

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Bud Figueroa

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
Nadine Wilmot
in 2006

Copyright © 2007 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Bud Figueroa, dated November 28, 2006. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project: An Oral History with Bud Figueroa conducted by Nadine Wilmot, 2006, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007.

Discursive Table of Contents—Bud Figueroa

Audiofile 1

Grew up in Oakland—family of Spanish heritage, began a farm in what is now San Ramon in the early 1900's—worked at a cotton mill in Oakland—dancing at Sweet's ballroom four or five days a week—helping feed neighbors during the depression—discusses work in solar energy field— moved to Richmond to work at Kaiser and help with the war effort—production at Kaiser was intense, and intensified after Pearl Harbor—then went to work at McClellan Air Field Air Force base in Sacramento—General at McClellan puts him in charge of raising morale, having heard about his music and dance experience

Audiofile 2

Helped organize musical groups and basketball teams at McLellan—led a very successful fundraising program for WWII refugees; received national recognition for it

Interview #1: 10-25-2006

Begin Audio File 1 figueroa_bud_1 10-25-06.wav

01-00:00:00

Wilmot: Okay. Regional Oral History Office and National Park Service. Today is October 25th, 2006, and I'm here interviewing Dr. Bud Figueroa.

01-00:00:15

Figueroa: Figueroa. F-I-G-U-E-R-O-A. Figueroa.

01-00:00:20

Wilmot: Figueroa.

01-00:00:21

Figueroa: Mm-hmm. Just like Figueroa Street in Los Angeles, which is the largest street in the world on record, and it's named after the Jose Figueroa who was General Figueroa and also become Governor Figueroa. I am a relative of the Figueroa family. We are a 200-year-old family in California, and we are one of the largest Spanish families in the United States.

01-00:00:50

Wilmot: When and where were you born?

01-00:00:52

Figueroa: I was born in Oakland, California, 1917, 10:45 am, and I was born on a Wednesday, and it wasn't raining.

01-00:01:02

Wilmot: It wasn't raining?

01-00:01:03

Figueroa: [laughs]

01-00:01:05

Wilmot: And did you grow up in Oakland?

01-00:01:09

Figueroa: Yes, I did. I was born there, and I lived with my father and mother until I was five, and then—

01-00:01:17

Wilmot: What were their names?

01-00:01:18

Figueroa: Their names was—my dad's name was Joseph Figueroa, and my mother's name was Pauline, and her parents were born in Russia, and all of my Figueroa family on my dad's side, we were all born here in California. My dad was born in San Jose, California, and my mother was born in—what you call it? Her father was born in Spain, but the Figueroa family side has been here over 200 years in the state of California, and been here for over 200 years in the United States of America, long before it was the United States.

01-00:02:00
Wilmot: Do you want to sit back a little?

01-00:02:02
Figueroa: Sure.

01-00:02:03
Wilmot: It's just easier.

01-00:02:04
Figueroa: But I'm very proud of my family.

01-00:02:06
Wilmot: Tell me why.

01-00:02:06
Figueroa: Well, the reason I'm very proud is because I do have some Spanish blood in me. I'm glad that I'm an American. That's what I'm really happy about. I'm happy I'm an American, and I'm happy that my family raised me to always love my country.

01-00:02:27
Wilmot: And what about—you didn't have any Native American in your family?

01-00:02:35
Figueroa: We're all born right here in California for my family, right on through here.

01-00:02:43
Wilmot: Did you have any American Indian in your family?

01-00:02:44
Figueroa: Yes. Yes, I did. Yeah, my grandmother, which was my father's mother, is—father came from Spain—Madrid, as a matter of fact—from Madrid, Spain, and my grandmother's mother was part Indian and Spanish.

01-00:03:11
Wilmot: And can you tell me a little bit about what kind of work your parents did?

01-00:03:15
Figueroa: Yeah. Before I was born, my grandmother's family and them owned a hotel in San Francisco. The hotel I don't know. The only thing I know, they owned a hotel when the earthquake, 1906 earthquake, came along and destroyed their hotel in San Francisco. So they end up buying a home—I mean a ranch in Hayward. What was that place called?

01-00:03:53
D. Figueroa: Canyon.

01-00:03:54
Figueroa: Crow Canyon, and Crow Canyon. There's homes in there worth millions of dollars today, but they own a ranch in there, and so they came over in this side in Hayward, and that's what they did, they had a ranch. And then they also

were general contractors, cement contractors on the side. The brothers all grew up to become—that's what they did. They were builders.

01-00:04:24

Wilmot: And what kind of crops did you grow?

01-00:04:26

Figueroa: What?

01-00:04:26

Wilmot: What types of crops did your family grow?

01-00:04:28

Figueroa: Oh, they grew all kinds of—well, almost any kind you can think of. Carrots, you know, cabbage, you know, and all kinds of—I can't think of all of them right now, but every vegetable that you normally have, they had it. They also had 10,000 pigeons. They raised pigeons. They started out with just a few pigeons, and they all started having babies and et cetera, and they grew up to 10,000 pigeons. [laughs] And then they used to sell more pigeons than anything. People would come at the door when we were eating and want to buy pigeons to eat, because that's what they ate.

01-00:05:14

D. Figueroa: And what about tamales, the Peralta tamales in Oakland?

01-00:05:19

Figueroa: Well, tamales came from my Uncle Leo, whose father had an Italian grocery store on the corner where we lived in our house in Oakland—they came from Hayward, and they eventually came out to Oakland, so that the schools--

01-00:05:45

Wilmot: One thing is please don't touch the microphone.

01-00:05:50

Figueroa: Okay. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. So they moved into Oakland, my grandmother and them moved into Oakland from Hayward. They still kept the ranch, but they wanted the kids, everyone to go to school. So they moved into Oakland, so they still kept the ranch, and so everything was back and forth. So they bought an acre of land and built a home in Oakland, and then they built another house on each side of it and sold them out.

All the property where they bought the home, it was only four homes on a full square block. One home had maybe two or three acres. The next corner had two or three acres. The next corner had two or three or five acres, and the one over here had one or two or three acres, and we were right in the middle, and what we did, we bought a part of every one of those pieces of parcel, and they subdivided it into four homes, so it was four homes what was built in there, and there's an old saying. If you build four homes, there's no subdivision law—big subdivision law—that you have to go through, but if you build over four, you've got to go through a lot of technicalities and everything, because

it's over four. But if you build within four, the laws on it is very small, so always remember that if you want to go into development. Buy a lot, cut it in fours. Don't cut it in five. Okay.

01-00:07:15

Wilmot: And where was this located?

01-00:07:16

Figueroa: This was located in Oakland.

01-00:07:19

Wilmot: Where in Oakland?

01-00:07:20

Figueroa: That was on East 20th Street.

01-00:07:23

Wilmot: East?

01-00:07:24

Figueroa: East 20th. And there was nothing but oak trees where my family—we had to cut trees down.

01-00:07:29

Wilmot: East 20th and what?

01-00:07:30

Figueroa: East 20th. 24th Avenue and East 23rd, and then 20th Avenue. We were way up in the middle-class area of 23rd, because it was a bad part of 23rd that's two miles on the other side of the tracks, where they're really dangerous. They have a very bad reputation, but the line was where the railroad tracks. They were on that side, and we were north of it.

01-00:07:55

D. Figueroa: He used to job through Mills College.

01-00:07:57

Figueroa: Yeah. There used to be a cotton mill. There used to be a California cotton mill, which was the first place I went to work.

01-00:08:02

Wilmot: Yeah?

01-00:08:04

Figueroa: Yeah.

01-00:08:04

Wilmot: You worked there? I drove past there today to come see you.

01-00:08:07

Figueroa: Let me tell ya! You went right past it! I organized it! I went to work at the cotton mill. Listen to this! I went to work there part-time at the cotton mill,

and I felt sorry—listen to this! True story. I felt sorry for the people because they were only getting 25 cents and 30 cents an hour, and I said, "Is that all the money you guys are getting?" So I read in the paper where a fellow was organizing the warehouse and longshoreman union in San Francisco, and I went and contacted him, and he said, "Come on out to my office," so I went to his office, and he told me exactly what to do. So I went back to my whatchacallit, and I start organizing the union. I'm the guy that organized the California Union, and it was the first cotton mill in the United States that was unionized in 1933—around that area. It was 1933, 1934, in that area. I was named president. The night I was made president, I said, "I resign, and I quit."

01-00:09:09

Wilmot: Why did you resign?

01-00:09:10

Figueroa: Well, I'll tell you. I just wanted to go in the jewelry business. I wanted to go in the jewelry business, so I went and worked my way into the jewelry business eventually, and that's where I worked for 25 years till World War II came along. I was in the jewelry business. I started in from the ground floor, worked my way up to manager and owning my own store, and then I stayed in the jewelry business for 25 years.

