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Berkeley, California

Virgil and Mildred Hooper

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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Audiofile 2

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Interview # 1: February, 11, 2003
Begin Audio File 1

00:00:01

Dunning:

Good morning, today is February 11, 2003. My name is Judith Dunning and I'm interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Hooper at their home in Parchester Village. And on camera is David Dunham. I thought we would start out today with a little bit about your family background. So I'm going to ask each of you your name and where you were born. Mrs. Hooper, I think I'll start with you. What is your full name?

00:00:34

M. Hooper:

Mildred May Hooper.

00:00:38

Dunning:

What year were you born?

00:00:40

M. Hooper:

1919.

00:00:43

Dunning:

Where were you born?

00:00:44

M. Hooper:

In Johnson City, Arkansas—a small little town.

00:00:52

Dunning:

And how many sisters and brothers were there in your family growing up?

00:00:56

M. Hooper:

There were six of us altogether.

00:00:59

Dunning:

So you came from a pretty good size family. What was your place in the family—where were you in the family, in that six?

00:01:07

M. Hooper:

I'm the oldest.

00:01:08

Dunning:

Oh, you are the oldest. Mr. Hooper, could you tell me your full name?

00:01:15

V. Hooper:
Virgil Hooper.

00:01:18

Dunning:
What year were you born?

00:01:20

V. Hooper:
January 1919.

00:01:25

Dunning:
Where were you born?

00:01:26

V. Hooper:
Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

00:01:29

Dunning:
How many sisters and brothers in your family growing up?

00:01:32

V. Hooper:
Just two of us.

00:01:33

Dunning:
Two? And were you the older or the younger?

00:01:38

V. Hooper:
I was the youngest.

00:01:40

Dunning:
Okay. I would like to ask each of you what you remember about your childhood home. What did it look like? I'll start off with Mrs. Hooper.

00:01:54

M. Hooper:
Oh, well, the houses in those days for black people weren't very much. All together, you had three rooms. In the front room, you had a bedroom and living room combined. Then you had a pair of children like my parents had. Then the next room was where all the kids slept, and then they had a kitchen. That's the size of it. It was a very small town, a sawmill town.

00:02:24

Dunning:
Did most of the people in the town work in the sawmill?

00:02:28

M. Hooper:

Most of them. They had big farms, and that's what they worked on.

00:02:37

Dunning:

Who were your neighbors? You don't have to tell me by name, but I'm wondering was it an all African American community? Was it mixed?

00:02:49

M. Hooper:

In the neighborhood where I lived, yes.

00:02:53

Dunning:

Mr. Hooper, do you remember your childhood home? What it looked like?

00:02:59

V. Hooper:

Yeah. Shotgun house, three rooms. Have you ever heard of a shotgun house?

00:03:18

Dunning:

I have.

00:03:19

V. Hooper:

Yeah. We had a three-room house, a bedroom and a bedroom and the kitchen. See, part of the kitchen was also a bedroom or breakfast room, where we had dinner.

00:03:37

Dunning:

But you didn't have to share with quite so many children as your wife.

00:03:41

V. Hooper:

No. There were only two of us.

00:03:45

Dunning:

Who lived in your neighborhood and community?

00:03:49

V. Hooper:

All black.

00:03:53

Dunning:

I'd like to ask each of you some things that you remember about your mother and father. What they looked like? What they were like?

00:04:04

V. Hooper:
Me or her?

00:04:06

Dunning:
I'll start off with Mrs. Hooper.

00:04:09

M. Hooper:
Well. My mother was a kind of small lady, she wasn't a big fat lady. She was medium—like real thin. My father, he was very strongly built. They raised us to the best of their knowledge to be like they would have us to grow up to be. He was a very good father. She was a good mother, and she didn't work out; he did. The part that I love to tell about my father and growing up, if we got sick over the night, he was the one who come to the bed to see what was wrong and see about us. Plus we didn't have gas and lights like we do now. We had lamplight; kerosene lamp lights. He would always keep one lit, and if it went out, he'd wake up and see there wasn't no light; he'd get up and light another lamp. So we felt comfortable. We just didn't have a lot of things that some people had.

00:05:23

Dunning:
Do you feel that there were certain things that your parents tried to hand down to you? Do you think there was certain things that your parents tried to pass down to you in terms of values?

00:05:35

M. Hooper:
Oh yes! He did. He was the one did most of it. Teaching after he come home, because my mother was a little sickly like and my father always looked after us. You see, to me, he was just a really great person. What do you want me to tell you about, my father?

00:05:57

Dunning:
Yes.

00:05:59

M. Hooper:
Well, my father was in service when I were born. My mother had a sister and a brother nearby, so he asked her oldest sister to let her son stay over with her, because he had to go to the service. At that time, I was glad, because I wouldn't never have been here, I don't guess. Right there where we were born, you didn't have—the doctor had to come by horse and buggy and somebody would have to go and get him and bring him out. We always delivered at home. As far as I know, to me my father was just really great.

00:06:48

Dunning:
What was his name?

00:06:50

M. Hooper:

His name was John West Island. While he was in service, he met his fair friend, his name was R. K. Landers. He was white, but they stayed friends all the way through. Well, they had money, so when he come out of the service, he and his nephew put in a plumbing shop. My father was a master plumber; they trained him. So to me, we was really well raised and well taken care of. He and my father got along just fine. He trained my father. So then after that, later on, he learned more and he became a master plumber.

00:07:39

Dunning:

Which is a wonderful trade.

00:07:42

M. Hooper:

He took care of his family really well. He never had to ask for help. We all went to school and the ones who wanted to go on further, went on further, and I happen to be one of them.

00:07:57

Dunning:

I think I will focus a little on your education, but first, I would like to get Mr. Hooper's story of his parents. Are there any particular things about your mother and father that really stand out in your mind?

00:08:11

V. Hooper:

Well, let's see. I think that my mother was only the one in her family that graduated from high school, and she had about eight or nine sisters and brothers in her family. They had a large family, but my mother only had two more.

My daddy was a bricklayer and my mother was a housewife and seamstress. Consequently, we did all right; we were always independent. My daddy never had a job working for anyone else, with him being a bricklayer. Ask me why, how did he learned the skill of a bricklayer, I don't know. When I got old enough to know what he was doing, he was laying brick. He was a competitor, because he had his own business. It's one of those things, at that particular time, being a competitor and being in competition, a lot of times he was taking jobs on a lower bid from other people. So he was always having trouble with other people all the time. A lot of jobs, he'd outbid somebody; then they would go by and tear up his property, et cetera, et cetera, on account of he outbid them, but consequently it was always a fight or something going on, whatever. He would outbid somebody on a job; he had to practically go armed to his whole job of his own. Because of those things that constantly went on was for the fight if he outbid somebody for the job, they might go by and destroy his tools and also destroy his job site. So, just one of those things that happened, constantly up until he was killed. One of those things.

00:10:22

Dunning:

Now, were his competitors other blacks or were they white businessmen?

00:10:29

V. Hooper:

White competitors.

00:10:30

Dunning:

Okay. Go ahead.

00:10:32

V. Hooper:

He was the only black bricklayer in this little town, but consequently whenever some time he'd outbid somebody, he might get the job started, then they would go by and destroy it—the job site.

00:10:48

Dunning:

Was that happening when you were a youngster?

00:10:51

V. Hooper:

I was a baby.

00:10:53

Dunning:

Oh, okay.

00:10:56

V. Hooper:

I think I was about nine months old when he was killed.

00:11:00

Dunning:

How was he killed?

00:11:03

V. Hooper:

Well, it might be shocking. Back in those days, you could go to the drug store and talk to the druggist and tell him what was supposed to be bothering you, and he would mix you up some medicine. Like, you come into the drug store, you know, they give you this, "Try this, you'll be okay." So at this particular time, they was having a flu epidemic and he had a nickname; everybody called him "Horse," or "Hoss." And they said, "Well, Horse, try this. Make sure you get home that you take you a tablespoon of this and take you a big swallow of water, you'll find you be all right tomorrow. Consequently, he took the water and went on and went and took a big swallow of water, and took some of this medication, and the next day, he was dead. That's damn near the size of it.

00:12:05

Dunning:

Did you hear that story from the time you could listen?

00:12:09

V. Hooper:

I knew it by heart.

00:12:13

Dunning:

Did it seem like maybe it wasn't an accident?

00:12:17

V. Hooper:

No, it wasn't an accident. The man told him, "Wait until you get home, take you a swallow of this and drink you a glass of water, you'll be all right." He was.

00:12:33

Dunning:

Did you first hear that story from your mother?

00:12:36

V. Hooper:

Yep.

00:12:39

Dunning:

So you never really knew your father, just a very big story connected with him. It seems pretty amazing that he was, you know, a bricklayer and in his own business. It's pretty sorrowful to think that he had to stop so young.

