her husband, they took part in the traditional way in the kivas. So she does all the traditional cooking, all the traditional baking and preparation. She does everything for them. I didn't learn—I learned some thing from my mother, but that was like around the edge, because we were always out in California. We did it the California way, but here there's a difference. There's a real big difference than what we learned out in California. My daughter is, she knows how to deal with the traditions that come from inside the kiva, I don't. There's a special way to—you know, the functions of a kiva. There are certain things you're not supposed to do, there's certain things you're supposed to do. I've learned from my daughter.

03:00:20:00

Castle:

Would you say that if you hadn't—you could have just gone to California and disappeared into urban life to a certain degree, if you hadn't maintained the curiosity or knowledge about maintaining traditional ways at the same time you might not have a daughter who knows the kiva? You know, I think—I'm interested in shaping how the village was this kind of space—often people talk about living in two worlds, it's almost like—I don't know, there's a moment where those worlds come together a bit as a native person. That's just me listening.

DeCory:

Well, the traditional people believe that there is someone somewhere that's the creator and the white man's way believe in the creator being god, and I think that's where our two worlds come together, is that we all believe that there's someone higher up, someone that's taking care of the people. What our traditional ways are to pray—the way I interpret it, what's equivalent to the Catholic saints. They pray to the saints, they pray to Saint Anthony, they pray to Saint Jude. They pray to the saints. In my {?} to pray to the traditional spirits. We believe that when a person dies they go back to that spirit world and they become part of the spirit world that comes and takes care of us. Like my son, he passed away—it'll be four years next month, in May. He went to the spirit world. So sometimes when I say a prayer, I'll just ask him to help me. It's like having my own personal saint, my own personal spirit. I'll ask him to help me. The help has always been there. My father is a spirit, my mother is a spirit. All the traditional people that have gone before us, they're all our traditional spirits, and so we pray to them. We pray to the spirits. We pray to the spirits that are all around us. We ask them for help, we ask them to guide us. We ask them for strength. I think that's something that's always kept me going. I'm not a practicing

Catholic. There have been so many changes in the Catholic religion, and there has been so much controversy in the Catholic religion that I just don't feel that I can go to church anymore. It doesn't mean that I've stopped believing in god. I still believe in god. I still believe the way I was brought up. I was brought up in catechism, that the Catholics don't recognize divorce. But my husband divorced me, and what did he do? He turned right around and—he's a lay person for the Catholic church. He was ordained.

Castle:
Really?

DeCory:
He was ordained into the Catholic church. I just think to myself, "How can you turn that religion off and on?" I think then because of all the sexual harassment by priests, Catholic priests, I just think to myself, "Did my priest do the same thing?" I never saw any evidence of that. But you just wonder, did Father Kelly, over at Our Lady of Mercy—is it still there?

Ruth:
Mm-hmm.

DeCory:
Our Lady of Mercy Church, where we all grew up and made first holy communion and everything. Father Garvey, I remember another priest.

Castle:
Are these churches here or in Richmond?

Ruth:
Richmond. They're in Richmond.

Castle:
Okay.

DeCory:
Anyway. I was really a devout Catholic back in those days. One of the main reasons was because my mother went to Saint Catherine's Indian School and that was run by the Catholic religion, and she made us do all the Catholic things. Church every Sunday, mass every Sunday. We went to stations of the cross during Lent, and we went to all kinds of things during Lent. We had to do this and that and the other thing for Lent. I still do that, you know? But not so much because of the church. I just do it for my own self. Like I sacrifice something. Like, Lent for the past maybe five years, I've given up three full meals. I eat maybe one meal a day plus maybe coffee and cookies or something in the morning, and a light snack in the evening. But I eat one main meal, whether it's breakfast, lunch, or dinner, I eat one main meal all during Lent, which is a good thing, because I lost some weight too. [laughter] But I still stick to the—I can't forget, and I can't ignore my upbringing in the Catholic church. I still stick to some of those things. But the Indian religion is the most important thing to me, as far as religion goes.

