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Charles Huff

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

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Audiofile 2

War housing built all over Richmond—worked as a dispatcher for the Bay Bridge—talked a man out of suicide on the Bay Bridge—as a dispatcher, oversaw the bridge and the ships passing under—made sure things ran smoothly—saw some strange things—Civil Rights Movement—kamikaze planes in the Pacific—women in the War

Interview #1: May 31, 2006

Begin Audio File #1: Huff 1.wav

1-00:00:00

Wilmot: Okay. This is May 31st, 2006. Nadine Wilmot with Charles Huff. Rosie the Riveter World War Two Home Front Memorial Oral History Project for the National Park Service. Good afternoon.

1-00:00:17

Huff: Hi.

1-00:00:18

Wilmot: Hi. Well, usually where we start is where and when were you born?

1-00:00:26

Huff: I was born in a little town in Oklahoma called Wister, W-I-S-T-E-R. Population 750.

1-00:00:36

Wilmot: And what year was that?

1-00:00:37

Huff: 1925. June 15th.

1-00:00:41

Wilmot: Okay. And what kind of work went on in that town?

1-00:00:46

Huff: Farming.

1-00:00:48

Wilmot: What kind of crops?

1-00:00:49

Huff: They had farmin'. We had a cotton gin. And that's about it in Wister. Just farmed and lived on the Indian reservation. I used to pick up Indian arrowheads—in fact, I still had a bunch of 'em and I gave 'em to my daughter. She's part Indian, yeah, and I guess she's still got 'em. All on a picture frame lined up like an arrow. [chuckles].

1-00:01:16

Wilmot: Mmm.

1-00:01:18

Huff: Yep. Then I--

1-00:01:20

Wilmot: Where was your family from?

1-00:01:22

Huff: My mother and father was from—well, my father, I didn't know him. Well, I knew him—I mean, him and my mother divorced when I was little. My

mother and her folks all came from Kentucky, headed west right after World War I and settled in Oklahoma. That's where I was born, and lived on a farm with my grandmother and grandfather. My mother remarried again in 1935, and then my step dad—I had a good step dad. We moved to town and then my grandmother died in 1937 on her 65th birthday, [Fort Smith?], Arkansas. I still miss her. I got a picture of her. Well, that's my great—that's me and her up there on the picture. And then my great-grandfather sittin' there beside me. Still miss her.

1-00:02:14
Wilmot:

Well, hold on a second; let me get that image for you so you can look at it. Okay. [pause] Will you tell me your mom's name and your great-grandmother's? And your father's name as well. Stepfather--?

1-00:02:35
Huff:

Well, I knew him by "great-grandpa." I don't know—I don't even know what his name was.

1-00:02:41
Wilmot:

Okay.

1-00:02:43
Huff:

And his last name was Akers. I know that.

1-00:02:47
Wilmot:

How do you spell that?

1-00:02:47
Huff:

A-K-E-R-S.

1-00:02:49
Wilmot:

Mmm-hmm.

1-00:02:51
Huff:

And then, when I was just a little kid, about like that one you saw—four, five, six, seven year-old, something like that—we was, he always come from Kentucky to Oklahoma and visit us, and then go back. And we was building a calf pen one day. And, I'm like a little kid, and I'm barefooted, and I stick my toe up there and I said, "I bet you can't hit it." About the third time, he got it. Cut my big toe off, right foot. [chuckles]

1-00:03:17
Wilmot:

This is your great-grandfather?

1-00:03:18
Huff:

My great-grandfather. He was about 85-some years old then. And--

1-00:03:26
Wilmot:

And then, there's your great-grandma? Is that her?

1-00:03:29

Huff: [looking at pictures] No, that's my grandma. And me. And I didn't know my great-grandpa on her side. I didn't know. They died before I ever come here. This is my—this is my grandma's husband's dad. And then this is me, and my daughter and my mother in Oklahoma one year. We went back to visit several years ago.

1-00:03:54

Wilmot: Can you move it over a little bit? Move this over? There you go, the light from up there wasn't there. Okay. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that picture. Okay, so what kind of stories did your family tell about themselves?

1-00:04:14

Huff: Oh...they wouldn't talk too much. My mother—oldest brother was—I guess he got in trouble—I don't know how much trouble it was—in Kentucky. He killed a school teacher. They got into it one day after school, and cut his throat. And so he went into the Navy during the First World War. And then when he got out of the Navy and come back, they left—that's when they headed west. So he ended up as a school teacher. And I guess it preyed on him so long—and I'm told this—and he killed himself about two weeks before I was born. He drank Strychnine in Oklahoma, there. And I didn't really know him.

In 1940, I got out of high school. I went to join the Navy in 1942, me and another guy. Your folks had to sign your paper if you're 17, see? So they had to be notarized. And my mother wouldn't—she wouldn't do it. So, me and another fellow, we got caught bold-handed in a feed store, trying to steal this notary stamp. [laughs] So I told my mother, "I'm going to California on my thumb or on a freight train!" So she paid my way, bought me a ticket on the train. And I came out with some people who used to be sharecroppers on our farm that lived in Graton, right out of Sebastopol, between there and Occidental And that's where I stayed when I was working on the Fred McMurray Ranch.

1-00:06:00

Wilmot: What's your mom's name?

1-00:06:01

Huff: Eliza. E-L-I-Z-A. Akers—well, Huff and then Henschley.

1-00:06:07

Wilmot: And what kind of work does she do again?

1-00:06:10

Huff: My mother? She worked in a—well, she worked on a farm there, but she worked in restaurants and things. And after that, you know...

1-00:06:17

Wilmot: And...

1-00:06:20

Huff:

In fact, to finish the story, in March of '43 I went back to Tulsa—my mother and step dad had moved to Tulsa—so I went and told her, "I'm still going in the Navy." She ain't going to sign no papers. So I went down to sign up. They told me to take 'em and have my folks sign 'em. They didn't say nothing about a notary, see, the war was getting hot and heavy, then. So my mother—I went down to where she works at the restaurant. She wouldn't sign them; my sister signed her name. Oh, I better not tell you that, though, huh? [chuckles]

1-00:06:49

Wilmot:

It's all right.

1-00:06:51

Huff:

Statute of limitation's run out, and besides, she's dead. So anyhow, she wouldn't sign 'em so I signed her name myself.

1-00:06:58

Wilmot:

Why didn't she want you in the military?

1-00:07:01

Huff:

She said, "If you get killed, you gonna blame me." I said, "If I get killed, I ain't gonna blame nobody!" That was my mother. So, everything turned out all right. I had an allotment made out to my mother when I was in the service. And the Navy had to get on her to cash the check. She didn't think she had them coming, and so did the bank down there. [chuckles]

1-00:07:24

Wilmot:

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

1-00:07:25

Huff:

No brothers or sisters.

1-00:07:27

Wilmot:

So she wasn't going to have you in the military.

1-00:07:29

Huff:

No. So, anyhow.

1-00:07:33

Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you some more things. You said you came out to California—well, let me ask you first this, why did you want to join the Navy so badly?

1-00:07:45

Huff:

Well, it was a war! Pearl Harbor for one thing, you know.

1-00:07:48

Wilmot:

Do you remember when Pearl Harbor happened?

1-00:07:49

Huff:

I do. Like I said, several of us had an old stripped-down car. It didn't have no seats. We had a crate to sit on, an old stripped—we pulled up to a house where

they had these wells, to get some water 'cause the radiator was leakin', you know, and we had to fill it up with water. And we heard people in the house, summertime, they had the radios on, we could hear 'em blasting, "Japs just bombed Pearl Harbor." So that's when I first heard about it.

1-00:08:18

Wilmot: You felt that you wanted to get right in there. Were all your friends also interested in enlisting?

1-00:08:22

Huff: Oh, yeah, a lot of them went in. One good buddy of mine, I wanted him to go in the Navy with me and his mother wouldn't let him, so he ended up getting drafted into the Marines and got killed in Saipan, first landing he made. You know. So--

1-00:08:35

Wilmot: How would you describe the community where you grew up?

1-00:08:39

Huff: Just a typical farm—cows mooing all the time. They had a sale, there, where people brought the cows in every week and sold them, auctioned them off and all, everything like that.

1-00:08:55

Wilmot: And social life in high school?

1-00:08:58

Huff: Oh, so-so, you know.

1-00:09:00

Wilmot: Parties?

1-00:09:01

Huff: Not too much. I wasn't a party guy. I didn't have a car. Didn't have the girls. [chuckles] I had one girlfriend that was pretty nice, you know. Part Indian. Other than that—in fact, I didn't even finish high school. I finished the tenth grade, came out to California, and then after I got out of the Navy I finished my high school. You know, the GED thing.

1-00:09:26

Wilmot: You described the community you lived in was a formerly Indian Reservation? What tribe was there?

1-00:09:36

Huff: Probably Cherokee, because I went to school with Choctaws and Cherokees. And when I was in the Navy, right after the war I guess is when it was, I went back to Oklahoma, right on that farm where we used to live. And the government had bought up the land and everything around there to put in a dam up the river, and make a big lake and everything. But there was Indian burial grounds. And I didn't know—we didn't know—my grandfather never knew it—a burial ground, and they had to dig all them grounds up—burial

places up before they covered it with water. And you should have seen the stuff that was buried with them Indians. In the middle of our cornfields! I said, "Man, if I knew them suckers had been there, I'd a been diggin'." [laughs] You know?

1-00:10:22

Wilmot: A lot of treasures, and--?

1-00:10:23

Huff: Oh, yeah, they bury them with stuff, you know. And I used to find these Indian arrowheads, and we just played with 'em like they shoot 'em with bean flippers and stuff for a long time, you know?

1-00:10:31

Wilmot: And I know that—was your family part Indian? Or were you somehow—how did you--?

1-00:10:36

Huff: My grandmother, I was told she was part Indian, you know, but I don't know for sure.

1-00:10:43

Wilmot: And then, you mentioned that you came to the Bay Area, was it? You came to California with sharecroppers, people who--?

1-00:10:53

Huff: Up in Sebastopol area, yeah.

1-00:10:54

Wilmot: Sebastopol, okay. And were the sharecroppers—do you mean that they were people who were also farmers like yourself? Or people who--

1-00:11:01

Huff: Yeah, they lived on our farm and they sharecropped. You know, to me, I don't know what a sharecropper—they help you, you know, and they take part of the stuff, you know, and everything. And they had several kids. We all went to school together, and--

1-00:11:14

Wilmot: Were they white?

1-00:11:15

Huff: Yep. Jones.

1-00:11:16

Wilmot: And were they also from Oklahoma?

1-00:11:19

Huff: Yep.

1-00:11:24

Wilmot: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about the journey coming west?

1-00:11:56

Huff:

I got on the train, and I think everybody on that train I knew. Headin' for California. I mean, I'm tellin' you. Used to get off—we got down to the LA area where the oranges are, you know, and the train just stopped. We'd all run off the train, and go run and get some oranges, pull some oranges off the tree. [laughs] You know? And then I got to San Francisco on the train, and then I had to get to Sebastopol. I think I had \$2 in my pocket when I got here. Used to snatch sandwiches and--[chuckles].

1-00:11:56

Wilmot:

So what did you do? You were 17 years-old? What did you do when you got to Sebastopol?

1-00:12:01

Huff:

I stayed with the Joneses. It used to be—all the kids and me, we was like, brothers and sisters, you know? I stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Jones.

1-00:12:11

Wilmot:

Did you find work immediately?

1-00:12:13

Huff:

Oh, yeah, right out at the Fred McMurray Ranch. That's where he worked. He took me out there the next day, and my first day of work—he was tearing a building down—and I was pulling nails all day. And then a little while after that, we was takin' out the prune trees—plum trees, I guess you call 'em—and cuttin' it up for wood. And we'd haul it into Santa Rosa to the chicken farmers, and we'd trade the wood for our chicken manure to put on the land out there.

1-00:12:43

Wilmot:

How much money did you get paid?

1-00:12:45

Huff:

80 cents an hour. [pause] Had a dairy on the farm. And as far as I know, they still have that ranch up there. Or the family does, of course he's dead, you know. 808 acres, then.