00:12:58

V. Hooper:

Back in those days, those things happened constantly. This is the time that—it was after World War I, a lot of the blacks was migrating out of the deep south going into Oklahoma and other places up north. My daddy migrated to Oklahoma, that's where my brother and I was born. So consequently, there was always something going on, like fights and et cetera.

People at that point in time were claiming land. You ever heard of claiming land? Land claim? They were claiming land. Those who were the toughest could claim some land and keep it. My father and his brother—he had two brothers, they claimed land in the state of Oklahoma. At one time, they were the only blacks that owned land in this part of Oklahoma in a section of the Arkansas River. My uncles were farmers and my daddy was a bricklayer. So it was always something that was really going on. You know, just one of those things.

00:14:31

Dunning:

Did your mother stay in the same community after your daddy died?

00:14:38

V. Hooper:

She stayed there until we got to be eight or nine years old. Then she went home to her folks in Texas; that's where she was really born. She had to leave Texas on account of how Texas got a little bit too rough. So that's when she had this brother-in-law and sister who had migrated to

Oklahoma. During that time, you could claim land. You state the claim to claim this land, but then you had to fight to keep it.

00:15:14

Dunning:

Is any of that land still in your family?

00:15:19

V. Hooper:

No, this land was sold around—1976. Yeah.

00:15:43

Dunning:

Okay, so pretty recently.

00:15:47

V. Hooper:

Yeah. But then my aunt and her husband, who were the backbone of the family, because they were the first ones to claim land in the state of Oklahoma on the black side of the fence.

00:16:07

Dunning:

Well, I'd like to ask you both and I think I will again start off with Mrs. Hooper about your schooling. What do you remember about your schooling, like the first school you went to?

00:16:23

M. Hooper:

The first school that I went to was in El Dorado, Arkansas. My teacher was named Miss {Mennon?}; I shall never forget it, because if you didn't do your homework or something, in those days, you got a swatting. And I never wanted to get a swatting, so I always tried to do my lesson. One teacher had from the first to the third grade, so they'd do a certain amount for one grade, then she'd cross over to the other side of that room, then the other grade, she would go along with that other grade. So if you was a good listener and paid close attention, you really was learning quite a bit. I would happen to be in that bunch that was—we was always quiet, and I wanted to learn, so I could surprise my father. I was really in love with my father and everything I did was to show my daddy what I could do. And that made me pay full attention. In those days, you had to always work. The family taught you, you had to work to help, make it better for the others that was younger than you. So my job was to wash dishes.

00:17:39

Dunning:

So that was your chore?

00:17:41

M. Hooper:

To wash dishes in the evening after school. I was so good at cleaning up that kitchen until the man that my father worked for, his wife wanted me to come in and clean her kitchen, so I had a job when I was eleven years old. I'd be getting out of school, go home, and get a little bite to eat, and go over to Mrs. {Landers?} house to clean up her kitchen. And I was really proud, because I was helping.

00:18:09

Dunning:

Do you remember what you got paid for that?

00:18:12

M. Hooper:

One dollar for a whole week.

00:18:16

Dunning:

One dollar? Okay.

00:18:17

M Hooper:

I thought I was really making money. [Laughter]

00:18:19

Dunning:

Did you get to keep that dollar?

00:18:21

M. Hooper:

Oh yeah. My father and mother didn't take it. There wasn't too much you could buy, because the store wasn't so close to you. You had to go quite a way, but whenever you had a chance, we went to the store. We could spend it, me and my brother. The way—whatever we wanted, we got it. Those {winding?} ball candies was very popular.

00:18:47

Dunning:

I've heard a lot about little candy stores.

00:18:49

M. Hooper:

You would buy a dill pickle, and we would break it in half, in two. And in the center of the pickle, we would put this {winding?} ball in there. We ate all around it, by the time we got down to the {winding?} ball, the candy made the pickle taste real good. [Laughter]

00:19:08

V. Hooper:

That was really an all day sucker down in a ball of candy.

00:19:14

Dunning:

How much would they charge for the pickle?

00:19:17

M. Hooper:

A nickel.

00:19:18

Dunning:

A nickel. Okay, that was—

00:19:20

M. Hooper:

Believe it or not, the {winding?} ball candy was just a penny. Everybody say, “How do you remember that”? I say, “Because I wanted to remember.” We would have lots of fun; we had a chance to pass by the pickle factory going to school and we could buy a pickle for that nickel, then we always had our {winding?} ball from the grocery store from the evening before. So we went to school ready.

00:19:49

Dunning:

And Mr. Hooper, what do you recall about your early education? What kind of school did you go to?

00:19:57

V. Hooper:

I went to regular public school, and I finished high school, and then I went to vocational school.

00:20:07

Dunning:

Did you have a favorite subject when you were in elementary school?

00:20:11

V. Hooper:

Reading. I used to love to read. I was always busy; I can say that. I was either making something or doing something or creating something. I wasn't an idle person. I guess by the time I was in the seventh grade, I was an assistant tutor to the teacher. I was always busy, always. I'm still busy.

00:20:45

Dunning:

Well, that's good. Now, your wife said that she had her first job when she was eleven years old, first paying job. Do you recall when you got your first job?

00:20:56

V. Hooper:

My first job that I had, I think I was delivering papers. But consequently I was busy all the time, as a matter of fact I'm still busy. I was busy all time. I guess by the time I was twelve or thirteen years old, I was already in business. I guess I—I'll say by the time I was about sixteen, I already had a business. I had about three guys working for me. I was busy.

00:21:33

Dunning:

What was your trade?

00:21:37

V. Hooper:

My trade was a shoemaker. I had a vocational school where we taught shoemaking, taught shoemaking on Bayside to people that wanted to be a shoe repair person, a shoemaker. And I also taught shoemaking for some of the black countries.

00:22:06

Dunning:

For some of the what?

00:22:07

V. Hooper:

Black country.

00:21:11

Dunning:

Oh, okay. Outside the United States?

00:22:12

V. Hooper:

They came here. We had a little vocational school there in Houston until I decided to retire.

00:22:20

Dunning:

Well, that's a good trade. Everyone needs shoes.

00:22:27

V. Hooper:

Yeah. That's what we did, feet and head. She worked on the head, and I worked on the feet.

00:22:36

Dunning:

Well, I'd like to ask each of you a question that actually I ask everybody I interview, and I'll start off with you. As a teenager, do you remember some of your ambitions, what you wanted to do with your life? Did you have a vision of what you wanted your life to be?

00:22:57

M. Hooper:

Yes. I had two aunties, they were my favorites. One was seamstress and other one loved to dress. She was a dancer. So I wanted to be between; I wanted to be able to make my clothes and make pretty clothes and then I wanted to dance so I—I could dance too, but I didn't want to dance in a vaudeville show or anything, I just wanted to know how to dance. And that I did. Well, they trained me, because that's what I wanted to do. I've always been independent, 'cause I started fixing my own hair when I was eleven years old. And I had one auntie was a hairdresser and one was a seamstress. I wanted to be just like them, 'cause I could see they was making money, so that's what I wanted grow up to do—to be able to make money and help myself and maybe if I had sisters and brothers. That I did, right up until not too long ago.

00:24:04

Dunning:

Well, that's pretty amazing to know what you want to do at age eleven and to do it.

00:24:11

V. Hooper:

At that point in time, a job wasn't something that you could always get. So at one point, at a certain age, twelve or thirteen years old, if you wanted a job, you had to create it. You had have ambitions in your head and your mind if you were going to create a job, because there wasn't too

many jobs that you could get. You'd have to make them yourself. Jobs weren't there and this is going for both black and white. There just wasn't a lot of jobs, so you had to be smart enough to create a job to make it. But consequently, after my father died, we had to work and go to school. I was always creating a job. Actually when I was twelve or thirteen years old, I had two or three guys working. I would always have work. I never really had a job for other people.

00:25:17

Dunning:

You like to be independent.

00:25:20

V. Hooper:

I can make a job.

00:25:24

Dunning:

Well, I want to ask you the same question that I asked Mrs. Hooper. You've already answered a little bit of that. Did you have a vision of what your life was going to be like when you were a teenager?

00:25:36

V. Hooper:

Yeah, I always knew. I knew I was going to be independent. I knew I was going have people working for me. I knew I was going to marry.

00:25:51

Dunning:

At what point did people stop treating you like a child and you felt like you were a grown up?

00:25:58

V. Hooper:

Well, actually I never was really a child. I never was. I always worked. In the evening after school, or before time, or whatever, but I always worked. I always had something to do. I don't think I ever took interest in learning how to dance until I was in my twenties. I worked. I had somebody working for me, I said, practically all the time. I had a paper out sometime, I'd have as many as three guys on a paper route. I was always working.

00:26:37

Dunning:

Sounds like you were a young entrepreneur.

00:26:40

V. Hooper:

Yeah. I had to create it if it wasn't there. I'd create a job. So consequently, I never did worry about getting a job. I never gave it a thought. Never.

00:26:53

Dunning:

How about you? When did people stop treating you like a child? When did you feel like a grown up?

