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Stella Faria

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

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

Interviews conducted by
Judith Dunning
in 2003

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Interview with Stella Faria
Interviewer: Judith Dunning
Transcriber: Sarah Wheelock
[Interview 1: March 6, 2003]
[Begin audio file Faria1 03-06-03.wav]
audited by Shannon Page, 11-9-04

1-00:00:12

Dunning:

Today is March 6, 2003. We're interviewing Mrs. Stella Faria at her old home-house in Pinole, California for the Rosie the Riveter project. My name is Judith Dunning, and I'll be doing the interviewing. Kathryn Stine is doing the video. Good afternoon.

1-00:00:36

Faria:

Hi! Welcome to our home, our old home.

1-00:00:39

Dunning:

Thank you. Thank you very much. What is your full name?

1-00:00:43

Faria:

Stella Marie. My maiden name was Freitas, and I'm now Faria.

1-00:00:49

Dunning:

What year were you born?

1-00:00:52

Faria:

1926.

1-00:00:53

Dunning:

Where were you born?

1-00:00:56

Faria:

Right here in Pinole.

1-00:00:59

Dunning:

Do you know where your parents were born?

1-00:01:02

Faria:

Yes, my mother was born in a small town in northern Portugal. My father was also from that area, different city. He was born in a larger city called Guimarães, which is a university city in Portugal. My mother left with her aunt to Rio de Janeiro to help her out with her young children, sort of a nanny-type job. She met my father there, who had gone to school. He was a bookkeeper and had gone to Rio de Janeiro. They met and married there.

1-00:01:46

Dunning:

Well, that sounds like it will probably be a whole story in itself, and we may be coming back to you, because there is Portuguese project going on at UC Berkeley. But I'm just going to ask you a few brief questions. Did your parents tell you many stories about what their life was like growing up in Portugal?

1-00:02:07

Faria:

Since my father was killed in an explosion at Hercules Powder Company when I was just a toddler, I didn't hear anything from him, but my mother told us stories.

1-00:02:20

Dunning:

Any that stand out in your mind?

1-00:02:23

Faria:

Well, she was from a large family, and they lived in a very rural part of northern Portugal. Everything centered around their family life and raising a crop. They sort of lived off the land.

1-00:02:46

Dunning:

Do you know how old your parents were when they left Portugal?

1-00:02:51

Faria:

I don't know how old my father was, but they were close in age, within a couple of years. So he probably left when he was eighteen or nineteen. I think she was seventeen or eighteen when she left.

1-00:03:09

Dunning:

Did they tell you how they happened to leave—where were they? They were in Buenos Aires?

1-00:03:18

Faria:

No, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

1-00:03:20

Dunning:

Rio de Janeiro. Oh, okay.

1-00:03:24

Faria:

They went to Brazil, which was the Portuguese colony.

1-00:03:26

Dunning:

Portuguese-speaking, yes. Did they tell you why they came to this area?

1-00:03:32

Faria:

It was 1925 that they came. That was the height of immigration, I think, to this country and everyone had a dream of finding wealth and happiness in this land of opportunity, although they were well-off in Rio de Janeiro. My father was a successful businessman. They had what would be similar to a general store. My mother had household help. She helped him in the store, but she had household help. They had a cook and a nanny for my two sisters when they were babies. So they had a comfortable life, but my father was more adventurous, I think, than my mother, and he wanted to come to America badly, so they did.

1-00:04:31

Dunning:

Do you know if they came specifically to this area because there were other Portuguese people?

1-00:04:36

Faria:

No, they entered at Ellis Island, came on a freighter. I can't remember the name of the ship now. But anyway, they did come on a freighter and landed at Ellis Island. Came by train cross-country—which is hard for me to imagine doing myself—with two babies, because my two older sisters were just infants. They were babes in arms in their passport pictures. They traveled cross-country barely knowing the English language, which was amazing, too. But they did have some relatives here. I had an aunt in Sacramento, and my mother had a cousin in this area. They had arranged for my father to work at Hercules Powder Company, so when they arrived, they came right here to Pinole. Lived in Pinole a short time, then moved into one of the little company houses in Hercules. Some of those are now those old Victorians or Queen Annes, whatever they are, are restored. We lived in one of those when we were little.

1-00:06:03

Dunning:

You lived there as long as your dad worked at the company?

1-00:06:07

Faria:

Yes, and for a short time after he passed away. The company let my mother stay. Then we moved to a house down here on this lower street below the hill we lived on later. We all stayed there until about 1936, I think. Then my mother remarried and I had a stepdad. They bought a house on the other side of the highway, but still here in Pinole. So I was here all of my young life.

1-00:06:37

Dunning:

Now, you mentioned there were four sisters. Are they all from the same mother and father?

1-00:06:45

Faria:

Yes.

1-00:06:47

Dunning:

Were you second from the youngest?

1-00:06:50

Faria:

I'm second from the youngest. The two older ones came over from Brazil. They arrived here in '25, I was born in '26, and my younger sister was born in '28. So my mother had four girls within six years.

1-00:07:10

Dunning:

Can you describe a typical day for your mother when all the children were at home and young?

1-00:07:18

Faria:

Yes, I can. I remember so well. We lived in a house down on Quinan Street, below us here. It had a huge bedroom. There were two double beds, so there were two of us in each bed. My mother got us up for school in the morning. We got ourselves dressed, and she always had breakfast ready for us. We didn't fix our own breakfast; I think we were a little bit spoiled. She was a typical homemaker. That's all she did, was provide good meals for us and keep us well fed. She was a wonderful cook and enjoyed cooking.

1-00:08:04

Dunning:

Did she cook mostly Portuguese food?

1-00:08:08

Faria:

Well, she was used to the cooking from her own family, so she had that influence, but then she picked up that Brazilian influence, so it was kind of a combination of those two cultures. Because the Brazilian food is a lot spicier and a little different from--.

1-00:08:35

Dunning:

Do you remember any favorite meals?

1-00:08:39

Faria:

Yes, every Sunday she cooked a big pot roast. We'd go to the little meat market here in town, and she'd give us a dollar and tell us to go to the butcher shop and pick up a dollar pot roast. The butcher knew that's how much we had for a piece of meat. We always got a frankfurter from the butcher as a little treat he handed us after we bought whatever my mother sent us over for. We always got a frankfurter. I think we were always anxious to run to the butcher shop because we knew we were going to get that. [laughs]

1-00:09:20

Dunning:

Would you get one each, or just whoever went?

1-00:09:22

Faria:

Just one, or if two of us went we each got one. But my mother was a good cook, and she always fixed a nice roast. She had potatoes roasted in with the meat, and sometimes she'd put carrots in. We always had a vegetable garden. There was an empty lot next to ours, and I don't know if it

belonged to the property or not, but no one ever questioned the fact that people raised vegetables there. We always had chickens or rabbits, which supplemented our meals.

1-00:10:03

Dunning:

How would you describe your mother? What did she look like?

1-00:10:07

Faria:

Everyone says now that I look a lot like her as I've gotten older. She had dark brown eyes, and my hair used to be very dark, and she had very dark hair. She was a small—we're all about the same size, about five-foot-two. She was probably that, no taller than that. She was healthier in later years, but she had some real problems after my father was killed. She developed a lung tumor, and our little country doctor here in town, Dr. Fernandez, took her in to Providence Hospital in Oakland, because my mother didn't have the finances to take care of something that major, even in those days. Found a thoracic surgeon to operate on her at Providence Hospital in Oakland. She was there for something like two months, so neighbors took care of us. We were all small at the time. Our next-door neighbor, a couple who had no children, took my younger sister and I. A friend up the street who had a daughter the same age as my older sister took her, and Celeste was taken in by a lady who had been like a right arm to my mother when she had problems losing her husband and being so new to the country and not able hardly to speak the language, and not able to really fend for herself. This lady, Mrs. Enos, I'm named after her, Stella Enos would take us for medical visits, to the dentist. She took us to have our tonsils out, and she was always there for my mother. Just a wonderful woman.

1-00:12:18

Dunning:

Even after your mom recovered.

1-00:12:20

Faria:

Yes. She took Celeste. Celeste stayed with her. So we were separated, but all close by.

1-00:12:27

Dunning:

So your mother must have only been in her twenties then?

1-00:12:31

Faria:

Yes, close to thirty. She was born in '90—she was close to thirty.

