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Albert Del Masso

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
David Dunham
in 2011

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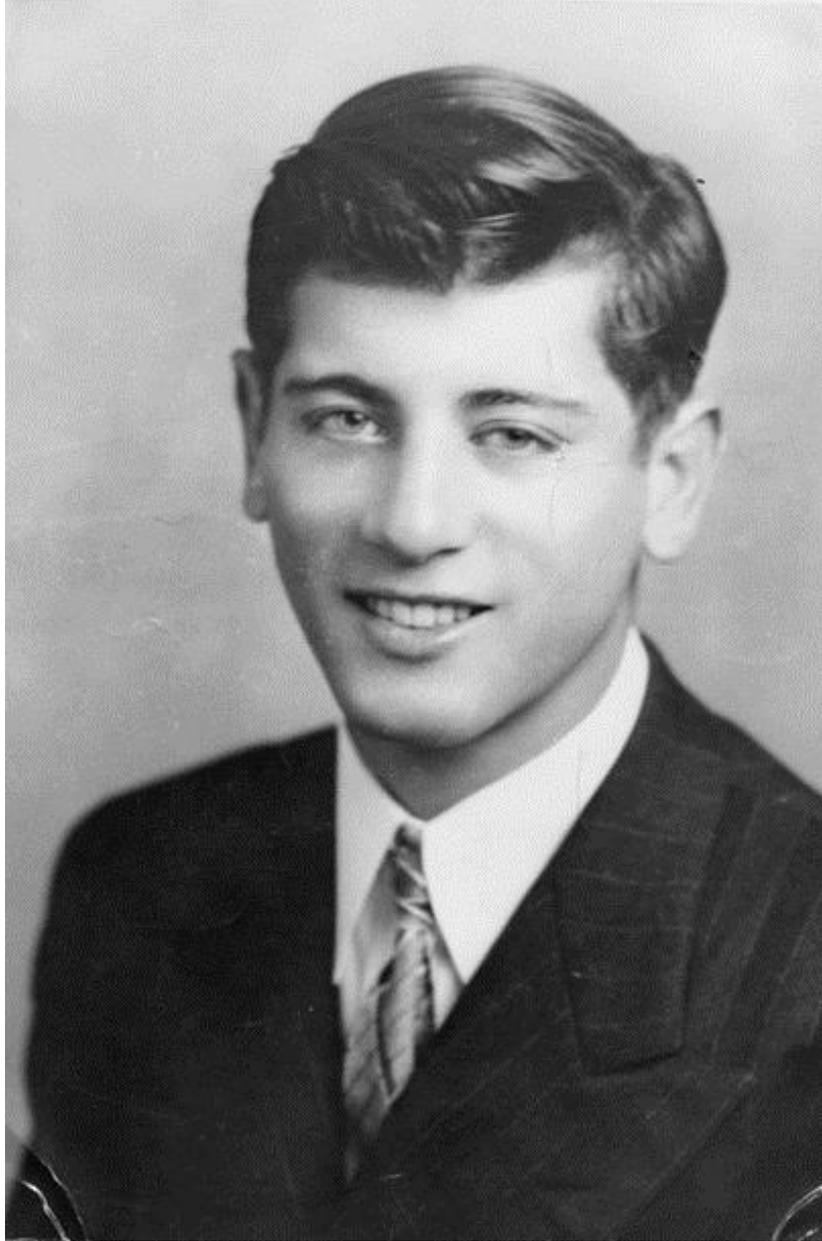
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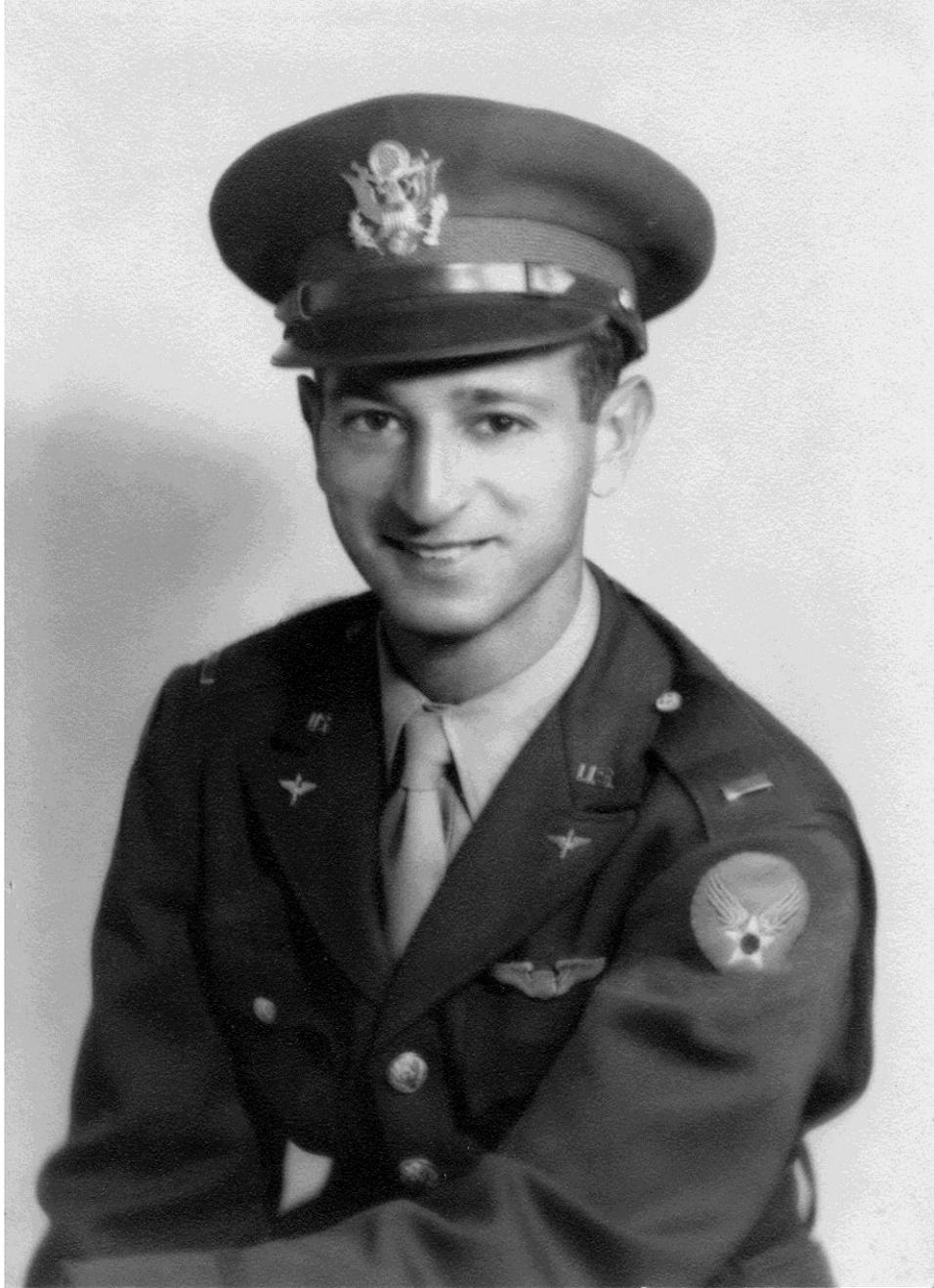
Albert Del Masso, "Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project" conducted by David Dunham in 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



Albert Del Masso



Albert with brother Pat Del Masso



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Interview 1: December 15, 2011
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Dunham: It's Thursday, December 15, and this is David Dunham from the Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project. I'm here with Albert Del Masso at his business in San Leandro, Bay Cities Produce, which he's been running since 1947. We're here today to do an interview largely to discuss his experiences near the end of the war when he entered the military and had some harrowing experiences, but we're going to start off with his early family background and talk a little bit about the World War II home front experiences as a highschooler, I think, and maybe your family's experiences as well. So we usually start at the beginning. Can you tell me your full name and your date of birth?

1-00:00:46

Del Masso: Albert B for Bruno Del Masso, June 18 or 19, 1926. My mom was never sure which day it was because she had midwives.

Dunham: Where were you born?

1-00:01:11

Del Masso: In Pocahontas, Illinois.

Dunham: Do you have siblings, or did you have siblings?

1-00:01:22

Del Masso: Yes, my mother was called out of a cotton field at age 13, 14 by my grandfather, a really hurtful and uncaring man. If he had been named Adolph I think it would have been better. And he forced her to marry his gumba, it's Italian for friend, who was thirty-three. She's fourteen. I think, I'm not sure, four or five kids by the time she's twenty-one years old. Dad, who was a violent alcoholic, gets tired of beating everybody, takes a hike, and dumps her at that time, just as the Depression starts.

Dunham: Wow, and where were you then?

1-00:02:03

Del Masso: We were in Oklahoma and Illinois, and we came to California at a terrible time, of course. I never saw my father again, only ever heard from him once when he called our house years later. I was a teenager, and my mother said to me the most amazing thing, she says, "Albert, your father's on the phone." I did not know what father meant really; I never had one, didn't know what that meant. Other people had fathers, I didn't, okay. "Well, what does he want?" "He wants to talk to you." I say, "You tell him that I'll never ever talk to him as long as I live." Why couldn't he send us \$10 a month? See, I watched what happened to my mother. I watched that poor little girl become a slave, a surf, you name whatever it was, trying to protect these kids, which she got practically no help whatsoever. So that was the last I ever talked to him except

when he died. The attorney called, Mr. Cunha from I think that was Oklahoma, to tell me my father left me some money. So I said to the attorney, “You tell him to take that money and stick it, right where it hurts the most.” He couldn’t help us—see, what happened to me and my mother was so tragic. These were the good days compared to what was laying for us. That would never have happened if he could have found us five or ten bucks a month so my mother would not have to do the things that did happen. So I refused the inheritance. I’m nothing to him. I wanted to go right down clean all the way through. So that’s all I ever had to do with him. We came out to California; it’s the Depression. What the hell are you doing? How do you make a living?

Dunham: What did your mother have to do in order to take care of you guys?

1-00:03:58

Del Masso: She was working in San Francisco at a cigarette company, and she was a very attractive woman. You know, it’s a funny thing, Dave; I had the most amazing relationship. I’m a son, I’m a child; but I have huge empathy for her. Instead of feeling left out or not being given very much, I really was—I have no idea where this ability came from—but to watch her suffer, and I knew that what all that’s happened to us, she was paying the total price for it. So she worked and took the train to San Francisco, and she worked at a cigarette company. Then she came back here and got a couple of jobs in Temescal, which is a little community not too far from here and for McFarland’s Candy Company. And we went to school there and abouts, and we had nothing; we were terribly poor, and things were about ready to get a hell of a lot worse. I don’t know when you want to get into the all that.

Dunham: Yeah, well let’s do that, but let’s talk a little more about your family background. Let’s back up a minute. You mentioned your grandfather. Did you know grandparents on both sides; can you tell me a little bit about each of them?

1-00:05:23

Del Masso: Yes. I lived with them. A little bit out of order, I can tell you how that was. David, I don’t want to be difficult; some of these things I have to connect in a way that makes logic to me.

Dunham: No problem.

1-00:05:37

Del Masso: So if I may, my mother was a very pretty lady. It was the Depression. We had nothing, nothing. We lived in a house full of rats. I was scared of the rats at night because they’d run over the top of you in bed. And what was she going to do? How would she earn a living? The young men would come by—a terribly attractive lady—on their motorcycles, and then they would go on their motorcycles. Not angry about it at all. What else could she do?

I don't remember much about my brothers; see, we were almost never ever a family. We were separated. To tell you how bad it was, one night the young guys come to get my mother to go to a motorcycle ride. They looked like Charles Lindbergh with their helmets on. And I threw a hell of a fit for her not to go. Our house, the doors had holes in them eaten by the rats. The drawers did too. We could hear them at night. And my mother left with her people. I took a blanket, and I went out on the street and slept on the sidewalk on the street underneath the lamp until my mother would come home.

I'm not angry about that at all. What the hell was she going to do? Couldn't anybody have helped us at all? There was no aid in that day for anything. Once in a while we got a couple of oranges from somebody. I don't know who that was.

So my mother lived over there. What happened to us, getting a little bit ahead here, but my mother had a boyfriend, handsome man, was a violin player at the hotels in San Francisco, kind of a mini-celebrity, big guy, good-looking guy. My brother Joe—this was 1932, so I'm about six years old, five years old, and I'm having kind of an out-of-body experience. There was a huge explosion, and I was reborn. I wasn't born before that. That was when I was born. You see I'm looking across at my mother covered with blood. I'm looking at her in bed on top of this man who's covered with blood and screaming and shouting, dying. The guy beat the hell out of my brother Joe. Joe had come to my mother's aid. He beat brother Joe up. And I was standing there watching, and they had a screaming physical fight, and he had a gun. She got the gun; she killed him. That's when I was born. I remember nothing before that and from that time on. The police arrived. They called my uncle to take us away to my grandparents' home.

My uncle Larry arrives; he's probably in his twenties, something like that. My uncle arrives, and the police, and he takes me over to his house. My brothers are put in institutions, one, because of no food to eat. He had rickets and the other brother had TB. And I was taken to their home and put into isolation, for all reason as abandoned, as I had become a pariah. An epic in life that I can't explain to anybody that they could possibly understand it. I'm not crying to you for pity and everything. I blocked it out pretty well.

I was sent to live with my grandfather and grandmother. He had, I don't know, five or six daughters, two boys. The police took me over to his house with my uncle. I don't know how many years I was there. I'll tell you something you won't believe. I lived in a house with a man, and never in all the years I was there ever addressed me one single word. I was like an animal being raised on an island in the Pacific with baboons. My grandmother was a nice lady. She was special.

I lived in a house. I could have nobody over; I could go no other place. And nobody would come over our house. This is in the thirties. A woman killed a

man; there was no television at this time. It was in all the newspapers, all the radio, and here my grandfather with his ego, Italian immigrant success kind of after all—he had a workforce of seven families working for him, and he damn well worked them. So I was the hated one because I evidently was the walking symbol of this thing happening.

And our neighbors, largely Catholic, wanted nothing to do with us because I was the pariah, and we were some terribly violent people. After I stayed there some years as a kid I finally ran away to find my mother, which I did; I still had to come back, stay there a while longer. And by the way, I can remember in court—I think Earl Warren I think was the prosecutor—at her trial an amazing thing happened. I'm not sure about this; my mother was probably the first person in California, maybe America, absolved of a homicide because of being brutalized by a man. Therefore, she was released. But we could not live with her for a while. Then finally she was released, and we could live with her. Up on High Street in Oakland way up near the cemetery, up there for a short time we lived together, not long.

You know where we lived? We lived in a small shed behind a garage in a home and backyard. No water, no electricity, mattresses on the floor, and that's how we were raised. We could go to the big house and beg, and they would feed us a meal once in a while in the back, although we were not allowed to come into the house proper.

Then my mother got a job working in a restaurant with a wonderful man who lived there, and so she was able to bring food home sometimes. Or I would go down there after school. My brother went to Lockford and Fremont, and he, of course, suffered the most. The wonderful thing for me is I was so young I did not know what was happening. The hurt was so enormous, you see, but it was kind of good for me. It just became a mental block down for me. My brother Mike just become numb. What a wonderful man he became. He was gracious, good, just good, wonderful person. That's how he survived, all just to block it out.

Dunham: He was the oldest?