00:27:02

M. Hooper:

I think I was about when I started fixing my own hair when I was eleven years old. That's what I was, I was a maid that went into a beauty operator. I went to school for it. They just started coming—different people would wash their hair and come over for me to fix it. At that time, we didn't have all these little stoves and thing, we had to keep a kerosene lamp. They had the lamp glow and we'd take a bucket bail and bend it and put across there to heat your irons with, to fix the hair with. And I could always curl it. Pressing and curling mostly is what they did. They shampooed their hair themselves and would come out with {pressed form?} whenever I wasn't busy doing whatever I wanted to do, had to do around the house. So I was always busy.

Finally when it got down to high school, that's what I wanted to do. Sometime, if the county superintendent was coming out to the school, they would know about it. So they would give me the home economic period to do some of the girls' hair if they'd come to school nice and clean. I would press it for them. Everybody would be all ready for the county superintendent when he got there. They would always have me doing something, because I always wanted to do something. I could cook, sew, and fix hair.

00:28:36

Dunning:

When did you two meet? You are allowed to interrupt each other now.

00:28:43

M. Hooper:

My father's job transferred him. The company moved to Texas. First, it was in a small town, called Henderson, Texas. So Mr. {Landers?} didn't do too good there with his plumbing business, so he moved to Longview, Texas and that's where we finished going to school, and high school there. All this time, I was always busy sewing, and making something for myself or somebody. My life was just really interesting to me, because things I wanted to do, I wanted to do it and I was so smart at it.

Until the graduating year, they told my father, since I was going to do it anyway. They had found this school in Houston, Texas where I could wear my cap and gown and finish going to high school the second semester and also be taking a beauty courses. The name was Wall's Beauty College on Stuart Street in Houston, Texas. So they let me go at the second semester and I didn't want to disappoint—I loved my father, I didn't want to disappoint him. So I was really working. I hurried up and got to the point, because I already fixed hair anyway. So that made me move along in the class with the ones who were seniors.

We had some {words?} instructors too. Right away, she told me that I could go to school and I could work in a beauty shop. And what I made in the beauty shop, I could keep it, 60 percent of it. So I would have money all the time to ride the bus back and forward—I stayed with my aunt and uncle. I enjoyed growing up in the South. It wasn't too hard, because if you wanted to help yourself, that made it much easier for you.

00:30:46

Dunning:

When did you meet Mr. Hooper?

00:30:49

M. Hooper:

I met him in Longview, Texas. [Laughter]

00:30:52

Dunning:

How old were you both?

00:30:54

M. Hooper:

Oh my goodness! How old was I?

00:30:56

V. Hooper:

I guess I was about eighteen.

00:30:59

M. Hooper:

Well. We were born the same year, 1919. He was born in January and I was born in March, so—.

00:31:07

Dunning:

That's pretty close.

00:31:08

M. Hooper:

And we still together! So we got married in 1944? 1941?

00:31:16

V. Hooper:

'41.

00:31:17

M. Hooper:

We got married in 1941. Then along after that, the big boom come. Then Mr. {Calhoun?} said he would transfer you here if you could come out and work and you worked at the shipyard; he came in 1944 and I came about—in 1945, at that time, we had our first child.

00:31:37

Dunning:

Oh, okay. Well, let me move right ahead. Do you have anything else you'd like to add about meeting your wife?

00:31:46

V. Hooper:

Yeah. I'm still in love with her. [laughter] My wife is my partner.

00:31:53

M. Hooper:

Well, we both wanted do something together.

00:31:55

Dunning:

And you've been married over sixty years now.

00:31:58

V. Hooper:

Sixty-four. Pretty good, huh?

00:32:02

Dunning:

It's great. It's really great.

00:32:04

V. Hooper:

Yeah. About to get acquainted. [laughter] They say when your wife gets to know you, you'll be working during the day, and you wish for something to eat, and you go home, and she's already cooked it, that means, you are on her mind. [laughter]

00:32:37

Dunning:

How did you come to relocate in California?

00:32:41

V. Hooper:

Well, after I got out of the service, I came out here to do my apprenticeship. I was going to school—I'd started in shoemaking before I went in the service—I came out here to finish up my apprenticeship and I took a job working for a shoe repair company. I went from a company, to a manager, to an owner. So consequently, that was the way it went. I guess by the time that I was a full—my oldest boy was born. When he was born, we had been married about a year or two years.

00:33:26

M. Hooper:

Long enough.

00:33:27

V. Hooper:

Long enough, but I don't know when I was single, but anyway—you stay married sixty some more years, you got a lot of time behind you, and a lot of happening in between. You really do. But then, I enjoyed what I was doing. So consequently, I kept going to school all the time, trying to apply more knowledge to what I really wanted to do. I wanted to have a vocational school, and a store, and I did all that. I had a vocational school and I had the first black shoe store in northern California. Then I also taught some students from Kenya—from Nairobi.

00:34:47

Dunning:

Where was your school? The vocational school, was that connected with the shop?

00:34:53

V. Hooper:

We had all these in one block.

00:34:54

Dunning:

And this was in Berkeley?

00:34:55

M. Hooper:

And in the same building.

00:34:57

V. Hooper:

In the same building in Berkeley, California.

00:35:00

Dunning:

Near Alcatraz? Was it?

00:35:02

V. Hooper:

On Alcatraz Avenue, between Alcatraz Avenue and San Pablo Avenue. We had just about a block of business at that point in time.

00:35:17

Dunning:

What was the name of your shoe repair and school?

00:35:21

V. Hooper:

Hooper's.

00:35:22

Dunning:

Okay. How many years was that open?

00:35:30

V. Hooper:

About forty-some-odd years.

00:35:32

Dunning:

It's a long time. Okay. So you came out here in '44 and when did you come? '45?

00:35:40

M. Hooper:

'45 March.

00:35:41

Dunning:

Okay. So you had one child already?

00:35:44

M. Hooper:

Yes.

00:35:45

Dunning:

Okay. Were you still in Texas at the time?

00:35:47

M. Hooper:

Yes.

00:35:48

V. Hooper:

Oldest boy was born in Texas.

00:35:51

Dunning:

Now you mentioned that earlier on you were living in Berkeley. Is that where you came?

00:35:57

V. Hooper:

We lived on California Street at that point in time. We moved from 3211 California Street to Parchester Village to this where we are now.

00:35:59

Dunning:

Do you recall when you first started to hear about California and the opportunities?

00:36:22

V. Hooper:

Yeah. I had friends of mine that were here during World War II and they were coming home on a visit and discussing what was going on, what they were doing, et cetera, et cetera. My brother had been to California and he got here for a while during World War II. He didn't go in service and he didn't like California. So that's the last advice he gave me was, "Don't go to California."

00:36:55

Dunning:

And you didn't follow his advice?

00:36:57

V. Hooper:

No.

00:37:00

Dunning:

Well, did you have an image of what California was going to be like before you got here?

00:37:07

V. Hooper:

Well, I don't really think so, because I had found that jobs were plentiful and you can also get jobs in California that you couldn't get in Texas. That was one of the things that caused me to come to California, because a lot of things was cut out—there was a stone in the road, you say, in Texas at that point in time. A lot of people avoided coming, avoided leaving, they left Texas and come to California where it felt like they had more freedom—to get a better advancement in working and raising a family.

00:37:49

Dunning:

Did any other family arrive here during those war years to work in the shipyards?

00:37:55

V. Hooper:

I had a brother-in-law that was already here working. I think I got a lot of advice from him by him coming home to visit, and matter of fact when I came to California, he found me a place to live and {__?} my {?} cost. I was working part time doing my apprenticeship with a shoe repair company, and I told you I'd be another four, five months before I could come out and he had been out here working. He gave me the answer, he said, "Just say you are ready to come, I'll send for you."

00:38:35

Dunning:

So it sounds like you were luckier than most, because a lot of people had a difficult time finding housing when they arrived.

00:38:44

V. Hooper:

Well, we found a house. Well, you have to be somewhat of an entrepreneur when you go to a strange place to find a house or whatever you are looking for. So you have to know how to look.

00:39:01

Dunning:

Do you recall some of your first impressions of the Bay Area when you arrived in '44?

00:39:08

V. Hooper:

Well, I really did. I enjoyed it myself. Because being a country boy, I could say, coming out of a small town, it looked like a whole lot was going on, you know. And I really enjoyed coming to the Bay Area.. I was, like, what do you call it, a bat out of the cage. All these things going on, the night clubs, showgirls, and et cetera, you know, it was a lot to see, and a lot to learn—and my mind was on what I was planning on doing. As soon as I arrived in California, I was able to get a job working at a shoe repair company at that point in time. We didn't have these shoes that people wear now; just about everything people wore at that point in time was also repairable and people had them repaired. So consequently, the minute I got to California, I worked in one place maybe three months. During that time, I learned how to get around, walking around where I found what places was, you know, {dentist?} places, repair companies where you bought supplies and et cetera, so the more long I stayed, the more I learned. So I'd say I worked for this store here about, the biggest store in northern California, biggest shoe repair company in northern California. I worked there about maybe six months.