1-00:13:03

Wilmot:

How did you make your way to the Bay Area from Sebastopol? How long did you stay up there?

1-00:13:08

Huff:

About, what, two or three months, I guess like that. Four or five of us quit, we come down here and we want to go to work in the shipyard, you know? So I worked in the shipyard number three, and I was a steam fielder's helper. And what that was, was me and another guy, we'd go around, we had a bucket of soapy water, we'd go around checking all the oxygen and settling lines for leaks.

1-00:13:36

Wilmot:

Hold on one second. Let me move this out of the way. [pause] And so, do you remember going and applying for a job at the shipyard? Like, how did you know to go find work there?

1-00:13:52

Huff:

Well, 'cause everybody else was doing it! So I just had a work permit. So then when I got ready to leave, everybody was froze to their job, see. But when I got ready to leave, I told my foreman I was leaving, he said, "You can't leave. You're froze to your job." I said, "Well, you just watch me." He said, "Oh, I'll have your @\$ in the Army." I said, "Well, fine." He didn't know I was just 17 years old, see? [laughs] He couldn't do nothin' to me. So, after that I went back to Tulsa and joined the Navy.

1-00:14:25

Wilmot:

I had a few more questions about the shipyard. So you were there for three months?

1-00:14:30

Huff:

About three or four months, yeah.

1-00:14:31

Wilmot:

And what was the work like?

1-00:14:35

Huff:

Just everybody worked, man. You come to work in the morning. There was a lot of playing going on, too. You know what I mean? A lot of illegal stuff. Well, I don't know if it was illegal or not, but you know--.

1-00:14:48

Wilmot:

What do you mean?

1-00:14:48

Huff:

Well, you'd find all these condoms laying around on the ground, and in the water, and all that stuff.

1-00:14:51

Wilmot:

Okay, a lot of sexual activity? Mmm-hmm.

1-00:14:55

Huff:

Of course, I had to work day shifts 'cause I was underage; I couldn't work nights, you know. But when we'd come in in the morning—and one morning—I had a little Model A Ford, I was driving to work—and it was foggy, couldn't see nothing. And this lady wanted to follow us. Well, we run off in a ditch, she followed right in behind us. So...so...and watched a guy one day—at the shipyard, they lift these big sheets of steel up, and got them clampers on it. And one come loose and come down, chop the guy's head right off. Yep.

1-00:15:30

Wilmot:

So it was dangerous work?

1-00:15:32

Huff: It was.

1-00:15:33

Wilmot: Did you have a lot of protective materials to wear?

1-00:15:35

Huff: No, see, the work I did, I would just go around and walk around, and check all the pipes where the oxygen and settling pipes run all over the shipyard, and go around, check for leaks. And then if they was leakin', we'd call somebody, you know, and they'd come fix 'em, you know.

And we'd be down in one of them ships checking the pipes, and the electricity would go off. Scary.

1-00:16:01

Wilmot: Sounds terrifying. You would just be there in the dark?

1-00:16:04

Huff: Yeah, you'd have to have a light, something, boy.

1-00:16:06

Wilmot: The other people in the shipyards, were they also from Oklahoma? Or were there people from everywhere?

1-00:16:11

Huff: A lot of them were. They were from everywhere, yeah. They were from everywhere.

1-00:16:14

Wilmot: And were you working with people of all ethnicities?

1-00:16:16

Huff: I don't care if they was from Arkansas, Alabama, or where they're from. They're all Okies! That what they call 'em, Okies.

1-00:16:23

Wilmot: And were there people who were, like, of all ethnic backgrounds? Like, were there black people--

1-00:16:27

Huff: Oh, yeah, black.

1-00:16:28

Wilmot: --and Mexicans, and Native Americans.

1-00:16:30

Huff: I don't remember Mexicans, but there was a few—but the blacks, too, you know...

1-00:16:35
Wilmot: At this point, you didn't still live up in Sebastopol. You actually has moved down here.

1-00:16:39
Huff: No, no, I moved down.

1-00:16:40
Wilmot: Where'd you stay?

1-00:16:42
Huff: Right here in Richmond.

1-00:16:44
Wilmot: Where?

1-00:16:44
Huff: Yeah, I got an apartment—oh, got a room.

1-00:16:48
Wilmot: Your own room?

1-00:16:48
Huff: At Point Richmond. First place I moved out of—I rented a room from people, you know? They fixed me a lunch, go to work every day. [chuckles]

1-00:16:58
Wilmot: What did you spend your money on? You were making money, now.

1-00:17:00
Huff: Yeah, just a little bit here and there. Whatever, you know? I had to pay the rent and stuff like that, and then I had a little old car I had to buy gas for and everything, you know?

1-00:17:08
Wilmot: Did you send it back home, any of it, or--?

1-00:17:11
Huff: No, my mother was still working then. And so, she was doing all right. Her and my step-dad split up, I guess, before I got out of the service, I think.

1-00:17:30
Wilmot: So—go ahead.

1-00:17:30
Huff: I had a good step-dad, though. Man, he was good to me. Me and two or three other guys, one night, we got—we had an old garage on the side of the alley, and we was pushing the car out of the alley, going to sneak it out. Because I had a driver's license, I was about 16. And pushing it down the alley, and the neighbors down saw it, you know. So they go up to the house and tell them, "Somebody's stealing your car." A '37 Chevy. Well, they come in for me. They knew nobody's stealing it, all right. So they was up waiting for me about

two o'clock in the morning when I come home. [chuckles] My mother, she wanted to thrash the daylights out of me; my dad just talked to me, my stepdad, took my license and everything, you know.

1-00:18:14

Wilmot: So he turned out—he was pretty good?

1-00:18:15

Huff: Pretty good, yeah. Didn't do that no more, though. [laughs]

1-00:18:19

Wilmot: When you were here in Richmond, where did you go shopping for groceries and things like that? Did you need to do that? Was that part of your life?

1-00:18:26

Huff: Yeah, you eat at a restaurant or something, you know? A hamburger. That's all.

1-00:18:30

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. Do you remember where you used to eat, or what it was like for you then?

1-00:18:34

Huff: No. Just eat anything, you know. Then after I got out of the Navy—where was I at? I came down here. I went to work at Mare Island. First job I had when I got out of the Navy. Mare Island. I worked over there for a year. I was a chauffer. I drove anything from a semi to a sedan. And in 1946, me and another guy was hauling a boat across the bridge to put on a ship over there. And that was the year and the month and the day that Alcatraz prisoners broke out and everything, you know? And my buddy—I didn't know him at that time, but I found this out later—he ran the captain's gig out of Treasure Island. He was still in the Navy. And he landed the Marines over there. And we could hear 'em shootin', goin' across the bridge. And I used to tell him that, you know? And after that I was workin' at a gas station, and he worked there, and we've been friends ever since.

1-00:19:45

Wilmot: What's his name?

1-00:19:47

Huff: Bill Brinker.

1-00:19:48

Wilmot: Where is he from?

1-00:19:50

Huff: Michigan, originally. But he was in the Navy when they bombed Pearl Harbor, but he was in the Panama Canal, runnin' ships through the Panama Canal. And he got out a year after I did.

1-00:20:01
Wilmot: I want to ask you why did you decide to leave the work in Richmond and go back to Oklahoma?

1-00:20:09
Huff: I wanted to join the Navy. I still wanted the Navy, you know.

1-00:20:13
Wilmot: So you still were underage, but you went ahead and forged your mother's signature. Tell me how that unfolded, going into the Navy. Did you go to a training camp first?

1-00:20:24
Huff: Yeah, they sent me--

1-00:20:25
Wilmot: Were you in Oklahoma, or--?

1-00:20:26
Huff: Right there in Tulsa, I joined it. And I don't know if you ever heard of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, they used to be on the radio and play all different places, in fact, out here some. Well, his brother played at our induction center when we was inducted into the Navy. And they sent me right to San Diego. And then, one reason I joined here was I had always heard that they send you away, further away, that way if you don't like it, you don't go over the hill. So if I'd a joined here they would have sent me to the Great Lakes or Farragut and I didn't want to go there. So I go back to Tulsa to join, and they sent me to San Diego. [chuckles] So I got about two-and-a-half months of boot camp. And we got on the train and we went right up to Bremerton, Washington, and that's where I went on the battleship--

1-00:21:14
Wilmot: What was going on in boot camp? What was that like?

1-00:21:17
Huff: We just trained. We trained along with the Marines and everybody. Like everybody else, you know.

1-00:21:20
Wilmot: Was it hard work?

1-00:21:21
Huff: Yeah, when they have you do double-time up the hill, runnin'. Stuff like that. And you had to learn to swim if you didn't know how. 'Cause I was raised in a river, you know, so that was me.

1-00:21:34
Wilmot: What river were you raised in?

1-00:21:36
Huff: Poteau River. That's the one they dammed up.

1-00:21:39
Wilmot: What do you call it?

1-00:21:40
Huff: The Po-to River.

1-00:21:41
Wilmot: P-O-T-O.

1-00:21:41
Huff: P-O-T-E-A-U. Poteau River. It run into the Arkansas River, and the Arkansas River run into the Mississippi, and the Mississippi run into the ocean. [pause] Great.

1-00:21:57
Wilmot: So where were the other men in boot camp from? Were they from all over?

1-00:22:02
Huff: Well, the ones I—yeah, really. They were several along with us that come out on the train. And one old boy, he didn't want to go, boy. He got mad, tried to keep from going. And if you wet the bed or walked in your sleep, they'd kick you out. So guess what he did? [chuckles]

1-00:22:21
Wilmot: Both of those things. Mmm-hmm.

1-00:22:26
Huff: So you know he did it on purpose, but—I don't remember his name now either. I felt sorry for him. He just did not want to go.

1-00:22:35
Wilmot: And was this an integrated boot camp? Were there men from all backgrounds there? Or was it all white?

1-00:22:41
Huff: They had blacks, but I don't remember any being in boot camp with us. I guess, I don't know, back then, you know, they kind of separated them. We had several blacks on our ship, but they was mostly for the officers mess, you know, and everything like that.

1-00:22:58
Wilmot: They were, like--

1-00:23:01
Huff: Cooks and stuff. And they did have a battle station when we went to battle, you know.

1-00:23:06
Wilmot: So when did you get these tattoos?

1-00:23:08
Huff: 1943, I think it was.

1-00:23:12
Wilmot: Can you put your arms up like that so I can see them?

1-00:23:14
Huff: Wanna see 'em all?

1-00:23:16
Wilmot: You can if you want to.

1-00:23:17
Huff: Oh, [yells to his wife] Mom! You hear that!!? She wants see my tattoo and I says, "You wanna see them all?" And I start unbuttoning my belt and she says, "Yeah, if you want to." My wife keeps saying, "Somebody's going to take you up on that one of these days." [laughs]

1-00:23:31
Wilmot: I thought that you were trying to take off your shirt and show your other tattoos, but—[laughter in background]. That's okay.

1-00:23:36
Huff: Well, I started unbuttoning my—[laughs]. That's what everybody asks me, if I've got them all over. And I said, "Yeah, you want to see 'em all?" And I started unbuckling my belt!

1-00:23:44
Wilmot: Well, you know, you make some choices there. Let me look at you.

1-00:23:54
Huff: Dragon.

1-00:23:54
Wilmot: Mmm. Why'd you choose that one?

1-00:23:57
Huff: I don't know. Just 'cause everybody else did, I suppose.

1-00:24:01
Wilmot: 19—what's it say there? What's the words that --

1-00:24:01
Huff: Crossed the 180th meridian, 1943.

1-00:24:05
Wilmot: And you did it on the ship? So this is what the Navy sailors did—the enlisted did on the ship, is they would give each other tattoos?

1-00:24:12
Huff: No, I got mine in Honolulu. That's where you got 'em. [chuckles] They didn't give them on the ship. I got a couple on my back, and a couple up here.

1-00:24:20
Wilmot: What are these two right here? What's that? Statue of Liberty--?