Furey:

How about for practicing Catholics? One reason that Catholicism was able to proselytize over all the Americans and forcibly convert most of the indigenous population to Catholicism was that they were able to incorporate the indigenous religions. So for practicing Catholics here in the pueblos, how much of the traditional spirituality is brought into the church for Sunday going practitioners?

DeCory:

Well, I've been to a few masses down at Laguna and they've brought in a lot of—well, I noticed that the priests wore {?} that have Laguna Indian designs on them. Like their chalice, it's not the golden chalice that I used to know, it's like pottery. They're singing a lot of their hymns in Laguna. They've translated them into Laguna and they're singing them in Laguna. They're incorporating a lot of the traditional—maybe the dress, some of the traditional ways of doing things into the Catholic church. The only thing they keep out is the religious part of that because that is purely ours. It can't be anybody else's. It can't be viewed by non-Indians. It's strictly our way of prayer. Like I said, the designs, the dress, the hymns, the words that are said, some of it is even done in Laguna. The masses are said in Laguna. A lot of them—and I see a lot of the elders in the church because they understand what's going on, because it's being said in our language.

Furey:

Isn't there also banning of all idol worship? Ruth said—I believe it was you—over the table, that when you get a Catholic school education, as an Indian, they tried to beat out the traditional spirituality.

DeCory:

There was a priest here who wouldn't hear of our traditional ways. In fact, he was telling the people that the plaza there is a ground for the devil. He wanted the people here to be strictly Catholic, no Indian religion at all. He was telling the people that if you go into the plaza, the demons will eat you up, or you're doing wrong. You shouldn't be in there. He was gotten rid of.

Furey:

He wasn't very popular?

DeCory:

[laughter] He wasn't popular, right. It's just some thing that—the people here are religious because the Spaniard that came through—this is all history, in history books—how Coronado came through this area and you know, those explorers. They found these poor savages, pagans, you know, no religion. They introduced Catholicism to the Indians here and they picked it up. A lot of them went to school at the Albuquerque Indian School where they also taught the religion, and Santa Fe, the Santa Fe Indian School. Then of course then there's—there was Saint Catherine's Indian School, which no longer exists now.

03:00:30:01

A lot of the kids went to school there because the parents wanted the kids to learn religion. They come back here and they try to combine the two. A lot of times it didn't work. You had to believe one way or the other, not both. But I think living out in California, that comes in. Because I can separate the two. I can separate the two. I can believe the traditional, our

traditional way, and I can also see the Catholic religious way. I was brought up with the ten commandments, I was brought up saying the rosary. Those kinds of things.

Furey:

Is your ability to blend the two related to the sixties, the new age spiritual revolution or whatever you want to call it?

DeCory:

Yes, I think in a way I think I can, because I can see both sides. I can see both ways. It all goes back to one—believing in god, believing there's a creator. It all goes back to that, for me it does. I don't know how it is with anybody else. But for me it all goes back to believing in one super-being, if you want. I don't know, if that's the way some people want to look at it. I believe that there's someone out there, something out there, that's taking care of me. That's why I'm living and breathing. Although sometimes I feel like I'm abandoned because some horrible thing has happened to me. Like when my son committed suicide I felt like I was abandoned. I felt like Jesus Christ on the cross. "Why has thou forsaken me?" After all the ways I believed, the Catholic ways, the traditional ways, why was I abandoned? I couldn't get answers to my questions. It didn't seem like the Catholic religion could answer my questions, nor could the Indian religion, they couldn't answer my questions. I'm still seeking answers. But slowly I'm coming to a point where, you know, things happen because they happen. I still believe in god. Just because I don't go to church anymore—I still believe in god. I don't go to every dance or every sacred occasion that happens here on the reservation, but that doesn't mean I've stopped believing in my own religious beliefs, in Indian religious beliefs. I say my prayers. I try to include all my family, my friends, especially my cousin and my best friend who have cancer—I pray for them all the time. I pray for peace in the world. I pray for all our Indian people to come home safely from the war.