01-00:09:38

Wilmot: I'm going to go back now. You said you lived with your family until your parents got divorced?

01-00:09:44

Figueroa: Well, my father and mother got a divorce when I was five years old, so he took me over to my grandmother's and left me there. So me and my sister there. And so we grew up there till I was 20 years old, till I got married. I got married when I was 20 years old.

01-00:10:04

Wilmot: What's your sister's name?

01-00:10:04

Figueroa: Huh?

01-00:10:05

Wilmot: What was your sister's name?

01-00:10:06

Figueroa: My sister's name is Florence. My sister's name is Florence, and I had a sister named Myrtle. Her nickname was Tiny. My nickname was Teeny, because we both were small, but she was one and a half pounds when she was born, and the doctors those days didn't have any kind of instruments for a young baby, so they told her that, "We have nothing here." So my grandmother says, "Give me the baby, and I'll take it home, and I'll take care of it," so they put my sister in a cigar box. They put cotton in the cigar box. That's how small my sister was. And they put her in a cigar box, and that was her bed. It was cotton

and in the cigar box, and my grandma would put her in the oven of the stove sometimes to keep her warm or whatever she did. I forgot what she did, but anyway, she took care of my sister and grew her up, and finally, her daughter, which is my Aunt Nita, ended up raising her like it was her own, because she never did live with my mother. Never lived with my father. She always lived with my grandmother, and her daughter lived there, and her daughter got married to the Santini family and they ended up owning an Italian grocery store on the corner. And then they ended up getting married. My aunts start going down there to buy the Italian food on the corner, and they got acquainted, and they finally ended up getting married.

01-00:11:47

Wilmot:

So that was your uncle and—

01-00:11:48

Figueroa:

My Uncle Leo. Leo Santini. He ended up becoming a chief engineer for 23rd Avenue Fire Department. He ended up becoming a chief engineer. He died as a fireman on the job, when he was retired. He was already retired, but he wanted to stay there in another month or two, and he went to help a rookie was in trouble, and by him going out to help the rookie, he ended up with a heart attack and died in the smoke.

01-00:12:17

Wilmot:

After the divorce, did your mom stay in Oakland?

01-00:12:19

Figueroa:

My mother stayed in San Francisco, and I never did—the only time I'd get to see my mother is when she'd come to school, and when I started going to school, she'd see me at school—you know, come and visit me once in a while at school, my mother. She died when she was 50 years old. She ended up having cancer of the liver, and she died very young. She died at 50 years old.

01-00:12:50

Wilmot:

Where did you go to school?

01-00:12:52

Figueroa:

Well I went to school—Manzanita. That's the first school I went to was Manzanita. And then I went out for track—I was very fast with my feet, so I went out for track, and I was the second fastest runner in my school. I had a little colored little boy that was—we had one boy that was colored in our school, and all the others were white, and everybody used to pick on him but me. But it happened to be I could fight pretty good. I had fast hands, and I'd protect him from the people who wanted to fight with him.

01-00:13:28

Wilmot:

What was his name?

01-00:13:29
 Figueroa: His name was Tony. I think it was Tony Lassiter or Tony, and he was the only colored boy, and if there's anybody ever know him—he's probably still alive. I hope he is. He'd be 90 years old or 89 years old, around my age.

01-00:13:44
 Wilmot: Did he live in your neighborhood?

01-00:13:46
 Figueroa: Yeah. He lived about—he lived—let's see, about four blocks from us. Yes. And he was the only one that was colored. All the others were all white, and the same way in school when he went to school.

01-00:14:00
 Wilmot: Well, what kind of white were the other students? Were they Italian or Portuguese or—?

01-00:14:04
 Figueroa: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. What you just said. When we moved, we moved in where there were Spaniards.

01-00:14:10
 Wilmot: And where did you move to?

01-00:14:10
 Figueroa: On 23rd. On East 20th Street.

01-00:14:17
 Wilmot: Got you.

01-00:14:17
 Figueroa: On East 20th Street. And 90% of all their families were born either in Spain; their families were born in Italy. They had a lot of Italians. As a matter of fact, most of the people took me for Italian, so they'd call me a wop and everything, you know? They'd call me all kinds of names when I was small, but that was one of them. I used to hate when they'd call me that, but they called me a wop because I looked just like I'd been Italian instead of a Spaniard. I'm like an Italian. And so anyway, I had a lot of Italians were in our area. More Italians, I'd say—probably more Italians than anybody. And there was Portuguese also, and probably others too.

But we had five different churches. My grandmother when I went there said, "One thing you're going to do when you live here, you have to go to Sunday school. I don't care what one. We have five churches here, and you can pick any one you want, because God's too big for any one church. So if you're going to live here, you're going to go to church. You go right to the Catholic's church first, and if you don't like that, you go there," and she says, "But you're going to church." So I went to a Catholic church first. [chuckles] Because I was baptized as a Catholic. But then they start talking about all these kind of different languages—Latin and all that kind of stuff, and that drove me nuts.

So I went to the next church. It was two blocks over and a little closer to my house, and it was a Southern Baptist, and I went there, and then there was the Presbyterian church about another block and a half from us, and I went to that one, and I ended up staying there till I died. I mean that sincerely. I raised my family at the Presbyterian, because they belonged to the YMCA, and that way my children were all raised, and when summer came, they had a place to go in the camp and things of that nature. You'd see it, and they were raised good with Christian beliefs and et cetera.

01-00:16:28
Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you a question. What kind of food did you eat in your house?

01-00:16:34
Figueroa:

Well, I'll tell you. I was lucky. That's probably one of the reasons I don't have any wrinkles at 89 years old is due to the fact that we had soup every night, seven days. On Sundays we had soup. We had soup seven days a week. There was never, never a night that we never had soup. I can't remember in 20 years that we never had soup. We had soup and we always had a salad, so we had all this, and all that came from the garden.

01-00:17:07
Wilmot:

What kind of soup?

01-00:17:09
Figueroa:

Vegetable soup. Every kind of vegetable you can think of is in our backyard. You understand? If it wasn't there, it was out in the farm, and I was raised on all those vegetables going in the soups, and not only that, but also in the salad. You see? So I got all these nice, wonderful food—homemade food, not where there's a lot of dope and a lot of salt and crap and everything in it, but everything natural, which was really good. My grandmother was an excellent cook, and she taught my aunt how to cook, and she ended up as even better than my grandmother, and then she married this Italian fellow—

01-00:17:51
Wilmot:

This is Myrtle?

01-00:17:52
Figueroa:

She married the Italian family, and their mothers would come over and show us Italian food, and they owned an Italian restaurant downtown. [laughs] And they'd go back and forth, so I would say mostly all our food was made of Spanish and Italian mixture. You couldn't tell. So it was really American food, because—

01-00:18:17
Wilmot:

Did you have chickens?

01-00:18:19
Figueroa:

Oh, we had chickens. God almighty. We had all kinds of chickens. Yeah. Yeah. We had chickens. We even had ducks. We had all this in the farm, see?

01-00:18:32
Wilmot: The farm at Crow Canyon?

01-00:18:33
Figueroa: Yeah. See, we had 10,000 pigeons! We were known--

01-00:18:36
Wilmot: So you would go back and forth between the farm and—

01-00:18:37
Figueroa: No. We'd have a little bit at our places. We had about an acre, you see.

01-00:18:45
Wilmot: In the city?

01-00:18:45
Figueroa: In the city. See, we had a big backyard. It wasn't small, but it was a big backyard, and the backyard, you understand, was big enough to build two homes or a house in the back, and that's where we grew a lot of our vegetables, and then later on, naturally—but what they did was they built buildings back there so that way there were miniature, so they had a little bit of geese here, and a little bit of ducks here, and a little bit of chickens here, and two coops. We had two coops with nothing but pigeons in them, but down there we had 10,000 pigeons—

01-00:19:26
Wilmot: Did you used to fly them?

01-00:19:27
Figueroa: --in the farm, and they'd have enough there to take care of the people and us to eat and et cetera there, and as people came and wanted it, we had enough there, and then they would deliver it back and forth. They'd have a truck and—

01-00:19:41
Wilmot: The pigeons were for food?

01-00:19:42
Figueroa: What?

01-00:19:43
Wilmot: The pigeons were for eating?

01-00:19:43
Figueroa: Oh, yeah.

01-00:19:45
Wilmot: They weren't for like flying or doing tricks?