- 1-00:24:25
Huff: That's a cowgirl. This the Statue of Liberty, here.
- 1-00:24:27
Wilmot: And who is A, with the heart?
- 1-00:24:30
Huff: Oh, that's just ace of spades.
- 1-00:24:33
Wilmot: Uh-huh. And then the other arm?
- 1-00:24:34
Huff: That's a rose and my mother, here. And an anchor and the USS Pennsylvania. And that's when I crossed the equator, 1943. And these others are just crazy.
- 1-00:24:46
Wilmot: Some ladies. In Hawaii. So you went and got a mess of tattoos.
- 1-00:24:53
Huff: Sorriest thing I ever done, really. [chuckles] 'Cause when I got this, I was going to be a Navy rat from now on but it didn't work that way.
- 1-00:25:04
Wilmot: So tell me about it. Tell me about it. Tell me about the Navy. What was that like?
- 1-00:25:08
Huff: Oh, I loved it. I did. I really loved it. I was a 40 millimeter gunner on the battleship. A first loader. I'm up on it, loadin' the gun. And then when we came back to get re-gunned, we went all through these operations, you know, shot down a bunch of planes, made all these landings. And at the end of the Philippines, we came back to get re-gunned because the big old guns, they can only cut the rifles off so far. So when we was in San Francisco, here, getting' it done, they sent us to a school down here by Half Moon Bay, Port Montara, I think it was—to a school. They come out with a new gunnery sight on the 40 millimeters. It was like a satellite dish up on the mount of the gun. And then I was a director operator; I fired the gun and everything after that, you know. They sent one guy out of each division that was on the 40 millimeters to do that.
- 1-00:26:09
Wilmot: Did you spend most of your time in a ship? Or were you kind of off?
- 1-00:26:14
Huff: All the time on the ship.
- 1-00:26:15
Wilmot: All your time was on a ship.

1-00:26:16

Huff: When we was on those islands—like one of them islands where you go up a river and hide, we sat in there for three months waitin' for orders. And we'd go on the beach. We had beer, you know, they kept it—they'd give you two cans of beer and you'd go on the beach, walk around, do this and that and the other. Talk to the natives. So then we decided to go to Sydney, Australia, two or three—us and the Mississippi, I believe. Or one of them other ships, I forget now. We was down there eight days in Sydney.

1-00:26:46

Wilmot: What was your favorite place?

1-00:26:47

Huff: Sydney.

1-00:26:49

Wilmot: For sure.

1-00:26:50

Huff: Sydney was nice.

1-00:26:51

Wilmot: Why?

1-00:26:52

Huff: Oh, it's just nice down there. I like it. We only went on the beach four times 'cause it was half the ship, you know, every other day. You know? So then we got orders to go. But they was good to us, Sydney was. Real good to us. And I've never been back there since.

Don't fly. Never been on an airplane. Don't intend to get on one. My wife's brother has his own airplane in Sacramento; I don't even fly with him. It is not that I don't trust the pilots; I don't trust the people that's workin' on them. I was on Guam, shipped in Guam one time, and we had some fellows came over from the B-29 base. We showed them around, they invited me and another guy over, so we hitchhiked across the island. At the B-29 base we spent the night and we was gonna fly from Guam to Saipan, which is about 100 miles, you know? Well, the big shots wouldn't let us go. So that's as close as I ever come.

1-00:28:06

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit about your fellow enlisted? The people you were enlisted with.

1-00:28:13

Huff: I don't know anything about 'em, other than that one I told you about. He just didn't want to go, boy.

1-00:28:17

Wilmot: Were there any dear friends you made while you were in the Navy?

1-00:28:20

Huff: Yeah, but, you know, the thing of it is, after you get out of the Navy—I used to go to the reunions at the Disneyland Hotel. Now, I was the ship with Johnny Carson, too. He was on the ship, see. Of course, he was a nobody then; he was an ensign. And we used to have the retirement reunions down at the Disneyland Hotel. And I asked the guy one day, "How come Johnny Carson never comes? He's broadcasting right here in Burbank." He said, "He never comes to none of them." He was just a private person. Never, you know...

1-00:28:52

Wilmot: Were you also an ensign? What were you --

1-00:28:55

Huff: No, I was a Seaman, First Class.

1-00:28:57

Wilmot: Okay. How do you get that designation versus being an Ensign?

1-00:29:00

Huff: Well, time in the Navy. And if you want to—my gunner—my Division Officer was always trying to get me to go up, take the test for Gunner's Mate. I said, "I don't want it." You know? I don't want to be tellin' somebody what to do. I want them to tell me. [chuckles] That's the way I look at it. But I liked it. It was good. But it's a whole different thing right now.

1-00:29:24

Wilmot: Well, I wanted to ask you that question. Go ahead, tell me. How is it different?

1-00:29:28

Huff: Well, we got no business in Iraq, in the first place, with the troops. In the first place, we ain't got enough over there to do anything. Russia fought them in Afghanistan for ten years and it didn't do nothing. The only way they understand anything is kill 'em all. I mean, bomb 'em. No sense in sending your boys over there; you ain't going to do nothing. And I'm not bashin' Bush, but he done something that I wouldn't have done. I wouldn't have notified 'em six months before I was coming, you know. They got all kinds of ways to get rid of stuff. So no, they couldn't get me to go again. No way. And I'll give you two-to-one odds they start to draft again, too, 'cause there's not many people enlisting like they used to. But no, them people, all they understand is death over there. And I'd either blow 'em off the face of the earth, or leave 'em alone and let 'em kill one another. That's the way to do it.

We got problems here they need to have the National Guard take care of! In fact, I'd like to see 'em start martial law in the country. The police can't do anything. The police—just like the other day, right down here in Santa Barbara, got after a guy who's got a record a mile long. And they chased him, and down here some place he got out and he was fighting the police, and they shot him and killed him. Now, "Poor thing! Why didn't they just hit him with a stun gun or something?" Come on! The police is even afraid to do anything

most of the times. Now the police is on a carpet, probably, see? So I don't even want to get started on that. [chuckles]

1-00:31:14

Wilmot: Okay. So tell me about how you—so you don't think we belong in Iraq at this time?

1-00:31:21

Huff: Don't belong there, period. Let them people take care of their own thing over there. In fact, that old boy that found Saddam Hussein, he should have dropped a couple of hand grenades. It's gotten worse since he was there, 'cause all them guys want to be head honchos over there. You know, they're killing one another!

1-00:31:41

Wilmot: What do you think is Bush's interest in being over there, then?

1-00:31:46

Huff: Well, who knows? You know, we're trying to be a momma and daddy to all of the countries. We've got stuff here that needs to be taken care of, you know. It ain't just Bush. It's ever since Vietnam. And if Truman had never fired MacArthur, there wouldn't have been no Korea or Vietnam, the way I look at it. That's just a little old seaman's boy looking at it, you know. And when you go to a war, they don't—now, the other day they had some soldiers—Marines had killed some civilians. Well, that happened in World War II, accidentally like, you know. I don't know if this was accidental or not, or nothin', but they did the same thing in World War II. I remember us landing troops at [Quajulin?], and not our fire, but the other side—they all was firing over and they was hitting some of our guys, you know. It just happens in a war.

1-00:32:54

Wilmot: Was that hard to see when you were in the war?

1-00:32:56

Huff: Yeah, you didn't think about it in them days. I used to see Marines and Army guys landing in on barges, and the Japs would hit the barges. Just blew 'em to pieces. Never knew what hit 'em. Sure it is, but you don't think about it at the time. After you get back you get to thinking about it, you know? And that's when it bothers you. But this thing, like what we got going over in Iraq, you don't know who your enemy is, or friend is. You know, they all look the same. So I just wish they'd get out of there and let them people take care of themselves.

You got more trouble down here on the border than you got over there, comin' in illegally. And up in Canada you got tunnels comin' underneath.

1-00:33:45

Wilmot: What do you think of that argument that says that actually we're all immigrants, since we all have come from other countries --

1-00:33:52

Huff:

That's years ago! I didn't come from over there. My folks didn't come from—their folks may have. But that's past history. That's like the blacks trying to tell you something now. Payback time. That's past history. None of them people's were livin' back then. They're just after something. I'm not a prejudiced person, period. If you're a jerk, you're a jerk. I don't care what size you are, or purple.

1-00:34:25

Wilmot:

I want to ask you the story of how you—you came out of the Navy what year?

1-00:34:35

Huff:

November 1945.

1-00:34:38

Wilmot:

Tell me how you came out of the Navy. Was it just because the war was ending, or--?

1-00:34:45

Huff:

Yeah, the war was over. In fact, we got torpedoed at—there's a hole where we got hit. [shows image] We were in dry-dock. Here's the middle of the ship. Knocked these two screws off, bent the shaft on this one over here; you can't see it. Killed 20-some guys. 52 hours before the war was over.

1-00:35:05

Wilmot:

Were you on the ship when that happened?

1-00:35:06

Huff:

Yeah. 52 hours before the war was officially over. We had been back to get re-gunned. We was the flagship. And we had just anchored in Okinawa, and it was at night. And we was in the process of bringing the flag back off the Tennessee, and there was plane flying around the harbor, his light on, everybody thought it was one of our own, you know. Well, the third time he come around, he got us. And then the next morning a diver went over the side and he got four guys out through the hole, but they couldn't get to the rest of them, so we stretched a net over the hole 'cause there was a typhoon coming in. And all a ship can get out to sea, otherwise you're washing right up on the beach, you know? So we had no power and the wind was about 125, 130 miles an hour, pouring down rain. So they tied these two sea-going tugs onto us, towed us out. The other ships got under way, got out. And one of the lines broke to one of the tugs; they was tandem. And we couldn't shoot a line back over because the wind was too hard. So two days, that hurricane just blew us around at will. We had no ventilation, no nothin', 'cause the torpedo hit right in our engine rooms in the Quarter Master's division. And finally, we got going; they put us afloat in dry-dock, and that's where we are there. And by this time the war's over.

1-00:36:38

Wilmot:

So when you say "It didn't turn out the way you had expected," meaning you didn't end up staying in the Navy? Could you have reenlisted to stay?

1-00:36:48

Huff:

Yeah, I could have stayed, but I don't know why. Just one of them things. I don't know. I just decided to get out. Sometimes I wish I had have stayed, and other times I don't, you know. Of course, I would have got out when I was 37 years-old, and still went to work for the state or something, you know. But you can always look back.

1-00:37:10

Wilmot:

Did you get any money for your college education? Or did you get anything as a result?

1-00:37:15

Huff:

I never took a dime of it. No, that had what they called—put in a 52/20 club. You get—what was it? They called it a 52/20 club. You get so much so long. I never even drawn on none of that. I got out and got me a job. In fact, I always had two or three jobs. But there were a lot of people—my friend, he took advantage of the GI Bill, went and graduated from the University of California and everything. But I never draw none of that.

1-00:37:50

Wilmot:

What kind of work did you do after the war was over when you were done with being in the Navy?

1-00:37:56

Huff:

Well, I worked—let's see, I worked—first job I had was Mare Island. Drove a truck. And then '47, or along in there, I worked for Davey's Tree Service, which is PG&E. Did their trimmin' trees for power lines. Then in '48 I went to work for the City of Berkeley, tree trimmer. And I always had another job at the gas station garage—like I said, two or three jobs. Then in 1949, I married and I was still working here and there and everything. So she had two boys when I married her, and then we had a daughter. So I went to work for the—as a--

1-00:38:43

Wilmot:

Where did you meet your wife at that time?

1-00:38:46

Huff:

I was working at the gas station, and she walked up. She had a flat tire down a few blocks away and wanted to know if I could go down and change it. And I said, "Well, I can't now, but when the other guy comes in, I'll go down and change it." And she worked at Cal. And I said, "If you want to, you can take my little car and go into work, and then I'll go down and get it, and you can come back and get it." She did. And we got to comin' in and getting gas, and talking. I told her my name was Huff. She looks at me, and her sister had married a guy named Huff, and from the same state. No relation! [laughs] So anyway, ended up getting married a year later.

1-00:39:24

Wilmot:

What was her name?