1-00:12:30

Del Masso: He was middle. He's the one that died. I had a brother die in Okinawa in 1945. Brother Joe, he understood everything, he understood what was going on, he knew what was going on. I'm standing with this man, Homer, who became my stepfather finally holding me up on his shoulders in the court room, in the hallway of the court room looking at my mother and waving at my mother to help the jury decide what they were going to do, see?

My brother Joe suffered the most because the hate and scorn by the religious community. They were Italian. See, my family was Italian. My family did not have religion and that's why they left Italy to get away from the Catholic

Church. Maybe that's good. I wish everybody could start out that way so they could make up their own mind what they want and not be so embedded that they can't make a free choice of religion. So I was able to make my own, and I make my own.

Dunham: Now not being so active in the church was that before the death occurred with your mom and her acquaintance or did that after that only because your family was scorned after that, I'm just trying to—do you know?

1-00:13:53

Del Masso: Well, I was mentally blocked out. My daughter wrote an autobiography for me, which I have. But my brother was taken away to somewhere across the bay to someplace for TB. My other brother had a disease that comes from lack of nutrition. So the most amazing thing—by the way, I just took a full page ad out Memorial Day for my brother Joe. I did one for my brother Mike, and I'm going to do with my mother.

It's just amazing; this boy led a terrible life. Father had beaten the hell out of him every way that he could. He was not a good student because he's got everything wrong. There's practically nothing we ate; we got a house full of rats. Who's going to look out for us, who's going to help us? What could Mom do, for Christ's sake? So I have a very low tolerance of a person who's not doing well if he hasn't tried to do well. Don't come to me with your Goddamned complaints if Mom did not give you pabulum, because I'll tell you about my brother Joe. The horror of his life just couldn't be harder. Remember, I'm numb, I'm just wounded from top to bottom. "What's wrong with people? They all hate me? They all hate all of us?" Nobody would talk to us, anything to do with us. I'm sitting all day long in a room. I spent my evening in a room like this with my grandmother knitting and my grandfather glued to Italian radio. We were as close as from here to you. Not say a word, not get up, go to bed, whatever, and this son of a bitch is over there, and I can't go out. I have to stay there. My grandmother can do nothing for me because the Italian guy is the boss of the family. And then, of course, I think I'll tell you the story that I run away.

Dunham: Now, was this back in Oklahoma when you went to your—?

1-00:16:10

Del Masso: This was in San Leandro, California, right down the street from here.

Dunham: Now, had they come from Oklahoma?

1-00:16:17

Del Masso: Yeah, my grandfather and grandmother were here before. There may have been a sister or two out, a daughter that they had.

Dunham: Just again for the record, what was the business your grandfather ran? You said he—?

1-00:16:30

Del Masso:

No, he worked for a company that grew vegetables. That's all I ever knew that he had done. And they had this home down the street down here, 1869 Williams Street.

So we had a full basement, and I lived there. I had no friends because I couldn't go out, they wouldn't come over because obviously we were very evil people. This death takes place. Here's my brother Joe with all this tragedy in his life. And Dave, he decides to be—see, I will hold you to this, you try to be all you can be. If you don't, don't bother with me. Go away, because if you're not going to do that then you're going to take it from somebody else and make him do it for you, besides taking care of himself. See, here's this man with nothing, he puts himself through college, San Francisco, any college, and aviation school, and he graduates from the military academy and becomes a pilot and becomes a lieutenant colonel with the Flying Tigers. I didn't think about that, but I have a book here that his co-pilot wrote using a painting that I had made of his plane as the picture on the front of the book. Flying all these missions over there. And Dave, this guy with only that education—this terrible, terrible background—flying ten, twelve, fourteen, fifteen hour missions throughout China and Japan in the war, losing a plane or two. When the war is over, they sent him to Nuremberg to be at the Nuremberg War Trials as an observer. They sent him to Europe to establish YMCA camps for all the children who were orphaned. He, my brother Joe, brother Mike and myself were all Oakland Recreation Camp people, supervisors.

Then they sent him high up in this spy-in-the-sky missile program, one of the first of its kind with the military. So here was Joe, and then they sent him to Viet Nam to be an observer for the Pentagon. Here's a guy—it's awesome what the hell you can be if you'll try.

Now, how in the hell did he climb over the mental baggage that he had to be able to do all that? The only problem, Dave, was that—this was the good thing about the military; mostly it's bad because it gets us into wars more and more. However, there's a certain discipline we'll take from the military that we wouldn't take at home, and whatever Joe got he could function well in the military, got to get function well with the discipline, but out of that he couldn't.

I have some friends of this nature whose experiences in the war were so tragic, so terrible, they could never function like you and me. There's a block, you wouldn't even know it. They will not get into hassles and reach out for pain and suffering, the politics—Republicans and the Democrats—they will not do that, because they know what the real pain is, all that stuff is nothing compared to what they've done.

I've had a couple of my brother Joe's friends—just got a letter from one today who's ninety-something, who was on his airplane with him. So my brother Joe survived all those different things that he was, and then finally retired, but he could not enter the American capitalist system. He was too damn honest. So he retired, and my brother loved the mountains, so my brother and I became partners. I made the funds available, and he prospected all over the mountains of California. We had a mine here, another mine—we had a claim here and a claim there, and we would go way up in the mountains. My brother being older and much more disciplined and not with a huge sense of humor at that time, I would never fool with him. As a little kid I only rarely had a brother because we were all separated, see.

But my brother, we'd go up in the mountains, and finally I'd say to him, "Joe," I says, "You know we're up 8,000 feet here carrying these two by fours or tree limbs up, because you got to mark your claim." I say, "Could you find gold down there about 3,000 feet?" So for his life he would find those claims, and we'd stake our claims. I don't know what's happened; they've probably fallen out of use today. Joe and I were a lot alike in that we were at home in the mountains and being at home with Mother Nature.

My brother Joe made it until his early seventies, and it makes you understand a little bit about war, the damage it does. My brother Mike—see, we never could be a family. Because of what happened with my mother, the tragedy of her life, she could never be a mom to us; she was almost embarrassed. We could never have anybody come to our house to visit. There'd be an adult who would know who she was. "Oh, you're the woman who killed that man." It doesn't walk away from you, see.

Dunham: After she was released, though, you were living together with her or—?

1-00:22:20

Del Masso:

Yes, in the shed for a while. And then this wonderful, wonderful man—he was a cowboy in Idaho, he was a cowboy—he came out here to the coffee shop, fell in love with her, and it just was awesome. This guy looked like Clark Gable; he had no education, handsome man. And the guy was a god-damn genius when it comes to mechanics, magnetics, lighting and this stuff, the internal combustion engine. I couldn't believe it.

I built my own house, if you can believe this. I got lost driving, asked a real estate broker directions and came out owning a three-quarters-of-an-acre lot in the hills, at twenty-three years old. The guy gave me a hammer, so I built a house, why not? So I built it; it took me three years to do the god-damn job, but Homer drew the plans for me to build the house. Can you imagine that? And we got them passed, and I spent three years up there, and they'd come up and give me a hand once in a while.

And this wonderful, wonderful man Homer never once spoke or remonstrated with us kids, ever. He and my mother together bought an old house. My mother got a letter from my brother Mike just before he died asking her to get married. He wanted that. Well, she did, and Mike died right after that on Okinawa, and I think it was his fourth or fifth invasion.

I will show those things to you before a while, too.

Dunham: Sure, yeah, may I?

1-00:23:44

Del Masso: He writes my mother and says to her, he's wounded, he's on Saipan, and they want to send him back home. He said, "No, Mom, I refuse to be released back home as long as you, my country, my family—as long as they're in danger, I will stay." Twenty-one-year-old kid, never had a car, never had a girlfriend, probably never had a pair of shoes; he's over there, and he feels that way. And we've got half of Americans screwing up so god-damn badly today, thousands of kids wounded just like him that'll never be mentally correct again. What the hell's the matter with us fighting in wars that we have not right to be in? But he did that, and he's going to stay there. Stop me if I'm going too long.

Dunham: No, no.

1-00:24:47

Del Masso: My mother and stepfather rebuilt that house and made two apartments upstairs. I have the same cement mixture today that they used to build their house. With that I used to build my house with. We got it as a monument, my daughter Cathy, a cement mixer. Mom and Homer would mix it and fix the cement and then drag it out and replace this broken house. Temescal was a wonderful neighborhood all the time. We did not know—

Dunham: This is where you build the homes, yeah.

1-00:25:29

Del Masso: I did not know my mother was building the house; I did not know that I was Italian. It wasn't important to me. I had no mentor or friend to track it onto. All I knew was you were an American, that's all that's important. But Temescal was all Italian at that time, or all Catholic for that matter. So we were going to be there, and they're going to rebuild the house. Well, around the corner was a lot of middle-class people, right near Technical High School on Emerson and Woodrow; I went all through schools there. So there we are over there, and around the corner is a handsome young guy, older than me, in the service with my brother. He had battle fatigue, they were going to send him home, and he refused to go home.

See, my brother and his comrades after the Saipan battle went on the ship with him, fooling him into thinking they were all coming home. And when the ship

left, they went off and left him. This is true, if people would just pay attention, it's not something happening to somebody else; that somebody else is us.

And what I was wanting to tell you about this is, this handsome and good looking kid, he was just a marvel. The guy would be in the movies today for what he had going for himself. The only people he would come to would be my mother's house. He'd come up and see me and say, "Could he talk to my mother?" I'd call my mother, and she came and talked to him. This is what happened; he's talking to my mother right off the street, and a motorcycle behind him backfired. He screamed and ran off my mother's porch and crawled into the gutter to hide from battle. I had to get him out of the gutter, because he was wounded, because they didn't come home with him, see. It's a wonderful thing that happens, a wonderful and a bad thing. People in those kinds of wars, it isn't just government any more. You don't just fight for the flag and the bravado and patriotism alone, but finally it gets you, and it's survival for you and your comrades.

So my brother Mike, he's twenty-one years old, he's gone. How's my mother ever going to make up to this guy, dead, and you're in this place where people don't have enough to eat and you can't get an education, and how can we ever be a family?

We're all separated all of our lives, see. So my mother was to a great degree destroyed on that, and here's my brother Joe mentally because of the wounds and scars that he's carrying, and here's my mother. By the way, the group that you belong to, Rosie the Riveter, You know I was somewhat involved with them when they started.

Dunham: Oh, yeah, we'd love to hear about that, too.

1-00:28:28

Del Masso: I called them up, and when they first started to put together, I had meetings with them.

Dunham: Oh, you mean when they were starting the park and all—

1-00:28:35

Del Masso: The concept. The only difference I had with them was trying to explain this one. I said, "Look, see, my mother worked in the double bottoms of the ships." She's got three sons in war. She's down there tying asbestos around all the pipes, fighting with guys drunk down there. She said, "Do you understand I got three sons fighting a war, you son of a bitch. You're over here laying here and not doing anything." It's a different war for her.

Well, she died among other things of asbestos. She was sick almost all her life. So what I was saying to the people at that time, I said, "Look, Rosie the Riveter, it's a hell of a title, it's a good one. But be careful here that you don't brand it in such a way that's the limitation. There's all other kinds of Rosie the

Riveters doing other kind of tasks. They got this, “Don’t leave that out.” My mother—so my next article I’ll be doing for the newspaper will be on my mother. My mother died in that war, as a casualty of that war, just like my brothers died over there. She’d be alive today if she wasn’t doing all that asbestos in that dark-little-holes place. And then when I finish my letters I always say, “And what would my brothers want today? Make no more gold star of our mothers. Ours are theirs. Then this man’s inhumanity to man called war.

My mother and stepfather died within ten days of each other from heavy cigarette smoking. If you wanted to do a hell of a movie program, get just a couple lines, yourself and the camera, stand at the street corner of Third and Market Street, San Francisco; stop every tenth person and say, “Tell me your life.” Wouldn’t we be amazed if my mother could have told them, see. But see, everybody in the family was ashamed of her, embarrassed of her, that woman who killed the guy, my brother and all that stuff. It doesn’t leave you. You can’t have people come over to the house. You can’t have your life.

In her particular case, she found God, she found Jesus, with Jehovah’s Witness. Whether anyone likes it or not, that’s up to them. All I can say is for her it gave her something in life to grab onto.

Dunham: Was her stepfather a Jehovah’s Witness? Your stepfather, excuse me. The man she married.

1-00:31:10

Del Masso: No, he wasn’t at all. Here’s this woman, no education, with this terrible life, and she had meetings at her house. This is big. This is one hell of a thing that “I had nothing, and suddenly I’ve got all these ladies coming over to my house to talk about Jesus Christ” and all that and different kinds of programs they had going. So it was a marvelous thing for her in the later part of her life.

Dunham: So was that while you were still a child, or was that later?

1-00:31:39

Del Masso: That was later.

Dunham: What about religion for you? I know you said the Italian Catholic Church had kind of shunned your family because of—

1-00:31:52

Del Masso: Dave, never having been programmed for religion—my brother’s dead, I’m sad because we can never be brothers. We can never have a chance. I am on one ship in the South Pacific, Guadalcanal, Espirto Santos, looking for his grave, I have no choice where the ship goes, but it just turns out that they’re going to a couple islands; where they take the bodies of the dead soldiers. I missed my brother on the island of Espirto Santos by a couple of days. They were re-buried in Honolulu. If I was going to be re-born again, I was re-born that day.

I went to that cemetery in Honolulu, grieving about my brother, I go in a little room there and find out where he's at, and I go out there. I'm in the produce business; I go to ranches and places. I was simply overwhelmed. There's not a ranch big enough to hold the crosses that were there. I got mixed emotions about God and all that stuff. I don't know much about all that.

I looked at all these crosses; some had Jewish symbols on them, some had other kind of symbols on them, and I found my brother's grave. I looked around, Dave, as far as I could see, and I saw crosses and crosses. I fell on the ground and just bawled like a little kid, not just because of my brother—"Who is this God, who in the hell are you? What the hell is wrong here?" Then I'm probably nineteen, twenty years old and flunked every god-damn thing in school, I'm not very smart. Good in a way; nobody had programmed me. I am "two plus two is four"; that I know. You're not changing a god-damn thing about that. You've really got some work to do.

You think there's a God? Fine, when you truly come back from heaven, come back and tell me about it; don't otherwise. So here I am, and I experienced this, and I thought, "You know what? I can think; I can come to my own conclusions, and I thought, "How is this possible, God?" Aren't you the God for the Italians, who are killing the British, who've got a God? Who are killing the Portuguese, who've got a God? Who are killing the Americans, who've got a God? Who got all this, the same God. You're trying to tell me—and I'm just being candid with you; can I be that candid?

Dunham: Mm-hmm.

1-00:34:27

Del Masso: God, you can solve this problem easy. You tell every human being on the face of the earth, "You hurt somebody tomorrow, your balls will fall off." That's not that that hard to do. My brother would be alive, all these guys would be alive, and we're over here, "You can't solve this for me?" How are we going to do it? We don't have that possibility to do it. Is that the best you can do?

So from that point on—I'm not bragging. My brother died in a foxhole. He did not have to die. All he had to do was raise his hands. We all face foxholes in our lives. Who are we? If my brother would have raised his hands in front of the Japanese, he'd be sitting in Washington, DC today. I said, "That's it for me." I said, "I will fight my brother's fight." This is not bragging; it's grief, grief. I've written five thousand letters, princes, kings, presidents, you name it, around the world, of things that I thought, not something that I wanted, but something that I thought was fair and right for all of us.