01-00:19:48
Figueroa: No. No. No. Our chickens laid eggs. Our chickens laid eggs. We had fresh eggs, and they woke me up at 5:00 in the morning, and they'd go cock-a-

doodle-do. At 5:00 every morning, they'd wake me up, and I tell you, my job was to clean those coops, so I worked hard. When I'd come home from school, my job just started. Now, I had to clean them up, and I had to feed everybody—make sure that all animals were fed.

We had a parrot that lived till it was 90 years old that said everybody's name in the family. It talked just like it was a human being. At one time, it made noises like a fire engine, and everybody that thought their houses were on fire or my Polly was on top of their house making sounds like a fire engine. [chuckles] And he talked like he was having a fight with another, and he would mark everything, and he'd get on top of the house, and it was really funny, but anybody could go.[laughing] Next question.

01-00:21:00

Wilmot:

Okay. I want to hear a little bit more. So you went to Manzanita School.

01-00:21:07

Figueroa:

Oh, yeah. From Manzanita School, I graduate from there. Then I went to Garfield.

01-00:21:11

Wilmot:

Garfield? And where was Manzanita located?

01-00:21:14

Figueroa:

Manzanita was located, I think, about ten blocks—eight or ten blocks from our home, so that would be around 30-something. I'd say 30th and 23rd or 24th. I'd say 24th Ave. and 30th or something like that.

01-00:21:38

Wilmot:

And where was Garfield located?

01-00:21:39

Figueroa:

And then Garfield was on 16th, I think, or 15th or 16th. Yes. 15th and 16th, on 23rd Avenue. 19th and 20th.

01-00:21:57

Wilmot:

So you went there for middle school?

01-00:21:59

Figueroa:

Yeah, and then Roosevelt High. Roosevelt today, I hear, is a junior high school today, but it was a high school. When I went there, it was a high school.

01-00:22:11

Wilmot:

And where was that located?

01-00:22:12

Figueroa:

That was located on 15th and 20th Street.

01-00:22:18

Wilmot:

So you could walk to all these places.

01-00:22:20
 Figueroa:

Oh, I walked to every one of them, even when the other one was ten blocks away. I'd walk there when I was a kid back and forth. That's another thing. I did a lot of walking [laughs] when I was a kid. Yeah. Yeah. I walked everywhere.

01-00:22:36
 Wilmot:

I wanted to ask you how did your family go through the Depression?

01-00:22:42
 Figueroa:

Well, you know, this is the God's truth. I was very fortunate. We had a lot of food. My family, in fact, we still had a lot of money, more than most people, I'd say, in our area or any place where we lived. How they got it, I can't tell you, but one thing I do know is the Figueroa family owned controlling interest into the bus system in San Jose. That's what I know. Before I was born, they owned the controlling interest of the bus system in San Jose, California, at one time.

01-00:23:22
 Wilmot:

Your grandmother and grandfather?

01-00:23:23
 Figueroa:

My grandfather's side of the family owned control. According to what I heard after I got big enough and old enough was that the Figueroa family—that was all Figueras, even those here—I haven't even met some of my cousins here—and the Figueroa families owned the controlling interest of the bus system.

01-00:23:51
 Wilmot:

What kind of work did your grandfather do?

01-00:23:55
 Figueroa:

Well, as far as I know, they had that hotel, and then they turned around. They had that ranch, and all my fathers and uncles were all born and raised, and they went to school on a horse. They had their own horses to go to school, and when they went to school, they went to school with horses to go to school. And my grandmother, which is the mother of my father, graduated from San Jose Notre Dame. There was a college here called Notre Dame, which was connected with the Notre Dame Irish place. It's called Notre Dame. The one in Santa Clara is now in San Francisco peninsula. It's called the peninsula there, so I don't know if she graduated, but I know that's where she went. And I think she was ready to graduate, but instead of graduating, what she did—she ended up getting a job during a summer vacation with a secretary to a judge in Stockton, California. She become a secretary, and from there, I think she decided she was going to be one of these nuns. She was studying and going to be a nun, and she gave up the idea when she got the job as a secretary, I think, and then she must've met my grandfather or something or whatever, and I think that she either graduated—but I know one thing. She didn't become a nun.[laughs] Yeah. She was going to be a nun, she told me.

01-00:25:37

Wilmot:

What was your social life like in high school? Go out and go to moves?

01-00:25:50

Figueroa:

Well, I'll tell you, I ended up where I like to dance. I used to love to dance. So my sisters danced all the time. They'd go to dances all the time. What got me started in dancing was the following. If I danced with the people I'd hang around, they'd call me a sissy, see? And they did. When I got started, they called—but I got to the point I really didn't care. My sister was going with a good-looking gal. She had a pretty body, had a pretty face, and I said, "Gee, I sure would like to know her more," but they were going to dances together, my sister and this gal, you know? So I said, "I've got to learn how to dance," so I ask my sister, Tiny. I says, "Tiny, will you show me how to dance so I can learn how to dance so I can to dances, and when you go to the dances, I can go with you?"

01-00:26:41

Wilmot:

Can you say your sister's name again? Tiny?

01-00:26:43

Figueroa:

Tiny. Yeah. Her real name is Myrtle, but they call her Tiny, because she was so small.

01-00:26:49

Wilmot:

Now, is she your sister or your aunt?

01-00:26:51

Figueroa:

She's my sister. She's one year and a day older than I am. I was born 1917. She was born 1916 on August the 28th, and so there's one year and one day difference. She's still alive. The last time I heard, she lives down South. So anyway, down in Southern California, down near San Diego.

But anyway, what was what we were talking about? We were talking about dancing. So she taught me how to dance, and I ended up learning how to dance good. I ended up liking it so well, I said, "I want to change my friends. I don't want to see my friends anymore. I'm going to learn how to dance." So I start going to dances with my two sisters. And then my stepmother would go, and we'd all end up going to dances at nighttime, wherever there were dances. So I ended up becoming a good dancer in high school, so I ended up, and the first thing you know I was dancing going to Sweet's Ballroom. You ever know where Sweet's Ballroom—?

01-00:27:57

Wilmot:

No, tell me.

01-00:27:58

Figueroa:

Well, let me tell you. I'll tell you all about it. I started going to Sweet's Ballroom in the thirties. In 1936, I was going to Sweet's Ballroom every Wednesday and every Friday and every Saturday and every Sunday, I was at Sweet's Ballroom. That's how much I become—I become an expert on the

floor. I was *known* in San Francisco, Sacramento—because I used to go to Sacramento a lot and dance. I taught them routines in Sacramento. I taught them how to dance in Sacramento.

01-00:28:36

Wilmot: Was this jitterbugging, or what was it?

01-00:28:38

Figueroa: You name it. I did it. When jitterbug first came out, I did routines you don't even see today.

01-00:28:44

Wilmot: Like you'd throw people up in the air?

01-00:28:46

Figueroa: Oh, yeah. We did all that stuff! Everything you see, we did the same thing. Yeah. I can't do that now, because I'm older, and I've got a bad back, but I did all that same stuff that you see today. I did everything. Everything you see on *Lawrence Welk*. You know that guy that dances with Lawrence Welk on Saturday nights? You ever watch *Lawrence Welk* on Saturday nights? That guy that dances with that girl? I can do every step he does. Everything he did, I did. And my wife ended up, when I met my wife, she did the same thing! [laughs]

01-00:29:19

Wilmot: So who were your friends who wouldn't dance?

01-00:29:21

Figueroa: Huh?

01-00:29:21

Wilmot: Who were your friends who didn't have dancing?

01-00:29:23

Figueroa: Oh, Charlie Diaz. His name was Charlie Diaz. He didn't like to dance, and he called me sissy, you know. So anyway, I ended up losing my boyfriend. I met new friends, and I ended up knowing more girls than—and I love girls better than I do men. [laughs] So I ended up girls got to liking me, because I dressed good; you know, I talked pretty good; and at the same time I had a nice car, you know; and at the same time I could dance. I used to train people how to dance. That's how good. I could've been in Hollywood! I had a chance of going to Hollywood in, I'd say, about 1939—something like that. Yeah. 1938, 1939, a person from Hollywood was at the Neptune Beach. You know where Neptune Beach is? There used to be a place at Neptune Beach. It was like Coney Island in New York. It's now they built an academy, because the war came along, and they knocked it all down and built an academy there, but it used to be that Neptune Beach used to be there, and dances—

01-00:30:35

Wilmot: In Southern California?

01-00:30:36
 Figueroa:

Just right there in Alameda, California. Neptune was right at Alameda—right there in Alameda, California, called Neptune. You ought to look that up, because Neptune Beach was the beach of the West Coast here. Anything in San Francisco, we had it or better. It's Neptune.

01-00:30:56
 Wilmot:

Okay.