1-00:39:25

Huff: Ruth Trippee, back then.

1-00:39:26

Wilmot: And where was she from?

1-00:39:28

Huff: Oklahoma originally, but her folks came out here during the Dustbowl days—in the Depression days, in the '30s. And she graduated from high school in 1935, down in Brawley, California. Then gradually moved up here, she married a guy, wasn't worth a [makes a gesture]. And moved up here and went to work at the university for the US Forest Service. And after that--

1-00:39:57

Wilmot: Would you mind taking off your hat?

1-00:40:07

Huff: [pause] The wife I got now, we got married in '68. And she had two girls when I married her. So I think I married women with kids, mostly, 'cause I grew up without any brothers and sisters, you know, and everything. And without a dad. So she had two girls, a 13 year-old and a 16 year-old when I married her. They're all doing good, got good jobs and a bunch of grandkids. [laughs]

1-00:40:35

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. That's a blessing.

1-00:40:37

Huff: Yeah, it is, boy. Yep. And I met her [referring to his present wife] through a lady I knew way back, right after the war. Well, heck, probably during the war or something. The guy I was runnin' around with all the time, we was like brothers. And his cousin, there was nothing between us, but her husband got killed in Germany right before the war was over—you know, over there. And she was pregnant when he left; he never even get to see his kid. So that was in 19—God, I forget when that was. But anyway, I hadn't seen her for about 20 years. And I had a cousin in Bakersfield, and I was going down to see him, and I saw this buddy of mine, like I said, was almost a brother. What happened to his cousin? Well, she lives in Visalia. So I called her up. And she was getting' ready to go to Arkansas, her dad was dying—her and her girls. So I said, "Well, I'm going to Bakersfield. I'll stop by." So I did, and I was talking to her, and she'd just had her car tuned up and it still wasn't running right. So I'm underneath her hood, my butt stickin' out, you know, and out of the corner of my eye I see this car pull up, and then pretty soon it went on. Well, I found out later it was her, 'cause when I went—Hazel, she road with me on to Bakersfield, and the girls followed us, and then we got to talkin'. And she told me she had a girlfriend she wanted me to meet. Snd she wasn't interested. And Hazel told her, "Well, we get a free pizza out of it anyway." So I went down and went out for pizza and everything. And her girls had her all spruced up,

you know? [laughs] Remember that, mom? [to his wife] Anyway, and that was her.

1-00:42:42

Wilmot: What's her name?

1-00:42:44

Huff: The gal down there? Oh, Mary Lou.

1-00:42:46

Wilmot: That's Mary Lou.

1-00:42:46

Huff: That's Mary Lou. So anyway, she said the first thing she saw on me was my rear end sticking out of Hazel's car. I said, "Well, you must have liked it." [laughs] So—that's history after that, about a year later. Yeah.

1-00:43:07

Wilmot: Tell me why you chose to come back to Richmond after traveling all over the world, and having been in different parts of the country. After the war, you chose to be here, and why is that?

1-00:43:16

Huff: I just wasn't going back to Oklahoma. Didn't have any—well, my mother was still there, and she died in '86. I came here, like I said, in '42, went back and joined the Navy. Then when I married my first wife, at the end of '54, we moved to Hayward, where the college is now on Highland Boulevard. And we lived there about until November of '58, and she died. We had just built a new house, lived in it four months. You know, and I just sold it and moved back over here where I knew everybody.

1-00:43:52

Wilmot: Before you met your first wife, where were you living in the Bay Area?

1-00:43:58

Huff: Right here in Richmond!

1-00:43:59

Wilmot: Right here in Richmond. Where?

1-00:44:01

Huff: In housing. Lived in the housing. After I come back—

1-00:44:05

Wilmot: This is after the war?

1-00:44:06

Huff: After the war. I lived in the housing. That's where she lived, in war housing.

1-00:44:19

Wilmot: Can you tell me a little bit about how you've seen Richmond change over the years?

1-00:44:22

Huff: Oh, yeah, it's changed. And it ain't for the better, either. It's gone broke. These people stoled it blind, for one thing. I don't know what the problem is. We've been thinking about moving, but, you know, it's tough to move.

1-00:44:50

Wilmot: I have a couple other questions, and I'm a little bit concerned 'cause someone is out there gardening, so we're going to hear that on your tape. [sound of lawn mower]

1-00:44:59

Huff: What the heck? Who the heck is that?

1-00:45:02

Wilmot: Maybe someone they hired to--

1-00:45:04

Huff: No, that's mine. Oh, that's Anastasia's brother, isn't it?

1-00:45:11

Huff's wife: Yep, the yard man's here.

1-00:45:16

Huff: Well, that's just him, though, it ain't yard day. I've got that guy—that's his brother—I've got him too many jobs. [laughs]

1-00:45:28

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you while you were in the military, or, just during World War Two, how much did you know about what was going on in Germany, and the Holocaust?

1-00:45:41

Huff: Just what we'd hear, you know? The only thing we'd hear on the radio most generally was Tokyo Rose, you know?

1-00:45:46

Wilmot: What's that?

1-00:45:47

Huff: Tokyo Rose, you ever hear of her? See, they don't teach that crap in schools!

1-00:45:52

Wilmot: I'm a little bit ignorant, it's true.

1-00:45:55

Huff: No, no, but I mean, Tokyo Rose, she was a Japanese raised right here in Chicago someplace, wasn't she or what? [to his wife] Anyway, she'd play music and she'd always tell you, "Ah, while you're out here fighting us, your wife's going out with somebody else." Nobody paid no attention to that. You know, we liked the music they played, you know? That's what you heard on the radio. That's all you heard on the radio, just about.

1-00:46:19

Wilmot:

Were these songs about—thank you, I'm good. [to Huff's wife who has offered a soda] I actually just finished my Coca-Cola, so I'm all right. What do you mean? Were these songs that were about, like, what was going on at the home front while you were away in the military?

1-00:46:38

Huff:

I don't remember all of that. All I remember is Tokyo Rose talking to the troops, you know, and saying what your girlfriend or wife, or somebody, is doing back home, and all this stuff, you know. And then they'd play records, I guess. But we didn't hear too much of it. I wasn't interested in it.

1-00:46:57

Wilmot:

So you weren't hearing anything about what was going on in Europe?

1-00:47:02

Huff:

No, we didn't hear about that.

1-00:47:04

Wilmot:

Did you have a sense of why you were fighting this war?

1-00:47:11

Huff:

I guess like most people, probably just because the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. We wanted to get even with them, you know? So I figured, you know...

1-00:47:18

Wilmot:

Do you remember hearing about Nagasaki and--

1-00:47:21

Huff:

Hiroshima? Oh, yeah, I was out there when that happened.

1-00:47:24

Wilmot:

You were out there when that happened? What did you hear about it?

1-00:47:27

Huff:

They told us. They passed the word around, you know, on the intercom. When they took off from [tien?] and went over and dropped the first one, and then a few days later they dropped another one.

1-00:47:48

Wilmot:

At that time, did people know the extent of what had happened with these nuclear bombs?

1-00:47:55

Huff:

No, I don't think nobody did, except for the one that was tested down in the desert, you know. They got 'em now four times bigger than that. That's what I said they should have done over in Iraq, or Afghanistan, with old Bin Laden hiding in them rocks up in the hills. Drop a bomb on top of one of them mountains; that would close all of them holes up. I think it—Vietnam, I figured, ruined this country for fightin', but I don't know.

1-00:48:36

Wilmot: What do you mean when you say that?

1-00:48:37

Huff: Well, I mean, we didn't win nothin' over there. And North and South Korea, they still ain't signed a truce, a treaty. Now you gotta worry about China. And I've always said, when Hitler started building up his army in the '30s, how come England and us didn't take note of that, and start kind of figuring, "Well, hey, we better get together with something?" We need to rewrite the Constitution of the United States to fit nowadays people.

1-00:49:19

Wilmot: What would that look like?

1-00:49:20

Huff: I don't know, but we got no courts anywhere that's worth a darn. Here's a kid just the other day—or a guy 'cause he's five-foot tall, and got a problem, child molestation—the judge gives him, what, a month. Probation or something like that. "Five-foot, he wouldn't have a chance in the jail." Woman judge. Come on. If somebody raped and killed my kid, if I got a hold of them, he wouldn't have no trial. You know? I don't like our court system. And I give you one example: my friend, who was a highway patrol lieutenant and a lawyer. Him and his partner were fighting this case, this old man died and he owned a bunch of shopping centers in Sacramento, around. And in his will, "Be settled within one year." They was on their seventh year! They ain't getting' paid, but that guy's lawyers is. Plus the income tax. So Ed got up in the court one day, got up in front of the judge, and told the judge, "Your Honor, why can't we just abide by the guy's will to be settled in a year? And we're on our seventh year." He told Ed, "Sit down, shut up, or I'll get you in contempt of the Court." That's a system?! I know you don't want to hear that. [laughs]

1-00:50:48

Wilmot: No, that's okay. It's all part of it.

1-00:50:50

Huff: It ain't what we're talking about, but anyway.

1-00:50:52

Wilmot: It's all part of it. Okay. I wanted to ask you a little bit about the Japanese internment here. You probably would have been in Oklahoma when that was really taking place. Were there—did you experience anything around that? Do you have any perceptions of it?

1-00:51:15

Huff: No, I never—they had—see, down about 40 miles or so from us they had a place where they had people. They wasn't Japanese, they was—I don't know what they were. Maybe Italians or something. But no, I never heard nothing about that. All I've heard is later, after the Japanese, they took their houses all away from them, which was stupid. You know, they was US citizens, you know. They should have never—if they did what they did, they should have

gave the stuff back to them when they got out. [pause] That's the way I look at it. [pause]

I never heard anything about prison camps, other than just what I told you. Out in Macallister, somewhere, they had a big place where they had them—put them out, like, working on something, in the fields or something. But we didn't hear much about that. I didn't stick around long enough.

1-00:52:36

Wilmot: Did you choose to have your children go to school here in Richmond? Did the children go to school in Richmond?

1-00:52:41

Huff: Her kids went to school—well, my first wife's boys went to school in Richmond. And then we moved to Hayward in '54, they went out to school out there and graduated high school. And then her kids went to school in Indiana, she came from, and she came out here in, what, '63?

1-00:53:03

Huff's wife: Four.

1-00:53:03

Huff: '64? They went to school in Visalia. And then they come up here, and Lynn finished high school here in Richmond. And Candy. And then she got a scholarship to go to Armstrong College. She went there a couple of years, and then Hayward. Graduated from there.

1-00:53:23

Wilmot: And your daughter?

1-00:53:24

Huff: My own daughter, she graduated from San Leandro High School, my own daughter. She didn't go to college. She was living in Truckee, and they went to Holland—he worked for a Holland computer outfit, and they was over there a few months. And when he came back, they settled in San Diego. Because his brother was a Navy jet pilot. And here at Moffett Field, when they closed it, well, his aunt lived down there, too. So they closed it here and the Navy paid him to go to UC Davis to become a doctor. So he was the Marines doc at Camp Pendleton. And that's one reason that they settled down there. Now they're moving back to Truckee, so they still got their house up there. And he got sent to Vietnam about a year or two ago—I mean, not Vietnam. Iraq. [to his wife] And you know what Bill told me the other day, mom? He's back over there. Yeah.

1-00:54:28

Wilmot: This is your son-in-law?

1-00:54:30

Huff: His brother. My son-in-law's brother. They was a Navy family. The dad graduated from naval academy, and my son-in-law was the oldest and he

didn't go. And then the other one was a chaplain in the Navy, and he's teaching over in Taiwan right now, and getting ready to marry one of them little Taiwanese gals. [chuckles] But, yeah, they're moving back to Truckee. In fact, Leslie's already up there. They built a new hotel in Truckee and she's working there. And I guess today is his last day down there, and they'll be movin' up here.

1-00:55:03

Wilmot: Let's stop and take a break for a minute, and then let's just consider where we want to go next. Okay?

1-00:55:08

Huff: Okay.

[interview interruption while recording media are exchanged]

2-00:00:00

Huff: --there he is up here, running in the buildings.