I'll tell you one. My brother's now dead. Our family can never be a family again. My mother can never pay back what life had taken from her and him. I'm a young man, working my ass off trying to earn a living. I don't know anything about anything really, but I'm going to learn. The funny thing about

being Italian, then I got a job in the produce department of a grocery store and I didn't know an avocado from an eggplant. So there I am; the war is over. I've got to do something. I start my own business. I borrowed \$750 from my brother and bought a truck and went out and knocked on doors selling produce. While I was doing this to try to make a living I went to visit my mother. She brought my brother's body back home. I didn't want that to happen, but I had nothing to say about that. So he comes home for a military funeral, my mother was distraught. My stepfather—a very kind, wonderful man, very timid, big handsome Clark Gable—he was all upset. I said, "What's the matter?" He says, "Mike's body's here now. We got a call today from Golden Gate Cemetery in San Francisco. Major something. They want us to have the ceremony on such and such a date." He says, "We can't do it. We can't do it."

David, I'm a cadet midshipman in the war; the lowest form of life in the world is a cadet midshipman. Everybody uses you for a rug. In some ways it's wonderful. If you can survive that, you can succeed at anything. I had a Captain who really worked on me about every other day. He was captain of my WWII Ship the *Sea Runner* in the South Pacific.

So there we were over there at my parents' house, and I thought as a cadet, "I'm going to call this Major." So I called this Major on the phone in San Francisco in the cemetery. I said, "Major, this is a very difficult time for me and my parents. They can't do this. There's a lot of grief and hurt here. Please, surely we can we set up some other day?" This guy says, "Cadet, I'm a Major, and I'm telling you this is what the hell it will be, and you will do it." I said to him this major god, "How dare you do this. He died for us, sir. You will call me back in the hour, or I will call Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson, America's leading commentators, and tell them, once you die for America does anyone care?" He did not call back.

I got born again that day. That will cost me five thousand future letters. This cost me a few million dollars probably. It won't stop; it doesn't stop to this day. I went and picked up the phone, and I called President Harry Truman at the White House. "I want to talk to the President." "You can't." I said, "I will talk to the President." "You can't." I said, "I'm telling you, and I told the Major, if you don't call me back in a half an hour, I'll call Walter Winchell, Drew Pierson." —I don't know if you ever heard of those guys—"I'll call the President. He didn't call." I said to his secretary, "You tell the President you're not going to do this to me, and I will not hang up. You're not taking my brother from us and treating him like dirt. There is nothing more important than that you don't give a god-damn. Because we've got an America today because of him, and you're not going to do this to us. I'm telling you I will call them and tell them if you are fighting for America, dying for America, nobody gives a god-damn about you." She said, "I want you to stay on the phone. Sir, we can't get the President to you at the moment. Would you talk to his military advisor, General Vaughn, his top advisor to the Pentagon?" I

said, “Yes, I will.” He says, “Son, tell me your story.” I told him. He says, “Son, you stay by that phone. Call me back in an hour if you don’t hear. The phone rings. “Here’s the Major.” “What can I do for you?”

That taught me how important you and I are, we’re so god-damned important. The tragedy, tragic in America. The reason we’re in this mess is we’ve accepted Republicans and Democrats, who don’t give a god-damn. It’s our Constitution that counts and our relationship with each other. So we had the funeral. It was a tragic one, it was a very hurtful one, and I was upset. I am me, and that’s all I’m going to be is me. I’m pounding on the casket, and telling God, “You’re wrong. This should never have happened. You could have stopped this from happening,” see?

So I’m not intolerant of religion. If it makes you a better person, so much for it. But, don’t give me that crap. So, then my mother found religion after that in order to be able to complete her life.

Dunham: Now I apologize, but what was the problem with the date, or was it just that it had happened and having a funeral at all or—?

1-00:40:48

Del Masso: No, that date they could not do it. To this day I don’t know what happened. But for them to not be able to cancel something, it had to be terribly important to them.

Dunham: But the reason why, you don’t know why the date was a problem, but it was—

1-00:40:57

Del Masso: Well, whatever it was, the major would not change it for them.

Dunham: It was something for your mom or your stepdad that was the problem.

1-00:41:05

Del Masso: I never asked them what it was it was.

Dunham: Sorry, so you didn’t ask what it was, you just knew it was a problem, and that’s what made you act so strongly and make this call and these calls and call on everyone on their behalf.

1-00:41:22

Del Masso: Yeah, right. What are we asking for here, for Christ’s sake? And I’ve had some marvelous, marvelous things happy in my life with people that you wouldn’t think you could ever talk to. I had a wonderful thing with Ronald Reagan once. That’s a whole another story.

Dunham: Well, we could hear that. Let me adjust, your microphone’s coming off a little bit if we could just, let’s see; I don’t know if I can reach it from there, let’s

see. I just want to get it. It's brushing sometimes, so. There, I think that'll do it,

Well, before we do that, let's come back to that and some later stories, but let me ask; you mentioned your mom. Do you know how she came to work in the shipyards, and which shipyards she worked at?

1-00:42:15

Del Masso: Moore Dry Docks, Oakland. Again, what I was saying to the people in your organization; "Don't leave her out." You named a category, but there are other people—

Dunham: Yeah, and just to clarify, it's been debated even the naming of the park, but it's just that iconic name, but it's to represent—and not just women who worked on the home front, but really it's the whole home front experience. But there is that problem, in fact, at Kaiser in the shipyards there were no riveters working on the ships. It was all prefabricated, so in the very park where it is most represented in Richmond, and where we've done a number of interviews, there weren't riveters so we're not constrained by that icon, if you will.

1-00:43:02

Del Masso: Somewhere I would hope in the literature that's explained.

Dunham: Yeah, absolutely, and most of all it's explained in these oral histories that we're doing and with like you're doing with us today. Well, let me just ask do you know how she came to work in drydocks? Now, it sounds like she worked swing shift or graveyard maybe? Do you know? You were talking about the hassles she had with kind of guys in the ship and fighting her own war there. Did you hear much about it?

1-00:43:25

Del Masso: She was there for her three sons in the war.

Dunham: Yeah.

1-00:43:29

Del Masso: Therefore, she would do whatever needed to be done, she would be there doing.

Dunham: Yeah, and did you hear about that experience from her, or elsewhere?

1-00:43:39

Del Masso: No, from her, from her.

Dunham: What do you remember her saying, was there harassment kind of there from the guys, or just—?

1-00:43:45

Del Masso: A little bit of harassment, but mainly it was her anger that the fact that she was doing what she was doing, and these guys would get drunk and hide.

Dunham: Yeah, just goofing off and not working kind of—

1-00:43:57

Del Masso: And her three kids were over there getting killed.

Dunham: Right, so she was worried about sort of the quality of the work and just taking it all seriously.

1-00:44:06

Del Masso: I'll tell you another story if I may, my mother. How pitiful. During the war you could not buy nylons, you know.

Dunham: Right.

1-00:44:13

Del Masso: It was impossible then, and so women had to salvage their nylons. Do you know how they did that?

Dunham: Remind us.

1-00:44:22

Del Masso: Okay. You have a jar, a mason jar. Over the jar some little metal work is done so the sock can fit over a magnifying glass. The sock fits over the jar open, you have little struts coming up that holds a magnifying glass, and there is a big metal pick with a sharp point. My mother would take your sock, and this was done in Temescal on Telegraph Avenue and 49th at Tiers Furniture Store. They let her have a little front bench about as wide as from that corner over to here, that's all, in the window, probably five feet, six feet in the desk. She would be there with the light on and with a little thing fixing your nylon socks for twenty-five cents, fifty cents. How humble can life get more than that? For them to take that old house and rebuild the whole damn thing, and that house is located in the central part of, one block from Tech High, one block from Emerson Grammar School right there, and the house was \$4,600, a lot of money then. We do live in a new world.

Dunham: Yeah, and what year did they rebuild the home?

1-00:45:51

Del Masso: They rebuilt the house a long time, but they bought the house I think it was in 1945, maybe 1944.

Dunham: Maybe just after the war, or before the war ended.

1-00:46:00

Del Masso: Just before the war ended.

Dunham: Now, the nylons story was a great story. Do you remember other experiences around rationing and/or conservation and what that was like? Can you tell me how the war changed things? Obviously, you'd already been through so much trauma in your life, so by comparison, aside from when your brother entered the military, in the early part of the war, do you remember what that was like? Do you remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

1-00:46:27

Del Masso: Yeah, my brother goes off, older brother goes off, Mike gets drafted, and an awful lot of people went from Temescal, a lot of Italian people, Geez, amazing the amount that went in the war. We had rationing, and that gets interesting because now you see the worst come out of man. All people were not going to be equally rationed, that's for sure. There were certain color-coded food stamps that you buy some different kinds of things. I don't recall there being any huge deprivation. Part of it I think was partial in the sense they wanted you to participate in something so that everybody would kind of get together and make a sacrifice together, like you turned in your toothpaste tubes and these kinds of things, and certain kinds of cans and stuff and so forth.

It's interesting the war. God, man can be so god-damn bad. For example, when we came home from one of our trips, we'd get these poor guys, been overseas for two years, the worst possible treatment a man can ever give to another man. My brother's division came home on my ship that was a whole ship of mourning going—I got pictures here into my album, good thing—2,300 people on a ship about three hundred fifty feet long. I'm not sure—my memory—but I think the bunks were between five and seven high. The guy on bunk number seven is puking on six, who's puking on five all the way down. The bathroom, the toilet, is unbelievable. It is a long trough probably twenty-five, thirty feet long. It's a trough. You sit on one side, I sit—it's butt to butt, opposite sides. As the ship is hit by big waves and is rolling from side to side.

But the wonderful thing, the salvation of humans is really enormous. I cannot believe the salvation possibilities of mankind that people do; it couldn't be any worse being on that cruise ship. The bottom of the last bunks were under water a good deal of the time. As the ship swashed back and forth, you can't get the water out of the God-damn bottom of the ship. As the water slashes back, the guy in the bottom is wet and so forth. Okay. Now everybody in this is doing a number two on the trough, butts next to these guys, and fifteen, twenty-five, thirty guys, sit. Well, some wonderful human comes by, lights a piece of paper, throws it in the trough. The ship rolls from side to side and the fire paper floats and goes all the way down burning everyone on their under their butts. [laughs] I'm nineteen years old, for Christ's sake, dumb eighteen, nineteen year old, and I'm learning being a cadet they're doing terrible things to me on board that—I'm lucky I survived that god-damn thing, and the Captain was doing part of it just to do me in, or just to teach me.

One of the ships—we were carrying cartons of ship’s stores, candies, cookies, goodies to have. Well, the captain—we had a newspaper aboard ship—and the captain would call out on the ship’s loudspeaker system. We had over 2,000 men on board. We were called an attack troop ship. I don’t know what the hell we were going to attack. Our biggest guns were five-inch 38s, pretty big guns, and then we had to bring the Marine guards to use in them. So the captain gets on and says, “This is to tell all of you, all of you, if you go into those areas where the goodies are stored—if you go into the lockers where the stuff is stored, you will be hurt. Stay out. “

Why? Because guys would go in there and take all the goodies out, and some get away. A few days later on the loud speaker to our 2,300 combat troops, “This is your captain again, This is your captain again, telling those of you who stole the guards’ guns, give them back now. [laughs] The guards probably gave them the god-damn guns.

But time and time again I saw these deeds. At the same time if the public could understand, we had to go down with a fire hose and turn it on those troops to wash them down and to force them to go up to dry out. I don’t know this, but I was told on our last trip home we got caught in a hurricane and we lost fourteen troops over the other side. I got hit by a big wave that hit the side of the ship and threw me clean across the ship, and I went out over the side, but I got caught in the railing. Otherwise I wouldn’t be here today.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:52:09

Del Masso:

In that kind of a life so many things can go wrong that can kill or hurt you. We were constantly losing people over one thing or another. The captain, for example, he would tell me to go to the fiddley, because it was way up on the top of the ship where the smokestacks are. first, go down to the engine room and tell them I sent you and remove that flag up there, Cadet. I go up there from the bowels of the engineer room, up ladder and ladder; I went up the ship’s smokestack to the fiddley. Axel E. Udall was the captain’s name. I’ll remember it forever. He was a Viking, and he had to learn ship life sailing one had to be a tough bastard. He had to be to live, so now he had a chance to get even, and I’m it. He gets me up there in the fiddley, and then says on his speaker, “All right, cadet,” and then to the engineers he said, “All right engineers.” He tells them to blow that thing. I’m up in the middle of this huge smoke stack. He tells them to blow tubes, all the tubes that are now belching exhaust going up, but are heated and coated with hot oil crap, see? It is so hot, oil and the whole thing is black, hot scary oil, I look like a tar baby. He’s sitting in the outside gun pit there, and I looked down, and he and the other officers are sitting there, and they are laughing so hard; they had the time of their life.

They got me, see, but then I would get them, see, because we can have an allowance once in a while. I'd get maybe once a week I get a couple bottles of coke. But I never could get it because I'm a cadet, they would take it from me. The officers would take it from me from the officer's refrigeration, see. So I'm the deck cadet, and there's an engineer cadet, and we were eating in the officers' mess. You know what they had done was so funny, they stole my coke. But I got them. I'm now saying to the other cadet loud enough for them to hear, "I took a pee in it." [Laughs] That will fix them.

Dunham: And you did.

1-00:54:23

Del Masso: Nobody touched my coke again.

Dunham: Aha.

1-00:54:29

Del Masso: It's amazing the humor. And the wonderful thing that people can do to survive those kinds of things. This is where I had the problem with the kids [Japanese] restricted into the ships barracks because I had access to some food. I never exercised the possibility of stealing food for them. I just did not understand their plot.

Dunham: Well, let's hold off on that. We're near the end of this tape, so let me just, let's pause here for a minute and we'll change the tape.

[Begin Audiofile 2]

Dunham: I'm here again with Albert Del Masso. This is David Dunham, and this is Tape 2 on December 15, 2011. I was going to back up; I'm anxious to hear more about your experiences on the ship near the end of World War II, but before you got there, I wanted to talk a little more—a few questions, you came to Oakland in the early thirties, is that right, as a very young boy.

2-00:00:29

Del Masso: San Leandro, yeah.

Dunham: San Leandro, okay, and then later moved to Oakland.

2-00:00:33

Del Masso: Yes.

Dunham: I know you were very young, but I was just curious, do you remember much about transportation? I know you talked about your mom, and she worked at a cigarette company taking, was it the train?

2-00:00:48

Del Masso: She took a train; I think they called it the Red Train at the time, and the ferry to San Francisco.

Dunham: And the ferry to San Francisco.

2-00:00:53

Del Masso: There was no bridge then.

Dunham: Well, sure. Do you remember when the Bay Bridge was built?

2-00:00:56

Del Masso: Yes, yes.

Dunham: And what do you remember about that?

2-00:00:59

Del Masso: The World Fair.

Dunham: Yeah.

2-00:00:59

Del Masso: The World Fair was there, and I was over there, and Mae West was there. I wandered around there, and I felt, "This is all very interesting."

Dunham: Yeah, how old would you have been there then?

2-00:01:09

Del Masso: Probably about twelve I guess. No, let's see 1938 I think it was wasn't it?