But in the meantime, I was always on the look, because I wanted to find something better. I was always in the process of trying to learn more myself, but it didn't take me long to examine what I was trying to do and people began to offer me jobs on the fact that they find out that I was teachable and easy to learn. So after about seven, eight months, where I had had offers for jobs to manage store and et cetera, et cetera. This was what I was doing up until I decided I was going

for broke. When you're going for broke, that means you're going for yourself. So I was able to get a job working in a shoe repair shop as an assistant manager.

00:41:40

Dunning:

I almost feel like we could do a whole project on your shoe business, but we may have to do that another project. What I'd like to ask you is did your husband communicate with you much through letter when he was in California and did you get an idea of what would it be like when you arrived?

00:42:05

M. Hooper:

They had a saying that "You're going to California where they sleep out every night, and everything you did, you made money." So sunny California, that's what I came looking for, but that was different when I got here.

00:42:17

Dunning:

Well, tell me about what it was like when you first arrived.

00:42:05

M. Hooper:

Well, when I first arrived, it was exciting, then it was kind of scary too. Because when it rained, if you hadn't went to the store before that rain, you would have to—we stayed over about on South Forty-Ninth, and that water would get up to over your knees. When you need to go to the store, and I had the baby and I had to have the milk, and I had to wade water up to my knees to go to Harbor Gate Market to buy what we needed for the house. Then he'd be going on to work. As he said, he was working in a shoe factory then. It was a little different from what I had in mind, because I just thought the sun shined all the time.

00:43:10

Dunning:

Oranges growing in all that area.

00:43:12

V. Hooper:

Sunny California.

00:43:14

M. Hooper:

They just gave a such beautiful picture. I didn't dream that people working hard like they were at the shipyard and changing shifts and all like that. I just didn't.

00:43:23

Dunning:

Well, tell me when you moved to Richmond, what did it look like during the height of the shipyard? Or I guess you came in right at the end.

00:43:33

M. Hooper:

End. Near the end of it. Yes. Well, to me, it just looked like a—oh, there was a stack of chemical here now. That was Seaport and that's where we lived at.

00:43:43

V. Hooper:

In a project over there.

00:43:47

M. Hooper:

There was Harbor Gate on up Hoffman a little further then. To get to the store, you walked. To get to ride a bus, you had to walk about two miles, because you had to go over on South Forty-Seventh and Potrero to catch a bus to ride to town or go on—you could catch the train. They had a shipyard train that you could catch and ride to Oakland. You could catch it just across from Seaport on South Forty-Seventh and. Potrero. Yeah, you had to walk a piece. Everywhere you went, you had to walk, because there was no—it wasn't convenient at that time. But I wasn't here too long before everything was getting better, the bus service and they cut out the shipyard train and then they had buses in place of the train.

00:44:38

Dunning:

Now, do you remember Richmond when it was really bustling—when Macdonald Ave. was filled with stores and movie theaters?

00:44:45

M. Hooper:

Yes.

00:44:46

V. Hooper:

I was working on Macdonald. That's the first job that I got as a manager of a shoe repair store was on Macdonald.

00:44:58

Dunning:

Do you remember the cross street?

00:45:00

V. Hooper:

Macdonald and Tenth Street.

00:45:03

Dunning:

Tenth Street? Okay.

00:45:04

M. Hooper:

They call it Harbor Way now.

00:45:08

Dunning:

Were there things that you missed about the South when you came here?

00:45:12

V. Hooper:

Not really.

00:45:13

M. Hooper:

I did.

00:45:14

Dunning:

What sorts of thing did you miss?

00:45:17

M. Hooper:

I just missed my family and the surroundings that I was used to. So I really, I never unpacked the trunk for a while. It was a long time. After we stayed with my sister and her husband and he found work, it was all right. It was good, because if you've got a trade, that's going to be your profession. So I did my hands. I did my sister's hands. Somebody saw it and they liked it and it started like that. And I just started—they come with their hair already shampooed and dried. And in between time, when we wasn't cooking something, I did hair; I had to use the kitchen because the {apartment?} wasn't very high.

00:45:59

Dunning:

Did you start off in your own house?

00:46:05

M. Hooper:

No. I started off in the apartment with my sister. Yeah. Then it was quite a while before—if you had your license and your diploma and everything from the school you was going and worked at in Texas, when you got to California, you had to go school again to take a brush-up. And then go to the state board before you could work at a beauty shop here.

00:46:31

Dunning:

Is that what you did?

00:46:33

M. Hooper:

Yes. I enjoyed it.

00:46:39

Dunning:

Now, were there things about the South that you didn't miss?

00:46:45

V. Hooper:

Talking to me?

00:46:46

Dunning:

I'm talking to both of you, whoever answers first. [laughs]

00:46:48

M. Hooper:

That I didn't miss?

00:46:50

Dunning:

Yeah. Was it really different here?

00:46:54

M. Hooper:

Yes, a lot different. People weren't friendly and a lot of them—everybody just lived so packed up. I wasn't used to that.

00:

:04

Dunning:

They lived so what?

00:47:05

M. Hooper:

Packed up, you know, apartments were so close. If they were talking a little bit loud, you could hear what was going on in that other apartment. If you was quiet and you was trying to be sleeping, and they had a party, and oh, it was really a whole lot different. But I caught on, they didn't bother me.

00:47:25

Dunning:

Now, your first apartment in Richmond, was that part of the war housing?

00:47:29

V. Hooper:

Yeah.

00:47:30

Dunning:

Okay. But you weren't shipyard workers, but you were able to get a place there?

00:47:34

M. Hooper:

Didn't you work in the shipyard?

00:47:35

V. Hooper:

I worked in the shipyard about two weeks.

00:47:37

Dunning:

Okay, tell us about your two weeks, because we are just learning this for the first time.

00:47:41

V. Hooper:

Well, actually, working two weeks in the shipyard, you could say somebody trying to get out; I was trying to get out of the shipyard and I went to work at—actually where we were living, I had to pass a shopping center and quite a few shoe repair shops at that point in time. I think I worked in the shipyard about three weeks because when I hit the ground, I hit the ground running. I was looking for a shoe shop. So, I got a job working for a company and this guy had—I think he had one deaf mute there working, or two deaf mutes; in fact, he did. He had two deaf mutes working in the shoe repair shop. At that time, I was very affluent in the sign language. We were taught sign language in school because a lot of people in what was shoemaking and shoe repair were mute. So you had to learn how to talk with your fingers and communicate with the people and et cetera. So it wasn't any sound, any trouble for me. I could already use sign language to communicate with deaf mutes, which occupied a lot of the shops, the work force at that time. A lot of people thought I was a mute.

00:49:10

Dunning:

Because you probably sign so well.

00:49:12

V. Hooper:

I'd be talking with people, and sometimes they'd be laughing about something we said; nobody would know what we were talking about at all. So, a lot of folk would be trying to talk sign language with me, and I could talk. I said, "You can talk to me."

00:49:29

Dunning:

Now, did you socialize much with the shipyard workers?

00:49:38

M. Hooper:

Yeah, my brother-in-law worked at the shipyard and I said we stayed with them.

00:49:44

Dunning:

When you came to Richmond, were you aware that this enormous change had happened, that it had been a small town of 23,000 and then it boomed to 125,000? Was that something you were aware of when you came in?

00:50:00

V. Hooper:

Only thing that you could really be aware of was the new housing development. These houses and apartments and et cetera seemed like they sprang up overnight—really didn't take them long to build them. Consequently, it was a place to stay with running water, you know, utilities already in, and all in fact, the only trouble, was the raining. The places would flood out, you know, it wasn't level like it was supposed to be. But we didn't live in that position too long, because they were building houses so fast. Until you put your name on the list, it wasn't long before you had a place where you could be, kind of high and dry but a lot of the places, where they built the houses, they also would flood out. I don't know. Well, I guess it was the management, whatever they did, you know, putting houses in, have water be that high; you'd be

trying to get home at night, get wet real fast. Next day, you'd be all right, that morning, going to work, water'd be run down. But you still got wet.

00:51:13

Dunning:

Yeah. I have heard about that, especially in North Richmond and the Richmond Annex, they still get really flooded out. Now, you mentioned that there was a lot of new housing being built, did you feel the effects of the restrictive covenant? You know, where blacks weren't allowed to buy or lease certain places?

00:51:35

V. Hooper:

You could see the effect. Boy, for feeling, it wasn't any Caucasian people living around you on purpose, it was only until I get another place. At that point in time, whenever blacks moved into this particular area, all the Caucasian people would move out. Just like you said, this place was here built as a mixed development, see these houses here. But then, didn't any Caucasian people lived in Parchester Village until just here recently, you could say about seven or eight years ago, we had Caucasian people living out here. They didn't live out here under no circumstances, matter of fact, didn't come through here either.

00:52:30

Dunning:

Well, since you were among the first residents to move into Parchester Village, can you give a little history of that? How you learned about this development, because Parchester Village is supposed to be the first African American development in the United States? Were you aware of that?