2-00:00:04

Wilmot: Let me see that? So you would periodically flood, where you were from.

2-00:00:09

Huff: Oh, yeah. It rained a lot in Oklahoma, boy.

2-00:00:11

Wilmot: Poteau River would then flood?

2-00:00:14

Huff: Yeah, Poteau River would back up and flood. They put in a dam and it stopped a lot of that stuff.

2-00:00:23

Wilmot: Are there any other pictures that you want to show me from this album?

2-00:00:29

Huff: [showing photo] This is my step-dad. Now, here's a picture of my real dad, one of them. And him. There he is right there. I showed that to the girls one day and I said, "You know who that is?" They said, "That's you." I said, "It ain't me; it's my dad when he was younger."

2-00:00:45

Huff's wife: Well, me too, except the coloring of the picture is different.

2-00:00:49

Wilmot: Let me take a look?

2-00:00:50

Huff: Well, here, you can see him better, but he's older.

2-00:00:58

Wilmot: I think your face is a little thinner than his.

2-00:01:03

Huff:

Yeah. And there he is now when he's—that's 1959, '58. Yeah.

2-00:01:11

Wilmot:

So you caught up with him later?

2-00:01:14

Huff:

Oh, yeah, well that's another story. When my first wife died, me and my little eight year-old girl went to Mississippi and looked him up. Got in there about midnight. And knocked on the door. Of course, he'd remarried again. He drove train. She told me he wasn't home, never asked us in, and his brother—the good brother—lived in the neighborhood—they both drove train. I said, "Well, do you know about his address and all," "Naw, but he lives down the street a few blocks." They'd been there since 1929 and didn't know what his number was? Come on. So I drove down the street, midnight, and found a house with a light on. His name is Charles Huff, same name as me. I used to ask my mom, "How come you named me Charles, not after my dad?" [chuckles] So anyway, now he's next door. So we woke him up, we spent the night. He was glad to see us. And that's him right there, Charles Huff.

So I says, "Well, Pauline told me he wasn't home. She didn't even ask us in." He said, "Well, I know he's home." He went and called up there and he says, "It's midnight now but in the morning you need to come down here, or we're coming up there." So he comes walking in, "Here, you want to see me? See what I look like?" He said, "I guess you've done been told everything was my fault." And he told him just to shut up. He said, "This kid's come all the way from California to see you, and he didn't come down here to talk about something that he didn't have nothing to do with." And he said, "If you want to show you're A double S, do it somewhere else." I have an idea his wife had something to do with it.

[looking at photos] That ain't his wife, there; that's his brother's wife. I don't know what the hell marriage—Pauline—there he is. Yep. That's me and a gal I used to know in the Navy, in Richmond.

2-00:03:09

Wilmot:

What was her name?

2-00:03:10

Huff:

Eva.

2-00:03:11

Wilmot:

Was that your girlfriend?

2-00:03:12

Huff:

No—well, she was. 'Til I found out she was a drunk and a whatever-else. And let's see, this here is—my wife that died, that's her sister's son. And my first wife's sister just died here this year in January. So I went to her funeral, you know.

2-00:03:47
Wilmot: Was that your first car, there? That white car?

2-00:03:49
Huff: No, a friend of mine gave me that. I had a Model A Ford. A '62 Falcon.

2-00:03:56
Wilmot: It's a really nice car.

2-00:03:57
Huff: I should have kept it.

2-00:03:58
Wilmot: Yeah, really nice car.

2-00:03:59
Huff: [to his wife] Should have kept it, mom. [Huff's wife says something in background] And then, this is my three cousins. This is my grandpa and them, which I didn't know all of them.

2-00:04:15
Wilmot: Let me see?

2-00:04:21
Huff: This is the one I told you drank Strychnine. My mother's oldest brother, here. And that's his brother, and the other brother. Let's see what else is over here. I'm going to fix them suckers later. Well, that's the same one you got up there.

2-00:04:55
Wilmot: Who's that?

2-00:04:56
Huff: [looking at photos] That's my mother's youngest brother. Of course, he's dead now. And here's when I first went to school. See, Choctaw Indian there, Choctaw Indian here. And there's a Jones, another Jones, another Jones—no, where is she? Another Jones up here.

2-00:05:21
Wilmot: Let me see.

2-00:05:22
Huff: [laughs] See how big—I went to first grade—school went up to, what, seventh grade, I think. A little country school, you know. [chuckles] [Huff's wife speaks] Yeah, it could have been.

2-00:05:43
Wilmot: So you had grown up around Indians, but did you find Indians in the Bay Area when you came out here?

2-00:05:53

Huff: There might have been some, but they wasn't full blood. These guys—you know what's ironic about this? Now, this is my step-dad's sister and he was full-blooded Indian.

2-00:06:04

Wilmot: Your stepfather?

2-00:06:07

Huff: This is my step dad's sister, she married a full-blooded Indian. And that's Henry, me and another guy.

2-00:06:18

Wilmot: Who's Henry?

2-00:06:19

Huff: Henry, that's the one that drank Strychnine.

2-00:06:23

Huff's wife: Did they live in the Indian homes, honey?

2-00:06:29

Huff: No, they—now, I was going to show you, here, my teacher. You saw the teacher here. See this, the teacher here? 19 year-old teaching school. Okay, I'll show you the picture of her grewed up and I'll tell you a story about her. [looking through photo album] See, I used to go home. Sometimes I'd be in one day in school. I'd be maybe only one, two hours there, and I used to go home with her and stay with her, you know, and sleep with her, everything. I was just a little kid, you know?

2-00:07:07

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. I understand.

2-00:07:08

Huff: And the years went on. I always kept in touch with her 'cause she was a neat lady, man. Shit, they were better than my folks were. And I'd go home—I joined the Navy and went home, and I used to always look her up. I says, "Mary, you remember when I used to go home with you and sleep with you when I was a little kid? You think I can do that now?" [laughs] She crackin' up, you know? She already married and had a couple of kids. [laughs]

2-00:07:29

Wilmot: She just took you in like an older sister or a second mom, huh?

2-00:07:34

Huff: I'm telling you, she was a good person, boy. And you know, we was back there one time. I used to go and see her, you know, and then the next time we went back, she'd had a stroke and was in a convalescent place, wasn't it, mom? And went over to see her. I wish I'd never went to see her, man. Never even looked like her. It was awful. See, that's the image you remember, you know. It's something else, boy. [back to album] That's the same as that up there, I

think. That don't go in there. And this is my daughter by her first husband when they got married. Got married in the Rose Garden, in May, raining.

2-00:08:19

Huff's wife: Only day it rained that month.

2-00:08:22

Huff: Yeah. [laughs] [pause] And that's my little girl. That was the war housing.

2-00:08:33

Wilmot: Let me see?

2-00:08:34

Huff: When my daughter was moving in. Can't see that too well. Shine's on it.

2-00:08:50

Wilmot: That was the war housing, huh?

2-00:08:53

Huff: War housing, yeah. This was about 1940—no, what was it mom? [to his wife] '49? '50? No, it had to be '50. '51, '52. '52 probably 'cause she's about two, three years old, here.

2-00:09:09

Wilmot: So, wait. So you got married in 19—the first --

2-00:09:13

Huff: '49.

2-00:09:13

Wilmot: 1949, when she was—okay. So you were living in war housing . Who else was living there?

2-00:09:19

Huff: A lot of people was living in them. They tore 'em all down since, you know.

2-00:09:23

Wilmot: And where was it, exactly?

2-00:09:24

Huff: It was on 3rd and Main, this one was, but they had 'em all over Richmond. They had 'em—I lived in one on 21st and Ohio, and 10th and Cutting. Yeah.

2-00:09:35

Wilmot: In that housing, like, who lived there with you? What other families? Were they also from Oklahoma? Where were they from?

2-00:09:42

Huff: Nah, just from everywhere.

2-00:09:43

Wilmot: Was it mostly white families? Or was it mixed?

2-00:09:45

Huff: It was mixed. Oh, yeah, mixed. There's the one I lived at 21st Street. [phone rings]

2-00:09:57

Wilmot: Okay, should I stop this for a minute? [presses wrong button on camera] Oh, this is going to take a picture. Watch your eyes. Sorry. Okay. When did you buy your first home?

2-00:10:20

Huff: At the end of '54.

2-00:10:22

Wilmot: And was that Hayward?

2-00:10:22

Huff: Hayward. I had a house with a half acre, and then I bought the half acre next to it from the guy's brother. Didn't want it. \$3,000 for a half acre, can you believe that? So, then, I sold the old house and built a new house on the other half acre.

2-00:10:37

Wilmot: Did you get to use a VA loan at all? You didn't use any of your veteran's benefits?

2-00:10:42

Huff: Nope. Nope. Here's my grandma in a casket, 1937. Died on her 65th birthday.

2-00:10:54

Wilmot: She was young.

2-00:10:58

Huff: Stomach cancer. I used to sleep in the hospital, with her right in the room, Fort Smith, Arkansas, when they found out she wasn't going to make it.

2-00:11:05

Wilmot: You were close to her. What's her name?

2-00:11:07

Huff: Amanda Akers.

2-00:11:14

Wilmot: [pause] And who's this one? Who's this?

2-00:11:16

Huff: That's my daughter, Erica. And here's when she first started at school. I got one of these made for her, but I forget to give it to her. That was in Hayward. That's my first wife's son. He was a highway patrolman when he came back from Vietnam. Let's see, where is he here? [looking at photos] Right there. And he went and spent 28 years on the highway patrol. And, let's see, I got a big picture of him someplace. I don't know where in the hell it's at. Well, I thought I did have. Huh. [turning pages]

2-00:12:03
Huff's wife: You do have it. It should be in there.

2-00:12:06
Wilmot: Let's look at this "Voice of the Bay Bridge." What's that?

2-00:12:08
Huff: That's me when I worked on the Bay Bridge.

2-00:12:10
Wilmot: Can you tell me that story?

2-00:12:11
Huff: Oh. Yeah, I was a dispatcher over there.

2-00:12:21
Wilmot: Tell me about that work. What years did you do that?

2-00:12:24
Huff: I transferred to the bridge in 1953. The first two years I was on a fire truck, extra fireman. Then I drove tow truck. And then I got a promotion, went into the office about 1962, '63, dispatched for all the state-owned bridges. And this here is where I retired, and I had a party over at Spanger's. That's one of the old call boxes, they made for me with the light. Put a helmet on it. [laughs]
And then --

2-00:13:05
Wilmot: What did that work consist of?

2-00:13:08
Huff: Well, see, the state has their own—when I drove tow truck, we had red lights and sirens, and everything on our truck. We, like, did a lot of things like the Highway Patrol, kind of, you know. And then I got in the office dispatch, and you have to—every time you send a tow truck out, you had to mark down the time you got the call, time you went out, time it got done, and everything. You know, you have to write all of that up. And so, anyway, one night—one day—we used to have a shift—we worked shift work—and the call come in about two o'clock in the morning one morning. And we had a shift, you get off at eleven o'clock at night, and you double-back at seven o'clock in the morning. Well, I lived in Hayward then, so I didn't want to drive 22 miles. I just slept out at the firehouse there, you know.

And a call come in about two o'clock in the morning that somebody'd climbed up on the bridge, and nobody knew if he jumped. So I jumped in the truck and went out there with the guys. And nobody else had climbed up there. So--

2-00:14:09
Wilmot: You climbed up there?