1-00:12:38

Dunning:

Did you ever find out what was wrong with her?

1-00:12:43

Faria:

She had a lung tumor, but this doctor removed it successfully, whatever they had to do. I don't know the details, but she told us later she never got a bill. Never saw a bill.

1-00:13:04

Dunning:

Were you able to visit her at all?

1-00:13:06

Faria:

No.

1-00:13:09

Dunning:

I know the rules have really changed in hospitals.

1-00:13:11

Faria:

No, we didn't see her while she was there. I don't remember seeing her. My older sisters might have gone, been able to go, but I don't remember seeing her. In fact, she had a problem with nasal hemorrhages, and she was at the old Cottage Hospital in Richmond. One of us—I think it was Celeste—went to see her, and she had her nose packed. She remembers that vividly, how scary it was for a child to see her mother in that condition.

1-00:13:48

Dunning:

It seems like you had a lot of upheaval.

1-00:13:50

Faria:

Yes. My mother was a strong, strong person. She endured some really hard, hard times. When my father died, in those days they didn't have insurance policies or liability or things like that, so the Hercules Powder Company let her stay in the house for a short time. I think she said they paid the burial expenses at Wilson and Kratzer in Richmond. And I think she had something like \$120 or something that they gave her for a few months. She said it wasn't enough for her to manage on, so the house was big, she took in boarders. She did laundry for the office workers at Hercules. There were a lot of bachelors who wore white shirts and needed someone to do their laundry, so she did that until she remarried. She made all of our clothes, usually from hand-me-downs people gave her.

1-00:15:09

Dunning:

She was resourceful.

1-00:15:10

Faria:

Yes, she was.

1-00:15:12

Dunning:

You were only two going on three when your father died. What kind of stories did you hear about that?

1-00:15:21

Faria:

The only thing I recall about my father was on payday, the people from Hercules got their paychecks, and they came downtown to cash their checks. He always brought us a Hershey bar. It was a two-story old Victorian, and I remember us as little children lining up there by the door, waiting for him to come home with that five-cent Hershey bar. [tape interruption for phone]

1-00:16:16

Dunning:

Do you know the circumstances of your father's death? Were there other people killed in the explosion?

1-00:16:24

Faria:

One other man. We had a copy of the *Oakland Tribune* front-page article about the explosion. There were, I think, two other men involved, but not killed. He was the foreman at the nitroglycerin plant, and my understanding is that they wheeled these little buggies with nitroglycerin up this little pathway to the top of this knoll. I don't know if it was automated in any way, but these little carts went up this path. One cart would go up, and the empty one would be coming down. There was some sort of incident there that caused—and I understand that nitroglycerin's very sensitive, so evidently—and they had more than a few, I think, explosions there in that nitroglycerin plant.

1-00:17:40

Dunning:

During your childhood?

1-00:17:41

Faria:

Yes, later on.

1-00:17:46

Dunning:

Do you remember having special household chores as a child?

1-00:17:51

Faria:

We did. There were four of us, and we took turns doing different kitchen duties. We had to make our beds, which we didn't always do. We argued a lot about whose turn it was to do what in the kitchen. If it was your turn to wash dishes, you might not want to wash and you'd bargain with your sister to dry instead, or to wash for her the next day. We argued a lot about whose turn; we always claimed that somebody cheated on their turn. Later on, when we were older and we had things we'd rather do than be washing dishes, if we had a friend that wanted to do something with us, we made all kinds of excuses. My poor mother ended up half the time doing it just to keep peace in the household. You can imagine with four girls and a mother, that's a lot of females in one house.

1-00:19:03

Dunning:

Your father died right at the height of the Depression.

1-00:19:07

Faria:

Yes, 1929.

1-00:19:10

Dunning:

That must have been a really rough time. Did you understand that your family was having a rough time? You being only two, maybe that was—

1-00:19:23

Faria:

Yes. No, because right after, say around 1930, I would have been four. Then within those few years after, that's when everyone really was suffering. In 1929, it was the crash, but I don't think anyone felt it immediately except for the people who had money and had lost their fortunes, but we didn't have a fortune to lose. So that wasn't our big concern, it was just a matter of existing. But I do remember that this aunt that I had from Sacramento later lived in Vallejo. My uncle, her husband, worked for PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric], I think. I remember them going to the bank and being concerned about whether or not they were going to be able to get the money that they had. That was one thing that kind of stood out in my mind. Why, if you had money in the bank, wouldn't you be able to get it? I remember us being over in Vallejo with my aunt and uncle, and I remember the adults talking amongst themselves. It didn't make sense to me; I was too young to really understand what was going on.

1-00:20:53

Dunning:

Do you think growing up during that era affected you later? Growing up during the Depression?

1-00:21:01

Faria:

Yes, I think it made me understand the value of money a lot better, and understand the value of friends, because my mother needed help a lot and people really came to her rescue.

1-00:21:21

Dunning:

Were there other Portuguese Americans, or just—

1-00:21:24

Faria:

Yes, Pinole had a lot of Portuguese and Italian and Irish. I think the whole community was made up of Portuguese, Italian, and Irish. And there were farmers out in the valley. My husband's grandparents both farmed the Pinole Valley out here. His paternal grandparents, the Farias, farmed on the left side of the valley, and his maternal grandparents, the Roses, farmed just this side of Pinole Valley High School, that area. So there were lots of Portuguese people in this area.

1-00:22:09

Dunning:

Was your family tight with that community? Did your social life revolve around the Portuguese community?

1-00:22:14

Faria:

There were Portuguese lodges and they had lots of social activities. We had what they call the Holy Ghost Celebration. I don't know if you've ever heard of those. That's a Portuguese celebration that's held usually in the spring. They have a queen, who represents a queen who supposedly sold her jewels to feed the poor. They have a feast. They call it sopas. It's not really soup, but they cook beef overnight, long, for hours and hours, to make this broth. They pour it over French bread and then they cut the meat up and they serve that to everyone that comes.

1-00:23:08

Dunning:

This would be right in Pinole?

1-00:23:10

Faria:

Right here in Pinole. Portuguese Hall is just down at the foot of the hill here.

1-00:23:17

Dunning:

Did you speak Portuguese at home?

1-00:23:19

Faria:

Yes, we did. I spoke Portuguese and, in fact, took a class at UC from a Portuguese professor who was here from Brazil. He used to laugh at my accent because he said, "I can tell that you're not Brazilian, and I can tell that you're not from Portugal," because my parents were from the continent. The Portuguese from the Azores have an entirely different dialect, but my parents were both from the continent. He could tell that I had a mixture.

1-00:23:58

Dunning:

Are you still fluent in Portuguese?

1-00:24:02

Faria:

Well, I can manage, but I don't get to use it. I was a language major at Cal, and I took French, Spanish, and Portuguese all at the same time. Sometimes I used to throw in words in the wrong file.

1-00:24:18

Dunning:

You must be very good in languages.

1-00:24:19

Faria:

I loved languages. I had intended to be an interpreter, but didn't do that.

1-00:24:28

Dunning:

Looking back on your childhood, are there things that you learned that you still value today?

1-00:24:37

Faria:

Lots of things. Went to school at the little elementary school up on the hills, on the back side of that big eucalyptus grove. It was eight grades. We had wonderful teachers who looked out for us personally. Because it was a small town, they knew our parents and they knew what was expected of us at home. So they really, really I think shaped and molded the children who went there, and when we went to Richmond High—we had a first-grade teacher who had a little willow stick. She wrote beautifully; it just didn't even look like it was done by hand. And she expected perfect penmanship. She, and I think in those days most teachers did do that. You had to just make perfect little circles and lines through the circles. If you weren't holding your pencil right, she tapped your knuckle.

The students from Pinole who went on to Richmond High sort of stood out. There were lots of teachers that used to say, "I can tell which kids in my class came from Pinole," because we did have some very, very strict teachers who demanded a lot, but really we should be thankful to them because they did a wonderful job.

1-00:26:25

Dunning:

What was the name of your school?

1-00:26:27

Faria:

Pinole-Hercules Grammar School. Then I went on to work for the principal and the superintendent. In '48 I worked for Miss Collins. There's a school named after her here. Margaret Collins [Elementary] School.

1-00:26:49

Dunning:

I was going to ask you a bit about some of your memories of Pinole, but I think maybe you've addressed a number of those. One thing I might add is, who lived in your neighborhood when you first moved?