Dunham: Or '39.

2-00:01:22

Del Masso: I was about thirteen, fourteen years old. No television. Television was just coming.

Dunham: Yeah. Now, did you go to the movies?

2-00:01:32

Del Masso: Well, I'll tell you that story there, too. Some of the guys were going to the movies, and I never asked my mom for anything for consumption. I just never did. I don't know why. I look back and I'm really pleased with myself. It wasn't that I developed something. I was terribly sympathetic to my mother. For some reason I felt that whatever was going on in her life was so tragic I didn't need to add to it. So I asked my mother if I could have a dime. My mother broke down and cried. She couldn't give me a dime. Difficult for her, she could not be Mom to me as the moms were being to the other kids to be able to go to the show. So when you went to the show in those days, the movies, you got two tickets, you know that? Two tickets side by side.

One was for you to give, and one was for a prize, a drawing. They may have had this ball on the end of a string that goes out, or ride a bicycle. Whatever it is, you can have a drawing and win something. Well, a lot of us didn't have an awful lot and could go to the show only once in a while. But you see, when

they got through with all those prize tickets they threw them outside in the garbage can, and I went out to the garbage can and gave them away because they would call a number out for a prize, and now there'd be three different guys winning because I had given out all these extra tickets. I was a scoundrel. Having some fun to do it that way.

Dunham: Do you remember which theaters you would go to where you would do that?

2-00:03:26

Del Masso: There was a *T and D* in Oakland, called "tough and dirty." There was the Orpheum, and I've been trying and I have failed from my life. I went there with my mother to see a movie. I'd really give a little bit if I could find that damn movie that I was at with my mother. I was just a little kid. I can't be more than probably four or five years old or something. The movie is in black and white, it's in a dark like a castle and these guys are going down a windy staircase. At the end of the case, the staircase, there's a vortex, a huge raging black hole. Of course, I know that because I'm watching the movie, and seeing people disappear and all, and now the good guys are going down there, see. In the middle of the movie with this terrible crisis moment I started yelling and screaming throughout the theater, "Stop there's—" [laughter] I would like to see what the hell the movie was today.

Dunham: Did your mom take you out? Did you stay through the movie?

2-00:04:33

Del Masso: Yeah, we stayed.

Dunham: But you were interacting; you were trying to protect them.

2-00:04:40

Del Masso: Yeah. We never traveled any place to speak of, or went any place, except the mountains. It was interesting because my mother, we'd go to the mountains, Yosemite. We'd camp out; we took a rope and some blankets. We tied them tree to tree to tree, through the blanket over them. Some wonderful things happened. We'd go up there; there's no motels. Where we lived in San Leandro—we lived in Oakland near Seminary and the freeway. There was a cannery down there.

There was a family down there with a little machine shop. One of those men over there married a full-blooded Yosemite Indian native. Marjorie Castinetti was her name, nice lady. She was actually poorer than we were because this guy was an alcoholic and was beating on her, lived in Sonora. So we would go up to Coulterville, where these people had a little mine—mining gold there, probably mining gold today. So this woman Castinetti's father lived in a log cabin with dirt roof and floor inside. And I remember this man; how old he was, I don't know. Joaquin Murietta was *the* bandit in California. This guy, her father, was held hostage by Joaquin Murietta, to keep the horses for him. He did what he did, and they were coming to change horses. To this day I

remember this guy there because they had a little well over there, and that was called Hangman's Town there. Marjorie was such a nice lady, and I've really been privileged in life by the timing of things that I had nothing to do with. She would take me, we'd go to Yosemite. Can you imagine this, I'm with probably the only full-blooded Indian left alive or thereabouts, and she's taking me through the park, singing me all the Indian songs, holding my hands and show me all the Indian trails. Of course, I'm so young, what could I do with all that information? Then her little nothing house in Sonora; she'd have all those Indian baskets or artifacts that belonged to the tribe. Some of those baskets are worth thousands upon thousands of dollars.

But he was drunk and beating the hell out of her, and the place burned down. But my mother looked after her, fed her. After all isn't this drunk just like my mom's husband Joe? So Mom looked after her, and it was kind of just an offshoot of what happens. And with part of her tribe they took me down and showed me a back trail, the back way out of Yosemite.

Dunham: Now, she was not Indian. It was her husband was Indian, or they both were?

2-00:07:48

Del Masso: She was Indian, and he was an Italian. He was a mean guy and poor her, what the hell was she going to do? So she would come and stay with us once in a while, and my mother would try to give her some food, different kind of thing. I was up there because it was interesting that this old guy was keeping the horses for this other guy when he'd go on his raids up there.

Dunham: Huh, interesting. So have you been back to Yosemite much since then? How do you compare. It's just so different now?

2-00:08:22

Del Masso: My Yosemite is gone. I have been back a few times, but not in a long, long time. I go up there by myself I go up there I go to a valley that I have all to my own, some cattle in it, they have a creek. I've never seen another human being there, and you can't get me by phone, and I don't have a cell phone—I'm never going to have a cell phone. This generation's gone crazy, can't stand to be by themselves, can't stand the privacy. I go up there and sit on a rock in awe in what's up there and what I have, and I could go there all day long, catch a fish and bring them back, and we've been up there and had some wonderful things happen to me.

I wanted to establish a memorial for my mother and stepfather, so we gave funds to Alpine County, which is almost all Indians, and one half for the students and teachers, one half for the wild flowers to plant along the streams and so forth. I tell you we're really proud; we're a big thing in a small pond, and we built a library up there for the Indians kids. They have a hard life, terrible hard life. You would think integration would be over and done with this; it's not at all. Being raised by their grandmas and grandpas, they have no

homes. I can show you some things up there that you would not believe that people could live like that. I find them along streams and so forth.

Dunham: Did the Indian woman, who your family befriended, did she have children with—?

2-00:10:01

Del Masso: No. I went up there to do this, to establish the fact that it's so awesome up there and beautiful. Let's establish something up there and help the community a little bit. So what we've ended up with is a library for the students, and the teachers are just in awe. I'm in awe of them. These teachers were mostly Caucasian, would want so hard to succeed, but they had no way to tailor the library to these people living the kind of way they did, so now they've started out being this big. Now it's a full, big classroom. So we buy the books and these—what the hell do they call them, the thing you read now?

Dunham: On a computer or a kindle?

2-00:10:49

Del Masso: Kindle. So it's working out wonderful for the kids. I'm really proud of them. We're setting up a foundation so others can continue with it.

Dunham: Wonderful. Well, let me ask you; you went to Oakland Tech High School, right, during the war years? What was that like, being in high school during World War II?

2-00:11:10

Del Masso: It's interesting, David. There's no bragging going on here—that's not it. I never really realized how important you could be to yourself and to others. Fortunately for me it's like, "Here, we've got a pretty good-sized company here." There's no ego here—don't have it—don't want it. Sometimes it gets you in trouble because you don't know what your position is. You may be far more important in your community than you think. But we won't want anything from anybody, so we're okay.

I had a teacher come to me in junior high. I can't tell you why. They wanted me to run for class president. I didn't have any shoes to speak of. I had a paper route—I get up at 4:00 o'clock in the morning, 5:00 o'clock in the morning. I'd go up to Lake Temescal, and I'd get a dollar for the paper route, fifty cents or a dollar. My mother couldn't go to school with me. She was embarrassed and humiliated about the whole thing, no education. Then I'd go sit in class. I didn't know what the hell to do, flunked everything. They got me as class president. I became class president for graduation class at the junior high school. I tell you something really remarkable. I don't know why, but the first, second and third year in high school I was class president six times.

They asked me to run for student body president. Why? My mother didn't even notice about these things. She wouldn't have understood them. She

would have embarrassed me by being involved. But you see, we were an embarrassment to the school now. You're going to what? Two or three thousand students, and you've got a student body president whose mom is a murderess?

So the top people in school called and asked me not to run. So I became class president again. I flunked physics. I flunked Algebra 1. I flunked Algebra 2. I flunked French. Teacher asked me, "What the hell are you doing in this class?" "Well I like Pat." [laughter]. Pat Finch was her name. What a nice gal.

So what happened to me, Dave, was a remarkable, remarkable thing. A couple of people unbeknownst to me kind of took charge of me. Why these middle class kids—I couldn't go to the dances; I didn't have any clothes to wear. When all this is said and done—remind me, let me get you the photograph of our graduation picture. All the students in there—I'm the class president, in an old, dirty pair of corduroys. They put me way down at the end, and I shamed all of them to have me in that picture. This was their class president for three years. I didn't know; there was nobody to teach me how, didn't know how to tie my shoes or how to wash my face. When I went to my grandmother's I didn't know what to do. It was like it was like being shoved off on a god-damned island someplace, being raised by monkeys, you see. I can only now, looking back, begin to understand: how in the hell did I survive? How can you live like this?

Dunham: Well, not just survive, but how did you develop the skills and leadership skills and people skills that you'd become class president multiple times?

2-00:14:59

Del Masso: I'm embarrassed in some ways by the whole thing because I didn't understand the symbolism of what I was doing quite so much as maybe if I had understood what was happening. But the wonderful thing was the kids liked me for whatever reason because obviously somebody had to vote. So we had our graduation, it was a wonderful thing with all the students. I was in sports for a little while, but I didn't know how to play anything or do anything.

Dunham: What sports did you play?

2-00:15:38

Del Masso: I played football, and it was one of the first football games to be radioed, Technical High School, and I was going to be quarterback because the other quarterbacks got hurt. I raced out in the field, and I ran into some guy that weighed about 200 pounds, got my nose broken, and got carried off field. That ended my sports life.

I became friends with some of the people in that school. And a remarkable lady who was the—I'm going to say Assistant Principal, I'm trying to think of her name. Helen Vockel. She became one of the top people in school, counselors, and can you believe this, Dave, I had flunked everything. She got

me an appointment at the Maritime Academy, the Senatorial thing. I had no idea what I am doing but I want to get overseas as fast as I can to find my brother. I wanted to get the hell over there.

There I am; she gets me an appointment. I'm over there in San Mateo, the school, academy. I'm now occupying a seat in the room where the people in that room had already graduated or those that flunked were gone, leaving some vacancies, and now they're taking their final graduation test. We have navigation, terrestrial and celestial. What the hell, I flunked algebra twice. So there I am, and I'm looking at this, I understand nothing, and I have no idea why I'm here. I realize these guys got one more major problem to solve. The graduation test a very complex terrestrial Mercator projection of a trip. A test took hours to complete very, very complex. I have not a clue why I was there; it might as well been a foreign language class. I entered a totally new world for me and would have sixteen different courses to complete. I'm actually in a classroom with the most promising of people, a few even young college professors. I did not know at the time that this was a place the draft avoiders would join to not go to war. That was what was said about it later by its critics.

The most amazing thing happened to be me, Dave. Maybe it's common to talk to some professor to know this. I suddenly realized that if two plus two is four—I know that because they told me that—I could I decide by myself that two plus three is five. I actually learned how to extrapolate from what I knew to what the next thing could be. The light went on there. I graduated from that academy with about a three-point average, which was not too god-damn shabby.

Now, I'm there; I don't know how to swim; I'm scared of water kind of. But this is all about being around water. So they got a big tower, I think eighteen feet high, and you had to go there jump off the tower into the water and teach you how to survive. You go up, you stand on the tower, you put one hand around your nose like this, the other hand here, and then you jump over the side, and this is to prevent you from getting into too much more trouble, see. You've got your legs crossed because you don't want things getting in between your legs. Now, I go there. I know if I got to the top of there I better not hesitate to jump. I am scared of water, but the guards, the officers there went to get the lifesaving equipment, and they want you to jump.

At the time *the* wrestlers in California was the Sharp Brothers, at the time. I screwed up everything. In the water were life preservers called I'm going to say Kapak, a vegetation of some sort that would help you float.

Except if it lays in the pool all night long it doesn't help you float; it helps you drown. So I picked this thing up not knowing about this thing, I put it on—it weighed about fifty pounds I think—and I went up there scared that if I didn't jump I'd be too afraid. So I jumped.

Dunham: You weren't supposed to jump.

2-00:20:48

Del Masso: I wasn't supposed to jump. There was no lifesaving gear yet. I went down sixteen feet to the bottom of the water and sat on the bottom. Again, I had a lifetime experience. I could not get the preserver off and panicked and suddenly I was wrapped in a blanket of peace dying. I was getting rosy or happy down there. They picked me out of there and pumped all the water out of me.

Dunham: Is this in the bay, or where is this?

2-00:21:07

Del Masso: This is a big pool on the base. So what happened then was that I graduated. I actually got out of that god-damn base and graduated. And as we were graduating the Admiral came to the base to honor us, and the famous Sharp Brothers who were *the* Wrestlers were there, and so when the Admiral came up, they said, "We'd like you to meet our finest swimmer," that I was the record swimmer for the base. I'd never completed the course. They let me fake the course.

Dunham: Was that a joke, then? That they called you the finest swimmer? Or just because you're the only one that jumped in.

2-00:21:54

Del Masso: It was a joke. They were telling— [laughs]

Dunham: That you were seaworthy, then?

2-00:21:57

Del Masso: I'd had to be an embarrassment to them is what I'd have to me.

Dunham: Oh, my. So was this about a six-month training, or how long was—?

2-00:22:02

Del Masso: Six months. Six months, and then you're out; you get a citation.

Dunham: Did you graduate high school in three and a half years or what was—?

2-00:22:11

Del Masso: Three years. In those days a term was one year.

Dunham: Now, just to back up a little bit about the high school, in just Oakland and the Bay Area because this is during the war when there's this tremendous migration to the Bay Area. So I know before you said you didn't really think of yourself as Italian American, just American, but did you notice what was the ethnic makeup of the school originally, and then as people were migrating in did you see much change?

2-00:22:38

Del Masso: No, I didn't see any change in school. The interesting thing was we had a high number, high for us, of the Asian population. It wasn't high, but high because there was any at all. They kept all to themselves, more or less apart, and you might—I won't go there now—but you might remind me of the Asians, I was a camp counselor and it got kind of interesting. Anyway, I was put in the playground, it was all Asians; that's kind of interesting. So we had a small Asian population, many Japanese. And farmers, interesting.

Dunham: So what year was that then? Did many of them—?

2-00:23:24

Del Masso: Nineteen forty-four.

Dunham: Forty-four, okay, so this is later in the war.

2-00:23:27

Del Masso: Forty-four, forty-three, yeah. Where you notice the change was one of my friends in school's parents ran a hotel-motel room down on lower Broadway in Oakland about probably around 8th Street something like that, and the tremendous surge of black people coming into the area now to work in the shipyards and things like that.

Dunham: Primarily from the South?

2-00:23:55

Del Masso: From the South, yes. Otherwise, going to school it didn't change anything particularly.

Dunham: There weren't a lot of children of those parents who were at your school.

2-00:24:12

Del Masso: There were some black people—I'm not sure, but I think we had a black student body president. I don't want to get too far afield, but the blacks that we had at that time, that we went to school with, we all lived in different places—West Oakland was that—but I never saw anything at all ever of discrimination by anybody about anything, not at that time.

Dunham: And never experienced anything against Italian Americans during the war?

2-00:24:51

Del Masso: Once on leave, I come home and found, out my Italian cousins are fighting in North Africa against Italians trying to kill them.

Dunham: Your Italian-American cousins.