00:52:53

M. Hooper:

Yeah. We had read about it in some paper from church. We'd be talking about it, we went to northwestern Baptist at that time under Reverend F. W. {Watkins?}. Because he's passed on and his son too, Richard, but they was instigated in being able to help get these low-rent houses and no-down-payment houses. You'd surprised, we moved into this house when they said, "You could buy you a home if you had a hundred dollars to put down." I was out here, round about—I always worked with the youth—and I went back and I told my husband about it, I said, "Well, I made an appointment for us to go out to see this man." And I said, "Here's his card, his name is O.W. Smith." And he said, "Well, we'll go." We come out and he said, "A hundred dollars." Well, we didn't have it that Sunday, but that Monday my husband went to the bank and got it and gave it to me. I come out here and brought in. We were among the first people to put money down. You've seen how it is, he just has some picture that we were showing.

00:54:08

Dunning:

Oh, okay. So there weren't any houses built at the time?

00:54:10

M. Hooper:

On this land? No. They had just got this land from Mr. Parr.

00:54:15

V. Hooper:

I think there was about four houses out here at that point in time and they were only for the developers to demonstrate.

00:54:25

M. Hooper:

Yeah, the offices.

00:54:29

Dunning:

Did you get to choose? I know there were a couple of styles of houses here, one is what they called what the Flat Top Smith Houses.

00:54:38

M. Hooper:

The raised one over here, we had it done.

00:54:41

Dunning:

Oh okay. You put this, another roof on.

00:54:43

M. Hooper:

Yeah. They were all flat top.

00:54:45

Dunning:

Oh, every one?

00:54:46

M. Hooper:

Every one of them was a flat top.

00:54:46

V. Hooper:

That's what they used to call the guy who built the houses; they used to called him Flat-Top Smith. O. W. Smith, that's what his nickname was, et cetera. They called him Flat-Top.

00:54:57

M. Hooper:

The main thing that was so interesting to me that you could pay down on this property; they were building the houses—my idea was, I'll have somewhere for my children to play: a yard, a front and back yard. Right away, I told him, "You better get the money, because he said 'be there by 2:00.'" I didn't go to church that Sunday; we come out here. Boy, when we got here, they were lined up waiting to go in to put their money down. You couldn't get a place for a hundred dollars down, of course, you had to pay two hundred dollars when you moved in. But they were building these houses so fast.

00:55:37

Dunning:

How many houses all together were built?

00:55:40

M. Hooper:

It was supposed to be four hundred and fifty. I don't know how many really it is, because I never investigated it. I was so glad to get mine. [Laughter]

00:55:49

Dunning:

They all were built with five thousand square feet lots. So that's good. So you could have a yard.

00:55:56

V. Hooper:

And flat top. We had a raise put on here, you know. Like you see some, you know.

00:56:01

M. Hooper:

And that patio too. At that time, the way they're building them now—I told my husband, maybe we're going to get {opposites?} like that, because half of it is just like a regular house and then you have other part with windows around. I liked that better, because with this plastic, if it comes a real hard rain or storm, that will bust it, you know, the wind will broke through the force and it splits it. And if it gets real, real hot, it do the same thing. But for the benefit of our children, as we were down the years, through the years, we wanted somewhere for them to have, but that was right there, that type of patio was what they were doing then. So we love Parchester Village. I love it. [Laughter] Because this is something that—the first thing we bought, that we could say was our very own, was this property.

00:57:03

Dunning:

When you moved in, I know you had your son and you had Paulette; did you have any other children by then, 1950?

00:57:10

M. Hooper:

One more. We had one son born, my baby son, was born here in Richmond. Other than that, we haven't have had no trouble like some people say about here. We just don't have it. I guess we are different type of people.

00:57:28

Dunning:

Now, you mentioned that there were lines of people waiting to put deposits down.

00:57:32

M. Hooper:

Oh yeah.

00:57:34

Dunning:

Were there enough houses for all those people waiting or was there a waiting list?

00:57:39

M. Hooper:

Well, I think so.

00:57:43

V. Hooper:

The waiting list was long. We had a waiting list long time before we really caught up with the waiting list. Then on, you know, you were building two, three houses a month. But when we first started they were building eight and ten houses a month, you know, around here.

00:58:02

Dunning:

Well, how soon after you gave them the hundred, did you actually have a house?

00:58:07

V. Hooper:

Well, it's about two months. Oh man, a house?

00:58:14

Dunning:

Now, it seems like, I know the buses will come in here now, but at that time, how did you get around?

00:58:21

M. Hooper:

We had to walk over to {Leverton?} and Broadway and we could get a bus there. But that didn't seem like nothing, because if he were working in {Albany?} and going to school in Oakland, it seemed to me like it, he was just happy to be having a place to come to that was your own. I didn't like going so early in the morning, but I had to be over there for ten o'clock. So I'd just get up and most of the time, I would—sometimes, most people, if they see you at the bus stop, they were so nice. They would give you a ride, if you was going anywhere near the same place they were going. Any place like Oakland or Berkeley or some, they'd drop you off. And then so you offer to pay them, they wouldn't take no money. We were just so happy, everybody was to have some place to come to call your own. The people were just really nice. It took us a while to get the bus service out here though.

00:59:20

Dunning:

Do you remember when the bus service first came in? Which decade it was?

00:59:25

V. Hooper:

Oh, my god.

00:59:29

M. Hooper:

No. I don't remember that.

00:59:30

Dunning:

Were your kids still little?

00:59:32

M. Hooper:

Yeah.

00:59:36

V. Hooper:

I know I had a load every morning, then I'd have a load every night.

00:59:41

Dunning:

A load of people you'd take out.

00:59:43

M. Hooper:

Well, people were nice.

00:59:45

V. Hooper:

Yeah. We all had—it looked like something that would automatically happen. People would be on the corner of Tenth and Macdonald. They'd be waiting. We didn't have a bus out here to—everybody that was working in Oakland, Berkeley, places like that, they came through Tenth and Macdonald, where you picked up a load of people. When you went out in the morning, you went by {Hamm School?} over here and—what's the name of that other school? They had that elementary school, I was trying to think—.

01:00:21

M. Hooper:

Oh, oh. Baldwin.

01:00:22

V. Hooper:

Yeah. Well, anyway, we left in the morning, everybody had a load of kids.

01:00:31

M. Hooper:

We had two elementary schools. Bayview and Baldwin.

01:00:37

V. Hooper:

We'd have a load of kids going out and loads of kids coming in, loads of people of people coming in after we left in the morning. I'd leave in the morning, we'd have a load of kids. I have had seven, eight kids in my car, nothing but heads.

01:00:53

Dunning:

Well, this probably explains what Paulette, your daughter was telling me that you were known as the parents, the Hoopers. You were the parents to a lot.

01:01:02

M. Hooper:

Well, I always named my house, the house beside the road with an open door. Because they was always welcome to come here. I hate to see older people, and some of them do, act like they was never young. So they had to have somewhere to go. So they would come here, and they said, "Don't they mess up your house?" I said, "No. When they mess up my house, when they get through, they clean it up." That's the way I always told them, "You clean up what you mess up."

01:01:32

V. Hooper:

We never put a rug on the floor until I guess everybody was grown.

01:01:40

Dunning:

Oh, okay. We are going to pause for just a moment and change the tape. Actually we are moving along pretty well, so you may get to eat lunch today. [Laughter] Are you both doing fine? Is this okay for you? Is this working out all right for you?

01:02:01

V. Hooper:

Yeah.

Begin Audio File 2

00:00:03

Dunning:

I'd like to ask you about the school situation for the children of Parchester Village, because I had read that there were some problems in that Parchester Village was unincorporated and so there was a bit of a fight to have your children go to the Richmond public schools. What can you tell me about it?

00:00:26

M. Hooper:

Well, it wasn't too much of a fight. But everybody had to agree and meet, you know you have to meet and agree on to certain different things. It wasn't too long before. They could only go to one elementary school and that was a baby. It was just too many kids in one school. Then they both crossed on that side of Broadway and built Lake. So that made it be, just right to have. It really was three elementary schools in that area, but on Broadway and—it used to have the school, they wouldn't let blacks go to that school. They called it Broadway Elementary School.

00:01:18

V. Hooper:

At Eleventh and Broadway.

00:01:21

M. Hooper:

Yeah, right over there.

00:01:23

Dunning:

And that was a public school?

00:01:24

M. Hooper:

Yeah. Some way everybody found out and different people was coming and speaking and everything. The school had to be integrated, because otherwise, they were going to get their money cut off, so that's when they ended up with Broadway, and—not Broadway, Bayview and Lake School Elementary, they went up through the sixth grade.

00:01:55

Dunning:

Which schools did your children go to?