1-00:27:09

Faria:

I was born in a house over by the present fire department. I didn't know any neighbors there, because I was too small. I remember living in Hercules, as I say, because we looked forward to my father coming home with a Hershey bar every payday. There was a little park right in the middle of Hercules. The children all played there. When I think back, being only three years old, four years old, we had a lot of freedom. We just roamed the whole area and were perfectly safe. Every neighbor knew everyone else, and everyone looked out for everyone else. It was great growing up in that kind of an environment.

1-00:28:07

Dunning:

You knew when you went to the elementary school that you'd probably be going to Richmond Union High School?

1-00:28:12

Faria:

Yes, because there were no other schools here, just the elementary school. Then we went to Roosevelt Junior High from here.

1-00:28:20

Dunning:

So after the eighth grade—

1-00:28:23

Faria:

We went to Roosevelt Junior High for ninth, then ten, eleven, twelve at Richmond High. We rode on a school bus, and because we had a distance to go, the bus picked us up around seven in the morning, sometimes quarter to seven. They would change our schedule. We were sort of the end of the line, so they started here. Sometimes we went out through the Giant Road around the back there, picked up in San Pablo, and then on to Richmond High. Other times we went through El Sobrante and down the [San Pablo] Dam Road and around the back side to Richmond High. So we took circuitous routes to get to Richmond High, but we left early in the morning.

1-00:29:10

Dunning:

What time would you finally arrive at school?

1-00:29:14

Faria:

Well, we got there earlier than most of the other kids, so we'd go to a study hall. If we hadn't finished our homework, we had a little time to do some extra work.

1-00:29:31

Dunning:

How was that transition when you went from Pinole to Richmond? Had you had any experience in Richmond before?

1-00:29:37

Faria:

We had to do our shopping in Richmond because there were no stores here in Pinole. So everyone from Pinole was familiar with Richmond.

1-00:29:47

Dunning:

Where would you go in Richmond?

1-00:29:49

Faria:

There was a department store called Albert's on the corner of Ninth.

1-00:29:58

Dunning:

Ninth and Macdonald?

1-00:30:00

Faria:

Yes.

1-00:30:00

Dunning:

So you knew Richmond when Macdonald Ave. was booming.

1-00:30:04

Faria:

Yes. I worked at the National Dollar Store. That was about the time that Richmond was beginning to get really busy, and lots of people were shopping for work clothes. The National Dollar Store was that type of store that carried just very basic type things. I was probably fourteen and a half, fifteen. You could get a work permit at that age. They called it a special work permit. So I worked there, and then went on to the shipyards later.

1-00:30:50

Dunning:

Do you have any recollections of what Richmond looked like before the war?

1-00:30:57

Faria:

Yes. The area between Richmond High and downtown Richmond, after school we could walk practically at a straight angle into town. Most of that housing that came during and after the war was built in that area between Rheem [Avenue] and Nevin [Avenue], or between Rheem and Roosevelt [Avenue], that section was pretty empty.

1-00:31:36

Dunning:

What was the population of your high school? Do you know how many students were in your class?

1-00:31:46

Faria:

I have forgotten, and I have worked on my class reunion. [laughter] All these years, after fifty-something years I have forgotten how many were in our class. We lost a lot of our graduating class because they went into the service. They knew they were going to be drafted so, so that they would have a choice, a lot of them enlisted in the navy and marines, whatever, air force; so that they would have a choice.

1-00:32:18

Dunning:

Before we really seriously get into the war years, I wondered what was the face of your junior high school? I had heard that there were very few African American families in Richmond before the war, there were about fifteen, but there were a number of other ethnic groups. What is your recollection of that?

1-00:32:42

Faria:

Well, when I went to Roosevelt Junior High, it was a big change coming from a little school where everyone knew everyone else. But Richmond was a very close-knit community. There

were two junior highs, Longfellow and Roosevelt, which is now the Gompers Continuation [School]. Longfellow was over on Twenty-third Street, and the students there came from the Mira Vista, East Richmond Heights, that area, up on the hill. So we always felt like they were the elite, because they lived up on the hill. And anyone, too, who went to Longfellow Junior High sort of acted like they were better than those who went to Roosevelt Junior High. There was kind of a little class distinction there.

1-00:33:48

Dunning:

Even then.

1-00:33:49

Faria:

Yes. But those who did go to Roosevelt Junior High were a close-knit group. We had a lot of Mexican families whose parents worked for the railroad, and I have several friends who worked with me at the Dollar Store. I knew them all through school. I still know Vee Alcaraz, who went all through—I met her in junior high, and then she went through high school with me.

1-00:34:25

Dunning:

We may ask you a little bit about that later, if there are any other contacts from those early days, because that would be particularly interesting. Richmond was 23,000 people, and then in just a few years it was 125,000 people.

1-00:34:43

Faria:

Hundred and twenty-eight or so, I think they said.

1-00:34:45

Dunning:

Yes. Could you just see this happening all of a sudden, or was it more gradual?

1-00:34:52

Faria:

I suppose if you looked at each specific change, you might notice it more. Like, if you were shopping, you'd notice more people, or if you went to the movies, the movies were more crowded. But generally speaking, I didn't notice a tremendous change from 25,000 to 125,000, or whatever. It happened fast, I know that. My first job at the shipyards was—that section I worked in handled finding some housing, because people were coming in so quickly. That, and they were in charge of getting deferments for people that were in jobs that were more critical than others. The fact that there wasn't housing was obvious, I think.

1-00:36:05

Dunning:

Did people move up to Pinole, this whole area, too?

1-00:36:09

Faria:

We didn't notice much of a change, I don't think, here, because there was no government housing, so there was just the same limited number of homes available here. Unless people had moved out and someone came in and rented, we basically stayed pretty much the same.

1-00:36:31

Dunning:

I know that there were a lot of people who took in boarders, or that had what's called a "sleeping room." The bed would always be warm, because every eight hours the sleeping shift would change.

1-00:36:44

Faria:

Yes, and somebody else would come in. No, I don't know that that was a common thing here.

1-00:36:52

Dunning:

How about trailers? I know there were some trailer camps on San Pablo Ave.

1-00:36:57

Faria:

Yes, in San Pablo there were trailer parks, but nothing like that here in Pinole. There was a sense of edginess because there were so many immigrants here, that they might, and especially after they moved Japanese out of the area, then there were threats that the Italians, because of their connection with Germany, that there might be Italians moved out of the area. We had neighbors, the Gozzanos, who, the poor people, maybe they weren't that old, they seemed old to me, but at that time they were so upset, it just made her ill, because they were afraid they were going to be moved. This was a pretty frightening thing.

1-00:37:56

Dunning:

Did you know any Italians that were moved?

1-00:38:00

Faria:

Not from here in Pinole.

1-00:38:03

Dunning:

You mentioned earlier that you had a Japanese American student, you went to high school with her. Would you tell us that story?

1-00:38:14

Faria:

Yes. We had been in high school just a short time, and she was in my French class. Our teacher was Miss Swenson. The phone rang in the classroom. She went to the phone and answered it, and went over to—the girl's name was Junko Maeda. She went over to Junko and she told her that she was wanted downstairs in the office. She told her to take her things. She picked up her books and she left, and she didn't come back in before the class ended. So the bell rang, I went to my locker and she was there. She was, I think, typically Japanese. She was trying to not show her

emotions. I could tell something was wrong, and I asked her what was wrong, and she was real teary-eyed and she said that they were being relocated. She and her family had to move. It didn't quite set in. I thought, Why does she have to leave? She's from here, from Richmond. I got thinking, Well, there's war on, and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, I guess they do have to get them out of here. But it still didn't make sense.

1-00:39:52

I never heard from her again, never saw her again until I was working on my own class reunion and had gone to a reunion that my husband's class had had a year before. I heard someone say that there was someone named Maeda there, so I went over to her and I said, "Are you by chance related to Junko, or do you know someone named Junko?" She said "Yes, she's my sister-in-law." I told her who I was, and that she had been in my class before they were relocated. She gave me her address, and I called her. You know, we really didn't have anything in common to talk about, and it was such a sensitive matter that I didn't really know how to approach it. I felt so bad, and I could tell by her voice that she was emotionally upset. I told her that I was working on our reunion, and I said, "Do you think you'd want to come?" And she said, "Gee, it's so nice of you to even think of inviting me, but," she said, "I don't know anybody. I never kept in touch with anyone." She said, "I would feel so awkward coming." She did ask me about one classmate, Jean Hileman, who had gone all through school here in Pinole with me. She had become friendly with Jean Hileman. The last I had heard about Jean, she had moved to Texas. I didn't even have an address to give her, and had no way of giving any more information to her. But we had a little conversation, and I told her that it just really stayed in my mind and affected me in a real hard way.