01-00:30:56
 Figueroa:

So it was all turned down into an academy for the war, because the war was on and et cetera, so they was bought up by the government.

01-00:31:06
 Wilmot:

So it sounds like the Depression didn't really impact your family so much.

01-00:31:10
 Figueroa:

It didn't hurt us any to the point—by the way, we were—so what they did—we helped the people that were poor. When we put food on the stove, we'd cook. There was no food just cooked for our family. My grandmother insisted that other big pots of food would go on the stove, that were big pots, like this here. So when it was made, there was enough soup for me and enough soup—and that night, before we ate—you know what my job was before I ate?

Before I ate, my job at night, every night except Saturdays and Sundays before I sat down to eat or anybody ate, I would go out with sliced French bread and a knife and cut slices of French bread, one or two slices in each house, and bring the soup. And my grandmother would have one end of the soup. I'd have the other end, and my grandma and I, walking out of the house. From the kitchen out to the front door with a soup bowl, and going from places—we knew the people who didn't have any food, and we'd feed the people that we knew that didn't have it.

01-00:31:24
 Wilmot:

Were they in the area?

01-00:31:24
 Figueroa:

And yeah, they lived in the area. They were having their financial toll during the Depression and et cetera, so we helped people out, and my grandma was that kind. I'm that same kind. I grew up. I'm glad she taught me, because I'm the type of person that likes to give. I'd rather give than receive, and I mean that sincerely. That's one reason why I'm living like I'm living. I gave a lot. I was a multi-millionaire at one time, and here I am sitting here with no money. I'd rather be rich. Yes, that's true. I'd like to be rich, but I'd rather be poor and have a good, clear conscience of knowing that I was good to my country, and I was good to the people who I met.

I love people, and I really want to—I'm not through yet. I'm just getting ready now to build a small little community called the Figueroa Solar Community,

and then when it's all solar energy—every house that's going to be in my little community is going to be solar energy, wind, and et cetera. And every house, every window, is going to have solar. The windows are going to be solar as well, so any sunlight that comes in the window, I'm going to—I studied all that stuff for 50 years, and I also was a contractor. When solar energy started, I was building swimming pools with solar energy thirty years ago. Thirty years ago, I was one of the pioneers of solar energy here in the State of California and in the United States. I had two corporations I put together 35 or 38 years ago. One of them was called the Figueroa Insulation and Energy Company, and the other one was called the Figueroa Solar Energy and Insulation Corporation, and I'm the founder of them. My son is a cofounder.

01-00:34:15

Wilmot: Wonderful.

01-00:34:16

Figueroa: Yeah. And I'm the founder of both of them.

Wilmot:

Good.

Figueroa:

And my son is a cofounder with me.

Wilmot:

Great.

Figueroa:

And he's my son, and him and I are still together. [laughter] Yeah, so anyway.

01-00:34:27

Wilmot: So I had a question for you. Back to those War years.

01-00:34:31

Figueroa: What?

01-00:34:31

Wilmot: Back to those—

01-00:34:32

D. Figueroa: I'm sorry.

01-00:34:33

Wilmot: It's okay. [equipment adjustment]

01-00:34:39

Figueroa: I'd like to mention—

01-00:34:39

Wilmot: Pause. Pause. Pause. [interview interruption] There. Now you can keep going.

01-00:34:49

Figueroa: I'd like to add, because this is very important. I danced with all the big bands—Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby. Bing Crosby's brother had a beautiful orchestra during the Depression, and I mean that very

seriously. As a matter of fact, I think it was one of the last big bands I danced with just before I got married was with Bob Crosby, Bing Crosby's brother. He had a Bob Crosby orchestra, and they traveled all over the United States, and they'd come to Sweet's Ballroom and Oakland, and I followed them to Sacramento, followed them to Los Angeles. I followed them to Sacramento, and they had a beautiful band. Tommy Dorsey—I followed his band, met with Tommy Dorsey, shook his hand, and his brother Jimmy. I met his brother Jimmy, who also had his own band at one time, and who also played in the band of Tommy Dorsey. And all of the bands was called the big bands. I danced and met the orchestra leader and always went up and shook their hand and told them what a good band they had, and I could always say I met the best in the business.

01-00:34:58

Wilmot:

How did you meet your wife?

01-00:36:00

Figueroa:

By dancing.

01-00:36:02

Wilmot:

Was she a dancer?

01-00:36:02

Figueroa:

I met my wife by dancing. Yeah. I met her at a hotel that had the dancing, and we had a big band there. One of the big bands. I think Bing Crosby was there. Bob Crosby's band was there, the Senator Hotel, and then he was out at the [Sweet's] Ballroom, and we met both places, and then we finally got acquainted, and I was living in Oakland at the time, but I was traveling just because with the big bands when they left Oakland, they'd go to San Francisco, and I'd go to San Francisco, and when they left to go to Santa Cruz, if any of them went to Santa Cruz, I went to Santa Cruz. And then from there, they'd go to Sacramento, and I'd follow the band in my car, and I'd end up dancing wherever they were because I loved them so much

01-00:36:46

Wilmot:

Did you get paid?

01-00:36:46

Figueroa:

No. I just loved to dance!

01-00:36:48

Wilmot:

So you met your wife dancing?

01-00:36:50

Figueroa:

Yeah. I met my wife dancing, and then I lived in Oakland. I still met her here, and then every time I came up, I'd go dancing with the big bands, and I'd meet her again. And then finally, one time, about a year later, I was with [Ginzerlie?] Jewelers, and they sent me out to Sacramento because the assistant manager was going on a vacation. "Hey, Figueroa, will you go to Sacramento and act as assistant manager up there in Sacramento while the

assistant manager is going on a vacation?" I said, "Sure. I'll go." So I went up to Sacramento, and guess what? [laughs] I met my wife again when I came up, and when I went back, I told my company, "I want to be transferred back to Sacramento. I think I want to live there. I met a girl." And that was a true story. I ended up moving up here because of my wife, which was my little dancing partner from Sacramento. And the people I taught how to dance, they ended up living next door to me, and their brothers become close to me, and I ended up becoming the best man in the family when they got married.

01-00:38:01
Wilmot:

What's your wife's name?

01-00:38:02
Figueroa:

My wife's name is Vera, V-E-R-A. Vera J. Figueroa. She's dying right now. She'll probably be passed on within six months. She's dying right as we speak. And doctors are all—what?

01-00:38:16
Wilmot:

What was her maiden name?

01-00:38:17
Figueroa:

What?

01-00:38:17
Wilmot:

What was her maiden name?

01-00:38:19
Figueroa:

That's her name. Her maiden name was Butcoff, B-U-T-C-O-F-F, Butcoff.

01-00:38:25
Wilmot:

Where was she born?

01-00:38:26
Figueroa:

Well, she was born in San Francisco, and I was born in Oakland, which is really funny, and we met in Sacramento, and her mother and father were both born in Russia, and my mother happened to be—her parents were also born in Russia. My mother's mother and father were born in Russia.

01-00:38:50
Wilmot:

I'm going to change something. [adjusts microphone]

01-00:38:55
Figueroa:

Were born in Russia. Yeah. I think I'll tell you the true story there. In one of the big bands was—I forgot what it was over in—is that hooked up?

01-00:39:27
Wilmot:

Yes.

01-00:39:27
Figueroa:

One of the big bands was hooked up—I can't think of it right now—was at Neptune Beach in Alameda, California, and while I was over there dancing,

everybody stopped dancing just to watch me dance, because I had this certain routine that I had learned from San Francisco, and *they* learn it from Los Angeles. It was a routine, just like you see on TV when you see that guy dancing a routine. [laughs] Some of those routines like I was doing 50, 60, 70 years ago I did.

01-00:39:57

Wilmot: How did you choose to go into jewelry?

01-00:40:01

Figueroa: Huh?

01-00:40:01

Wilmot: How did you make a choice to go into jewelry?

01-00:40:03

Figueroa: Well, I was selling clothing. I was selling men's clothing in a men's shop, a beautiful men's shop in Oakland, and my best friend named Harry Feinberg says, "Bud, you ought to get in the jewelry business, because you'll make more money than selling men's clothing." I said, "Yeah, how much?" He said, "Fine." I said, "I love jewelry," so I went around and I finally walked around to see if I could find a jewelry store I'd like to work in. I'm very particular where I'm going to go work. So I walked all around the stores. It had a bunch of jewelry stores. I said, "What store would I like to work in?" and I finally found at the last. I was just ready to go home, and I was just walking up Broadway, and it was a little store called Hudson's Jewelry Store. It was right across the street from where Macy's is now—right across the street. And it says, "Hudson's Jewelers."