2-00:14:10

Huff:

I climbed up there, and here he sat about 15 feet back over there. And "Stay away from me, stay away from me!" I says, "Hey, man, I ain't going to bug you." So I asked him what the problem is. "Eh, my wife tells me I'm crazy." I said, "What's your name?" He told me. I said, "Harold, you know what? My wife tells me I'm crazy." I said, "It takes one to know one." I said, "You got any kids?" He had three little girls. This is 1957. So I talked to him, and told him "Don't do nothing stupid." And we had a Coast Guard standing by, and he saw that boat going by and wanted to know what that was, and I said, "Oh, that's just a barge going by." So he just—and then about the time I figured I had him about ready to come down, he wanted his wife, his brother-in-law, and their preacher out from Richmond. And do you know where he lived at that time? Not at that apartment house, but the one right down here. [points outside] We didn't live here then. So the Highway Patrol is running out, and getting them, and bringing them back. So about an hour I figured I had talked him into coming down, so I come down and got me a rope of the fire truck, made me a saddle with a slipknot in it, see, in case he fell, he may be hanging out there, but he ain't going to hit the deck or water. So I went back up and I told him, I said, "Well, now they've got your wife and your brother-in-law and them down there." And I'd holler down. He didn't want to go to jail. I said, "They ain't going to take you to jail, man!" And I said, "Come on, let's go down and talk to them, man. You'll be all right." So he come up. About two hours I was up there talking him down, talking him down. 1957.

30 years later, I retired, and it was in the paper. Didn't mention his name—see, they put in the paper everything you've—bridge—didn't mentioned his name, but said he was a metalologist at the Livermore Radiation Lab. And he said, he knew it had to be him, he told me, later. So he called me up, took me out to dinner, thanked me for saving his life 30 years ago. And here about three years ago, he died. And I went to his funeral, and I didn't know his girls. See, they was just little then. They's grown. And I went to the funeral and I'm figuring a way I can bring it up to them, you know. The youngest girl lives in Crockett, her name's Candy. So I said, "I used to work on the Bay Bridge." I said, "Do you know anything about the Bay Bridge?" She said, "Oh, yeah, we knew it, but he didn't know we knew it." I said, "Well, I'm the guy that talked him down." Man, them girls grabbed me, three of 'em. Thanked me for giving him 40 more years of life. [weeps] You know? It felt good.

2-00:17:08

Wilmot:

That's really special. That's real special.

2-00:17:14

Huff:

Yep. [back to photos] He always played the accordion out here at the banjo playin', ever since then. And he died about—what, mom?—three or four years ago, wasn't it?

2-00:17:23

Huff's wife:

Not too long ago.

2-00:17:25

Huff: Yeah, so, I got one here. I want to show you, some history, you want to know history. All these awards I got, I went through the sheriff's training, hazardous spills, and all that kind of stuff, I got.

2-00:17:42

Wilmot: Who is that, there? [referring to newspaper clipping in album]

2-00:17:45

Huff: High school wonder boy, [Fornham Fish?] He learned to fly from—see that thing he's on, that plane?—Orville Wright, he learned to fly from, 1912. And they had a postcard, I got the postcard in here. Made a picture of it. And he belonged to what they called the Early Birds. And he worked on the bridge with me. He was in World War I, a lieutenant. World War II, he was a Captain. He had a little drinking problem, but—so then, he was Pancho Villa's personal pilot. And one day one of them renegade Mexicans shot him up through the leg, and they shot him in the shoulder. Well, that was the end of his flying days, he left. And he lived right down here in San Pablo. And he finally left the Bay Area, retired. Had put him in a veteran's home in Yountville. And his stepson and I, we all worked together on the bridge. I'd keep an eye on him during the day when he was working, and vice-a-versa. He learned to fly from Orville Wright, soloed in four hours. His dad bought him a \$5,000 airplane. He was a prominent doctor and his brother was a doctor. And he used to barnstorm in these fairgrounds, people on the wing performing, and all this stuff, you know. And finally he—see, he got out of the Army. I think he was an airplane mechanic. And he was working on this plane down in Pasadena one day, you know, and he took it out for a round. He'd come in and flew right through the hangar and out the other side. Well, that was the end of his Army days. [chuckles] That was a no-no.

Yeah, he died up there in Yountville. In fact, we donated the plaque he had from Early Birds. He belonged to what they called the Early Birds, you know, from 1912. We donated to the Yountville Veteran's home up there. And he had a—I think I got it in here—a picture. It's probably on the other side now. Oh, there it is. That's the postcard I made the big one off of. You can see it a little cleaner there.

2-00:20:13

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. So you worked on that bridge for 30 years?

2-00:20:16

Huff: Who, me? I worked 37 with the state. I worked three years out on Walnut Creek Yard, and then I transferred to the bridge. So I put about 34 in on the bridge, 33, 34.

2-00:20:26

Wilmot: And this is the Bay Bridge, or the Golden Gate?

2-00:20:28

Huff: Yep, Bay Bridge. Now, the Golden Gate wasn't owned by the state. The nine Bay Area counties own it. And I dispatched for the Richmond, the Carquinez, San Mateo, Dumbarton Bay Bridge, and the Richmond Bridge. All of them.

2-00:20:45

Wilmot: Tell me what a dispatcher does, exactly. Like, they take phone calls--?

2-00:20:48

Huff: No, you're on the radio. You got a radio. All our tow trucks and everything had a radio in it. Electricians, they all—we had radios. In fact, we had a highway patrol radio, too. In case of emergency we use it, you know? And we had to log all that stuff. Keep a record of it, see.

2-00:21:07

Wilmot: So, you would call people on your radio and tell people to go do things? Like--?

2-00:21:11

Huff: Yeah. We had guys stationed at the end of the bridge in San Francisco, and at the island there where you go through the tunnel, at the island, and then at the tow plaza. My office was at the tow plaza, there. If you go through the tow plaza going to San Francisco, the last building on the left—you see that little shed up on top?—that's where we sat. And I had binoculars; I could look at everything. [chuckles]

2-00:21:34

Wilmot: So you would be able to see if there were stalls on the bridge, and--?

2-00:21:38

Huff: Well, we had buttons out there, call boxes they push. You know, like I showed you here, that one call box. That's what they made me a light out of, the electricians did. [Huff's wife sneezes]

2-00:21:46

Wilmot: Bless you.

2-00:21:46

Huff: Out of the call boxes. And they still got call boxes. So then—I forgot where I was going with it, now.

2-00:21:56

Wilmot: You were telling me, once they would press the button, then you--

2-00:21:58

Huff: Yeah, they'd press the button, but then it comes in on a ticker-tape and I need to tell the guys where to go. And we had cameras on the bridge; we could zoom right in on them. And we had to operate those metering lights. Have you ever seen them metering lights? We had to operate those. So that's one reason I quit.

2-00:22:14

Wilmot: Why?

2-00:22:14

Huff: I didn't quit. Well, I got mad one day and I told my boss off, and his boss. I said, "This place is run like a funny farm, man! No help!" So if we wanted to break, we'd put a tow truck driver on the radio. So I went over to San Francisco to check on my retirement. And I was working for \$150 a month when I quit. So I left. Bye.

2-00:22:39

Wilmot: Do you mean that you were, at that point, going to get \$150 a month from your retirement, or...?

2-00:22:43

Huff: No, I'm saying—naw, no. I could retire at \$150 less than what I was making working. So I figured the heck with that noise. I was going to try to put 40 years in, you know? But shoot! I ain't going to work for \$150 a month. I was retiring. [laughs]

2-00:23:04

Wilmot: I understand. That helps me. I wasn't quite doing the math.

2-00:23:08

Huff: Yeah, man. Shoot. So anyway, yeah, I liked it.

2-00:23:11

Wilmot: Did you get to have, like, little treats up there in that box? Like coffee and donuts?

2-00:23:14

Huff: [Huff's wife laughs] Hey, we had our own kitchen, had our own TV to watch the soap operas.

2-00:23:18

Huff's wife: Had a full kitchen.

2-00:23:20

Huff: Yep, ice box, everything.

2-00:23:22

Wilmot: Which soap operas did you watch in there?

2-00:23:24

Huff: *The Young and the Restless* and *As the World Turns*.

2-00:23:26

Wilmot: Do you remember the theme song from *The Young and the Restless*.
[humming] Doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doon, doon, doon, doon,
doon...

2-00:23:35
Huff's wife: Yeah. Do you remember the name of it?

2-00:23:36
Huff: I don't know what it is. Yeah, we still watch 'em. Still watch 'em.

2-00:23:42
Wilmot: Okay. So, now, how long were your shifts in that box? How long did you stay in there?

2-00:23:46
Huff: Eight hours.

2-00:23:47
Wilmot: There were eight hours, so you had at least two other people to share with?

2-00:23:51
Huff: Well, we had tow truck. We had sometimes four tow truck drivers on at the building area, you know.

2-00:23:57
Wilmot: But you had to share that job with someone in order to --

2-00:24:00
Huff: Well, I'd get off shift. Work eight-hour shifts, straight eight-hour shifts. No lunch time, no nothing.

2-00:24:06
Wilmot: There were three dispatchers, then? Did you work seven days a week?

2-00:24:13
Huff: Well, yeah, when we worked in shift work, you worked six days of days, off two, seven days of swing, off two, seven days of graveyard, and off four. You'd get off Wednesday morning at six o'clock, and you didn't have to go back 'til Monday evening at two o'clock.

2-00:24:34
Wilmot: Kind of like how nurses work.

2-00:24:35
Huff: Yeah. So then as guys come and go and everything, some guys wanted to work straight shifts, but everybody had to agree. I said, "Yeah, hey, I'll take it." I had seniority on everybody, see, I could get the shift I wanted. So I took six mornings, and two of the afternoon shift the last few years I worked there.

2-00:24:57
Wilmot: Who else was dispatching with you? Were there any other long-time people?

2-00:25:03
Huff: Yeah, Glen Davis. There was a whole bunch of 'em. Then gradually one leaves and go take over the Richmond Bridge, and retire and everything. But I was the last old-timer left.

2-00:25:18

Huff's wife: But you had a chance to take over a bridge in San Diego.

2-00:25:20

Huff: Oh, yeah, they wanted to send me down to San Diego. It was right after her and I'd gotten married and moved our two kids up here. And they wanted me to go down and take over that new bridge in San Diego, the Coronado Bridge

2-00:25:34

Wilmot: That's a beautiful bridge.

2-00:25:35

Huff: And I said no. I don't like southern California and I said, "I ain't going to take these kids out of another school," you know. So I didn't do it. Glad I didn't now. [laughs]

2-00:25:45

Wilmot: Is there a way that, like, because you were working on the Bay Bridge you became very familiar with its structure?

2-00:25:52

Huff: Nah. Didn't know nothing about structure. Nope, didn't do that. That was the painters, and ironworkers, and stuff, you know. I was there when they took the Key System trains off, you know.

2-00:26:09

Wilmot: So you were there from 1950-something.

2-00:26:12

Huff: Oh, I transferred there in '53.

2-00:26:13

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. '53 through 1960--

2-00:26:17

Huff: Well, 19 and—let's see, I retired in '86. But I quit in December of '85 because I had sick-leave vacation up the yin-yang, you know, I used it. I was out on that train one day, that the train tracks, the Key System tracks, and the old ties—creosote oil, and the trains running back and forth—and we was out on a—they'd catch fire. You just drop the drippings from a flare on it, and it would catch it on fire. So I'm out there firing that hose and that thing off, and I hear this train blow its horn, so I knew he saw me, see? Next thing I knew, he's bearing down upon me, baby. I heaved a hose, and jumped over the rail, and everybody saw heels flying in the air. They thought the train had hit me. If it had been any other guy—run over the hose, and cut it off, and they stopped. So the old man comes back who was running the train. And I told him, "If you wasn't so god-damned old I'd knock you on your ass." The Highway Patrol gave him a ticket.

2-0027:16

Wilmot: Were you in a union?

2-00:27:20

Huff: No. We were state employees, you know, we didn't have to have a union then. But when the old Jerry Brown got in, you either had to be a union guy or a CSEA member. Well, I was a CSEA member already, you know.

2-00:27:31

Wilmot: Cal State...

2-00:27:32

Huff: Cal State Employers, you know.

2-00:27:33

Wilmot: Did you belong to a credit union and everything?

2-00:27:36

Huff: I do. Number 9.

2-00:27:38

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. Cal State 9. Okay, were there ever—I'm going to put this down because I'm getting tired of holding it. [referring to camera] But what I want to ask you before—were there ever any other events—you described to me the experience of saving that man's life off the bridge. Were there ever any other special events that happened like that?