1-00:42:02

Dunning:

This was your fiftieth high school reunion, wasn't it?

1-00:42:06

Faria:

Yes.

1-00:42:09

Dunning:

So you never saw Junko again.

1-00:42:11

Faria:

No. Never saw her.

1-00:42:13

Dunning:

Where is she now?

1-00:42:15

Faria:

She was living in a home above—I think that's called College Highlands above Contra Costa College, that section below Fairmead.

1-00:42:30

Dunning:

She's still in the area?

1-00:42:31

Faria:

She was there then, and I don't--.

1-00:42:34

Dunning:

It's almost ten years now. Do you know any other people that were interned?

1-00:42:43

Faria:

Well, we knew all the Japanese families in Richmond, because they all went to Richmond High. [interruption for barking dog] There were lots of Japanese families. There was one family that owned the Park Florist, and their name was Miyamoto. And of course, the Adachis, that are still in the area. That family was there. There were lots of Japanese farmers out in that area, North Richmond. That's not really considered—I guess it is North Richmond out there, and that's where most of them had either rose gardens or flower gardens, hothouses out there.

1-00:43:54

Dunning:

Did you notice when suddenly there were no Japanese around?

1-00:43:59

Faria:

Yes, it was pretty obvious. There was another family of Katayanagis, and one of them came back to Richmond and had a good job at Chevron. There were quite a few. The Hondas.

1-00:44:24

Dunning:

It seems like that experience with your Japanese high school mate really made a deep impression.

1-00:44:31

Faria:

It really did. It really did. I don't know why, but it did. In my own graduating class, there were only a few African Americans. The Ellisons were a well-known black family. Doug Ellison was a boxer, and his mother worked for DMV, I think, Department of Motor Vehicles. She was an old-timer in Richmond. There were just a handful.

1-00:45:08

Dunning:

The Graves family. I know that they were pretty big.

1-00:45:16

Faria:

Most of them lived in the North Richmond area. Aside from the African Americans, there were mostly Italians, farmers, out in that area.

1-00:45:30

Dunning:

Right before the war.

1-00:45:30

Faria:

Yes, out in that area off of where the American Standard plant is out there on Giant Road.

1-00:45:44

Dunning:

You certainly went to high school during quite a time of transformation in the United States. You graduated in 1944, and you mentioned that you could get special work permits at age fourteen, so that's when you worked for the National Dollar. Then, between junior and senior year in high school, that's the first time you went to work in the shipyard?

1-00:46:10

Faria:

Right.

1-00:46:11

Dunning:

Will you tell me a little bit about how you got that job?

1-00:46:16

Faria:

I don't remember if they had notices at school, but, because there was such a shortage of help, with everyone going off to war, I think they advertised that there were jobs open at the shipyards. I always worked. I mean, we all did in my family, whenever there was a chance to work. I babysat infants when I was eleven years old, and always had a job. Before I worked at the Dollar Store, I worked in the soda fountain here in town in the drugstore, and babysat all the time. So I always seemed to have a job. Whether it was advertised at high school or whether it was word of mouth, I knew that they were hiring, so the minute school was out, I applied and got a job at Yard Number One. That's the office that handled veteran exemptions and housing. That's where I worked for a gentleman, he was Dutch. His name was Dirk Feenstra. He was an engineer, I think. I had one time in the afternoon where I had to go out and pick up timecards in the yards, so I walked through the yards. So I was pretty much aware of all these huge ships being built.

1-00:47:49

Dunning:

Was that a desirable position that you had, working in the office? Was it more difficult to get those jobs?

1-00:48:02

Faria:

I don't know. Maybe they were particular about who—I was a good student in school and always had good grades, but I don't know that that had a lot of bearing. They were so desperate for help that it just seemed like anybody who wanted to work could work in those days.

1-00:48:25

Dunning:

Did you ever consider working, you know, building the ships?

1-00:48:29

Faria:

No, I didn't. It just seemed like it was a noisy, dirty, real hard—I felt sorry for the people who were doing the job, because I rode to work with three gentlemen from town here. I couldn't drive; I couldn't have afforded a car if I wanted one, so I rode with these three gentlemen who worked out in the yard. One of them seemed quite old. I don't know how old, but he worked there, and his son also worked there, and rode with us. They just seemed like they had a hard, long day when we left in the afternoon. I don't think I would have enjoyed having to work as hard as they were working. It was hard work. You could tell, the women that were out there working, with their lunch pails and dressed in jeans, or some of them that were welders had those leather pants and their hair tied up in bandannas. They just looked so weary. They really looked like they were drained and exhausted at the end of their workday.

1-00:49:48

Dunning:

In Shipyard Number One, where you were working, who else worked in the office?

1-00:49:55

Faria:

I really don't remember what the total crew was, because there were people doing different things and people in and out of the office. It was a busy place. It seemed like people were on the phone all the time, trying to find housing. That was a big thing at that time, to try to find housing for people that were coming into the area that wanted to work at the shipyards, but needed a place to live.

1-00:50:25

Dunning:

What I'm wondering is if in your office, if it was mostly made up of people like yourself, or people that were born and raised in this area, and then the people that migrated from the South and Midwest, would they be the ones that would actually be working on the ships?

1-00:50:44

Faria:

I think that the people in the offices were mostly people who were residents of the area, and were schooled here. I think they're the ones that took those office jobs. I don't know whether there was any preference shown, but I don't remember even meeting people who were new to the area in that office. I remember that I worked for Mr. Feenstra, and I remember all these other people at desks, but I worked from the time school was out in June and I was back in September, so I didn't have a long period of time to get really acquainted. I just went in, did my job and everything I was asked to do, and made sure I did it well, because I didn't want to lose that job. That was a good way to make some fast money.

1-00:51:39

Dunning:

So in your day-to-day work there, there wasn't too much connection with the people who were working on the ships other than, you said, collecting the timecards.

1-00:51:50

Faria:

No. Not in that Shipyard Number One. In fact, we were outside of the yard at the front end, on Cutting [Boulevard] there. The office was a two-story wood frame building right there at the entrance.

1-00:52:08

Dunning:

What kind of sense did you have about what was actually happening in the shipyards?

1-00:52:15

Faria:

I don't think I really realized that there was so much activity, and that ships were just being built and sent down the way so fast. Looking back, it's unbelievable, almost, that they could have built those ships as fast as they did. I realized when I went out into the yard to pick up timecards, that it was noisy and that there were people just hustling and bustling. Everyone seemed to be just flying. You didn't see anyone sitting around. If you sat around, you probably didn't have your job the next day, I think, because they really were on a tight, tough schedule.

1-00:53:07

Dunning:

Did you get a sense that it was the twenty-four-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week operation?

1-00:53:14

Faria:

Well, I was probably more concerned with my little eight-hour-a-day shift, but I was aware of the fact that these people were working hard, really working hard.

1-00:53:31

Dunning:

Tell me a little bit about Macdonald Ave. during the shipyard years.

1-00:53:38

Faria:

There were a few soda fountains, and Conn's Drugstore on Twenty-third, and Conn's Drugstore on Tenth and Macdonald were popular places because they had a soda fountain, and the kids all went there for sodas and cones. They had a chocolate-dipped cone, which was new at the time. I remember Blumenfield's was another department store farther down, I think on about Sixth. Then Albert's was like a mini-Macy's, you know. It was a neat little store. It had a shoe department, and they seemed to carry nice things for a store in those days. Garfinkel's was another, more of a boutique-y type store that had more suits and dresses and even some furs. Had furs. Bad thing. [laughs]

1-00:54:49

Dunning:

Would you go to the movie theaters there?

1-00:54:52

Faria:

Yes.

1-00:54:53

Dunning:

Because I heard they were open twenty-four hours a day—

1-00:54:55

Faria:

Yes. One of my sisters-in-law, who lives up in Redding, came during the shipyard days from Texas. She worked for years at United Grocers in Richmond. She was telling me that one of the fellows that she worked with, named Fisher, told her that there were nineteen little theaters, besides the big theaters, that showed just newsreels. Have you ever heard that story?