I looked up there, and they had a spiral stairway inside of a jewelry store, and the man that owned the store had New York spats! You know the spats? They wear spats on their feet, and they're all dressed up, and he's got a cigar in his mouth, and I looked at the stairway. I said, "This is where I would like to work." It was the most prettiest jewelry store I'd ever seen in my life with this spiral stairway. And I went in and asked if I could go to work.

And they said, "You ever work in the jewelry business?" I said, "No, but I work in the clothing business, and if Harry Feinberg is my friend, he works for Eddie Lipson up the street," and guess what? Eddie Lipson owned that store. It was one of his chain stores without his name on it called Hudson's. He owned that. Eddie Lipson. Which is a big chain today. They're all over the United States. They're all over California.

01-00:41:50

Wilmot: L-I-P-S-O-N?

01-00:41:52

Figueroa: Yeah. Lipson. Eddie Lipson. That was Crescent Jewelers. Crescent Jewelers in Oakland started on 13th and Broadway is where they first started. It was on

the corner of 13th and Broadway, and today they're a big chain. I work for Hudson's Jewelers, and he owned Hudson's also.

01-00:42:15

Wilmot: So this was in high school?

01-00:42:16

Figueroa: No. At that time, I was still going to high school. Yeah. See, what I was doing is trying to sell jewelry on the side. I was trying to sell jewelry on the side if I could, and then they told me that I couldn't have a job until Christmastime. He said, "You come here, and we'll give you a job at Christmas." I went to bed at night, and I said, "Jesus, that's four or five months from now. I'll go down there. I'll work for nothing." So I went down there and asked him if I can come down here on Saturdays and work for nothing, and they said, "No, you can't work for nothing in this store. I'll tell you what. In the summertime, you come here when you have your summer vacation, and you come here and go to work for me, and I'll give you \$15 a month, but I'm not going to let you work for nothing." So I got \$15 a month for a whole year, and that's how I learned, and I got in the jewelry business where the Jewish boys—I'm a Spaniard, and I'm in there with the Jew boys now—so they said they're going to make a Jew boy out of me and et cetera, and they did.

They trained me and educated me, and then I end up—watch this—taking an extension course from the University of California on salesmanship. From the University of California, the best course I ever got in my whole life that made me so I become a millionaire. I would've never been a good salesman had it not been for the University of California. California had this course, and they had a professor at the University of California that came out with a book. I wished I had that book. That book was the best book I ever had, and what I learned was this. Here's what I learned, and I'm going to tell the whole world about it. If you want to be a salesman, and you want to close anybody, find out what they want—not what you want, but find out what the customer wants, and then help them get it. And what I mean by helping them get it is that you help them with the terms and conditions. Listen. "Don't worry about the money. Let me do the worrying, and let's see how much you could pay down. How much do you feel you can pay by the month? And let's go ahead with it and close the deal." And I learnt that from the University of California and more than that.

01-00:44:28

Wilmot: Let me ask you a question about World War II. In 1941, when Pearl Harbor happened, what was going on in your life?

01-00:44:39

Figueroa: Well, I'll tell you where I was.

01-00:44:40

Wilmot: Tell me where you were.

01-00:44:41
 Figueroa:

On exactly Pearl Harbor day, my wife and I was picking out the tile for our kitchen. We were building a brand new home.

01-00:44:53
 Wilmot:

In Sacramento?

01-00:44:53
 Figueroa:

Yes. In Sacramento. I was in a jewelry store. I was with [DeVaughan's] Jewelers, which today has a chain of stores, but at that time, I was one of the original salesmen for [DeVaughan's] Jewelers.

01-00:45:05
 Wilmot:

So you were picking out tiles when—

01-00:45:07
 Figueroa:

And I was buying a brand new home, and the contract said, "You come out on a Sunday," because that's my day off, "And come out to the shop. I'll meet you out at the house, and I want you to pick the colors of the tile that I want to put in your kitchen," and I was ready to move into the house. I was ready to move in 30 days where we were moving in. So I said, "Okay. I'll see you on Sunday." So we went out there, picked the tile out, and while we were out there, we could hear people talking, and he had the radio on, and the first thing you know, we heard that Pearl Harbor was attacked.

01-00:46:47
 Wilmot:

And then what happened?

01-00:46:48
 Figueroa:

And then my wife and I, we looked at each other, and I felt so bad, and so I left right after I picked that tile out. I went back home, and I started thinking, gee, here we're at war, and we got attacked. I said, "I got to go to war, or I got to do something. I love my country." I mean this sincerely. I said, "I love my country. I can't stay in this jewelry store. I'm going to have to get out of this here and do something. If I don't go to service, I've got to do something to know that I'm doing something for my country."

01-00:47:24
 Wilmot:

So how did your wife—

01-00:47:24
 Figueroa:

So what I did then—well, watch what I did then—was that I contacted a friend of mine that was working at Richmond Shipyard, and his name was [Lloyd Fosberg?], and him and I used to live together, and he was not a certified—but he was a welder, and he was welding, and I said, "Listen. How about seeing what you can do to get me a job, and now that it looks like we're going to go to war, see what you could do to get me." And he says, "Bud, don't worry. I can get you a job with Kaiser Shipyards out here." So I went out to Kaiser Shipyard. I went to work for Kaiser Shipyard, and I stayed with Kaiser, and I moved when he opened up another shipyard. I went to work

there, and the first thing. I worked at every one of Kaiser's shipyards, and then I end up working at the—they built one ship where it was supposed to be done in x amount of hours or x amount of days or one day or something like that, and I know that we were putting the parts together, so I can honestly say that I was still there at Richmond Shipyard working for Richmond Shipyard when they built this fast ship and then put it in the water and broke a world's record of building a Liberty ship in x amount of hours, x amount of days, and et cetera, and had it in the water.

01-00:47:52

Wilmot: One second.

01-00:47:54

D. Figueroa: That was Kaiser, right?

01-00:47:55

Figueroa: That was Kaiser Shipyard. Yeah.

01-00:47:57

Wilmot: So wait. Did you move your family back to Richmond—to the Bay Area?

01-00:48:02

Figueroa: Oh yeah. So what I did, I went to my boss, and I said, "I'm quitting, and I'm giving you a month's notice. I'm going to leave, and I'm going to Richmond, California, and I'm going to work in the Richmond shipyards," and he says, "I'll give you \$300 more a month if you stay," and boy, during the Depression, \$300 extra a month was a lot of money, and I said, "You can give me \$1,000 a month, and I'm not staying." I said, "My country's at war, and I've got to do something in order to help protect it." So I left the jewelry store and went to work.

01-00:48:38

Wilmot: What'd you do with your new house?

01-00:48:39

Figueroa: What?

01-00:48:39

Wilmot: What'd you do with your new house?

01-00:48:40

Figueroa: I sold my new house, and that's what I did. I sold my house, and I moved to Richmond and lived in a Richmond dormitory. Richmond Kaiser Hospital had arrangements with homes over there in Richmond, and that's where I lived. I lived right there in one of their deals there for a while.

01-00:49:03

Wilmot: And was it a family—

01-00:49:05
Figueroa: And then I lived there only for a short while, until I found a home in Oakland, and then I went ahead and finally found a house, and I lived in Oakland.

01-00:49:12
Wilmot: Well, let me ask you. So was this family housing that you were staying in?

01-00:49:14
Figueroa: Yeah.

01-00:49:15
Wilmot: Was Vera there too?

01-00:49:16
Figueroa: No. No, just me. I was going back and forth.

01-00:49:20
Wilmot: Between Sacramento?

01-00:49:21
Figueroa: Yeah. Yeah, until I got organized.

Wilmot: Which shipyard?

Figueroa: I went there to the shipyard. The first Kaiser Shipyard that he built with the government's money was Kaiser number one or Kaiser number two, and I worked for them all. I think he had Kaiser number four. Didn't he have four shipyards? And I worked in every one of them.

01-00:49:43.
Wilmot: Did you have a special shift?

01-00:49:46
Figueroa: Yeah. I'd become a welder, and then ended up as a certified welder. I'd become a certified welder, the best welder you can be, when I got through.

01-00:49:54
Wilmot: Did you join the union?

01-00:49:55
Figueroa: What?

01-00:49:55
Wilmot: Did you join the union?

01-00:49:56
Figueroa: Oh, yeah. I belonged to the union and everything. Oh, sure.

01-00:50:00
Wilmot: Were you part of the Boilermakers?

01-00:50:01
Figueroa: I belonged to two of them. I belonged to the welder's union, and I belonged to the machinist's union, and yeah. Whatever I had to do, because you couldn't go to work unless you belonged to the union. So yeah, I belonged to union, and yeah. I was a certified welder. I could burn as well as weld. And what they did with Richmond Shipyard, I was so good, I got so good that whenever they had anything that had to be certified for a well outside or whatever, they'd call me, because I was such a good welder. They'd know that when that well was made by me, it was first-class. Yeah.