2-00:28:11

Huff: Yes, when I first—I used to patrol the bridge. I was on bridge service. We had a pickup that we patrolled the bridge during the commute rush. And that's before the bridge was one-way. And we had red lights and signs on our trucks, you know. So I seen this car stalled going westbound, and an old man and an old lady was trying to help this woman, and this woman had one leg over the rail. So I put on the siren and cut across over, and she had one leg over, ready to jump. She was real sick, sickly and all. And if she'd got the other leg over, she would have jumped. So I pulled her off the rail and called the Highway Patrol and everybody, and they come and got her.

And then, one day we had a guy—[chuckles]—Highway Patrol had a guy who climbed out on one of them gantry things that paint on the lower deck. Highway Patrol pulled his gun out and said, "Hey, man, you either jump off or I'm going to blow you off!" He come out crying like a baby. [claps and laughs] Those damn people, they want to get—something's wrong with them, really. I forget now who in the heck that was.

But, oh yeah, there was one woman who jumped off there one day by the island, and landed on the island down below, boy.

2-00:29:30

Wilmot: Did she live?

2-00:29:31

Huff: No, she didn't live. Then another guy jumped off the bridge and hit—he jumped out far enough, but he was too close to the pier and wind blew him right back and he hit the pier.

2-00:19:41

Wilmot: Did he live?

2-00:29:42

Huff: Nope.

2-00:29:43

Huff's wife: Tell her about the naked lady.

2-00:29:45

Huff: Oh, yeah, one woman took her clothes off up there one night and jumped off.

2-00:29:51

Wilmot: Did she live?

2-00:29:53

Huff: Nope.

2-00:29:52

Wilmot: I'm sorry. So--

2-00:29:54

Huff: She hit the island down there, too. And then one time there was a—let's see, what was that. I keep forgetting what I was going to say. I'll think of it in a minute.

2-00:30:05

Huff's wife: The naked lady in the car. The naked lady in the car driving through.

2-00:30:12

Huff: Oh, you go through the toll lanes, there, you can see all kinds of things. Primpin' her eyes, dressin', one woman. I kept seeing this highway patrol driving up through traffic going back, and back up through the traffic, and back up through the traffic. And he saw us looking out the window, so he comes up there and he says, "Hey, man, did you see that woman?" I said, "What woman?" He said, "That woman there with no clothes on getting dressed in the car." I said, "Why the hell don't you pinch her and give her a ticket?" He said, "There's nothing indecent about that." We didn't see it, though. [laughs] Oh, god, the things that went on, man.

2-00:30:49

Huff's wife: A plane hit the bridge. Didn't it hit it?

2-00:30:53

Huff: Oh, a plane hit the bridge, yeah. There was from L'Amour—naval place down out at L'Amour. And they took off from the Oakland [Army] Base over there, you know, and they hit that cantilever section, right before you get to the

island. Just right in there where the earthquake broke it. You remember that? You don't remember that, do you? Anyway.

2-00:31:14

Huff's wife: She remembers the earthquake. [laughs]

2-00:31:15

Huff: But that's where the plane hit. And two or three days later, they found them out there, still in the cockpit.

2-00:31:24

Wilmot: But you weren't working on the—you were working on the bridge when the earthquake hit?

2-00:31:30

Huff: No, I wasn't working on the bridge. I'd already left, but I went out there.

2-00:31:35

Wilmot: To go look at it?

2-00:31:36

Huff: Yeah, I went out there 'cause, you know, my highway patrol friend, we went out. And Big Jack took us out. We went out where the hole was, walked across the gangplanks, [referring to his wife] she like to have a fit. [laughs]

2-00:31:46

Huff's wife: That's the last thing I told him before he left home, was stay off of that gangplank.

2-00:31:50

Huff: You know, they had a plank pressed across where you could walk across, and one thing had fell. Yep.

2-00:32:02

Wilmot: I have another question for you about the bridges: did you work closely with the Port of Oakland at all? Or Naval Air Station Alameda?

2-00:32:10

Huff: No, we don't work with them. The Army base was right there next to us, you know.

2-00:32:13

Wilmot: Oakland Army Base. Did you work with them at all?

2-00:32:18

Huff: Mmm-mm. We had a car one day coming towards Oakland, off the bridge, and run over the Army base ramp, and run into the guard rail down there, and drove one of them big boards right through—I don't know how it missed him, man. If it did, it drove him right through that car and through the seat. Right through the motor. Just missed him. So I went over there and we towed the car off. I was on a tow truck then. And the big old timber was still in the car

through the back of the seat. [laughs] And then one day on the San Mateo Bridge—I was dispatching—they had us call out there, and they sent the driver out from the San Mateo Bridge. They had drivers there, too, but we dispatched for them. And some woman had run over a piece of rebar in the car, and it went right up through the floorboard, and through the seat, and right up her. [gestures to his chest] Killed her. She had two kids in the car. Somebody'd lost it, see? It probably fell off a truck or something.

2-00:33:17

Wilmot:

Rebar, is that a type of wire--?

2-00:33:19

Huff:

Rebar, they put in concrete when they build it. You know, rebar, reinforcement. Yeah, a lot of things happened. Boy, it's crazy. We had a car out there one night—I was on the fire truck this night. This was about 1953 or '54. And about ten cars involved, two of 'em burn up. So I went out there. So I'm hosing. One guy come out—this all happened in a matter of seconds—somebody told me it was there, saw how it happened. They saw this thing come out of the car and run across—they thought it was a pillow on fire or something, you know? And by the time you got about halfway across, he decided to go back the other way, and this time they realized it was a human. Jumped right off the bridge. It was a Navy doctor.

So anyway, got it all cleared up, and hosed it down with a hose, and I found a crystal. I mean, just a watch, you know? With no case, no nothin'. And I stuck it in my pocket. And come to find out that this watch must have come off that Navy guy. And it was an 18-jewel Hamilton. So I sent it back to the Hamilton Watch Company and had them to fix it. Put me a new case, new everything on it. Re-did it. And they never did find the Navy guy. I still got that watch in there. 18-jewel Hamilton. It's so old now, I sent it back one time when the main spring broke. And I sent it back to Hamilton Watch Company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They said, "It's too old. We can't fix it." I brought it down to old man in El Cerrito Plaza, and he fixed it, \$95.

We had a guy run off one day, run through the rail. Going off the Fremont off-ramp, at the end of the bridge in San Francisco where you go off down Fremont Street and went right through that rail, and it threw this one guy out and he hit the [Lillygrath? Lithograph?] Building over there. You could just see where he splattered. [claps hands] I've seen a lot of stuff.

2-00:35:34

Wilmot:

Did you ever worry about terrorism on the bridges? Were you guys --

2-00:35:36

Huff:

Nah, there wasn't nothin' like that going on back then.

2-00:35:40

Wilmot:

People weren't thinking about terrorism? So mostly disturbances were either car accidents, or people --

2-00:35:45

Huff: Suicides.

2-00:35:46

Wilmot: -- people trying to throw themselves off the bridge?

2-00:35:48

Huff: That's the way it was, yeah. That center anchorage, you know, halfway between San Francisco and Treasure Island? There's a center anchorage, they called it, out there. And down on the pier, people used to drive their boats out there and they'd go party inside. They'd climb up on there, and go inside, and party. It's like a big auditorium in there. So they finally started putting locks on the doors and everything, you know? [laughs] A lot of things went on.

2-00:36:19

Wilmot: Did you ever used to hang out in San Francisco, socially?

2-00:36:23

Huff: Nope. The only time I've been in San Francisco since I retired is on the bus. With the seniors. Went to Fisherman's Wharf. The kind of people over there don't intrigue me, man. Get shot, or—nowadays you get shot. It used to be you can do that kind of stuff, but nowadays...

2-00:36:44

Wilmot: Well, who does intrigue you? Who does intrigue you?

2-00:36:46

Huff's wife: [laughs] Grandkids. [laughs]

2-00:36:50

Huff: Bernadette Peters. [laughs] Yeah. Now the grandkids nowadays, boy. I took the grandkids one year over to San Francisco—that's right, I did, didn't I? I took the twins. We got identical twins. And I went over to San Francisco and the USS New Jersey battleship was in there. Right after, I guess, the Vietnam War, or something. Anyway, the guy that was skipper on it was on the Pennsylvania and I wanted to see him. He was a captain. And of course, when them ships come in like that, the captains generally go off some place; I didn't get to see him. So I took my little twins over there to show them—and I've got picture of it someplace with them big old guns and everything. That's one of the twins. And this is the other twin. [showing photos]

2-00:37:46

Wilmot: Mmm, looking just alike.

2-00:37:48

Huff: That's their sister, and this is their younger brother. He's in Sac State right now; he's going to be a shrink.

2-00:37:53

Wilmot: That's exciting.

2-00:37:55
Huff: Yeah. He's already psyching you out. So anyway, all them kids could talk about—they was ball players, you know? And they told me to hurry up and get back, and see the 49er game. [laughs]

2-00:38:09
Huff's wife: They were only about six years-old.

2-00:38:10
Huff: Yeah, six, seven years-old, man.

2-00:38:12
Wilmot: Were you raised in a church? Were you part of a church growing up?

2-00:37:17
Huff: I went to church when I was growing up, yeah.

2-00:38:18
Wilmot: What type of church?

2-00:38:19
Huff: I went to Methodist, Baptist --

2-00:38:22
Wilmot: You went to all these?

2-00:38:24
Huff: -- Nazarene. I went to any of 'em, yeah.

2-00:38:26
Wilmot: Hm, so your family didn't have one church.

2-00:38:28
Huff: I think my mother and them was—what was she? [to his wife]

2-00:38:31
Huff's wife: Baptist, I think.

2-00:38:32
Huff: Well, my grandmother—the one in the casket—she was a hardshell Baptist.

2-00:38:36
Wilmot: What's that mean?

2-00:38:37
Huff: Well, it's—I don't --

2-00:38:38
Huff's wife: No makeup, no nothing!

2-00:38:40
Huff: No makeup, no nothing. A hardshell Baptist. They believed in washing feet and all that stuff.

- 2-00:38:48
Wilmot: When you became an adult, did you make a choice about what kind of faith?
- 2-00:38:55
Huff: Nah, just plain old Protestant, you know. Church of Christ. We used to go to church up here—around here it's the First Baptist Church because we knew the preacher, you know?
- 2-00:39:06
Wilmot: Who was the preacher?
- 2-00:39:06
Huff: Franklin. He's not there no more. He's retired. So we went out to Bay Hills out here; I don't know what kind of church that is. Mostly young people. And I don't know how this guy knows all that. Boy, he's sharp, being as young as he is.
- 2-00:39:24
Wilmot: You mean the preacher there? The pastor.
- 2-00:39:25
Huff: Yeah, a young guy. Bay Hills, it's on Appian Way. You don't live around here, huh? Where you live?
- 2-00:39:36
Wilmot: I live right where Emeryville, Oakland, and Berkeley come together. I live right there. I wanted to ask you, also, the question of race relations in Richmond after World War II, after the war. The whole complexion—you know, people had come from the South, black people from the South—it had really changed. Did you experience that? Did you see that happening around you?
- 2-00:40:04
Huff: Well, I moved to Hayward and lived out there a few years, but I think it started changing during the '60s when all the hippies, and the dippies, and whatever—you know, constitutional rights and all this kind of stuff, you know.
- 2-00:40:22
Wilmot: Civil rights?
- 2-00:40:23
Huff: Well, whatever. Yeah. It's just gotten out of hand so far, you know.
- 2-00:40:31
Wilmot: But you were—so that was the 1960s, so you were, like, learning about Martin Luther King [Jr.]. Did you hear about Mr. King?
- 2-00:40:37
Huff: Oh, I knew Martin Luther King, yeah. I knew who he was. Good guy. They shot the wrong guy. They should have shot Jesse Jackson. He's the sucker that

stirred up more crap than anybody. That's not Martin Luther King. Nothing wrong with him. He was a good guy. But Jesse Jackson's something else.

2-00:41:00

Wilmot: So --

2-00:41:01

Huff: And it ain't because he's black, either.