It's not our war—well, we're living here and we're enjoying the freedoms, so I guess they should go to war. But, my son was in Saudi, in 1991, during that Desert Storm. I know how the families are feeling right now who have sons and daughters in Iraq. At the same time, my other son was in Korea. He was going through that student uprising and all that. He said it was like a war. You could see those rockets going overhead. He was in that DMZ. He said it was just like a war, a war zone. From both sides, I had one in Saudi Arabia and the other one was in Korea—it was just a really hard thing for a mother to go through. I never knew if my sons, either one of them, was going to come home in a body bag, or if I was ever going to see them again. But thank god, thank our spiritual—all the spirits that they did come home safe.

Furey:

On the topic of Indians in the military, how did the Acoma and Laguna families feel about sending their children to fight in a war that was foreign, so far away, and one might say, for the white man? Was there any sense of—how would you say—lack of meaning or lack of cause in the war?

DeCory:

Well, I think with our people there was a lot of sadness when the war broke out. Our people were being sent over there. There weren't any women at that time in the military. Being sent over—Nellie's sister was in the navy but I don't think she was sent to any combat zone or even close to

it, I think they were stateside. Back then my mother had cousins in the military and they were sent to those war zones. There was a lot of sadness, a lot of—it was like—

Furey:

Was there any indignation?

DeCory:

Yes, “Why were they sent over there? It wasn’t our war.” That was a question that was never answered. “Why were they sent? It’s not our war.” But they were sent anyway, they had no say-so. The men that were sent over there couldn’t say, “No, I can’t go.” They couldn’t even—what do they do now? File for conscientious objector? That was unheard of back then. They couldn’t even do that. They went anyway and they served their country. When they came back it was like—we were happy to have our men come home, our own people come home. We were sad when they came home in a body bag, when they came home in a coffin. Yes, well, they got a star to put in their window—the parents got a flag, one of those little emblem things with a star, saying that, indicated that someone in our family was killed in the war. What good was that? I would rather have my brother home, my brother, my father, my uncle. Those were sad times. Those were really sad times in our way.

There was celebration though, when they came home. They were so happy to come home. Nowadays a lot of them enlist right out of high school because the recruiters come to the high school. That’s how both my sons went. My older boy, George, he was just barely eighteen when he left home. He had just turned eighteen in June and in August he left. My other son, he didn’t leave—well, he turned eighteen in October. He didn’t leave until maybe February of the next year. But he was still quite young. I looked at it in a good way, because—well, when my son joined up there was no wars going on. It wasn’t until after he joined up, that’s when that Desert Storm thing started. The way I looked at it was, “Here’s an opportunity for you as a young man. Because basically, there’s nothing for you around here. You can go work at Laguna Industry but periodically they lay people off.” That was before we had the casinos. Actually, there was no place around here to work. They had to go to Albuquerque or to Grants to go have a full time job. I looked at it as an opportunity for my boys to learn, to set aside some money for a college education if that’s what they wanted when they left the military. Another was, to go see another part of the world which you would probably never have an opportunity to see. In my own personal view, my boys going into the military was an advantage. But then the thing in Desert Storm started up. I was at work when the first bombs were dropped, or the first shot was fired. One of my coworkers came into my office and she said, “Did you know that they started the war in Iraq?” I said, “No.” Well, my son hadn’t contacted me for quite a while because they were put on stand-by.

03:00:40:01

He told me that when they get put on stand-by, all communications stop. They can’t even phone their parents until they’re ready to leave. My son called me the night before he was put on a plane to go jump off that airplane into a foreign country. I didn’t even have time to think. I went to work with this—my shoulders just holding this heavy, heavy thought. One of my coworkers came in and she told me, “Have you heard that they’ve started the war?” I don’t know how I got through the rest of that day, but I came home and I sat in my living room, full living color, the war was on TV. Those Smart Bombs were going left and right, those rockets were going this

way and that way. And it was scary, very scary. The whole time he was in Saudi I don't think I slept. I didn't have a good night's sleep. [telephone interruption]

[End of interview]