1-00:55:34

Dunning:

Well, I've mostly heard the stories where the shipyard workers who couldn't find housing would go in and sleep, and I have heard quite a bit about newsreels.

1-00:55:46

Faria:

Yes. She said that he told her, and he's a native Richmonder, that there were nineteen little theater things where they showed just the newsreels to keep you posted on what was happening in the war. That was the first I heard of that, so I told her I would tell you about it, but I didn't know that. The Fox Theater was on Macdonald, and down on Sixth or Eighth was the State. That was the State Theater. That one was the one—I think they were a little fussier about kicking people out of the Fox, because the other one was known to have more people sleeping. Whenever they talked about going to a movie, they'd say, "Well, it's playing at the Fox. You can go see it. Don't go down to the Flea House." They called it [the State] the Flea House because they claimed that there were so many people sleeping there that it became not the best place to go watch a movie.

1-00:56:49

Dunning:

How much interaction did you have, as a high school student, with all the newcomers in Richmond?

1-00:56:58

Faria:

They just kind of melded in. It seemed like they were always there, to me. I didn't really feel that they were newcomers.

1-00:57:17

Dunning:

I know you mentioned that you lost a number of high school boys who enlisted, including I think your boyfriend.

1-00:57:26

Faria:

Well, one of them went.

1-00:57:29

Dunning:

Okay, one of your boyfriends.

1-00:57:31

Faria:

I wasn't that serious about any of them. [discussion deleted]

[end file Faria1 03-06-03.wav]

[begin file Faria2 03-06-03.wav]

00:00:40

Dunning:

We were talking about some of your sisters' fiancé and husband enlisting, and then one of your boyfriends.

00:00:50

Faria:

They didn't enlist. They were drafted. My classmates enlisted, a lot of them enlisted, because they didn't want to be drafted into the army, because if you didn't enlist, you automatically were drafted into the army. So my older sister had just recently been married. Her husband was drafted. My sister Celeste's husband was drafted. She was not married at the time; it was her fiancé. And my boyfriend, my present husband, were all drafted and called in at the same time. The draft board in Richmond, Judge {Horner} handled the drafting call. They were all notified at the same time, all left on the same day and went down to the Presidio in Monterey. So my stepdad, who was a wonderful father to us, drove us down to Monterey so we could have one last fond farewell. We all said our goodbyes there at the Presidio. My brother-in-law, my older sister's husband, ended up in the air force. They switched him over, and he went to Truax Field [Army Air Base] in Wisconsin. I think it was Truax. Anyway, he went to Wisconsin.

My now-husband, boyfriend then, went to Florida to {Tent City?}. It was called Tent City, St. Petersburg, Florida. My brother-in-law, Harold, who became my brother-in-law later, ended up in Florida, too. He went to Texas first, and it was by coincidence that my husband was in a chow line and my brother-in-law came through. They ran into one another, and then ran into one another again in Texas, at Fort Hood, I think. Then my husband shipped out—he was still my boyfriend then—went on the *Queen Mary* over to England. He said it was a real zig-zaggy route because of the danger of submarines. He ended up over in Germany. He went over just at the end of the war, and then got out in '46. We were married in '47.

00:03:37

Dunning:

You had mentioned earlier that they were drafted in 1943.

00:03:44

Faria:

Yes.

00:03:46

Dunning:

So you were only about seventeen years old. How about your future husband?

00:03:50

Faria:

He's three years older.

00:03:57

Dunning:

Did you have much communication with him when he was gone?

00:04:00

Faria:

Wrote to him every day. Practically every day.

00:04:06

Dunning:

Do you know if he got most of the letters?

00:04:09

Faria:

Yes, he did, and cookies, care packages, everyone sent things from home. That was important at that time, to try to keep in touch. Everyone baked and sent things from home. He did get all of my letters, and he was pretty good about writing, too. I don't think men are as good about communicating as women, but he did write a lot.

00:04:41

Dunning:

And my next big question is, did you save those letters?

00:04:45

Faria:

No, I didn't. I should have. You know, after a while it becomes clutter. You save and save, and then when you get to be—he'll be eighty in May, and I'll be seventy-seven soon, and you just accumulate a lot of stuff in all those years. When we moved from here, I think I still had a lot of them in our downstairs storage area. We just had to get rid of things.

00:05:20

Dunning:

Did you save a one?

00:05:22

Faria:

No, I don't have any.

00:05:26

Dunning:

Did you ever keep a journal or a diary during that time?

00:05:30

Faria:

No, I didn't. I was so busy either going to school or working. I wanted so badly to finish Cal, and my parents couldn't afford to send me, so I knew that I had to make enough money for books and tuition, which seemed like a whole lot of money in those days. By today's standards, it was just peanuts. But twenty-six dollars for tuition, and I bought all my books used, at the used bookstores, but it still—and I had to ride the Greyhound bus, so I had to buy bus tickets. I knew that I had to make enough during my summer stints. I took all kinds of jobs. When I was going to Cal, one of my friends who lived in a sorority, they used to post all these little jobs that were

available. She was a good sport, and she would do anything I wanted to do. We used to go into Oakland, and we did inventory at Capwell's and at Hale Brothers, and oh, we'd dig under those sliding door counters underneath and pull out stuff that had probably been there we thought for fifty years, but we had to count it. It was dusty. We did some really tacky jobs, but we did whatever we thought we could earn a few dollars at.

00:07:09

Dunning:

And you made it through two years at UC?

00:07:12

Faria:

Yes. And then I just felt like I couldn't. The commute was, I think, getting to me more than anything else, because my classes were getting more demanding, and I really needed library time. We didn't have a library here. We had a little branch county library that was a little one-room thing that catered mostly to children, with children's books, nothing that we could use for research. If I stayed and went to the library, I knew that I was going to get a late bus, and then I'd be lucky if I got on the bus, because the buses were so crowded and full of servicemen. If there were servicemen aboard, they were supposed to have preference for seating. There were always gentlemen that would get up and say, "Take my seat," but usually the bus was so crowded that half the time I stood. And I was so tired by the time I got home, and in the rainy winter weather it was really drudgery. I decided I just couldn't do it anymore.

00:08:25

Dunning:

Was that a pretty tough decision for you?

00:08:27

Faria:

Yes, it was. It was. But I had a job right away. I went to work as a dental assistant and worked at that. Those were still busy, busy times in Richmond. I worked for a Dr. Collins downtown. Probably every doctor and dentist had an over-capacity practice in those days. We worked hard. I did everything. I did the bookkeeping, I did appointments, I did chairside assisting, I cast inlays, I did the X-rays, developed them, did the whole nine yards in that office. That's what jobs were in those days. If you got a job working in an office, it didn't mean that you sat a desk and did a typical secretarial job. You did a lot of extra things if you wanted a job, a good job.

00:09:35

Dunning:

I'd like to also hear a little bit more about your work in Shipyard Two and Three, but before that, I have one question that I ask everyone I interview. About the same period of time in the forties, you were a teenager. Did you have certain ambitions or dreams, or a vision of what your life might be like?

00:10:01

Faria:

Well, I hoped that it would be better than it was when I was growing up, because things were not easy when I was growing up. But I don't feel that we suffered from it. I think in a small town like Pinole, and I'm sure it was the same in Richmond, families were all going through the same

hard times, and we didn't feel that we were poor, or poorer than anybody else. We were kind of all in the same boat. As long as we had a nice comfortable home to live in and were clothed and were fed well, I don't think that we wished for anything more than that at the time.

00:11:00

So I hoped that some day I would have a good job, and I thought about being a language interpreter. I was always interested in foreign languages, and I thought that that would get me a good job and that I could be successful at that. That's kind of what I dreamed of doing, and I was offered a job in Washington, D.C. My parents took me to a lodge convention-type thing in Oakland, and there was a group of Portuguese air force and naval officers there. I met this gentleman who was a naval attaché in Washington, D.C., and then when he found out that I was a student at UC and that I spoke Portuguese and was fluent and could read and write it, he asked my parents if they would consider letting me go to work for him in Washington. Well, it sounded so glamorous. Being from this small town, the more I thought about it, the scarier it sounded, and my parents certainly weren't going to let me go to Washington to work, or have me be farther than ten miles from Pinole, let alone cross-country. [laughs] He gave me his card and told them to consider it, and told me to be sure to get in touch with him if I was interested in coming to work for him in Washington. I still have his little card. I look at it every once in a while and I think, "Gee, what would have happened to me if I had done that?"