2-00:25:05

Del Masso: Yes. So I'm on leave. I go to my mother's house in the Temescal area. These guys walking around with these kind of dungy clothes on, I said, "Mom, who

in the hell are those guys?” “Those are Italians.” “What do you mean they’re Italians?” “They’re Italian prisoners of war.” “You’ve got to be kidding. It’s Thanksgiving.” Downtown Oakland there’s a thousand GIs just looking for somebody to say hello to me, give me a turkey drumstick. And these Italian soldiers are all being invited to their houses because they’re god-damn Italians; therefore that makes it okay if you’re Italian? In the meantime, what are we going to do with the Japanese, kick their kids out? Are you out of your god-damn minds?

So I did not say that this was a good thing. Whoever they are, they’re traitors as far as I’m concerned because we can always talk about countries and wars and how crappy that is, and I’ll agree with that. But, however, once you take side in that thing, and my cousins were angry—the fact that these guys were let run around. Okay, let them stay here and pick up garbage and do what they got to do but you go home to the barracks over there when it’s over. Don’t turn around and sit down and dine at my family for Thanksgiving while the American kid down here has no place to go at night. I really was angry with the Italian community at the time and thought, “How in hell can you do this?”

Dunham: It wasn’t that they were staying with the Italian families in general, just the holidays. They got that holiday meal—?

2-00:26:42

Del Masso: They’re working around coming out of some barracks someplace into people’s homes. But the Italian Americans were including them in truly for Thanksgiving. They could probably talk to the guy who knew a relative back in Rome for Christ’s sake. They probably could come up with somebody that they even knew together. The point was, for Christ’s sake, he was trying kill your other cousin over there, and this guy over here has no place to go. I was appalled.

Dunham: Well, let’s go back ahead then to you’ve just graduated from the Academy, and what happens then?

2-00:27:33

Del Masso: Interesting life. See, every once in a while God finds me, and I make the mistake of getting off of first base. You see if I played ball and I got on first base, you’re never going to see me steal second, unless it’s a home run. I ain’t going because I don’t figure I’d get there in the first place. So what am I telling you that?

Dunham: Well, you just graduated from the Maritime Academy.

2-00:28:01

Del Masso: Well, I’m graduating, and I got this little uniform with the gold on it, and all that, I’m like a little toy soldier. I’m going out with my girlfriend. I drop her off, and I take the bus home. As I get off the bus a long block from my house, two or three sailors get off the bus coming down the street, and they had a

bunch of bottles, and they just beat the hell out of me. Why, to get even with this cadet looking like an officer. They just beat the hell out of me. I got up, ran all the way home to my house, ran inside the house shouting and got a big dagger, went all the way back to where it happened—went about ten or twelve blocks looking for these guys. The bad thing if I had found them, they would have not lived till today, because I had done nothing wrong, had not hurt anybody. So I now was under the hands of the base psychiatrist. One of the officers on the base was angry with me for not showing up to get on the ship I was supposed to get on, a C-4 big one. I couldn't go. The psychiatrist wouldn't release me.

Dunham: This was the aftermath of being beaten?

2-00:29:33

Del Masso:

Yes. They wanted to find out that I hadn't been drunk and that I caused the thing or something like this. But when the psychiatrist got through he said, "Hey, this guy is a victim." And he gave me an okay, but I missed my ship. So he gave me an okay—it was a wonderful thing to happen—and I ended up with this ship, smaller ship. For the life that I had to live being there, this was a better way to be on. So then I showed up for that one—I'm there—I know nothing about ships to speak of, and we sailed the bay over there, but we didn't have much of equipment to make us familiar with a whole bunch of things. I didn't understand navigating very well.

So there we go on the ship. The ship has deck cadets and has engine cadets. We're assigned to certain people, in my case one of the third mates. I would go down to the engine room to learn some things down there, but I didn't participate in the ship and did every ornery task that there was to do. I was a messenger. I was everything, ran a launch to take people somewhere I was just a grunt. I had report cards on my ship performance. I had to do my own study. I had certain studies, navigation, loading, unloading, et cetera, incremental to do constantly. And then sometimes I would get into port and be met by an academy officer meeting me, wanting to see my work. But when you're on the ship you're totally with the officers in what they're doing and learning what they're doing and how they're doing it, so it's hands on experience. There's an awful lot to learn, a lot is very dangerous, too.

We didn't live a bad world. We had clean rooms and decent food, and the god-damn thing was an adventure. I had a lust for adventure developing because I just couldn't learn how to read books. See, I was so dumb in school; I didn't know we had libraries. I was embarrassed. I didn't know what to do in there. So I made some money from my paper route, and I'd rent books. It's amazing what you learn watching others or being with others who will help you. If you don't have that, you live in a vacuum, you're going to look pretty dumb, and to this day I rarely, rarely ever go out to try anything different in the presence of other people. I don't want to look dumb. I don't know how to use a wheelbarrow. How can you be so dumb not to know? Oh, you'd be

surprised what it helps to be as a little kid in growing up if people show you all the things that you accept that, you know, you just take for granted.

Dunham: So it's June of '45 that you set sail—?

2-00:32:43

Del Masso: I get on the ship in July.

Dunham: What kind of ship was it that you did get on?

2-00:32:45

Del Masso: A C3 attack troop ship.

Dunham: A C3 after you missed the C4. Okay and what is your mission?

2-00:32:51

Del Masso: Take troops overseas for the invasion of Japan, and that's what we did, and it's spelled out here in these papers. We went to Kwajalein; we went to Enewetak, to Leyte, Manila. We went to all these places to get to where we would join the invasion force, aircraft carriers, battle ships tens of thousands of troops. Our goal was for us to go to a place called Ulithi Atoll and join the invasion.

Dunham: Ulithi Atoll?

2-00:33:34

Del Masso: Ulithi Atoll. I never heard of a person who ever knew the damn place. \And these atolls, some of them were only a matter of four or five or six feet above the water. Now, here was their battleships, cruisers, you name it. They were ready for the invasion of Japan was going to take place. They didn't know anything about the bomb.

Dunham: Yeah.

2-00:33:55

Del Masso: So there we were, and the captain would use me as a grunt to take the small boats ferrying troops to different ships. They didn't know that I didn't know a god-damn thing that I was doing, but they—the interesting thing about all this, too, it's amazing what you trust an eighteen-year-old with. Now, if I had three or four college degrees, you wouldn't even get close to doing this, what you just give a kid to do over there.

So what I did, we arrived there, we had the troops, they were amassing the thing. I have a lot of real frustrations with this, really anger over this period of time. My brother's dead on Okinawa, okay? They dropped the bomb. Why in the hell didn't you drop the god-damn bomb on Okinawa? Why didn't you drop it there instead on all the god-damn civilians in Tokyo for Christ's sake? Or wherever you dropped it. Drop it on my brother, and eighteen or twenty-eight thousand other Americans would be alive today. You didn't have it?

Why didn't wait a few months until you got the god-damn thing ready? Okay, I can ask that question, I've never seen it. I've never seen anybody debate the subject.

So there we are, we're going to invade, and they drop the bomb. Dave, this was just one of these unusual things in my life. My whole god-damn life is this way. There's hardly a day goes by—I have people call me, want to know what I've screwed up for the day. What happened to you? What'd you do today that was so bad?

Before we're overall finished with this, ask me why my legs say Michelin on them. To get down to it, I'll give you something to laugh about.

Dunham: So you're arriving there in Japan, bringing troops.

2-00:36:03

Del Masso: Now bang, we're going in for occupation now. I'm on the god-damn first ship into Japan.

Dunham: Yeah, are you participating in the occupation, or are you just—?

2-00:36:12

Del Masso: Yes. Well, we take the troops in there, and then we stay there waiting for what our mission's going to be, and I'm in there wandering around Tokyo and the Emperor's Palace at night at one or two or three o'clock in the morning.

Dunham: This is before the atomic bombs—?

2-00:36:24

Del Masso: After the bomb was dropped. When you drop the bomb, we're no longer going to be an invasion force, we're occupation. And here we are. Jesus Christ, everything is destroyed, pretty close, and here I am in there. I have no fears. Let me back up. We were going to go in, we pull up to Tokyo, and you get a pilot on board. Do you know what a pilot is?

Dunham: No, you told me a little about it before, but tell us about it.

2-00:36:54

Del Masso: Any local body of water you go in, they have somebody that knows about it called a pilot. Two thousand three hundred combat troops angry—including me, my brother's dead, and "You god-damn Japanese bastards," da da da da da. Remember, I am a sole thinker; you could tell me, and I'll listen to what you got to say, but I'll make up my own god-damn mind what I think is right or wrong, okay. So here we are, I'm angry with the Japanese for what they did, well my government told me what they did. Of course, it's never all one-sided. So there we are, the captain calls me to the bridge. "You will go down and go through those troops, and you will take the pilot on board." So this is the first Japanese—these are combat troops from Europe. And here I am,

eighteen years old, saying “Stand aside please, stand aside please, make a hole for him. The pilot’s coming aboard. This 18 year old kid had to push plead don’t hurt him, stand aside I was lucky they didn’t kill me. Dave, I can see this right here right now. The hated enemy, the vulture, the killers of the world is going to climb on board this ship. Here climbs up a frightened little old man in a black rubber galosh-like outfit, and he is scared to death. I looked at him and I thought, “Holy Christ, that’s it? That’s what this war was all about? This guy is the enemy?” What the hell does he have any more to say about that war than you and I have to say about Iraq today? Especially in Japan? A citizen in Japan has got anything to say about anything?

So I’m realizing, “Now, wait a minute now; something’s not right here.” But I get him through alive, and he does his job.

Dunham: I assume they were hassling him and—

2-00:38:49

Del Masso:

The hate was so enormous you could have cut it with a knife. That very same Captain when we left here, we deliberately ran over some sampans, some big ones. In the back they had a big lantern saying, “We crushed them.” Our huge god-damn ships, we ran right over the top and crushed them. That’s how he was going to get even with them, see. Different people handled it a different way. But anyway, what it philosophically told me, “Something’s wrong. What the hell is wrong here? What’s this guy, I’m going to hate him for going to war?” There’s reason to hate all right, but it sure as hell isn’t him. That’s all wrong. If you and I know that we’re in a war in Iraq and it’s totally wrong for all the wrong reasons, why are we still there? Why don’t we do something about it? If you were one of those people, wouldn’t you be angry with us?

Dunham: Yeah, despite having just lost your brother in Okinawa, this one man who you had to escort in really humanized the enemy for you, the so-called enemy.

2-00:39:53

Del Masso:

Then the thing was, “Why didn’t you drop that god-damn bomb on Okinawa? Why did you drop it on all them god-damn civilians? What do they have to say about the god-damn thing? Drop one in Okinawa. Now, if it doesn’t work *then* drop it over there. But wouldn’t it have been a hell of a lot finer, number one, if the atom bomb had not been used against people, civilians? They didn’t go for a military establishment, particularly. I’m thinking about this. I’m questioning everything. I’m questioning every god-damn thing the government does.

Dunham: And you saw Tokyo even before the bomb, from what you saw in Tokyo clearly there was tremendous civilian casualty there as well.

2-00:40:28

Del Masso:

Yes, all the way from—the other part of the story, we went from Yokohama. There’s not a building standing from there almost all the way to Tokyo.

Dunham: So what were those days like while you were waiting your next orders? You weren't actively involved in the occupation, you were just—but you were observing?

2-00:40:51

Del Masso: No, but you know as your unlearned kid the entrepreneur came out. There's nothing that can help me, us. I don't have the capacity the ability to think in a conniving sense, it's just not there. But if you've got some nylons, if you've got some goodies, and you're over there, I don't give a damn how bad things are; there will be people with money. I saw things with people with money where people were starving. I couldn't believe it.

We landed at the dock in Singapore, I mean in Shanghai. We had to call in the Chinese nationalist police troops with guns; otherwise we couldn't get off our own god-damn ship because thousands of people were there hungry. If you threw a tin can over the side of the ship, a cardboard box, Holy Christ. People were coming up to the side of the ship with long bamboo poles, and they would hold something up to sell you something, see. And the troops on board the ship—nice guys, some of them—the coin of the realm was cigarettes, are you aware of that? That was the coin, not just cigarettes but wings, dominoes, whatever it was, was Camels.

I'd get some packages of cigarettes, fifty cents a pack at the ship store. Why I'm here today I don't understand. I would never hurt anybody. But I wandered around Tokyo at 1:00 o'clock in the morning in alleyways selling my packages of cigarettes. That was money. That's why I have the coins and Japanese paper notes in here. The real smart people trade. And Japanese occupation money, if you could get it home you could change it into American dollars. I didn't know that. I wouldn't know how to do it. But while I was there, I was selling all this stuff and getting all the Japanese money. MacArthur changed the currency while I was there where you could no longer trade the currency, so what was I going to do with all this Japanese money? I bought pearls. I gave pearls to the crew; I gave pearls to my mom—

Dunham: How did you have so many cigarettes to sell?

2-00:43:13

Del Masso: You could get them aboard the ship. That was great. And it turned out to be, too, in one trip there was a hosiery place at the San Leandro-Oakland border—I can't think of the name of the company now—because you couldn't buy nylons. This is so true. We don't have a chance, you and I who are not into finessing games. The captain was a nice guy. Here was the depth of poverty you could hardly believe. Two big black limousines arrive through this crowd as the authority guards pushing them apart, beating the hell out of them. I'm asked by the captain of the ship—I have no idea why—to go on a trip with him through Shanghai. Shanghai is as far from here as San Francisco. That's one city. We arrive at a huge, huge walled estate. Here I am

around nineteen years old, and I'm sitting down in this whole event in awe. It is so beyond me. I'm in a palace, and jade is every way, wealth is every way. I sit down at a table, and I actually have a girl wiping my hands and my mouth off for me, each one of us. He had loaded the ship with nylon stockings. Do you have any idea what those sold for over here? I can't think the name of the site where the nylon factory was. He had made his black market and put those on board the god-damn ship.

Dunham: Your captain.

2-00:44:54

Del Masso: The captain. Why he invited me to the thing, I don't know. But the wonderful thing about ignorance is, if you don't know you can't do it, you might think it's okay. So I actually hired a rickshaw and got on the rickshaw and went all through Shanghai at night in the dark in alleyways by myself, selling stuff that I had. I sold my watch, my wristwatch; the hands broke off of it. But it would tick, if you shook it you would buy that. Anything you had for sale.

In one of these photo albums of my trips, I've got a stamp collection here. One guy aboard the ship's father was a stamp collector. He told him about a stamp you could get over there where the plane is flying upside down with the Japanese bomb on top. He said it was worth about \$2,000 or something. I bought one. The kid, I got one from him, he brought them back, then, of course. I got it back and like a great collector I scotch-taped it in my book. Of course, that ruined the whole god-damn thing, see.

Dunham: What do you remember about Shanghai other than your late night sales?

2-00:46:05

Del Masso: Abject poverty and people starving like animals. I was embarrassed and am still ashamed to this day of the cruel behavior of the American military. When the reboarding siren time came, and everyone had to reboard, all these people had to go back to their ships. See in the bund Shanghai—the pictures are in there—the ships anchor out tied to buoy. Come in, unload, and go to the buoy outside. It's now dark. I got to get back to the ship at a certain time, so hundreds and hundreds of people, sailors and soldiers now going to their ship. Calling every dirty vile name, "You Chinks" this, "You Bastards" that, and I thought, "What are you doing, for Christ's sake, man? Don't humiliate us. It's like you're away from home now, you can be a really sordid bad person. You wouldn't want to do it in your own neighborhood."