01-00:50:42
Wilmot: Where did you find the house for your family to live in?

01-00:50:49
Figueroa: Oh, I—gee.

01-00:50:49
Wilmot: Where in Oakland was it?

01-00:50:49
Figueroa: Gee, I don't know. Can I tell you, I really don't know. I can't even remember. I was trying to think of that here the other day. I just know that it was a big house, and—

01-00:51:00
D. Figueroa: The one on 109th Avenue, you're talking about?

01-00:51:02
Figueroa: No.

01-00:51:03
D. Figueroa: I'm not following. Was this when we were kids living with you?

01-00:51:07
Figueroa: No. you weren't even born, Dennis.

01-00:51:10
Wilmot: So this—you don't—

01-00:51:13
Figueroa: No. No. I just know Oakland. That's all I know.

01-00:51:15
Wilmot: So when was your first child born?

01-00:51:18
Figueroa: My first child was born in Sacramento.

01-00:51:21
Wilmot: Okay. So you already had a family when you were up there.

01-00:51:24
Figueroa: Oh, yeah. That's why I didn't want to go to war. I would go to war if I had to, but that was one reason why I figured I probably won't go, because I already had a son, and I had another son, so I had two. I was already a father of two.

01-00:51:38
Wilmot: A father of two sons.

01-00:51:39
Figueroa: Uh-huh.

01-00:51:48
Wilmot: [adjustment to microphone] You can always lean back.

01-00:51:51
Figueroa: I am. Okay. I finally left Richmond Shipyard right after we built that boat, the Liberty ship that broke a record. When that ship went in the water finally, I left the Shipyard, and I went to work for where Sacramento airport—what's the name of that? What's that airport in Sacramento that I used to work for?

01-00:52:33
D. Figueroa: Oh, I believe it was McMullen.

01-00:52:35
Figueroa: McClellan Field Airport. Air Force base. A lot of people don't know it, but it was the second largest air depot in the world.

01-00:52:40
Wilmot: McClellan. Right.

01-00:52:40
Figueroa: McClellan. It's no longer there, but I didn't know what it was until I finally—when I left Kaiser, right after the ship went in the water, I figured I did my job there, and I wanted to go back to Sacramento, because things were starting to happen in Sacramento, and I wanted to get myself reorganized. I loved the city of Sacramento better than I did the Bay Area, and I said, "If I'm going to, I got to go back, and I want to go back." So I went back to Sacramento, and I got a job as a certified welder for McClellan Field Air Force base building airplanes. Now I'm building airplanes from shipyard to airplanes I'm building, and one day while I'm there—oh, I was only there about three or four months, and I got a call from a sergeant, a corporal, and a private. Three soldiers came to me, and on the back of my welding outfit I had Bud, B-U-D. So the guy said, "Are you Bud Figueroa?" and I said, "Yes. I'm Bud Figueroa." He says, "The general wants to see you." Now, what? I'm going to have a general see me, and I'm in a welding outfit. And what the hell's a general want to see me? Well, I had to go, because there's a sergeant, corporal, and a private there to take me to see the general, so I didn't know what the square was. So I said, "Okay," so off to the general's office.

I go to the general's office, and the general says, "Listen. I want you to know you can sit and relax." He says, "I just contacted your boss at De Vaughan's Jewelers," because that's where I was working before the war. He says, "I contacted De Vaughan's Jewelers, and I talked to Mr. Lesser, and Mr. Lesser told me that I'm not only 100% honest, I'm 1000% honest, and I thought, you was just the guy I want to talk to." And that I was also a good salesman, which I was. I was the best in the business, and thanks to the University of California. So anyway, the end result came that—he says, "I've had three salesmen try this out, and they all have failed, and they haven't done a good job, so I fired them, so I called your boss to find out if you could be trusted, because I want to hire you as a salesperson in my business here. I want you to run this organization in the entertainment business." He says, "I want some music going on. I hear you like to dance," which I did. I danced for my company. Every time they had a party, they made my wife and I dance, because that's how good we were. Yeah. Yeah. We were professional, which we did. So he says, "I want you to take over. I hear you like to dance." I said, "Yeah. I dance with all the best. There isn't a dance band in the United States of America that I haven't danced with that's called the big band, not once, but dozens of times each." And he says, "That's what I want you to do. I want you to build the morale here at McCullen Air Force base. We have 2,000 people in the morning. We have 3,000 people working in the afternoon, and we have another 2,000 or 3,000 people at night. We have almost a million people working here in this plant, and we want you to build the morale here at the airport, and I'm the general in charge, and I'm putting you in charge. Do you think you can do it?" And I said, "If I'm sold, I can do anything, but I've got to be sold."

So he's sitting down like you are. He got up and made me sit in his chair. He says, "You're sitting there in my desk, and you're not going to leave that desk until you tell me you're sold." And he went and got some stuff over in the corner, brought it over, and laid it in front of me. It was a stack this high. He says, "You're going to stay there, read everything there, and then when you get through, when you tell me you're sold, I want you to notify one of these people here that you're ready, and I want to talk to you." And so anyway, he'd come by finally, and he says, "Are you sold yet?" I already took a bunch of notes, and I says, "Yeah. I'm pretty well. I think I could sell this thing. As a matter of fact, I think I'd do a good job for you."

01-00:57:29

Wilmot:

What year was this?

01-00:57:30

Figueroa:

Well, the war was on. Let's see. The war was still on and going pretty good. I'd say the war ended in '45, right? So I'd say about a year and a half or two—

01-00:57:42

Wilmot:

'44?

01-00:57:43
Figueroa:

Yeah. I'd say about two years before the war ended.

01-00:57:50
Wilmot:

So what did you end up doing?

01-00:57:51
Figueroa:

So what I did, I just went around. I got a list of all the people who played instruments during the war, and he gave me the list of them, and I went around to ask them if they would like to volunteer their time on lunch hour for one hour and be on my team. And they said, "Yes," and if they did, I just said, "Okay. Did you ever own the band?" And the one that owned the band, I said, "Okay. I'll help you put a group of workers that play instruments, and you be the leader, and I'll go talk to them, and I'll get them on your team." And so that's what I did. I just went around. I had a job. My job was the following: I can go any place in that building.

Now, remember, we've got a million people working there in three shifts, a total of a million people working there. They had buildings under the ground that I never, never, knew was there. It's two and three stories deep into the ground. They were building machinery stuff, and everything else—all electronic stuff and everything else down in those two and three stories under the ground. I didn't know it was there till I got pass, because I had a pass where I could go any place I wanted to go and do anything I wanted to do.

As a matter of fact, this general gave me a special deal to put on my car. I had a 12-cylinder Lincoln Zephyr, so that's what I was driving around in. I got that when I was in the jewelry business. I bought it. I didn't buy it while I was in the shipyards. I owned it when I was in the jewelry business, and I ended up having a convertible Lincoln Zephyr made by the Lincoln people at that time, and I turned around and he says, "Here's some gas. You need gas money for your car. What kind of car you got?" and I told him. He says, "You're going to need some gas stamps," so he gave me four or five books—nothing but gas stamps. "This is for you and for your car for the month, and when you run out, let me know, and I'll give you some more," and that's what I had. So I never had to work for that 12-cylinder Lincoln Zephyr. It would eat up gas like water, so anyway, I got all the gas that I wanted, and what he told me—"You don't have to park your car anymore, starting from now till the end of the war, and you won't go to war, so don't worry about it, because you'll be all exempt." And I said, "Fine. Everything sounds good so far."

So he says, "Here's what I want you to do. I want you to drive your car into the main gate, and here's a star," and that star on my car lets me park my car right next to his, so I got to park, drive in with all these million people, with all these people having to park their car. [laughing] I got to drive in like I was a general and park right at the general's quarters. So every day while I was there, my Lincoln Zephyr drove right in there and drove right by his car with a

star on it, because I had a star right on my car, and then I had a pass where I could go *any place* in the building.

01-00:61:07

Wilmot: Did you finish out the war in Sacramento?

01-00:61:08

Figueroa: Yeah. Oh yeah. I finished right with them. I stayed right with them until the end of the war. I didn't leave until the end of the war.

Wilmot: Stop.

Figueroa: I wouldn't leave, because I also organized a basketball for them also.