00:12:52

Dunning:

Were you still in high school when you got the card, or were you a UC student?

00:12:55

Faria:

I think I was in my first year over there. [laughs] So that's as close as I came to having a dream job, besides doing what I did later.

00:13:10

Dunning:

When did you realize you were going to marry your husband? He was off in the service.

00:13:14

Faria:

He was off in the service, and he came home. He was discharged on Valentine's Day in '46. He was anxious to get married. I think all of the servicemen who had been overseas and had spent all that lonely time away from home came back, and there were lots of marriages here in Pinole right after—in '46, '47 and '48.

00:13:51

We had grown up close as neighbors. He just lived across the creek when I lived over on Peach Street. I was a good friend of one of his sisters. He's from a family of seven, and his sister Eleanor was a good friend of mine. I never did see much of him, because he milked cows on his grandmother's ranch, the Faria Ranch, just across the freeway there. So I never did see very much of him. The neighborhood kids used to get together after dinner and go play baseball out in the big lot out in the pasture. One evening he came down after he was through milking the cows, and he had a bicycle. Not very many kids had bicycles. That was a luxury in those days. So he had this old bicycle that had been given to him, and I said, "Gee, I really would love to know

how to ride a bike.” I don’t remember how old I was, but I was a kid. So he said, “Well, I’ll teach you.” He said, “Here, get on,” and he gave me one big push and I went just sailing down Tennent Avenue. It was sink or swim. I learned to ride a bicycle in one quick lesson. So that was my real first experience with getting to know my husband. [chuckles]

00:15:19

Dunning:

What is his full name?

00:15:21

Faria:

Clarence. He’s baptized Clarence Leland, but his confirmation—we’re Catholic—name was James, so he always went by Clarence James Faria.

00:15:36

Dunning:

Are many of his family members still around in the Pinole area?

00:15:41

Faria:

Yes. Well, he has an older sister who’s about eighty-four now, who’s in Bellingham, Washington. He just lost a sister a year ago Christmas, and his youngest sister passed away, so he has just one sister left and three brothers.

00:16:03

Dunning:

One of the things I also wanted to ask you, getting back to the high school years, I know you said a lot of the boys left. Did you find that you had many new students, or do you think most of the new high school-age students who came went immediately to work in the shipyards?

00:16:26

Faria:

There were new people coming in. I didn’t really pay attention, I guess, to where they were from at the time. I know we were busy with things trying to help the war effort. We had a Red Cross group that did bandages after school. There were activities that were connected with the war effort. But I guess at that age, you’re so busy with school that you’re not paying that much attention to all the things that are suddenly happening right under your nose. You just take it as they come, and it becomes just part of the program.

00:17:17

Dunning:

One of the longtime residents of Richmond who is now dead, Stanley Nystrom, his family is really old-time Richmond.

00:17:26

Faria:

Yes, the school named after him, Nystrom [Elementary School].

00:17:28

Dunning:

He remembers going to the post office, and people would comment on the fact that he didn't have an accent. They'd say, "What kind of an accent do you have?" because everyone coming from the South and Midwest had very different accents.

00:17:45

Faria:

That's true. In Richmond you would have noticed it more than in Pinole, I think, because we didn't have housing available to people that were moving into the area as much as Richmond did. But I noticed it in classes where you'd notice an accent, or a little Southern-type drawl, or just expressions that weren't typical to the area. But most of the kids that came in, it probably was tougher—you know, a hard thing for them, coming to an area where they didn't know anyone than it was for us, just accepting them as new people.

00:18:33

Dunning:

Mr. Nystrom would tell me when he would go to stores or to the post office, often people would ask him to read a letter, or to address something, because a lot of people who came here didn't have those skills.

00:18:48

Faria:

That's right. There were.

00:18:50

Dunning:

Is that something you noticed?

00:18:52

Faria:

I didn't really notice it, but I know that there were people who were illiterate, who they said were illiterate, that came. They were poor farm families. I later had a friend here in town who said she came out with her family and they didn't go to the shipyards, they picked fruit. She ended up very well off, but she said as a child it was really tough. They'd move from farm to farm, wherever they could find work, because of the drought in the Midwest. It just happened to be the timing was right. They were suffering back there, so California was the end of the rainbow.

00:19:47

Dunning:

What was the racial climate during the forties?

00:19:54

Faria:

As I said, there were African American families who everyone seemed to get along with. There were no tensions that I know of. Later on, in the fifties, I worked at Richmond High, and I could not believe the change.

00:20:21

Dunning:

Will you talk about that?

00:20:22

Faria:

Yes, I worked in the main office. I worked for Mr. Gray, the principal at the time. I was doing the accounting. It seemed like the African Americans who were in the area then were so much more aggressive and disrespectful, where the ones that I knew from the forties were so polite, and just so nice that you wanted them to be your friend. It was a big change. I was there in '55 and '56, and then I had our youngest son in '57. They asked me to do some substituting. I went back and worked in the attendance office, and that was when they had those Afro hairdos and they used those angel food cake slicers to comb, do their hair. One fellow came into the attendance office, and he had been cutting school or something. He came in, and I asked him something in a nice way, and he took the note that he had and wrapped around the tines in the angel food cake slicer and he shoved it at me. I jumped back. It scared me to death. I thought, "If this is typical of what you have to put up with at Richmond High now, I don't want to do it any more." I really was afraid, and the vulgarity, it just, the whole picture was so different from when I was a student there that I had a hard time believing that it could change that much.

00:22:34

Dunning:

The atmosphere must have changed tremendously from when everybody was feeling patriotic and working together and really busy, to the war's over and without notice, there's this huge population of people without jobs. Were you still in the shipyards at that time, or were you already working for Dr. Collins when the war ended?

00:23:05

Faria:

The war ended and things were still fairly normal, I thought. In '46, we were still very busy, to '48. I'm trying to think when I really noticed that things were... I guess it happened gradually, and I can't say exactly what year it changed so much, but it did become obvious that things were not the same.

00:23:43

Dunning:

I've heard from a number of people, especially longtime residents, that they thought the new population, as soon as the jobs ended, would leave and go back to the South and Midwest. And in some cases, people did leave. But then they got a hint of California and they liked it, and came back with other family members. So the population really did remain large.

00:24:11

Faria:

Yes. It didn't ever go back to a decent... I think that that was kind of sad, because Richmond was a really nice, clean town. I'm not blaming ethnic groups; I know it was just what happened because of this sudden growth and then the rapid decline. I went to work in real estate in the late seventies, and we used to go down to preview properties. I rode a bus downtown one day, and I was busy talking to one of my coworkers, and suddenly I opened my eyes and I had no idea where I was. We were on Macdonald Avenue. I had no idea where I was, and I knew Macdonald Avenue like the back of my hand, because I worked there and shopped there. I knew every little restaurant and coffee shop and drugstore and clothing store, from Marlene's to Macy's to everything. And nothing was the same. What wasn't torn down was boarded up, and that was a shock to me. I thought, "Could this have happened so fast?" because it had been such a booming

community. When I worked for Dr. Collins I banked every day at the Mechanics Bank and knew the area so well. Suddenly, I didn't even know where I was. It was a shock.

00:26:07

Dunning:

What you're saying, I've certainly heard that before. Seems like people have been very sad about that, especially people that were there before the war, that the city lost its center. Now it's starting to revive a bit, but there was a big loss. The stores moved to Hilltop [Mall], and that's different.

00:26:38

Faria:

Yes, it was sad. It was a really nice, nice town. City, when it grew, but it was like small-town. It was friendly and nice and everything. It was an attraction to people, and then suddenly you avoided the place if you could. That is sad, when you see a town die. It really died.

00:27:09

Dunning:

Well, I would like, before we wrap up, to go back a little bit to those other summers you worked in the shipyards. Shipyard Number Two, you were in tax and accounting?

00:27:21

Faria:

Yes. All of the Social Security and unemployment tax, whatever taxes they had in those days, were all reported to that one central office. Everything was logged into these huge ledgers. There were no computers and no electronic equipment to post these things on, so it was all posted into these ledgers. They were run off on sheets; I don't know what kind of machine. Marchant had calculators and different types of business machines, and I don't know what they were printed out on, but then they were all put in these huge ledgers. We just had stacks and stacks and files and files of ledgers full of tax records. So those records were all there, and it was a busy, busy office. I worked the summer there of—that would have been summer of '43.