Well, what were we saying to these people over here? We're reinforcing the fact that we are a lousy people, see? This is what took place over there. I was embarrassed and ashamed by the whole thing. As far as whatever good we had done for China we were losing it here big time.

Dunham: You had those feelings at the time?

2-00:47:03

Del Masso:

Yes. As far as the Asians are concerned, I was always treated okay. Oh, I know, I forgot to tell you the story, in the bum boats the guy's got a long bamboo pole, huge pole, got to be twenty, thirty feet high. He's wrapping in a bag a pair of shoes, carvings et cetera, something you'd want to buy from this. Hundreds of troops lining the chain-link fence along the deck negotiations everyone yelling and half of our troops drunk. A very bad scene, bartering. Deal gets done, and everyone cheated. You the troop buyers send down the cigarettes, cartons mainly. And again—I don't know what this is, why there can't be a God—what our sailors were doing aboard the boat was getting two by fours and cutting them, opening a carton of cigarettes, putting the two by four in, fixing it all back up, sending it down. Of course cheating the bum boat man who by now may have cheated him as well. Can you imagine what that little guy was going to do when he showed up at his boss's place with a two by four in the box?

The Chinese did their thing, too. They laughed like hell because later on it rained one of those days, and all the guys with all the hand-carved boots and all that stuff. It rained, but you see, the boots were really made out of some kind of special cardboard. They all rotted and turned yellow, so it was a two-way street.

Then I was buying stuff—I don't have any here, but I have it for my family today—I bought hand-carved boxes that fit inside the boxes that fit inside the boxes, and I had the means to do it because I could get some coffee, and I could trade it. So we're leaving now, and stuff was coming to the ship. This captain was a nice guy, so they're loading it on board the ship. The loud speaker exploded, "Cadet, what the hell do you think you are—taking that stuff to your ship, that somebody else is paying for, to take it home?" The captain said, "Cadet, report to the bridge." He says, "Cadet, who in the hell do you think we are? Do you think this is your private ship or something?" When I was bringing all that stuff back, I could give it to everybody, and I did. I still have a bunch of it.

The wonderful thing for me with the war, I did not see much carnage. An awful lot of it was adventure. Guadalcanal was just unbelievable. I'm running all around Guadalcanal. There are god-damn bombs all over the place that haven't exploded. I can do that and have this adventure. That's a far different thing than being in the god-damn battle when someone's getting slaughtered and getting killed.

Dunham:

You weren't in Hiroshima or Nagasaki after the bomb? You weren't there so, okay.

2-00:49:54

Del Masso:

I was there on one of the first trips. No. So I was treated well by the Japanese. I've even tried to send some stuff back; it came back with my brother, my

brother Mike who got killed. If I could find the people who owned some of the jewelry and stuff, but it's almost impossible to do.

Dunham: It came back with his body?

2-00:50:14

Del Masso: Yes, with his body. I still have a whole trunk upstairs.

Dunham: Now, when did you find out that he had been killed? Was it while you were training, or was it after you had set sail?

2-00:50:33

Del Masso: No, I was in the Academy. It was in July just after I got in the Academy over there.

Dunham: While you were still in training?

2-00:50:40

Del Masso: Yes.

Dunham: So you were training up until July—?

2-00:50:47

Del Masso: Yes, almost up to January, let's see, yes, I was in there in July, so I was—

Dunham: Did you start in January or—I was thinking it was January through June, but correct me if I'm wrong.

2-00:51:01

Del Masso: January to June, yes.

Dunham: Then you set sail sometime in July.

2-00:51:07

Del Masso: Somewhere in there because he died when I was the Academy. It was a tough period of time for me.

Dunham: Absolutely. We're almost at the end of this Tape 2. Maybe we should switch tapes, and then I want to hear about your return back.

Begin Audiofile 3

Dunham: This is David Dunham again with Albert Del Masso. This is Tape 3 on December 15, 2011, and we were just talking about your first trip to Japan and your experiences there. Do you know about how long you were there before you came back, were you bringing troops back?

3-00:00:30

Del Masso: If I looked at my notes, I'd probably be able to find out.

Dunham: Maybe I have it here in some notes, too. You came back to San Francisco, right?

3-00:00:37

Del Masso: I believe that's correct.

Dunham: So you had more voyages than I realized, I guess.

3-00:00:47

Del Masso: I think there's four or five.

Dunham: Four voyages I'm seeing, and so it looks like you came back September 7, or left September 7 and arrived in the US September 20 in San Francisco. Then October 15 is then when you left. Is that when you had families—?

3-00:01:11

Del Masso: After the bomb goes off.

Dunham: I guess I was curious about the experience of when you were taking some Japanese-American or Japanese families that were being deported.

3-00:01:21

Del Masso: That's another trip, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, now do you know the circumstances of those families, why they were being deported or sent to Japan.

3-00:01:29

Del Masso: Yes, something to do with the loyalty oath; some had parents who—for whatever reason, they were being kicked out of the country.

Dunham: So those were those who had been incarcerated and were considered traitors, who had not agreed to the loyalty oath, basically and had been considered enemies and after the war were deported. So what was that experience like?

3-00:01:59

Del Masso: Well, we're making another trip back over. I don't even know these people on board the ship. To this day I don't know how in the hell they managed to hide them so well, but we had troops as well.

Dunham: So you didn't see them at all, the families; it's just they were there.

3-00:02:11

Del Masso: I did finally. As we were approaching getting closer to the landing a couple of these kids came to me. My bunk was right on the back wall of the ship, so I could look down on the deck, and I could see them. They came up to me—they were being let out for some exercise—and asked me if I could get them some goodies, cigarettes. At least one, if not two of them I went to school with. But we weren't friends in school; we just never had anything to do with each other, that's all. There was no discrimination. That was the first I was

aware that something was happening here that I didn't know, but I didn't know how to judge any of that. I wasn't angry with them because holding against them what their parents did. I was trying to get them some goodies a few times. If I'd known it today what it was, I'd really made an effort for them.

But the captain comes to me. We're in Yokohama. I'm thinking all I know it is a cold time, and it's winter—I think its winter; it's cold, it's raining. The captain says, "Cadet, take them on the transport small boat over to a barge." I had to take them in the terrible, terrible time's weather, take them and dump them on the god-damn barge. There's nothing around. There's nothing standing. These are kids I went to school with who'd done nothing wrong, and I don't know that their parents did anything wrong, particularly. So there they are over there; they're all little farmers is what I think is what they were, shopkeepers. Dumped them over there.

I later on took the train from Yokohama to Tokyo. I don't know if there was even a single building standing, big safes, metal struts for buildings, foundations, and God, what a terrible, terrible place. I got bothered, and I thought, "What's happened to these people? What are we doing here?" Meantime all the Italians are over in Temescal having Thanksgiving dinner, and I tried to take this story to some places in the media. I tried almost all of the media and say, "Look, wouldn't it be interesting, out of curiosity for us, to be able to find some of these people today?" How did they manage to endure?

The Japanese, I was not in fear of anything, and I'd wander around all day and half the night. I never got harmed or threatened. Some of the Japanese would invite me into their homes, and they would go, "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom." They couldn't talk English to tell me what had happened, see?

I never made any friends particularly. They were farmers trying to grow something to eat. It truly was a sad spectacle, so for whatever reasons, I became concerned about what happened to these people. I'm not trying to make a huge judgment out of the whole damn thing, but thinking that was a pretty damn rough way to go and why we do that and not the Italians? Why we do that and not the Germans? I don't understand that. So it is some prejudice involved.

Dunham: You said trying to contact the media and tell the story, was this shortly after the war or many year later?

3-00:06:30

Del Masso: Years after the war, but for the last twenty, thirty years, but nobody had any interest in it whatsoever.

Dunham: Do you know about how many were on, that was just one ship maybe but how many—?

3-00:06:42

Del Masso: You realize today they did one hell of a job of keeping those people aside.

Dunham: But you were on the boat, though, that took them out to the barge, you said, is where they were left?

3-00:06:54

Del Masso: Yeah, I had a little small boat; hold about twenty, fifty people. I took them to this barge. I can't say more than maybe ten or twelve people over there, but that could easily have been more. It could have been another day or time, and the interesting thing is, we look back at it now, and I can't believe they managed to hide these people on the entire journey, they didn't see more of them.

Dunham: But that was the whole group, was just the ten or twelve or so?

3-00:07:30

Del Masso: I don't know, that may be just the ones that I saw over on the yacht on the barge. How many were on our ship I don't know.

Dunham: So you don't know how the spot where they were dropped off was chosen or if it was just sort of—was there any reason for that—?

3-00:07:44

Del Masso: I had no idea. As far as I know, they were just dumped there. Go find your own way. If there was any organization to get through anything for them, I didn't see it.

Dunham: And they probably didn't have much of anything on them.

3-00:07:58

Del Masso: I think they probably had a couple suitcases. I don't think there was anything more than that.

Dunham: Yeah, it would be certainly interesting to know what happened and if there were many more like that who were deported then. I haven't yet determined much about that, but it's worth looking at more. I think you contacted us—was it reading about the Port Chicago, or reading about the Japanese American that was have a grant relating to Japanese-American incarceration. No? Okay.

Well, back to that, you had mentioned that you had gone to school with some of—you recognized one or two of the younger ones. Had you known about the incarceration and when Japanese were taken to the camps?

3-00:08:43

Del Masso: No. Later on, at the time there wasn't interest. The more I started to learn about wars and American involvement the more angry I became that we

treated people so bad. I began to realize perhaps all those crosses in Oahu including my brother Mike were wrong!

Dunham: Because I just wondered, too, like with your grandfather and, was it farming? Or what kind of business worker was he? That was through the Depression and during the war and beyond?

3-00:09:04

Del Masso: At that time he was a worker for somebody who was doing some farming. Greenhouses.

Dunham: Greenhouses. Because many of the Japanese Americans were farmers and in agriculture and, of course, lost their farms at that time. And that's the other side of the equation, aside from why were they treated differently? It was also the opportunity to take the farms and for others to do that. To put them out of business is something else people talk about, so I just wonder if you'd seen anything about that. But you were young at the time; that's another layer of the story if you will, I think, having to do with race and economics and opportunity as well

Well, anything else about these multiple voyages and how you're changing prospective around war through these journeys as a young eighteen and nineteen year old? Do you want to share with us?

3-00:10:08

Del Masso: Being in the produce business I dealt with many small farmers many of whom had lost their farms. Nothing less than cruel theft. I regret philosophically—I just got a letter from Cindy Sheehan because I support her. I regret that I was late to becoming a strong, strong critic, skeptic of my own government. Viet Nam was wrong. It was terribly wrong, but you couldn't do that to me. See, my brother died, and taking an American flag, burning that flag, no. That's where I came from. I could not do otherwise. So when people were anti-Viet Nam burning the flag I was pretty angry about that, "Be mad, but leave that alone, see?" When I look back on it now—I've been trying to find a way for years to talk to Jane Fonda. I had dinner with her brother once.

Dunham: Peter Fonda.

3-00:11:32

Del Masso: To apologize to her. "You were right about Viet Nam." She was wrong in the sense of going too far, but the point is, "You were there, and I wasn't there," because—and this gets to my God thing—what the hell's the matter with us? Mom today can't afford her house, can't afford her car; she's working, Dad's working; can't get the kid in college. And we're bombing who today with billion dollar whats? Are we crazy or something? Think of what we could be doing. My brother didn't die for that. It wasn't what those guys died for. They believed their government. There's nothing to believe of this government of Democrats or Republicans as far as I'm concerned. I still believed in America

and my brothers and mothers sacrifices. How angry I am that it took so long to understand the treason upon our citizens by our government.

And I'd apologize to Jane Fonda for what had happened here. I've had some contact with Premier Ian Smith in Rhodesia. I sent him a letter, and I sent him a hundred and fifth bucks and said, "I'm apologizing for my government." I said, "We have no business involving ourselves in what you're doing over there. Rhodesia was the breadbasket of Africa. They have nothing. Just fantastic; look at it today. Want to buy a bottle of beer? A trillion dollars will do it for you—a trillion. You can even get a trillion-dollar note if you can get one.

I'm a total skeptic of governments, and I think that what happened in 1776 was so awesome in all of history, that what our forefathers gave us and what they died for. How can we just throw it away? The worst thing in America today is apathy. My brother died in a foxhole. He didn't have to die there, could have rose his hands up in the air and he'd be today. What are we asking the average Joe to do? Get out and vote and pay some attention and protect our Constitution and to hell with two-party democracy? We don't deserve our place in the world today because we squandered it and we've lost it. And I'm ashamed that I've lost my brother over something like this in that kind of war. And then it goes further than that; if that's the best human beings can do God, you failed.

Dunham: Can I ask with your other brother, was it Ray or Roy? I'm sorry.

3-00:14:03

Del Masso: Joe.

Dunham: Joe, who served in the military all those years and was an advisor and observer. These feelings that obviously started early in your service and kind of seeing the humanizing of the enemy if you will—I'd say with that whole navigator who came on, but took many years—as you said well after the Viet Nam War—did this philosophy in you come to shape while Joe was still living? And is it something you discussed with him? Because I imagine he was very staunch pro-military, would be my guess, but I may be wrong.

3-00:14:42

Del Masso: We never had the conversations. Now that we're talking about it, we never had any discussions I've written thousands of letters to newspapers, was a regular writer to newspapers and the *Oakland Tribune*—it was the Maynards who ran the paper and Senator Knowland. I guess what I was impressed with is our power: to fight for our rights. If your cause is right and just, and you're not trying to take advantage of everybody, you may disagree, and that's okay. But if you don't get out and make some kind of sacrifice in behalf of what your beliefs are then some other guy will take it all away. If you don't protest,

where are you at? Oh, as to my brother is dead, he died giving you the opportunity to fight and keep our Constitution.

So my big problem today is that I've lost faith in my government. I've lost faith in the American people because we're a democracy, which is ridiculous. There no possibility of a democracy ever being successful. It's a basic failure of mankind and yes, gods too! You and I are going to Las Vegas and gamble, and every time you go to the door, the house calls a guy over to you and says, "This is your partner." You go in and your partner says, "Now you use your money and when you lose, it's your loss. When you win, we share it. This is a democracy. We all share equally?"

Fifty percent of the people aren't working, aren't doing a god-damn thing. It's not that I'm not some sympathetic. If my brother could do what he did to get off your ass and start moving, if you've got cripples, you got hurt—we should be helping you and doing something. But if you can do it, you don't take it from this guy over here. Do it. You going to hate this millionaire over here? Well, how many guys are faking Workman's Comp today, or not to be here, faking medical—or faking whatever they're faking. Add all of them up, and that group of people cheating the system are taking away from the middle class just as much as those politically super-rich corporations over there.

So not being raised with a religion and adult input—the mistakes that I made is if not having any kind of tutors so to speak, mentor, I made subconsciously a terrible mistake once thinking that if I, uneducated, clearly recognize a flaw in judgment everyone else must already also know. If I found out two plus two is four and as such was bad, and was going to happen, thought all I had to do was talk about it, because everyone else knew it as well as I do. Not at all, half the people don't care or have no interest in the subject fertilizing man's darkest failure, "apathy".