01-00:61:20

D. Figueroa: Tell about the quick camp business.

01-00:61:20

Figueroa: Watch what--

[interview interruption while recording media are exchanged]

Begin Audio File 2 figueroa_bud_2 10-25-06.wav

02-00:00:00

Figueroa: --organized the orchestra bands, which later, I also organized basketball teams for everyone in the department so they had their own basketball teams—women basketball teams as well. And I was a good organizer, is what I was, and a I was a good salesman. I could sell anybody anything. But the job that he really wanted me for—he wanted me to head a multi-multi-million dollar project, and that's why he contacted DeVaughan's Jewelers. He wanted somebody who was trustworthy and somebody who had a good sales background, and that's what I did. I fit that bill.

So when he first had me in my office, he says, "I hear you're a good salesman, and I need somebody here. I've hired three sales managers already, and I just fired the other one, because I think he's doing a lousy job, and I think I've got one right in front of me that's going to be able to take his place and do a good job." And I said, "Well, what is it?" and he says, "I need x amount of men." I think it was 40-some odd million, if I'm right, that they figured they can get out of this. With a million people working there, they ought to—so their goal was 40 million, I think. That was the goals the government gave the general, so the general says, "I got \$40 million as my goal to get, so the money's not going to be here in America. All this money's going to Europe. It's a refugee fund, and it's going there to help the people that are being bombed. It's helping the people that got to get food and help the people that are suffering over there." And I says, "Well, that was what I liked about this program. I know I can sell it," and I said, "That's going to be an easy job. I already got my sales pitch and everything—what I can say when I get there."

And I want to say this—I'm going to pat myself on the back. I never, never lost one deal. If I ever talked to anybody about the refugee drive, he donated five dollars if that was all he could give me per check. Each paycheck, I got a minimum of five dollars, but nobody said no to me, because when they tell me they can't afford it, and I just told them, "You cannot afford not to give it to me, because I'm going to tell you something. You're going home every single night, 365 days out of the day. You're going home to your wife and your family. You're feeding your dog. You're having all kinds of fun, and et cetera, but these people are living in tents, or they're living in some kind of a situation where their home was bombed," and I get so sentimental with them, and it was just the way I felt, and I never lost a deal. They all gave me something. I said, "You've got to give me something. You've got to give a few dollars to give your heart an opportunity to feel free inside that you're helping somebody besides you making the money. You're making good money here. You can give me at least five dollars a paycheck that's going to help somebody in Europe get some bread or food or milk or whatever," and I always got five dollars or ten dollars from them a week.

I never lost a deal, but the point I want to get at—I did such a good job that the general called me in and told me what a good job I did, and the first thing you know, I didn't know it, but my name was listed in the national paper. And first thing you know, my name, Bud Figueroa, got x amount of deal, and ended up getting millions of dollars worth of money for the refugee drive, and the first thing you know, I was getting phone calls for a job.

So the boss at an engineering department called me up. He said, "Figueroa, are you the guy I'm reading about here in our national magazine?" I said, "Yeah. I'm the guy, Bud Figueroa, the head of the refugee drive here. Yeah. That's me." He says, "How'd you like to make \$50,000 a year when this war ends? You know, it's going to end in another year or two. It'll be all over. I've got a job for you. Make \$50,000 bucks a year. You interested?" I said, "Sure. If I've got \$5,000 or \$10,000 here I'd be happy," I told him, "But I'll take \$50,000 any day." He says, "You come on over to my home tonight, and we'll talk about it," so I did.

So I went down, got a haircut, got my suit out of the cleaners, [laughing] went there with cufflinks on, a nice shirt. You'd think I was going dancing the way I was dressed up. Drove my 12-cylinder Lincoln Zephyr, and parked it right in front of his house. When he's seen that Lincoln Zephyr, he says, "Is that yours?" You know, because it cost thousands. Today, it costs \$800,000. You want to buy my car that I owned, yeah. If you've got a million bucks or \$800,000, you can own my car. That's how good of a car I had.

02-00:05:15

Wilmot:

So what was your job there?

02-00:05:16
Figueroa: When I was in the jewelry business, I bought the automobile.

02-00:05:21
Wilmot: What was your job for the engineering firm?

02-00:05:23
Figueroa: Huh?

02-00:05:24
Wilmot: For the engineering company, what was your job?

02-00:05:26
Figueroa: I was doing all the welding, and I'm no longer welding. I'm dressed up in a suit and everything else till the war ended. I went to work in a dress suit. I was now selling bonds.

02-00:05:40
Wilmot: Selling bonds?

02-00:05:41
Figueroa: I sold bonds till the end of the war. Right till the day the end of the war came, I was gone. The day that the war came, I was gone, and matter of fact, he knew. I was leaving a few days before the war ended, back and forth, and he knew I had things going.

02-00:05:56
Wilmot: What kind of things did you have going?

02-00:05:58
Figueroa: I'm going to tell you what happened.

02-00:06:00
Wilmot: Okay.

02-00:06:01
Figueroa: I mean, I'm going to tell you.

02-00:06:02
Wilmot: Go ahead. Tell me. Tell me now.

02-00:06:03
Figueroa: This is history. And I'm in every book you want to look at. I mean, I'm in the mechanic book—the international mechanic books. All the sports magazines, I was in. There isn't a sports magazine, including the mechanic's magazine, and if I had my little book, I could show you where my son, Dennis, was in the bed. How old were you when that picture was taken in the mechanic's magazine?

02-00:06:27
D. Figueroa: That was all three of us brothers, and mother.

02-00:06:30
 Figueroa:

Yeah. Mother was there.

02-00:06:31
 D. Figueroa:

I was born in '46, so I would have to say it was in the late forties and early fifties.

02-00:06:39
 Figueroa:

Okay. Okay. Now, I was in all magazines at that time, because now everybody wants to know who the hell I am. Because of that refugee drive, my name become known of what I did, because I did something nobody else did. Number one write-up was there were three salesmen—managers that had big records of being sales managers that failed. I come in in a short while, and the first thing you know, I then fulfill the allotment that was there in a short while, and my name was in the paper, and this engineer spotted it, and he called me up, and the reason why he called me up—he had a patent that he had for seven years in his garage, and when the war was over, he wanted to market it, and he figured the sales background that I had would be just perfect for him, so he ended up saying, "I'll give you an interest in my patent if you will help me unroll my invention," and I says, "Fine and dandy. Just tell me what you got." So he just had me come out to his house. I went out to his home, seen his patent, and when I got through, I'd sold my car. I was so sold, I sold my car. I ended up eventually selling my Lincoln Zephyr to buy money to hire an attorney and form my own corporation called the Quick Camp Corporation.

02-00:08:08
 Wilmot:

What was his invention?

02-00:08:11
 Figueroa:

My invention? You're going to know about it right now, because everybody in the world knows what it is. That's how good it is. I'll tell you what it is. Any time—I mean this sincerely—any time you see at Sears and Roebuck's or Montgomery Ward's or any sporting goods store in the world where you see a tent that's got arms on it—they could be aluminum today, because aluminum wasn't born at that time. Everything was steel until later on, and during the war, they invented this aluminum deal where they could now do so many things with aluminum, and now you can see that. Where you see tents that's got aluminum arms, where they open up the tent with arms, and it opens up in a matter of five or ten or 15 minutes, I'm the guy that promoted that. So I took it from the garage. I met with the Sears and Roebuck people. I met with Montgomery Ward people. I met all the biggest stores in San Francisco, all the biggest stores in Sacramento, all the biggest stores in Chicago. That's how I was in Chicago. I was appointing jobbers and manufacturer representatives traveling from one state to the next, and they were giving me money when I couldn't even deliver, because I was just getting ready to manufacture, and they wanted so many of these tents, and they'd give me a deposit on them.

02-00:09:37
Wilmot: That's great. Mr. Figueroa, I need to—

02-00:09:40
Figueroa: And they're in all over.

02-00:09:41
Wilmot: In order to finish our interview, I need to go back to the war.

02-00:09:44
Figueroa: To war?

02-00:09:44
Wilmot: To the war, so I need to ask you a couple of questions.

02-00:09:46
Figueroa: Sure.

02-00:09:46
Wilmot: What did you know about what was happening with the Holocaust in Germany and the Jews? Did you know anything about that?

02-00:09:55
Figueroa: No. I did not know anything about the Holocaust until I read about it in the paper like anybody else got to know it. I never knew anything about it. What caused me to do what—I'm a good American. That's all I want to do, is to defend my company and help it the best way I can.

02-00:10:12
Wilmot: So there was that, and then also, did you kind of know people who were interned during when the Japanese were interned? Did you see all that happening?

02-00:10:22
Figueroa: Well, I read about it. Yes.

02-00:10:24
Wilmot: Did you have any Japanese friends that disappeared or—?

02-00:10:27
Figueroa: No. No, I didn't have any Japanese friends that I know of. No.