00:28:34

Dunning:

Would you ever get feedback from the workers about having their federal tax taken out of their salary?

00:28:43

Faria:

No. I think there was a PR office that handled any complaints. The gentleman who was in charge of that accounting department, I'm sure, is the one who handled all of those little problem things that would crop up about the taxes, but I don't know that anybody ever complained. You just expected that part of your paycheck went to taxes.

00:29:14

Dunning:

Do you remember what your paycheck was?

00:29:16

Faria:

No, I don't. I wish I had kept stubs. I did keep those for a long time, too. You'd love to have had one, darn. I'll ask my sisters. They both had jobs at Yard Two. Arlette worked for {Arthur Mave?}. He was an administrative assistant at Yard Two, and she had a good job. She's my older sister, who's in that launching picture. Celeste had a good job at Yard Two, also.

00:29:52

Dunning:

Were you there together? Were you ever there at the same time?

00:29:56

Faria:

I was there during the summer, but I never was around where they were. Everyone carpooled, that's another thing: because of the gasoline, you carpooled. Everyone was in a ride group, so I just got a ride wherever I could hitch one, because I was not a full-time worker. If I was going to work the whole year I would have been in a carpool, but since I was just going to work summer months, I just would ask someone if they had room in their car for those two or three months.

00:30:34

Dunning:

Coming from Pinole.

00:30:37

Faria:

Pinole to Richmond, yes.

00:30:38

Dunning:

Right. That reminds me; I had a few questions about the rationing. I've heard a lot of stories about lines. Everybody remembers a lot of lines in the forties.

00:30:52

Faria:

Oh, lines, lines... I remember standing in lines to try to get a pair of nylons. There would be a rumor that Hill Brothers in Oakland, for instance, was going to have stockings on such and such a day, so everybody would hop in a car and go to Oakland. If you had a way down there, you went along for the attempt to get a pair of stockings. The lines would go around the block. If you were lucky enough, you'd get up there and they still had stockings, you might get a pair of stockings, but you might come home empty-handed. But it was worth a try, because there just weren't any stockings to be had. You know, over the counter you couldn't go, like now, buy a pair of L'eggs at the drugstore. They were a real prize package in those days. You stood in lines for a lot of things. There was a shortage of so many things, even if you did have stamps to get things, they'd run out of butter and sugar. Because people knew that it was rationed, if they could get it, they'd get it with their stamps, whether they needed it or not, because you might not get it when you needed it if you waited.

00:32:22

Dunning:

Do you remember very many people having Victory Gardens?

00:32:24

Faria:

Yes, absolutely. Everyone grew vegetables. Like I said, we had rabbits and chickens, too. My youngest sister, who was just a year and a half younger than me, went to work. She was a straight-A student and she took a business course. She was a stenographer. They asked her to go to work for the district attorney, as a secretary to the district attorney at their Richmond office. They had a branch office in Richmond. Before they built the county building, they were located above {Gay Vargas's?} tavern on the corner of Twelfth and Macdonald. She worked there with some deputy D.A.s, and she was seventeen. She had a court reporting job.

00:33:16

Dunning:

Seems like there were opportunities.

00:33:18

Faria:

Yes, there were. If you were a good student and you had some skills, you could find yourself a job. You didn't have to struggle like you do now for a job.

00:33:31

Dunning:

I think we could probably go on for another hour, but I promised you that we would stop around four. But before we stop, I'd like to ask you about when you worked at the Kaiser administrative offices in 1945.

00:33:49

Faria:

Yes. I was in Mr. Kaiser's administrative office, which was located at Shipyard Number Three. He had a group of administrative assistants. I worked for Mr. Fred Bechill, was his chief administrative assistant. I worked in his office. We did progress reports on these big, wide typewriters. They were all done by hand. The data would come in from all the shipyards on the ships that were being built, and then the progress reports were done there. That's where they kept a record of what was going on in all the yards. There were some gentlemen there who later went on to other positions with Kaiser's empire when he stopped the shipbuilding. It was kind of interesting; they knew he had an office upstairs. He was rarely seen out there, but you knew when he was coming, because there was a lot of hustle and bustle, making sure that the offices were presentable in case he did come down, which he didn't do. He went upstairs, met with his administrative assistants, and then was out of there. But it was kind of an exciting day just to know that Mr. Kaiser had come out to the yards.

00:35:28

Dunning:

Did you meet him?

00:35:30

Faria:

I saw him, but I was just a little flunky college student working for the summer. I didn't have that priority. But anyway, I did see him. He was a rather portly man, but everyone said he was very nice to work for, that he was a very nice person to have as a boss. Never heard any complaints about him, and these gentlemen that I worked for were all his chief honchos, sort of.

00:36:07

Dunning:

I read something that you'd written about K.J. Samuels and L.A. Smith. Are those the honchos you're talking about?

Faria:

Yes, L.A. Smith, Jr., and K.J. Samuels, and Fred Bechill were administrative assistants. I know that when it looked like the shipyards were going to slow down, at least, I heard that Mr. Smith was going to go to Fontana Steel, I think. Or Permanente Cement, one of Kaiser's other companies. Mr. Samuels went to the Kaiser Center in Oakland. He ended up at the Kaiser Center in Oakland; I don't know whether he went there directly from the shipyards. And I don't know what happened to Mr. Bechill. I assume they all held positions with Kaiser Industries after the shipyards.

00:37:11

Dunning:

Did you have an opportunity to join Kaiser health care when you worked in the shipyards?

00:37:17

Faria:

No. Since I was a part-time worker, those benefits weren't available to me.

00:37:24

Dunning:

When they opened it up to the public in the late forties, did you become a Kaiser member?

00:37:32

Faria:

No, because I married in '47 and my husband worked for Chevron, so I was eligible for his coverage. Never did have Kaiser. My older sister belongs to Kaiser.

00:37:48

Dunning:

Do you see Richmond as a historical place?

00:37:54

Faria:

Yes, I do. There was a lot of, not just the shipyards, they had the Ford Motor Company [Assembly Plant] was big, lots of people employed there. We had a lot of friends who worked for Ford Motor Company before they moved to Milpitas. They took most of their things down there. But F & P [Filice and Perrelli] cannery was bustling at the time. There was a lot. Richmond Standard—no, the sanitary district came after, but Rheem was big, American Standard [American Radiator and Standard Sanitary Corporation] was big. I'm trying to think of some of the others. There was a lot going on in Richmond. A lot of activity.

00:38:50

Dunning:

What do you think Richmond should be remembered for?

00:38:57

Faria:

Maybe not just remembered—I think they're famous for the shipyards. I think the shipyards really left a mark there, more than the Ford Motor Company or any of the other big things. Chevron was where most of the people found employment. The oil refineries were big employers all up and down the bay here. But the shipyards left a mark. They were unique to the area.

00:39:36

Dunning:

What's your feeling about the new Home Front National Historical Park?

00:39:41

Faria:

I haven't been able to get down to see it, and I have to do that, but I think it's nice that they've done that. I think it's sort of a feather in Richmond's cap to have a little recognition for what they contributed to the war effort. We just sort of took it for granted. All these ships were being built and it provided a lot of employment, but I don't think that we realized really what that meant to the war effort. Maybe we were naïve about the whole thing. I was young, so I probably was one of them who just thought, "Well, they're building a lot of ships out here, and we can go to work out there," and took it for granted. But looking back, it was really a boon to their economy. The stores were just really bustling. If you went downtown to shop, it was full of people, and every business seemed to be busy.

00:40:54

Dunning:

How about entertainment? Would you go to clubs in Richmond? Dancing?

00:41:01

Faria:

I didn't go because I didn't have a car, but I had high school friends who went to the USO [United Service Organizations], where they entertained troops. I had a couple of girlfriends who would go and dance with the servicemen who were in town. I never did that, basically because I didn't have transportation. We rode the bus to school, and otherwise we had to bum a ride.

00:41:36

Dunning:

In your small write-up, you mentioned that you recalled the big explosion in Port Chicago, the ammunition depot, in 1944. Is there something you'd like to add about that?