00:01:59

M. Hooper:

They started at Bayview until they built Lake School, because it was too many all cluttered up at Bayview. Then they transferred, so I think it was all this side of Bradford Drive, back this way. Went to Lake School, they transferred into Lake, and all on the other side, they went to same school, Bayview Elementary. And from there, they went to Walter T. {Hamm?} for Junior High and then to Richmond High School.

00:02:33

Dunning:

And how did you find the education for your children? Were you satisfied with it?

00:02:40

M. Hooper:

Yes, after they got to the school and made it better for them. I'm satisfied with the school.

00:02:46

V. Hooper:

We handled it. We had—this is little Johnson Drive; Johnson Drive is the first area of City of Richmond, that graduated three doctors.

00:03:03

Dunning:

Really?

00:03:05

V. Hooper:

We had three medical doctors come off of this street.

00:03:09

Dunning:

That's significant. So they were children that grew up right here from the beginning?

00:03:17

V. Hooper:

They grew up on this street.

00:03:20

Dunning:

Did you know their names?

00:03:21

V. Hooper:

Yeah. Nathan Alan, Harold {Orr?}, and King—not Don King, Don King's brother up the street there—

00:03:43

Dunning:

Well, you probably had a lot of kids pass in and out.

00:03:47

V. Hooper:

This is where the kids met, right in this house. We didn't put a rug down until we'd been here twelve years, before we put a rug down in this house.

00:03:59

M. Hooper:

The other boy's name was Ron King and he's working in Washington DC now.

00:04:07

V. Hooper:

And this other boy, Harold {Orr?} just came back to the Bay Area.

00:04:13

M. Hooper:

He works at the Correctional Center out in Pleasanton and that's where he's working at. He's a medical doctor there on the staff. His name is Harold {Orr?}. And the other is Nathan Alan and he's in Sacramento.

00:04:37

Dunning:

This is a kind of unusual community in that it's a little isolated. Was it a tight community? What was the atmosphere like in the fifties after you--?

00:04:50

V. Hooper:

In the fifties, the atmosphere was education.

00:04:53

Dunning:

Was what?

00:04:55

M. Hooper:

Everybody wanted to get the children to be educated. We had trouble getting bus service and everything even for the children. But that was the first who had buses put on, was for the school buses. And they would transfer them to so many to one elementary school and so many to the other until they come with all the ones graduated from sixth grade going to Walter T. Hamm, the junior high school that was in this district.

00:05:29

Dunning:

Were there any services here, any stores or where would do your shopping?

00:05:34

M. Hooper:

We used to have a store on—

00:05:38

V. Hooper:

You see, that big lot by where they got the playground, that used to be a store where the center is now.

00:05:45

Dunning:

That's where the neighborhood house is?

00:05:47

V. Hooper:

Yeah. That was a store and a service station.

00:05:52

M. Hooper:

Before they got that down to putting up a center and we had a little shopping area over there, it a little grocery store, a variety store, a café. They tried to have a pool hall, but they just kept breaking in. They closed that up and they put a church in it, then from there, they come to Greater El Bethel. Everybody helped build Greater El Bethel. The first church built was Parchester First Baptist and we decided we need another church—both of them Baptist, but we do have them. Then they also got a recreation center now. But when you stay in a neighborhood and it's building up and growing, it's a lot of work, but we didn't mind it.

00:06:40

Dunning:

Now I noticed that many of the names of the streets are named after ministers.

00:06:45

M. Hooper:

That's right.

00:06:45

Dunning:

Now, was that right from the beginning?

00:06:47

M. Hooper:

That's right, because the main street is this one, that's McGlothan then [Al?] McGlothan had a big church in North Richmond, but they was along with the whoever was—remember O. W. Smith and all of them that was having a meeting and Mr. Par sold this land for these houses. Ministers really was the biggest part of the meeting. All these streets is named after some minister. Griffin Drive was named after Reverend Griffin and this one was named after Reverend Johnson and Thomas Drive was named after Reverend Thomas. The first place they had for a center, they were going to use it, but they used it for a church. And Reverend Thomas was the first pastor of Parchester First Baptist.

00:07:45

Dunning:

Now, was the church a very big part of your life and your children's life?

00:07:50

M. Hooper:

That was all about it. That's right.

00:07:56

Dunning:

Tell me again the name of the church that you went to.

00:08:00

M. Hooper:

Out here?

00:08:02

Dunning:

Out here, yeah.

00:08:03

M. Hooper:

Well, Parchester First Baptist, but then we always worked in Albany and Berkeley, and I met some more people then. We were Methodist, and this was all Baptist out here, so we went to Easter Hill United Methodist.

00:08:20

Dunning:

So you'd go all the way over to Easter Hill?

00:08:23

M. Hooper:

Yes, for a long time, but finally I had to come back, because that transportation and some going this way, some going that way, and we had to raise the kids and we wanted them to be going to church. After we all helped to raise money to build Greater El Bethel—that's the new Baptist Church—I worked in that church and also my children for a while.

00:08:49

Dunning:

What do you think has been the best part of living in ParchesterVillage?

00:08:56

M. Hooper:

The best part? Well, it used to be nice and quiet, but now it's kind of a little [phone rings]

00:10:02

Dunning:

Nobody there?

00:10:02

M. Hooper:

They were selling a trip to Orlando, Florida. [Laughter]

00:10:06

V. Hooper:

I said it was.

00:10:08

M. Hooper:

I said that was a tape so I didn't—

00:10:10

Dunning:

I thought it was a really important message or—

00:10:15

M. Hooper:

Been there already anyway.

00:10:21

Dunning:

You were starting to tell me about the best parts of living in Parchester Village.

00:10:23

M. Hooper:

Parchester Village was a beautiful place to raise a family. Everybody seemed to care about each other. To be so we have in Parchester, whenever we have it, is somebody that don't live out here, they come out here, they know somebody, then that's how they get it started. But otherwise, if people who moved out here when Parchester first got started and it was settled, when they used to have a big grocery store down here, something like a—if you ever lived in a small town, they called them commissaries. You could buy anything, material; it's just whatever you needed was in this place. I hated when it closed down, but all of that credit goes to Mr. Parr, selling this land, and made it possible for a lot of people who probably never would've owned any property.

00:11:22

Dunning:

Now, were you ever criticized by any people for living out here?

00:11:27

M. Hooper:

Yeah, lots of times.

00:11:29

V. Hooper:

They didn't know we were in heaven. [Laughter]

00:11:33

M. Hooper:

Well, after some of them started visiting people out here, do you know some of them sold their homes in Berkeley and bought out here?

00:11:42

V. Hooper:

It was nice out here. I didn't know it was that nice out here.

00:11:46

M. Hooper:

I don't know what they was thinking, but they was surprised when they started visiting people who they knew out here and out about and some of them really bought out here.

00:11:55

Dunning:

Now, have there ever been a period of time when you thought about leaving Parchester Village?

00:12:02

V. Hooper:

Not yet.

00:12:03

M. Hooper:

Not really. [Laughter] You'd leave and go on a vacation or something, but you'd really be getting lonesome, you'd be ready to come home, back home when time comes to get back to Parchester Village. It was just free, the atmosphere among the people was really good. The kids all had a good time. After they let me have my shop and convert the garage into a beauty shop, this was where most of the—I always worked with the youth, as I said, and I had—I was over two girls' groups and one boys'. He always helped in the evening when he come home from work. And then other parents would help me come by. So we got the children—went into different things. Ones that were raised up in Parchester Village, they're not so bad. It's the ones who're moving in and out. People decide they want to move out, they sell their houses or they rent them out. That's where that trouble comes here.

00:13:08

Dunning:

Are most of the homes occupied now?

00:13:11

M. Hooper:

Yes.

00:13:13

V. Hooper:

Yeah. Still trying to get in them. Looks like they are building new houses out here right now.

00:13:18

Dunning:

Right on this land?

00:13:20

M. Hooper:

They did. They got three houses under construction right now, brand new houses over here on Jenkins Way—three brand new houses under construction. They're making them smaller and two-story houses, but then they're putting them up right there, right on Jenkins Way there.

00:13:41

Dunning:

You probably accustomed now to living right on the bay?

00:13:45

M. Hooper:

Well, we had to get used to it. It's all right. It's not so bad.

00:13:49

V. Hooper:

In fact, the only bad thing about Parchester Village now is that they tore this down and put in the [Richmond] Parkway.

00:13:57

Dunning:

Oh, the Richmond Parkway?.

00:13:58

V. Hooper:

You get an excessive amount of wind. It comes off the bay and keeps it cold and et cetera. But this Parkway messed up all this out here.

00:14:11

M. Hooper:

Oh, not really, plus you can get to where you are going faster.

00:14:15

Dunning:

Well, do you have more people driving down your streets now that you're right off the Parkway?

00:14:22

M. Hooper:

No. The Parkway helped that, because you see you just go right up, and out Giant Road, and you can go take the Parkway and you get to where you are going faster anyway. So I thought at first it might be troublesome, but it's not. It's better.

00:14:42

Dunning:

Would you ever go out to Point Pinole? The regional park out there, do you ever walk there?