Witness the economic disaster thing we've got going in America today. I had no education. I knew this was going to happen. I have letters going back forty years telling people this was going to happen. I got my secretary here from in 1970 taking her down to the numismatic store to buy gold at \$69 an ounce. That gold is worth \$2,500 an ounce today. For her, who was raised in the Depression and had nothing.

So I thought if by the time something became apparent to me it'd be an obvious danger to all—we'd all know it, we would all do something about it together, we would all do something. Well, it turned out that it's not the case at all. The mistake I made, and why education is important, if you get education you know an awful lot more about man. For three thousand years he's being killing each other, but if you don't have any of that background, how long will it take you isolated on an island at birth and raised by chimps to learn two plus two is four? About ten thousand years might do it, see. So what I failed to realize is the fact that everything I've done in my life I've had to

learn myself. I'm lost, I stop on the street, go to the building, ask directions, I come out, now an owner. I own in the Oakland Hills a three-quarter acre view lot near this little golf course near Jackie Jensen and Zoe Ann Olson.

Well, what do you do? You go buy a hammer to build a house. Nobody told me I couldn't, and that this lot was in a homeowners association. I didn't know that. I went and bought a hammer, and I lived three years and built the house worth over a million dollars. I went upstate the other day to go back to visit some of my neighbors.

I'm as surprised today as what I managed to do as what I did. And I'm not applauding by it, I did it because of personal pride and family, but it's amazing the power we have and the fact that we've lost it in America, don't seem to care.

Dunham: But if you were predicting and seeing this course for some years, then it can't be a surprise—maybe only a surprise that it took this long I would think. Now with that, your skepticism of government and skepticism of war—obviously things aren't too simplistic, but what is your prospective about people who are trying to name these things? You mentioned Cindy Sheehan, who has been one powerful advocate. Now there's the group Occupy, which is a particular thing. What is your prospective on that movement?

3-00:20:23

Del Masso: Because of this curse I have of seeing fully the disasters to come in advance, I thought everyone educated also knew this and together we would all react and save ourselves. Only now looking back do I perceive the power and evil of greed and apathy to deceive and destroy.

Well, I went over to visit with Occupy and have a little fun, and I saw some people, very interesting. It's a totally confused issue because they come from such divergent different backgrounds. I don't see how they could ever agree on hardly anything. I have no quarrel with them. At least, if I disagree with you, but you're not protesting your position, then how are those guys in Washington going to know what you believe if you don't do that?

The problem is that I am so skeptical of my government, that Occupiers can't do any god-damn thing because if they had a possibility they would destroy them. Do you know of the SOS, the School of the Americas? Excellent. I'm a big supporter. There isn't a god-damn national that we're not invading now one way or the other that did not come out of the School of the Americas, who we trained the assassins.

Dunham: You're a big supporter?

3-00:21:25

Del Masso: Yes.

Dunham: How so?

3-00:21:29

Del Masso: I sent them some money.

Dunham: Why is that? I'm trying to see how it fits.

3-00:21:33

Del Masso: Okay, we have a school. Have you ever seen it in the paper or on television of a school that trains people how to be assassins, how to pull eyeballs, how to pull nose, how to kill people, how to torture them.

Dunham: So I just want to make sure I understand that you're a supporter of closing the school, or you're a supporter of those who are trying to show that it exists and protest it.

3-00:21:52

Del Masso: Exactly, that what I—

Dunham: I heard you say you were a supporter of closing the school, which didn't surprise me.

3-00:21:56

Del Masso: Say we have that—and yet what are we hearing about it, what are we told about it. See the reason that gets the Occupy people there never will be a chance for them to succeed because these people will take it all away from them.

Dunham: Well, I think that's the question. The question is whether or not—it seems to be with mixed results so far, but that they are actually getting some messages out there—

3-00:22:21

Del Masso: Yes, yup.

Dunham: Including the notion of while it's more complex than just saying there's rich people over here getting over and poor people—it's more complex than that, but if you look at the economics of the last thirty years I think they have a valid point. I tend to agree that there's a greater issue here. I think if enough people do pay attention, change, and start caring and recognizing that they can be citizens and can help create change, there's potential—to me that's part of the equation, and I admire your full perspective in having been through what you were with your family, having lost your brother in the war and even despite that, seeing how complex and simple in some ways it is—they were all human. I'm glad you've connected with some—yeah, you're right, not nearly enough people know about the School of the Americas, which has been around for a very long time.

3-00:25:20

Del Masso:

Well, we're pretty well in agreement. I was surprised—fine, I don't want to bore you with my personal life. I don't know where this all goes. Let me bring a sort of a—stop any time you want. This thing with me believing that God looks for me to get on first base. If you're my friend, you're my friend. I had two people die in my company here. We went out and bought them homes and cars and put the family together. We've got checks going out to a guy who was taken out of the country four years ago from here, wonderful man. We send him a \$500 check to Mexico for him. Another woman got sick—we're sending money for him. We don't lose you because you're not here; you come into our life; you're not going out without us doing what we can for you. Stop me when you want to.

So I have a friend in the business, the numismatic business. I go in the store, we do a lot of business together—coins, medallions, where's Tom? He's in jail. What do you mean jail? Well, this guy that he trusted as a friend did da da da da to him, okay. So he gets tossed in jail. I wrote him a letter in Santa Rita Jail to Tom. All is not lost. "When you get out, you come to see me, and I'll help you start your business again," because I believed him. To make a long story shorter—I gave him the money, he started the business, Pleasant Hill Coins. He's doing well.

He comes to me—he's going to buy a warehouse, okay, \$250,000. I'll loan it to you—give me 10 percent. I said, "No, I don't want 10 percent. Let's make it somewhat less; we're friends." I'm not Snow White. I just got to be fair with you, so I have a right to expect you to be fair with me. I can't do otherwise, so he buys a warehouse. Do you know that some guy went by there and thought he smelled marijuana? And when I sent Tom the escrow check, he didn't want that check, so I sent him a Cashier's Check from my bank to that bank—that's clear enough—not hidden money—not something bad.

And the agreement I drew up on a piece of paper. His attorney did something. He deceived me by not sending me the final escrow papers. Keeping me in the dark from the devious machinations. Later a guy went by the building and smelled marijuana. To make a long story short, this is became one of the biggest marijuana growers in California. Tom in the office hugging Diana saying "No way is this true, I he would never hurt a hair on her body, all a big lie!" Now there's a lawsuit. You see, my contract escrow billing did not transfer to me yet, therefore now our federal government, our heroes, those sons of bitches, came in and wanted my \$250,000 and lies and deceits to fabricate me to cheat me.

We spent three of the most miserable years—our house and yard was searched quietly here, and my company was also here, and you name it, every god-damn thing. The Drug Enforcement Agency was trying to make me the godfather of the whole thing. All because I trusted this man, and I had to hire an attorney. It got so god-damn bad it ended up being this guy coming down

to my office to investigate me wanting to know who the top guys were so they could go get them.

You don't understand; I hate god-damn drugs. If I knew where they were, I'd be telling them where to go down there. To make a long story short, I get caught before the grand jury. That's how bad this thing got. I got squashed. So now we're going to go to court. We do go to court. One of Ronald Reagan's top judges is the judge, and all the government agents are in there with the jury telling them what a bad guy I am financing all these drug deals. Can you believe all these my very own government protectors together trying to steal and criminalize me for my \$250,000 loan for the building?

I wouldn't even know marijuana if—anything about it in the first god-damn place. So anyway, so here we are, got to go to court. He, the head of the DEA, says I got a receipt here from this coin dealer. You bought \$123,000 worth of gold here. This is scary; here he is walking back and forth like Perry Mason you know. I said, "No, sir. You have it wrong. I didn't buy \$123,000; I bought \$188,000." I said, "Would you like to see it?"

And I walked into the god-damn building with gold and silver in my hand, and nobody stopped me. Can I show it to the jury? The DA now shows an invoice of a silver purchased from Tom, and I say to him and the jury, "Your Honor, all right." I ask what about the silver over here? Same thing. "You got it wrong; it was double that amount." I says, "You know what, sir; these things belong to my employees. I bought those for my employees for their profit-sharing plan." Wells Fargo Bank at Fourteenth and Broadway, we put it in the bank. I have never been to the bank; by the law I cannot go into that account. I had it set up that way. To protect my hard working employees.

There's a committee, and the manager of the bank went to the vault and opened it up with my committee—everything is there and nobody had been back there for four years. I said, "By the way, what we bought for three hundred dollars now is worth \$1,500." We're doing pretty well. Now I went through all of that shit because I trusted that man, my friend, who told me that this wasn't true at all. Now the DEA—he put a government agent back on the stand and said, "Did you not say that you investigated this Del Masso person real estate brokers financial relationship, and they told you he was?" I was financing the drug deals.

"My attorney now is going to call the brokers back then to the stand now." They said, "We never said that. It wasn't true." My attorney now calls the lying bastard DEA agent back to the stand." He says, "Well gee." I says, "I guess maybe I wrote it up wrong. Gosh, I just made an error." The real estate agents called to testify totally and completely show the DA the agent to have lied."

I don't know what you make up on all this, but see, I can't live that way. So Mr. Bevins is the head Drug Enforcement Agency guy. He's a good man. He's tough. My attorney says, "Well, Mr. Bevins." This guy was his friend. He knows how to pick his friends better. So when it was all over, the judge and Mr. Bevins are fighting. "What in the hell did we do here?" The judge says to this guy, Tom Grossi, "How dare you? This guy did that for you and helped you, and you did this to him?"

The agent guy says, "This thing is over. We want him to have his money back." And our government wanted that building so god-damn bad, they were going to steal it from him and know it was wrong. So here we are, so I called Mr. Bevins on the phone—he's a good man—and said "Mr. Bevins, we got troubles here; please let me explain. You wake up every single morning, and everybody in your life is guilty of something until proven innocent." I can't do that. I got to find somebody believe I can trust. I said, "I can't live another way. I got to trust somebody."

And I'll tell you, but there's a lesson here; I've learned it the hard way. You got a friend, okay, but putting some gasoline on the table, be careful. Don't put your money on the table with gasoline it's like I putting matches on the table. There are some people that can like a dog sniffs you and know you for what you are, right? Well, there are these guys they can sniff you and your weaknesses. I like people and want to be able to trust people, and I don't want it to be otherwise, yet I cannot continue to get other people in trouble following me into the pit.

Dunham: Yeah, well, that's too bad, but I take it you've had many other more positive partnerships and collaborations than that—than negative.

3-00:34:29

Del Masso: Yeah. Do you know who Sidney Pollock is?

Dunham: Um-hm, sure.

3-00:34:36

Del Masso: Well, I own the rights to the movie *West with the Night*.

Dunham: I don't know that. Was that a movie that was done?

3-00:34:44

Del Masso: Let me get it for you in detail, I'll give you a book. *West with the Night*, and Sidney Pollock was going to do the movie. I spent a lot of time in Africa, in Indonesia, our calendar this year was—I'll get you a calendar—was a trip of my Komodo lizards, dragon lizards. I went over and spent some time with the villagers over there, see.

Doing photography, it's what I personally wanted to do, see—collecting for museums and the San Francisco Academy of Science. This *West with the*

Night, it's a movie about this first woman—first ever to fly across the Atlantic opposite of Lindbergh—my wife and I went over and met her. I was spending a lot of time in Africa—different places and with the producers and director of *West with The Night*. I got the movie rights to her book, and second book as well called, “Straight on Until Morning,” and a third one as well, *Splendid Outcast*.

So Mr. Pollock was going to do the movie then. I got in trouble again. I trusted a guy that I thought needed help, that he'd be a partner. He turned out to be an awesome cheat and liar. He hurt a couple of people really bad throughout Hollywood, Frank Sinatra's people and a few others.

Dunham: All of this is Pollock or someone else?

3-00:36:11

Del Masso: Here, Mr. Pollock, too.

Dunham: Oh, somebody else, not Sidney Pollock, okay.

3-00:36:16

Del Masso: Mr. Pollock was such a nice man. So we, wife Diana and I had the rights to the movies *West with The Night* by Beryl Markham and also *Straight on Until Morning* by Mary S. Lovell. There wasn't a movie star in Hollywood who did not want to do this movie, you name them. We went to Africa with Julia Ormond and spent some time over there with her and the writers and the producers. And again I made a tragic mistake of trusting because this guy who was part of this movie famous literati restaurateur from Sausalito, California—before I got involved—he brought me the project, the option he had purchased as he was losing it because he couldn't get financing for it.

So I bought it, cost me a \$100,000, and he was now going to be out of it, and I said, “I don't want you out of it. You did all the work; you're staying.” “I'm leaving you in as a partner.” It turned out to be the guy, a Hollywood producer, was a total alcoholic, ego, wanting to be accepted by the literati. One gal committed suicide. A couple of other—Diane Baker got hurt bad because of what he was doing while he was my partner. He wanted people to love him and be part of Hollywood. See, he was out selling this project to other people when we already had sold it. No one could get financing because every time they tried he had killed the whole trust in the god-damn thing. Money was not his goal but the complete need to salivate his ego. No limits!

I got back now for \$60,000—

Dunham: *Because* it got sold multiple times?

3-00:37:40

Del Masso: When movie producers went out to sell the book the guy refused to sign off. .” All because I thought that this guy—he should stay in and share, and all along

his outright lies and deceptions killed any Hollywood trust in our project. Both Sydney Pollock and Diane Baker and others simply gave up!”

Dunham: I know Sidney Pollock has passed, but where are the rights?

3-00:37:52

Del Masso: I still have them, oh, Warner Brothers has *West with The Night*. But we have the other books, the other two books: [*Splendid Outcast*](#) and [*Straight On until Morning*](#).

Dunham: So is still a chance of it being made or—?

3-00:38:01

Del Masso: There’s a chance—I got a few phone calls, but some of these things only happen and you have to run when it’s hot! Mr. Pollock was such a nice man. I talked to him on the phone. I sell potatoes I’m talking to Sidney Pollock, and I said, “Mr. Pollock, we need to do this movie. The deal I made was that I get the right to the movie for one night in San Francisco before it’s released, and I’m going to invite all my friends. See I bought four hundred forty of those books—it’s a little book. It’s *Splendid Outcast* for your announcement to come, an invitation to the movie opening over there.

Dunham: Yeah, Oh, wow. Well, I hope it happens.

3-00:38:47

Del Masso: Integrity means an awful lot in Hollywood, very much, because it is so rare. So when I called Mr. Pollock to do *West with The Night* he says, “Al, I just did *Out of Africa*”—he had won seven Oscars. I said, “Mr. Pollock, that’s only half the book.” I said, “Meryl Streep was sitting with Robert Redford, and she says, ‘Where are you when you’re not with me?’ You know where he was? He’s with this gal Beryl.” I says, “And I have all the books.” I said, “You’ve only done half of it.” He says, “Let me call you back. I’ll talk to my people,” his writers. He does call back. “We’ll do it.” And then he caught this guy, my partner Gutekunst, selling the book to two other people, and Mr. Pollack, he calls back and he’s going to do it, and this finished it.

This all lying, and yes not for money but an out-of-control ego. God, he hurt so many people and Diana and I still don’t have our fifteen minutes of fame!

Dunham: More trouble than it’s worth at that point.

3-00:39:34

Del Masso: Yeah. I don’t know what you can do about all that stuff. It’s human nature—so what you can do? You can be sure to bring your attorney. On another one of my great cases that I drew up, the contract, the guy a gambler who—again I get cheated badly. My attorney says, “I will never ever sell another sack of potatoes if you don’t ever make up another god-damn contract.”