00:41:53

Faria:

Well, I remember it so well, because I was on the telephone. Our telephone was in the kitchen, and I lived just on the other side of San Pablo Avenue here. It just felt like the world had come to an end. It was just a massive boom. I got off the phone, don't know who I was talking to. Or maybe I had just started dialing, but I don't know that I was in a conversation, but I got off the phone. We thought that we'd been hit by a bomb. Because it was wartime, we thought that maybe the Japanese had dropped a bomb here like they did in Pearl Harbor. We just were imagining all these horrible things, had no idea what was happening, but my older sister was a good friend of Charlotte Fernandez, who was Dr. Fernandez's daughter. He's a legend here in

Pinole. He was the old family doctor, and the Fernandez Mansion is still down here, a historical spot.

He was called immediately. I think all of the doctors in the area were called immediately, and Charlotte, his daughter, who was my older sister's best friend, called to tell her that her father was called up to Port Chicago, that there was a terrible explosion and that there were just—they didn't know, they thought hundreds of people killed. It was terrible. So we knew fairly soon. I don't know that there was anything on the radio immediately, but the boom was terrible. We were so used to explosions here in Pinole, because of the Hercules Powder Company. They had a lot of explosions. Our house was plaster inside, and we were constantly fixing windows, repairing windows and cracks constantly, because the explosions did damage the homes here a lot. But that one was really terrible.

00:44:14

Dunning:

Yes, over three hundred people died.

00:44:16

Faria:

Yes, three hundred and twenty-one, I think they said.

00:44:19

Dunning:

Well, we've gone five minutes over, and I know you have a long drive back to Folsom. Is there anything else you'd like to add today?

00:44:30

Faria:

No, unless there's something else we didn't cover that you had in mind. Since I was not a native Richmonder, but spent a good part of my life back and forth to Richmond with school and working there, I was very familiar with Richmond, and I think that most of the people here in town were familiar with Richmond and had lots of Richmond friends, so it was a big part of my life, and having worked there so much.

00:45:03

Dunning:

What is your image of Richmond today?

00:45:09

Faria:

I hope it can restore itself a bit, I really do, because it's a prime spot, with the bay and close to San Francisco. It has so many good things. Pretty hills, up in Mira Vista, the hillside of Richmond. It's a pretty city. I hope that things will halfway go back to what they used to be. I'm sure things will never be the same, and that's with anything. You're dreaming if you think it will always be like it used to be. Those things don't always happen, but there's certainly opportunity for Richmond to become a nice city again like it used to be. I hope it happens. I know there's a lot of new development down on the bay side and down where the park is. I hope that they will have a lot of restoration, because it is a pretty spot.

00:46:21

Dunning:

I promise this is my last question.

00:46:24

Faria:

That's okay. I'm enjoying talking to you. I hope I haven't bored you with things that are not important at all.

00:46:33

Dunning:

No. Not even a little bit. It's great. About six years ago you moved to Folsom?

00:46:39

Faria:

Yes.

00:46:41

Dunning:

How was that move for you? Do you miss the Bay Area?

00:46:45

Faria:

We have two sons. The one who lives in this house here, he's on disability. He had a serious heart attack. Our younger son is a California Highway Patrolman. He has a wife and two children who are going to be eleven and twelve. They're fourteen months apart. We sort of wanted to be close to them. We were always there for our older granddaughter, who's now off to college at Biola [University] in southern California. He could see that Pinole was changing. Maybe not drastically like Richmond, but having grown up here, from the time we were children, it has changed a lot. It didn't bother me, but my husband does not take change well. So our son, Jim, said, "Why don't you get away from there? That hillside is too much for Dad." Having working around asbestos so much at the refinery, he has a lung problem. So he kept looking for a place for us to move, and there was a little senior development going in, so we went up and looked at it and decided to move up there.

00:48:05

And yes, it was hard to leave Pinole. When you're born and raised in a small town and know everybody and everybody knows you, and you go to a totally new place, at our age was hard. We didn't miss the town itself; we missed the people. We missed our friends here. But we do get back often, and I think that's the good part of it. We still keep in touch, and I have a sister here. One of them is still here, so we do keep in touch. We e-mail every other day or so, so we always know what's going on in Pinole.

00:48:46

Dunning:

Now, I promised that was my last question. However, you mentioned that your husband was affected by the asbestos. Many, many people I interviewed in my previous project had breathing problems, had lung problems. Some from work in the refinery, some from work in the shipyards. Is that a big problem for your husband?

00:49:14

Faria:

Well, he's done fairly well. He has a fibrositis in one lobe of the lung, and they keep tabs on it. But he does pretty well. This hillside, trying to work a hillside, and he's a dirt farmer, he loves to be out in the dirt. He just would not have someone do it for him, so for that reason it was a good thing to get away.

And speaking of asbestos at the shipyards, I remember when I went out to pick up timecards out in the yards, I remember these little white particles floating around. I didn't know at the time. That had to have been asbestos from all the asbestos they were using in the ships for insulation. But I remember it. I'd think, "What is that?" It was almost like snow, little snowflakes in the air. So I'm sure that those people that worked out in the yards did breathe a lot of bad air.

00:50:20

Dunning:

Yes. I've heard about people just coming home with the clothing, and then a family member would be doing the laundry and would get it.

00:50:28

Faria:

That has happened to some acquaintances of my husband, who were insulators and worked with asbestos all the time. They brought home their clothing and the rag they used, almost like a dishtowel-type material to wrap the asbestos in. They'd bring it home and their wives would wash it and bleach them out, clean them and use the cloth. There have been more than a couple cases that I know of. They're either gone now, or are critically ill from it.

00:51:06

Dunning:

Does the name Vera Jones Bailey ring a bell to you? She lived in Pinole, and I know that she lost her husband and was having some problems herself, too.

00:51:21

Faria:

That name doesn't ring a bell, but my husband was a superintendent out at the refinery, and so he was out on shutdowns, and whenever they removed asbestos from the piping, it was always just floating through the air. But they didn't realize how serious it was.

00:51:46

Dunning:

Right. Any special ambitions now? Places you'd like to go, or things you'd like to do?

00:51:51

Faria:

No, I think at our age we're just happy to be halfway healthy and retired and enjoying our grandchildren, and our two sons are still alive. And we have a really nice daughter, and former daughter-in-law that I still consider a daughter-in-law, so we have a nice family. Our family is close, so we're happy just doing that. We took an Alaskan cruise a couple of years ago, and that was our last one we've taken. We're kind of leery of flying, you know, chicken now with the world situation, so we've stayed kind of close to home.

00:52:32

Dunning:

I want to thank you very much, and if I had been able to reach you the last few days I would have asked you if you had any other pictures from the early Richmond days or when you worked in the shipyards. If you haven't thrown those out, maybe one of the times you come up in the next several months, maybe Kathryn and I can come by and photograph them. We can do it right on the video.

00:53:03

Faria:

Oh, so you can do that. Okay, I'll check with my sisters and then if I do have your phone number, which I'll keep, and if I want something mailed to you, do I use that address?

00:53:20

Dunning:

Yes, that would be fine. We could even get your sisters together and do a little taping.

00:53:27

Faria:

I think Celeste would do a good job, and I told her that you had suggested maybe would she be interested, and she said, "Oh, no." She's just really shy and doesn't want to do anything like this.

00:53:48

Dunning:

Well, thank you very much. We appreciate your taking the time.

00:53:51

Faria:

Well, it was a pleasure. I enjoyed doing this. It was a nice experience. It's fun. Maybe I can talk my sister into doing it, too.

00:54:02

Dunning:

Tell her it didn't hurt.

00:54:04

Faria:

No, it didn't hurt at all, and you make it so easy, I just hope I haven't bored you with things you're not concerned with.

00:54:09

Dunning:

No, not at all. This is pretty informal, and no one really can have a wrong answer.

00:54:17

Faria:

When you asked about Victory Gardens, I remembered our little house down here, below this hill. We had lettuce and we had carrots, and we grew all the vegetables that we could grow, even potatoes. If we had chickens and rabbits, that dollar pot roast from the meat market on Sunday was about the only meat that we bought at the meat market, because we had to be pretty self-

sufficient. With rationing, you didn't have that much you could get without food stamps. I forgot: coffee was another rationed item. It just came to me. But we managed.

00:55:13

Dunning:

Thank you very much.

00:55:16

Faria:

You're welcome. My pleasure.

[End of interview]