00:14:49

M. Hooper:

No. I don't really walk out there. That's down here, yeah. But we've had affairs up there, picnics and different things.

00:14:57

Dunning:

Okay. Tell me about the community center, the neighborhood house.

00:15:03

M. Hooper:

The neighborhood house. This is Parchester Community Center. The neighborhood houses are over at North Richmond, but this is Parchester Community Center. It's nice. People seem to like to going there.

00:15:20

Dunning:

What sort of things happen there?

00:15:23

M. Hooper:

Different things. Sometime, the other group from Oakland and Richmond, white and black, have their meetings up there, because everything's compact right there in that center and they serve from the kitchen. It's just really nice. You haven't been inside?

00:15:42

Dunning:

I haven't been inside. No.

00:15:44

M. Hooper:

You should, it's really nice.

00:15:46

V. Hooper:

One Saturday every month, they have a community meeting.

00:15:49

M. Hooper:

I gave her one of those papers. I had one out there for her to see.

00:15:52

Dunning:

Yes. Yes. I did see that.

00:15:54

M. Hooper:

I don't know what happened to it, what I did with it.

00:15:56

Dunning:

It's probably in my papers somewhere.

00:15:59

M. Hooper:

If you want to view and see it, then you can call there. I think you would like to be going there, because they have a nice kitchen and a big meeting room and classrooms down in there.

00:16:18

Dunning:

Do you feel connected to the city of Richmond?

00:16:21

M. Hooper:

Yeah. It used to be San Pablo when we first moved here, but they annexed to Richmond, so this is considered Richmond.

00:16:32

Dunning:

Have either of you been involved in Richmond politics over the years?

00:16:37

V. Hooper:

All the time. This is where we held the community meetings; it used to be at our house. Everything that concerned Parchester at one time, it came through this house here.

00:17:00

Dunning:

Any issues that really stand in your mind? Any big meetings that you had?

00:17:08

M. Hooper:

Well, we always planned them. After we got people who would like to come, we had what we called a Johnson Drive block club. Then we'd meet from home to home. When would we meet? Month to month.?

00:17:22

V. Hooper:

Yeah. Month to month.

00:17:26

M. Hooper:

Then we did a lot of discussing. Some of the people who lived on other streets wanted to join our block club, because we had it. We would have had one great big opening on Johnson Drive was the street that they had the block party at.

00:17:44

V. Hooper:

They do a block party every year.

00:17:45

M. Hooper:

So we had to get some permission from the fire department and the police department, and they blocked off this from the beginning of McGlothan and Johnson and around the corner to Griffin and Lee Way. That of course was all in this block, the block party. It was really beautiful. Different houses sold different things. I think I sold cup cakes and ice cream here? [to Virgil] You had your stand—your stand was in front of your garage, and you had a long table. The city brought it all out and closed the street. You know, we didn't even have no trouble. But some of them said that was the first time they ever heard of a block club.

00:18:29

Dunning:

Sounds like a good idea. It sounds like this neighborhood, you do know your neighbors.

00:18:34

M. Hooper:

That's right, mostly, except the ones who're moving in lately or some of them moving out or some of them passed away and some of them just won't decide they want to sell their house, then they got old. We got a couple people who stayed in the senior homes now and they sold their houses.

00:18:51

V. Hooper:

A lot of them sold their houses and then bought back too.

00:18:54

Dunning:

Really? They left and came back?

00:18:56

M. Hooper:

Yeah.

00:18:58

V. Hooper:

Come home.

00:19:01

Dunning:

Now, recently, there's been a lot of focus on the new Rosie the Riveter National Park. Do you feel a connection to that at all?

00:19:14

M. Hooper:

What? To the park?

00:19:15

M. Hooper:

To the park. I mean is that any kind of big deal for you?

00:19:19

M. Hooper:

I'm glad they got it.

00:19:22

V. Hooper:

Rosie the Riveter, I cannot see those connections with it, because I never worked in public like a riveter, grinder, or whatever they do, welding and et cetera. I always worked inside of a building. I was always interested in what I was doing for a living and how I was doing it. You see? So consequently my connection with Rosie the Riveter would be very minute, because I never had an outside job, riveting or grinding or welding or et cetera. I never had that job. I know I was interested in it while I passed and looked, but I never worked as welder or grind or whatever they did, I never did that. Mine was always shoes. Hers was always hair.

00:20:21

Dunning:

Shoes and hair. It seems like you are both in jobs where people would come to you, so you've must have heard a lot of like local news, gossip, just lots of stories.

00:20:36

V. Hooper:

Yeah. I was the president of the home owners' association for quite a numbers of years. Most of my interest was in education and community awareness. A lot of things that people would be

doing, I just didn't have time to do it, so I didn't partake. You say like you got a small community, you got five or six churches, it's kind of hard for you to be a participant, because you can't serve 'em all. I could only stand off and look to maintain peace and tranquility. That's where most of the persons they have would be around the church for some reason. While they were discussing, then I can always be a friend; I'll stand off and look. [Laughter]

00:21:33

Dunning:

Now, Richmond as a city has had lots of ups and downs and the World War II years were really booming, and then it saw some pretty tough decades. Any particular times that seemed particularly positive in Richmond or particularly bleak?

00:21:57

V. Hooper:

Richmond or Parchester Village?

00:21:59

Dunning:

Well, let's do the City of Richmond, then we'll do Parchester Village.

00:22:08

M. Hooper:

Well, I didn't find Richmond to be too bad. It's just that people who are coming in, you'd surprised how people used to come by here when we had a little café up there, and they had a band on the weekend and then they'd come down and that'd be the troublemakers. It wasn't the people who were buying out here and living out here. So they finally did so much, kept breaking in to that one grocery store until they had to close it down, and then we--

00:22:37

V. Hooper:

We have a city council--?

00:22:41

M. Hooper:

We had a grocery store, a variety store and a café.

00:22:47

V. Hooper:

I'm talking about the different people we have on staff. We have a city manager, city attorney, these are the people that were raised out in Parchester.

00:23:00

M. Hooper:

Yeah. Isaiah Turner was raised right around the corner.

00:23:03

V. Hooper:

We are talking about what raised up on Johnson Drive. So we had everything packed.

00:23:10

Dunning:

Oh, okay. So people were looking out for you? Some of the residents who lived here and got positions were looking out for you?

00:23:18

V. Hooper:

Yeah.

00:23:19

M. Hooper:

Yeah. What was Fritz Allen, what was he?

00:23:24

V. Hooper:

Fritz Allen was once the mayor.

00:23:27

M. Hooper:

Was he?

00:23:28

V. Hooper:

Fritz Allen was mayor and Ike Turner right now is the city manager. And what was that guy you called— City Attorney?

00:23:46

M. Hooper:

Who?

00:23:47

V. Hooper:

Yeah. I'm trying to think the boy's name, the city attorney.

00:23:50

M. Hooper:

I don't know. I can't think of it right now.

00:23:53

Dunning:

It will probably come to you after we leave, but that's okay. [Laughter] Now, do you remember when the redevelopment really hit Macdonald Avenue and all those stores left? Did that impact you?

00:24:08

V. Hooper

Not really, because when they hit Macdonald, closed up the stores and people moved out, most of the spendable populations, the homeowners, the people that were buying, shopping and et cetera, didn't go on Macdonald for a long time. It closed itself down without support. The best thing happened to Macdonald Avenue and this place FoodCo where they got this place { _____?}. But see one time when I first came to Richmond, I worked on the corner of-

-

00:24:50

M. Hooper:

Harbor Way and Macdonald. Harbor Way is Tenth Street; they didn't call it Harbor Way.

00:24:58

V. Hooper:

It was a thriving community, but then as the people began to sell their properties and move to Walnut Creek and et cetera places like that, by then the stores began to close. It was just one of those things that could happen in any area where you have people grew up and move to another place. People died out. Just one of those things. And then this happened when nobody wasn't rehabilitating the places they were vacating. So you ended up with a lot of vacant houses in South Richmond and places like that. It all just went down like a balloon, you know, until now actually Macdonald's back actually rebuilding again. If you notice it; it's rebuilding.

00:25:52

Dunning:

I don't want either of you too tired and we are coming on to lunch, so I'm going to wrap things up, but I did want to ask you, you know, one more question. I noticed in the—I don't know if you get the San Francisco Chronicle, there was a big front page article about the asthma rates in North Richmond being so high. And there's a picture of a grandmother, Mrs. Reed, and her grandson, who both have asthma. So that brings up the issue of how aware have you been of, you know, the pollution aspect, you know living kind of downstream from some of the chemical companies, has that been a health issue for your family or your neighbors?

00:26:43

M. Hooper:

I don't think so, because when people were really raising quite a few babies around here, we had a well-baby clinic up in the—as I said, Parchester First Baptist was the first recreation center that was going up, but they took it for a church. But they had a well-baby clinic up there every week. They really looked after people and as it grew bigger and bigger, they moved farther and farther. But we have had some nice good help in Parchester from the City of Richmond, and that's why they are next to the City of Richmond. People voted for it and it seemed like everybody was looking forward to be annexed, and that made it easy for us to vote, because we needed to be annexed to Richmond at the time.