Dunham: So was that your last individual contract?

3-00:40:05

Del Masso: He has passed away.

Dunham: So do you have a new lawyer, or someone who's looking out for you?

3-00:40:09

Del Masso: A new lawyer.

Dunham: And you don't go around him? You run everything by the lawyer?

3-00:40:16

Del Masso: Well, I digressed so much I'm not sure if that's all the confusion—

Dunham: Well, let me just ask you one other thing. We've talked around various enterprises you've had, but I guess I want to know, just in brief, and I know it's a much longer story than that, but how did you get started with this company—when did you come out of the, I guess, the Merchant Marines, and what happened after that?

3-00:40:36

Del Masso: Came out in 1946. I started this thing in about 1947. I worked for a company, Hunt Hatch, in downtown Oakland Produce Market. I was looking for a job, and I go there. He says, "All right, I'm going to hire you. Mr. Murphy, the manager little guy, a big company, took me down to see two truck drivers, big truck drivers like Jack LaLanne playing catch with hundred pound sacks of potatoes. He said, "You two, Brownie and Ray, come down here. This is Albert. He's going to run this department, he will tell you what to do—you damn well do what he tells you what to do." He goes off and leaves me.

Dunham: He had a lot of confidence in you. There must be something—

3-00:41:22

Del Masso: These guys were actually about ten years older than me. The two guys jump off the truck, they come over, and they pick me up, and they take to banana stalk hanging room. They tell me, "Listen, you little shit. You give us any trouble, we kill you." Oh I tell you, Dave, how wonderful life can be in some ways.

The two, Ray Osterman and Brownie, imagine a lifetime of visiting them. One of the two friendships, Ray Osterman, my wife and I just came back from visiting Arizona. He just had his ninetieth-some birthday; we went back and visited them. He's got the flying cross he got for flying a B-24, a B-17, over Europe after all these years.

Dunham: This is one of those guys who threatened to kill you?

3-00:42:01

Del Masso:

One's alive right there, and I gave him a terrible bad time, but because I had to have my hip replaced hauling his bananas. So they got \$28 a boxcar for hauling a carload of bananas, and they made me help, so they bought me a malt. They were teaching me how to run the business see. I started there, Hunt & Hatch, and one of my accounts there was Berkeley schools. Berkeley schools was going to quit because—so I went out to them. Tells what you can do when you don't know “no,” okay?

Dunham:

Okay.

3-00:42:37

Del Masso:

I went and I said to Mrs. Morton, who was the Berkeley Schools office Manager, “If I had a truck would you give me a chance?” She called in this woman Barbara, I forget her name, the lady. She says, “Yes, we'll give you a chance.” Why they would do this, I don't know. Of course, bad timing because that's at school vacation time. So the first day of my own deliveries I made \$3.35 or something. My brother loaned the money for the truck, that's where it all started. So what I'm going to do, Dave, is I had them thirty years, the City of Berkeley, and I had a fabulous relationship with them, and I lost it all over some political things that were happening out there that were not good. Cesar Chavez, politics. Things were going pretty bad out there, and I wouldn't play ball, so I ended up losing my biggest customer, whatever it was I did not have them anymore.

Every month I would have to come and provide a taste test. I would have to bring a new kind of vegetable to school to them to send to all the schools so they could taste what a turnip is or a new veggie. It was a hell of an idea, you know? So what I'm going to do is, my son and I are soon going to go out and see them, and I'm going to start a foundation and do something for them along that line. So we'll gift them with no cost, X amount of stuff out there. Just to thank them for what they did. If it hadn't been for them we wouldn't be in business today. They gave me a chance.

Dunham:

Oh, so that we in your first thirty years they were your—?

3-00:44:12

Del Masso:

Without it I wouldn't have made it.

Dunham:

Yeah, but then it's been almost thirty years since you haven't been with them—

3-00:44:17

Del Masso:

Right.

Dunham:

But you're going to go back and pay respect to that starting point.

3-00:44:23

Del Masso: Yeah, usually when we have a customer, they go out of business, but we don't ever lose them because we care, and they trust us.

Dunham: Yeah, well fortunately the Berkeley schools are not out of business, but they'll all struggle as they all right. That's very interesting, well, I'll take this off; you could take the mike off, and let me look at some of your photos, a minute here.

Yeah, so how many years ago was it that you met her Beryl Markham?

3-00:44:57

Del Masso: A good twenty years. But I have the silver cigarette case she gave to the Prince of Wales, who was going to be King of England—

Dunham: Wow, yeah.

3-00:45:17

Del Masso: When the King died, something happened, and the case was sent back to her; and anyway I ended up buying all her personal effects. A wonderful friendship developed here with one of England's leading judges, George Bathorst Noman, whose family took care of Markham's family in Kenya, and I bought all her memorabilia from him.

This is what I did for my brother Mike, a full page newspaper memorial. This is the one I just did for my brother Joe. Oh, I got one excuse me—

Dunham: That's okay. Can I look at those? Okay. And then you said you were going to do for your mom as well, kind of—very nice.

3-00:46:36

Del Masso: Right.

Dunham: What are those? Those are your—?

3-00:46:45

Del Masso: These are my grandparents.

Dunham: Your mom's parents?

3-00:46:48

Del Masso: Yeah, I just happened to find them, that's all.

Dunham: They were born in Italy?

3-00:46:53

Del Masso: Yes, and so was my mother and father.

Dunham: This is troop ships filled with over two thousand combat troops—?

3-00:47:08

Del Masso: Two thousand three hundred troops, yeah, from the European war theater.

Dunham: Wow.

3-00:47:25

Del Masso: That's for you. An initiation ceremony they have when you cross the equator at a certain place, they have a little ceremony they give you.

Dunham: To commemorate your first voyage or—?

3-00:47:35

Del Masso: Yes, first time I crossed that—I don't recall—yes, it has to be the first, it's September.

Dunham: Okay.

3-00:47:46

Del Masso: I'm not questioning what you'd be interested in.

Dunham: Are there any photos of you in here at—?

3-00:47:50

Del Masso: Yeah, the first one.

Dunham: What are these, the comic guinea pigs?

3-00:48:18

Del Masso: They got some ships over there they're going to drop the bomb and see what damage it does to the ships.

Dunham: So did that happen, they were there or—?

3-00:48:26

Del Masso: Yes, it did happen. I don't know if I was there or not when it happened.

Dunham: But those ships were there you mean for testing.

3-00:48:34

Del Masso: Yeah, this is near Hawaii, yeah.

Dunham: Do you know anything about those, how that—?

3-00:48:42

Del Masso: There are all monies from all the occupied countries I was in. No. I think they were successful when I'm over there, these companies, the countries, the money that they have; most of it like ours is getting over here, worthless.

Dunham: This wasn't back to your bartering days, this is more recent?

3-00:48:59

Del Masso: This is bartering, yeah.

Dunham: Okay, from back in the war or after that?

3-00:49:03

Del Masso: After the war, yeah. This again, this is the boats with a bamboo pole, going to try to sell you something.

Dunham: Okay, here's the pole.

3-00:49:20

Del Masso: Here's Shanghai, and there's the boat where all the ships—and there's Japanese, Chinese money. You name it!

Dunham: Yeah.

3-00:49:40

Del Masso: Here I am with all the money that I got. It's no longer good, so I'm burning it.

Dunham: You were burning the money?

3-00:49:48

Del Masso: Yeah.

Dunham: After MacArthur changed the—yen right to exchange in America.

3-00:49:50

Del Masso: Yeah, right. I was rich, and then I got nothing. Tokyo. Some of this money, of course, is practically worthless, and I have no idea what is of any interest or not. This is where crossing that place in the ocean we were being from a pollywog to a shellback. This is August '45, so this is in the first trip over.

Dunham: Who took the photos?

3-00:50:40

Del Masso: Some guy on the boat. There will be an entrepreneur on that boat who's got film, and none of us could get the film, and he'll sell them to you.

This is Manila. That was destroyed. The Japanese have been out of there. That's me over here. That's me there. Then here. That's our graduation class. Picture that uniform, huh?

Dunham: Yeah, absolutely.

3-00:51:25

Del Masso: One of those guys beat the hell out of me.

Dunham: I don't know about that, look pretty tough with your shirt off in those other shots. This is your graduation photo or—?

3-00:51:34

Del Masso: Yeah.

Dunham: Where are you in that?

3-00:51:42

Del Masso: I think that's me there.

Dunham: This is hats on, so it's harder to tell.

3-00:51:51

Del Masso: This goes all the way back to high school things. I don't even know why I did that.

Dunham: Well, it's nice.

3-00:52:03

Del Masso: Well, the thing is that if you have a family, you take it for granted all the stuff they're going to give you. What happens is that if nobody has a family to give you anything. It all has to start with you.

Dunham: So that made it that more important to you. I think it's great that you kept—

3-00:52:21

Del Masso: This is my brother Joe, my older brother. This is my brother Mike. As I said, I'm at academy, I'm honored to be there. My ship is a school, and a guy at any port hit can come on board and demand to see my records. These are all things that are navigations. For a guy that flunked every god-damn thing, what a surprise that they came to think—

Dunham: I've never heard of somebody flunking everything and being class president multiple times, didn't know that was allowed.

3-00:53:29

Del Masso: You're right. I would have thought the teachers weren't very happy with me, but one special lady Helen Vockel, a counselor who believed in me and got me a Senatorial seat at the Merchant Marine Academy and turned the light on for me and my possibilities—we became lifetime friends. Diana and I looked after her for the rest of her life. Well, I have another book someplace I've been trying to find before we get into this.

Dunham: What book is that?

3-00:53:41

Del Masso: Well, a book that had more about going to school.

Dunham: About the training, you mean the six-month training?

3-00:53:50

Del Masso: Yeah.

Dunham: What book is this?

3-00:53:55

Del Masso: January 1945, that's a book you had to have.

Dunham: That's when you started, this is your—

3-00:54:06

Del Masso: This is June 1945, so that starts in January, ends up in June.

Dunham: Right.

3-00:54:14

Del Masso: C3 attack troop ship, June 1945. This is a handbook that you're supposed to—
January 31 to June 1945.

Dunham: So what are the two different books? This is the American Merchant
Seaman's Manual, and this is, what is that one?

3-00:54:50

Del Masso: This is a story about Americans that have done things.

Dunham: Okay.

3-00:55:03

Del Masso: This is some of the trips, Manila, 1945. This trip here would be September,
when to Japan and Yokohama, that's when bringing the people back.
Shanghai, China.

Dunham: Now, were they all kids that were coming back, or were they parents, too?

3-00:55:24

Del Masso: I never saw any adults. I got to presume the adults were there, but I never saw
them. There might have been some on the barge. I was simply overwhelmed, I
couldn't compute that much hurt, how a man's mother, father, wives, brothers
and sisters lives all uprooted forever—ruined man needs no enemy, he has
himself a sorry philosophical revelation at nineteen .

Dunham: Those were definitely the beginnings of those—

3-00:56:11

Del Masso: That's interesting. Why would you be that way? It's not exactly something
you did it.

Dunham: Yeah, well, was that a part of your training in the Merchant Marines, kind of?
You've grown up, of course, during the war and all of that and your brothers
have been in the military, but to what extent were you prepared for that type
of experience?

3-00:56:33

Del Masso: Well, this is philosophical—

Dunham: Yeah, just seeing it and feeling it—

3-00:56:39

Del Masso: It was interesting that—I don't know when I wrote that in there—how you're bent and I am bent philosophically, maybe we don't have much to say about it.

Dunham: What do you mean?

3-00:57:02

Del Masso: Well, maybe you are what you are—

Dunham: Well, I think you're clearly the product of a wide range of experiences, and as you said, I think there was a deep conflict because you had lost your brother in the military, and so it was ingrained in you to sort of believe in the military and your government; you're invested in that. I think that's the hardest thing for someone—I think that's why generally military families are so pro-military because even if they haven't lost lives, everyone has some scars and damage from that, and you've got to believe it's for some good. Once you make that swing that you recognize maybe it was, and it's a big swing, I think.

3-00:57:51

Del Masso: Poor Cindy Sheehan is having such a rough time. If her loss is there, now what she is questioning is why did it every have to happen in the first god-damn place?

Dunham: Yeah. Are you familiar with those brothers, too? The football player who was up I think from the South Bay Area, and then played at Arizona professionally—

3-00:58:14

Del Masso: Yes.

Dunham: Right, and then yeah, there was a documentary made about him and his story, and his parents have been struggling to get the truth out about his story and the fact that he was also a com—he never wanted to be a poster boy for recruiting but they very much used him as that. So they've been trying to fight that effort because he was very conflicted about the war and more so as he was there.

3-00:58:43

Del Masso: Well, this is the tragedy about Viet Nam. Can you imagine going over there and coming home and finding out, no, you weren't fighting for some value of the American constitution? You were fighting for greed, whatever the hell it is and killed all those little mommies and daddies and kids over there; you come back here in humiliation and hurt, Jesus Christ.

I'm trying to think of the name for it. Right here is the bow of the ship, they call it the fish plates here, and would I would do—oh, eighteen, nineteen years old when—we had a hurricane or storm, we'd go hide in there here. The waves would come right over the ship. We'd hide in there and have this scary time, and of course the captain caught us and chewed our ass out.

Dunham: You hide there for fun, or just for the thrill?

3-00:59:35

Del Masso: Yeah, you die that way, too. This is where I was right here when I got washed over. Fortunately, I got caught there, otherwise—

Dunham: Had you learned to swim? Not that you could have survived had you gone over, but did you have a fear of the water in that way?

3-01:00:03

Del Masso: Evidently. I went right to the bottom.

Dunham: Did you ever learn to swim?

3-01:00:08

Del Masso: I almost drowned a couple of other times. I drop in the water, went right to the bottom.

Dunham: Well, my wife swears that that's her thing, too. I love to swim, and I wish she would enjoy the water more with me, but she grew up by the ocean in Oceanside, and her sister and she used to go to the beach every day. I think her sister had a typical kind of wave scare and never recovered from it, and both are afraid of the water now.

3-01:00:40

Del Masso: I have some stories; my other friend, wonderful man, his life's story should be in every net. He was on a destroyer five years; we never let him off the ship. He's such a wonderful man, everybody just loves that guy, wouldn't let him off the ship. "No, god-damn it, you're seasick every single day on board the destroyer, so a hurricane hit past Okinawa. The destroyer got caught into the convoy with a carrier. The captain of the destroyer saying to the carrier, "Captain, release us from the flotilla because we're getting green water, I mean solid water, is coming on to the ship." The asshole captain wouldn't do that, wouldn't release him. Of course, we're on a great big huge aircraft carrier, it's not so bad. The destroyer ship turned upside down in water by a huge wave; a hundred died. And my wonderful friend made it to a life raft and stayed out of the life raft so others could go in the life raft. His best friend was next to him, and he felt something and kicked his leg like this and kicked the shark in the nose. The shark went over and got his best friend in, too.

Dunham: Oh, my.

3-01:01:55

Del Masso: He survived that, and I have his life story and what had happened to him, and such a most wonderful passive man you'd ever meet in your life. See, people who bend for those kinds of things the difference in you, they know what really counts. They know where real hurt is.

Dunham: Well, wow, thank you so much for sharing.

[End of Interview]