02-00:10:34
Wilmot: So what did you know about that? What did you think about that happening?

02-00:10:39
Figueroa: Well, I think that was the worst thing that could ever—I have tears in my eyes every time I read about it. As a matter of fact, sometimes I couldn't even finish the story. Tears were just coming out of my eyes when I read it.

02-00:10:51
Wilmot: Why?

- 02-00:10:53
Figuroa: Well, because I just loved mankind, and I just liked things to be good, you know what I mean? I just can't stand to see too much suffering. That's one reason why I'm not a medical doctor. I'm a doctor of psychology and a doctor of metaphysics. All my life, I spent 70 years studying metaphysics, and I ended up becoming a doctor of metaphysics, and I ended up working with a— these last ten years, I've been with a retired two-star general. As a matter of fact, I could show you his picture here. [goes to get picture]
- 02-00:11:24
Wilmot: Actually, could I ask you a question?
- 02-00:11:26
Figuroa: Yeah.
- 02-00:11:27
Wilmot: Excuse me. Mr. Figuroa, so when the war ended, it was—
- 02-00:11:36
Figuroa: When the war ended—
- 02-00:11:37
Wilmot: With the two bombs that were dropped in Japan, what did you know about those atom bombs?
- 02-00:11:43
Figuroa: Well, let me tell you. When that thing came, you know what I did? When that came, I was so happy when that came. When it came, I was so happy, I said, "Boy, it looks like the war is finally going to be over," and I ended up with a positive attitude. I started saying, "Well, it's time getting ready for me to leave McClellan Air Force base," because I formed a corporation, like I told you. I sold my car now, and I bought myself a small, economical car, and I got my money for the car--
- 02-00:12:26
Wilmot: [interrupting] What did you know about the bombs that were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima? What did you know about those bombs being dropped?
- 02-00:12:32
Figuroa: Well, the only thing I know, when they bombed everybody, I just knew that people were suffering, and I just felt bad that the families were being bombed. That's how I sold all my refugee money, because I felt sorry for those people.
- 02-00:12:53
Wilmot: And then the other thing is, Okay. So that covers those three. How did Richmond change during the war? How did Richmond change during World War II?

- 02-00:13:06
Figueroa: Oh, there was—it come back to normal. Richmond came back to normal. I ended up going to work for the jewelry business, and later in the years, I went back. When the Korea War came, I was manufacturing everything in my Quick Camp. I was manufacturing the frames, but I was also manufacturing the tents, and when the war came along, I couldn't get new material, because the government now had picked it all up. So when they started picking it up, I couldn't get nothing, so I ended up going broke. I had the Stockton mayor and his supervisors gave me a \$3,000 building for \$200 or \$300 a month, just so I can get my business started.
- 02-00:14:20
Wilmot: My question is more about the city of Richmond during World War II. Like, how—
- 02-00:14:25
Figueroa: Yeah. And then when that came, I went to work in the back of the jewelry business, and I end up going to work for Brent Jewelers, and they sent me out to Richmond, and so I start selling jewelry in Richmond.
- 02-00:14:36
Wilmot: When was this?
- 02-00:14:39
Figueroa: Well, let's see. When we were in Oakland, Dennis?
- 02-00:14:52
D. Figueroa: 1953.
- 02-00:14:54
Figueroa: What was that?
- 02-00:14:54
D. Figueroa: About 1953, we moved from Stockton. I was in the second grade, so—
- 02-00:15:03
Figueroa: Okay. So what'd you say? '63? Something like that? Fifty—
- 02-00:15:06
D. Figueroa: 1953.
- 02-00:15:07
Figueroa: 1953.
- 02-00:15:08
D. Figueroa: '53 or '54.
- 02-00:15:09
Wilmot: So that's when you came back to Richmond?

- 02-00:15:11
Figueroa: Yeah. I came back to Oakland in the fifties. The Korea War was in the fifties, and then right after that, I went back in the jewelry business, and because I couldn't get no material, I went broke, as a matter of fact.
- 02-00:15:25
Wilmot: Well, people talk about how during the war—
- 02-00:15:27
Figueroa: And Richmond, as far as I'm concerned, was nice. I saw a lot of jewelry in Fremont, and that's how I made my living. I worked in Brent's Jewelers in Richmond on the main street right there.
- 02-00:15:40
Wilmot: In Richmond?
- 02-00:15:40
Figueroa: Right. Right. Yes. Four blocks from Kay's Jewelry Store was there. Kay's Jewelry Store there. Oh, I ended up going to work for them, too, later. I left Brent's and went to work for Kay's Jewelers.
- 02-00:15:51
Wilmot: Did you ever live in Richmond?
- 02-00:15:51
Figueroa: What?
- 02-00:15:52
Wilmot: Did you ever live in Richmond?
- 02-00:15:53
Figueroa: No. I drove all the way back and forth. The only time I lived in Richmond, like I told you, I lived in temporary during the war.
- 02-00:16:02
Wilmot: When you were living in the dorms, did you live with men from all over the country?
- 02-00:16:07
Figueroa: Yeah. Yeah.
- 02-00:16:08
Wilmot: Tell me about that.
- 02-00:16:10
Figueroa: Well, there were fellows from all over. You know, some of the people were from Southern California, the southern part of the United States, and you know, Mississippi.[laughing] There were a lot of colored people, you know, and Mississippi and everything, and Louisiana, you know, and—
- 02-00:16:36
Wilmot: Were you still dancing?

02-00:16:36
Figueroa:

Huh?

02-00:16:37
Wilmot:

Were you still dancing?

02-00:16:37
Figueroa:

Yeah. Oh yeah. I never stopped dancing until, oh, I'd say I was in my—I never stopped dancing until I was in my seventies, I guess.

02-00:16:49
Wilmot:

Okay. That's why you look so young.

02-00:16:51
Figueroa:

Yeah. Well, that's true, too, and my wife looks young, too, and that's true. Her and I, we danced a lot, and I never was without my wife. When I worked for a company, my organization always said, "We have to insure you and the wife, because you're always together," you know? Because we were. My wife is dying right now of cancer. She had a five bypass operation, and then she had heart trouble, and now she's got some cancer coming out on her forehead here, I think. Can't operate her, because her heart's not strong enough for it, and so the doctors told my daughter that they give her about six months, and she's gone, so my wife is living with my daughter, and my daughter is taking care of—I got my stroke seven years ago, and my son has taken care of me as well. And my son is a retired United States Marine. He's also a hero. He's got seven medals. He got the Presidential Citation from the President of the United States, and he also got the silver star, which is the third highest in the United States, the second highest in the Marine Corps, and he's a hero.

02-00:19:19
Wilmot:

Yeah.

02-00:19:22
D. Figueroa:

This is not about me, Dad.

02-00:19:24
Wilmot:

Let me ask you one other question, which is, how do you compare the war that's going on now to the World War II? How are the two wars different?

02-00:19:33
Figueroa:

Yeah. There's a big difference, and a lot of other people are not aware of the difference. There's a big difference between this war and the other war. The war we're having is with people who hate us, and they're in 60 countries of the world. They're not in one country, like we have like when we're fighting Germany or we're fighting Japan. These are groups of people, and they're called cells. There's anywhere from five to 500. It all depends, but they're spread all over the world. Today, as far as I know, according to the last thing I've seen on television and also in my newspaper tells me that they're in 60 countries of the world. Just think of that—60 countries. So they're scattered out, so what we're fighting is a cell of people. We're not fighting a country,

and there is the big difference, and that's what's making it so hard. They don't want us to succeed in Iraq. They don't want us to succeed in any parts of the world. They want us to be hurt, and they're doing everything right now in their power in order to discourage us and to discourage the American people.

02-00:19:53

Wilmot:

Well, listen. I want to thank you for giving us your time today. Thank you.

02-00:19:59

Figueroa:

Oh, and thank you. Oh, God bless. Can I say one more thing—

02-00:20:01

Wilmot:

Sure.

02-00:20:02

Figueroa:

-- that's very, very important? I'd like to mention that I'm going out of retirement, and I've decided I'd go out of retirement on my 89th birthday, so the August the 29th of this year, I went out of retirement, and now I'm looking forward to when I become 90, but right now, I'm getting ready to build a new community called the Figueroa Solar Community. It's going to have solar electric homes. Homes are going to be solar energy homes with solar wind and et cetera—the most modern little city in the country. I'm building it, and I've got the floor plans and everything. I've got a corporation all set up, and I've got a couple of small, limited partnerships getting ready to build. Right now, starting tomorrow, I can start building at least 20 homes with solar energy, solar electric. God bless you, and it was really nice talking to you.

02-00:21:04

Wilmot:

Thank you. Okay. Good job.

[End of Interview]