00:27:43

Dunning:

Well, I'm sure there are dozens of more questions that I'd like to ask you, but I don't want you to be dozing off or getting too hungry, but is there anything else you'd like to add now?

00:27:57

M. Hooper:

The only thing that I would like to just say, and I can say it over and over, Parchester is a beautiful place to raise a family. Because you going to control your children and the neighbors would help watch out that there because they watching out after their own, and people just seem to get along like that. This is a nice area and now that as they move out, they are mixing. Because on the corner of our street here, we have a full white family that have really rebuilt their house right on the corner as you turn and come down Johnson Drive on the left side of it. And if

you are going up, it would be on the right of the corner of McGlothan and Johnson Drive. They're really fixing these houses up a little different.

00:28:46

V. Hooper:

Oh yeah. We have people that are moving in, too, and they are glad to be out here.

00:28:50

M. Hooper:

It used to be, they say, all black, but it's not anymore. It's well mixed.

00:28:56

Dunning:

Okay. Yeah. I have heard that Mexican-Americans have moved in.

00:29:00

M. Hooper:

And some Korean people, too. They've been going to church out here too. Whatever fairs we have at the center, at the churches, they'll be there. We haven't had no trouble so far and I hope we never will. Everybody seem to want—and I don't blame them, because the houses are nice for the price that you pay, but now they are going up really high on these very same houses.

00:29:31

V. Hooper:

Houses that at one time, they started at 8,250 dollars, more ever down there, wasn't it?

00:29:39

M. Hooper:

If you wanted some property, you could get it.

00:29:41

V. Hooper:

That's like an apartment rent and a deposit, nowadays. You hear me? Yeah, 8,250 dollars, then would be a down payment on your house. I mean, we bought a house, you would buy a house at 8,250 dollars. Yeah, you'd buy.

00:30:03

M. Hooper:

Actually it was all the whole price. And for that hundred dollars down, you see why I was in a hurry for him to get out here and bring the hundred dollars so we could be sure to have a place out here for the kids.

00:30:19

Dunning:

Now, do you both have any special ambitions right now, things you'd like to do, places you'd go?

00:30:29

M. Hooper:

If I go some place, it would be just to visit it and come back. I'd like keep my house.

00:30:34

Dunning:

Oh, definitely. Any particular trips you'd like to make?

00:30:39

M. Hooper:

Well, I always thought that—I've been some—I went on one of those cruise ship, went to four different islands, but I would like to go back again and I told I would always like to go Rome, because I heard so much talk about it. Then I would just like to see, but I haven't {lost?} a thing over there, I just want to go and see. Because the cruise that I did go on, the three different islands, St. Thomas was my choice, the other islands and well, I always get pictures and books and bring back so other people can see. But I told him, if I had money enough, everybody I knew and love, I would like to take them on a cruise so they could see that it's different from what they think it is. It's nice. As a matter of fact, the people who live in St. Thomas, I don't know why they would want come over here and live. You ever been there?

00:31:38

Dunning:

No, but my parents went there once.

00:31:41

M. Hooper:

Oh, it's nice.

00:31:42

V. Hooper:

What they think?

00:31:43

Dunning:

They thought it was beautiful. We still have some of the watercolors from there.

00:31:47

M. Hooper:

Oh yeah. Well, you walk up or you go out in the morning, the sand, there's something—it's just good. It's like it's got light or something in it. When you get closer, right on that sand, Daytona Beach, Florida used to be the same way. You'd be looking trying to see what is that all that sparkling that I saw, but you can, you know, see it. I picked up some sand and anything you bring out from over there, you have to report it. So they let me bring a little box of the sand, so that I could show the different children as I was a youth leader. Some of them have been over, and they talk about it too. One of my daughters, Paulette, anywhere you name, she can talk about it.

00:32:34

Dunning:

She's traveled a lot?

00:32:35

M. Hooper:

Yeah.

00:32:36

V. Hooper:

Where is she now?

00:32:38

M. Hooper:

She's getting ready to go to Spain.

00:32:40

V. Hooper:

Spain.

00:32:41

M. Hooper:

She would leave Thursday.

00:32:43

Dunning:

Well, where have your children moved to? Where did your three children live?

00:32:51

M. Hooper:

One lives in Vallejo; the other lives in Sacramento; one lives in Richmond.

00:32:57

Dunning:

Okay. Well, that's close.

00:32:59

V. Hooper:

In hollering distance. [Laughter]

00:33:04

Dunning:

Well, anything you'd like to add now?

00:33:07

M. Hooper:

No, I think that's about all.

00:33:09

V. Hooper:

Okay, well thank you so much. We really enjoyed meeting you.

00:33:13

M. Hooper:

We enjoyed it. Think back what we have come, that was pleasure. I enjoyed it because it was nice and you don't mind talking about it.

00:33:22

Dunning:

Yeah, it was great. If we had a few more hours, I'm sure we could think of dozens of more questions.

00:33:29

M. Hooper:

Yeah, we would

00:33:30

Dunning:

Thank you very much, we really appreciate it.

00:33:32

V. Hooper:

I really appreciate you coming by.

00:33:34

Dunning:

Well, we appreciate you having us. Thank you so much.

00:33:37

M. Hooper:

And Parchester is a great place to live and a beautiful place to raise a family, because you can handle your children and you could talk with them. You don't just be raising your children and the other people's not trying to raise theirs. Because when Paulette was little, and they was growing up and everything, when Dr. Wright moved out here, he told me, he says, "Mrs. Hooper, you are doing such a good job with the girls, I wish you would train my girls along with your girls that you are already training." And I don't mind, I said, "You don't have to pay me nothing." They would just come on and meet with the other girls, and that's once a week. So I was over two girls group and one boys, because the men would help out with the boys. They just learn. I always told them, it's no problem too great or too small that if you talk it over with somebody and get a good understanding, that you can't solve. We got some nice houses, Joe Eddy Macdonald was raised out here, so was Isaiah Turner, both the boys lived on Jenkins that I'm talking about now. Joe Eddy made postmaster down in {Madera?} and you know where Ike Turner is, see everybody know what he's been. And then there was another one, Jeff Washington, he teaches school over here, going all the way down to the college. He teaches at that school, I forgot the name of it right now. But we have turned out some beautiful people out of Parchester.

00:35:18

V. Hooper:

I think we did pretty good.

00:35:19

M. Hooper:

Then we got Reverend {Dotson?} down there, if it gets too rough and the boys needs him, shake it up and a little religion, boy, would everybody call on Reverend Richard {Dotson?}. You know, they listened to him. He's got a sounding voice and when he get through, the boys is all right.

00:35:39

Dunning:

Now, were there other people in Parchester Village that you think we should talk to that know as much as you do?

00:35:47

M. Hooper:

Reverend {Dotson?} lives on Jenkin Way, and his son is working right now, in North Richmond, Whitney {Dotson?}. They cleaned up that one street that then got all—they even got a sub-police station there now. Whitney's in that deal in there. He's name is Whitney {Dotson?}. Anybody tell you about him. He probably can tell you more, but I would say his father and mother could be the next person that could add light to what you are doing and writing about.

00:36:22

Dunning:

Okay. Well, we definitely keep that in mind. And thank you and thanks again.

00:36:30

M. Hooper:

Well, it's nice. I enjoy Parchester, so I always—

00:36:35

Dunning:

That message came through loud and clear, which is great.

00:36:38

M. Hooper:

Paulette really can tell how I love Parchester. She knows how I've worked, but I have worked all over in the city of Richmond, did a lot of work, and can't do it now. But I'm glad when I could work, I worked, and I was always with the youth.

00:36:51

V. Hooper:

As a matter of fact, Paulette is leaving for Spain tomorrow.

00:36:53

M. Hooper:

On Thursday.

00:36:56

V. Hooper:

What's tomorrow?

00:36:57

M. Hooper:

Wednesday. I have to tell her that you got here, because she asked me when you were coming. I said, "Yeah, she told me Tuesday between 10:00 and 10:30." So you made it, and I'm glad you did. And I hope that we said enough that whatever you write—

00:37:18

Dunning:

Well, you did. As I said, the frustrating thing is we'd like to ask you a lot more, but we're going to keep it short for now. But thanks, thanks very much.

00:37:30

M. Hooper:

Remember you can always find Reverend Richard {Dotson?} and his son Whitney, you can always find him over there, he works with the neighborhood over there in North Richmond. I think his office is somewhere along in there about where that Richmond police sub-station is on that street. What is that, {Chestnut?}. He can fill you in on the other parts.

00:37:53

Dunning:

Okay that's sounds good. Are we still taping?

00:38:03

M. Hooper:

I can see that you got a good helper.

00:38:05

Dunning:

Oh, that's terrific, I'm telling you otherwise I wouldn't be able to concentrate, I'd be looking at all the camera.