2-00:41:03

Wilmot: No, I'm clear. So what do you feel Jesse Jackson could be doing differently, or could have done differently?

2-00:41:13

Huff: Keep his mouth shut, for one thing, and stay out of stuff that ain't none of his business. And pay his income tax. Who pays him?

2-00:41:22

Wilmot: So how did the Civil Rights Movement impact you?

2-00:41:26

Huff: Didn't bother me any.

2-00:41:27

Wilmot: Did it change your life?

2-00:41:30

Huff: Nah, I'm still the same old guy I always was. If you're a good guy, I don't care what color you are.

2-00:41:36

Wilmot: Did you kind of see the footage of the young people fighting in the South? Did you see all that stuff on TV?

2-00:41:47

Huff: Eh, I seen some of it on TV, yeah. That old gal that wouldn't give up her seat on the bus, I give her credit.

2-00:41:58

Wilmot: Rosa Parks, yeah.

2-00:41:59

Huff: Yeah. The government didn't treat 'em right, even during the war! But there ain't no need of them holdin' it against anybody for things that happened in the past. Do it from now on now, but all of them—most of them people now, it's payback time. Boy, I will never forget what—when—what's his name? A football player. O.J. Simpson. That guy is guilty as hell. But I heard this old gal on TV, about "It's payback time!" He killed that girl and her—killed them. Had all kinds of evidence on him. That's a heck of a thing for that woman to say, "Payback time." Just like that guy who caught Barry Bonds' homerun ball

the other day. He was an Oakland fan. He said, "I don't like Barry Bonds." That ball—if I was somebody, I wouldn't give him a nickel for that ball.

2-00:43:03

Wilmot: For Barry Bonds's--.

2-00:43:06

Huff: His homerun ball that tied Babe Ruth's record. Sittin' up there, and 19 years-old. "I don't like Barry Bonds." That's the worst thing you can say.

2-00:43:19

Wilmot: Okay. I'm confused because I'm not a sports person, so I'm confused about how these two are connected. But that's all right.

2-00:43:25

Huff: Well, he broke Babe Ruth's record. You know who Babe Ruth is! The only other guy to ever beat him was Hank Aaron a few years ago. And now Barry Bonds has broke it, homerun record. And this guy catch it—they balls are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars! So this kid caught this ball—a 19 year-old kid from, where, Pleasanton or someplace. And they interviewed him: "I don't like Barry Bonds, but I got the ball." I wouldn't give him a nickel for it. If I was anybody else, I wouldn't give him a nickel for it.

2-00:44:01

Wilmot: What's this part of Richmond called? What's this neighborhood called?

2-00:44:04

Huff: East Richmond Heights, here.

2-00:44:07

Wilmot: This is also East Richmond Heights? Okay. Well, I'm trying to think of any other questions I want to ask you today. Is there anything else you want to talk about that's important to you that we really didn't get to? Oh, I want to ask you this question --

2-00:44:27

Huff: Oh, the war, yes. When we landed troops on Saipan, on my birthday in 1944, we used to watch through my binoculars. I was a lookout when I was on the ship. A lookout. Had the binoculars. We'd watch the Japs; they'd throw their kids off the cliffs, and then they'd jump off. Committed suicide.

2-00:44:52

Wilmot: In advance of the American troops?

2-00:44:52

Huff: Well, while we was landing troops and everything, they didn't want to get captured or nothing. They'd just throw 'em off them cliffs, throw the kids off, and then they'd jump off. Killed them. Seen 'em do it. Saw MacArthur wade ashore, when he come ashore, returned.

2-00:45:09

Wilmot: That must have been a really difficult thing to witness as a young person.

2-00:45:14

Huff: Well, yeah, kind of stupid. [chuckles] That was their way of doing it. See, like the suicide planes, kamikazes. They flew right in. The ship right ahead of us one time—we was in Luzon—and about 15 planes come in at us. Man, we were shooting them suckers out of the water. And the ship, one of them—when we was going in, we was the lead ship. And in fact, I got a picture of it right here. Well, I guess it's in this book here. We was going in to Luzon 'cause the channel was kind of narrow there, so we had to—the only thing ahead of us was a minesweeper. And about 15 Jap planes come in at us.

2-00:46:01

Wilmot: How do you spell Luzon?

2-00:46:03

Huff: Luzon? Luzon. That's L-U-Z-O-N, isn't it? Or L-O-Z-O-N. So anyhow, there Port Manila is, and everything. Here we are, right here. That's when we going into Luzon, right here. Lingayen Gulf, they called it. We was the lead ship except for the minesweepers ahead of us. So when these planes come in and attack us, they give us a 180 degree turn to go back out. [showing] This ship right here is the Columbia, a jet plane flew right into the bridge of it, and knocked the peoples off into the water, and they fell out of formation. 'Cause you don't stop and pick 'em up; you send a little ship over to get 'em.

2-00:46:49

Wilmot: And you saw that?

2-00:46:51

Huff: Yeah, sure! When we made this turn, this ship was right ahead of us. The Columbia Cruiser. So it flew right into the bridge.

2-00:47:04

Wilmot: One thing that people talk about around World War II is the ways that the war changed women's roles, as women for the first time went out into the workplace. Can you talk a little bit about that? What did you witness happening while you were--.

2-00:47:20

Huff: There was a lot of women working in the shipyards, man. I'll tell you. Welders, burners—yeah, a lot of them. All the boys had gone in the service, you know? Women did a lot during the war.

2-00:47:31

Wilmot: Did they get treated the same as the men?

2-00:47:33

Huff: As far as I know they did. I don't know. They still talk about that women don't—for the same work, men get paid more than women. I don't know where they get that—I don't know if they do that nowadays or not. You got

women out here climbin' poles, you know, and all that kind of stuff. I'm sure they get paid the same as the other guys.

2-00:47:53

Wilmot:

And also, you mentioned in the shipyards that there was discrimination against black people during the war—the government discriminated against black people. What did you see around you?

2-00:48:02

Huff:

No, I didn't see 'em discriminating against anybody in the shipyard.

2-00:48:06

Wilmot:

What were you thinking of when you said that?

2-00:48:07

Huff:

Well, I mean, they talk about putting them in the service. Like, they do certain things, like, the guys on our ship, they was all in one [wad?] captain and then—a lot of this stuff is hearsay; you hear it on the news, you know? But I never see them get discriminated against when it was during the war, or nothing. 'Cause they just worked like everybody else.

2-00:48:36

Wilmot:

Okay.

2-00:48:37

Huff:

It's when this younger generation come up. You go down there and ask these kids in school. Did you ever hear of Bataan Death March, and all that stuff? They don't know what you're talking about.

2-00:48:48

Wilmot:

Yeah, our American educational system is not very good. You know, that's kind of a hallmark of America.

2-00:48:56

Huff:

That's history, man! That's history! You know, they can probably tell you more about the damn Revolutionary War and stuff than they can about World War II!

2-00:49:05

Wilmot:

Probably.

2-00:49:05

Huff:

Shoot.

2-00:49:09

Wilmot:

They don't know a lot. It's true.

2-00:49:12

Huff's wife:

And the thing is, if it had not been for World War II, our men fighting for the country, you guys wouldn't be here. Or if you were, you might be Japanese! [laughs]

2-00:49:24

Huff: None of us would be here.

2-00:49:28

Wilmot: What do you think about war in general now? What do you have to say about war? Do you think it's a good idea?

2-00:49:38

Huff: Well, this war we've got now, it's hard to fight a war. What do they call it? What do they call this kind of war? A terrorist war. It's hard to fight it. You've got 'em right here in your own country. What I'd do, I'd close the borders to everybody for a while, 'cause you've got too many people here. I don't any of them people wanting to get over here, especially the Mexicans. It's tough.

2-00:50:07

Wilmot: But then, some people definitely say, like, for example, Mexicans were here first all along anyway.

2-00:50:12

Huff: Oh, baloney. That's 200 years ago or something, you know. I know they always said they was going to take California back, too. But that's no reason, you know—too many illegals. Come in legally. Now, I can remember years ago, 30,000 could come in here, a year, legal. You've got that many coming in every day.

2-00:50:39

Wilmot: But then, what about those who say that basically our economy is built on this illegal labor?

2-00:50:48

Huff: No, it's built on China. There should be a law against—see, it's got so far out of hand, I ain't got no answer of how to fix it. I bought a bottle of apple juice the other day. Select, something--

2-00:51:04

Wilmot: Mmm-hmm. Safeway. Safeway Select.

2-00:51:06

Huff: Yeah, well, the writing says on it, made in China! I don't know if it says, "Concentrate made in China." I don't know if they're talking about the bottle or the juice, sounds like the juice. And then, look at Chevron. Our son-in-law in Benicia works for Chevron in Concord. Head of the Accounting Department. You know where they send him? To the Philippines. And to India. Come on, man! But you know why? 'Cause the cotton-picking unions has gotten things out of line so far, it's killing this country. I've never forgot what old Khrushchev said: "We're going to bury ourselves with our own freedom." And baby, that's coming true.

2-00:51:56

Wilmot: Let me ask you another question, too, which is about Chevron and Shell, and their presence here in Richmond. So you've lived here for about 40 years.

2-00:52:11

Huff: Yeah, more than that. [laughs]

2-00:52:12

Wilmot: Longer than that. I'm sorry. It's 50 years. You've been here about 55 years, in Richmond. And what has the presence of Shell and the oil companies been in Richmond?

2-00:52:22

Huff: Well, Chevron used to keep this town going, and probably does now as far as taxes is concerned. But they going to keep messing with Chevron 'til they gonna move. I'll guarantee you, the city is. 'Cause it's pretty old anyhow. But I don't know what the answer is. I know they got to keep people out of here someway or other. I don't know how they're going to do it. It's getting so far out of hand I don't think anybody can fix it. And it ain't just the President, either. This has been going on for years, you know? That border's been a mess for years. Now, how can anybody dig a tunnel from the line over here, through it, and come up under a barn, and somebody not know about it?! They got to do something with that dirt, you know? And the same in Canada. The illegals brings drugs in and everything.

2-00:53:26

Wilmot: Is there anything else --

2-00:53:27

Huff: And I think drug dealers, when they catch them--

2-00:53:29

Wilmot: Off with their head.

2-00:53:30

Huff: Right on, baby. The big shot. The big guys. Off with their heads.

2-00:53:34

Wilmot: Not the small ones? Just the big ones?

2-00:53:36

Huff: Well, any of them. Well, I mean, that guy --

2-00:53:38

Huff's wife: There would be no small ones if there weren't the big ones.

2-00:53:41

Wilmot: True that. True. Well, listen, is there anything else you want to tell me today?

2-00:53:46

Huff: Oh, hell, I can talk from now on, but--[laughs]

2-00:53:50

Huff's wife: [laughs] Did you tell her about being bombed? The ship.

2-00:53:54
Huff: Tell 'em about what?

2-00:53:55
Huff's wife: After the war was over, they bombed the ship.

2-00:54:00
Huff: Oh, they used all them old ships in the atomic bomb test in [Nanahuito?].

2-00:54:03
Huff's wife: No, no, no, no. Your ship.

2-00:54:06
Huff: Oh, yeah, I showed her a picture here when we got torpedoed just 52 hours before the war was over.

2-00:54:12
Huff's wife: Oh, okay. I thought it was over and they just --

2-00:54:14
Huff: No, they was already talking about it, and then—see, what happened was, we was in the process of bringing the staff back off the Tennessee. We was the flagship. And they're talking about the war being over; we're going to be signed on the Pennsylvania. We get to go to Tokyo Bay, man. Well, then after that, we got torpedoed and they assigned the Missouri, took over the flag, you know. We was all mad. [chuckles]

2-00:54:41
Wilmot: You were glad the war was over, though?

2-00:54:42
Huff: Oh, yeah.

2-00:54:43
Wilmot: Was it lonely being in those ships?

2-00:54:59
Huff: During the war, you didn't have time to be lonely. You eat chow, sometimes you'd have to run to your battle station two or three times before you got done eating. And then after a while, it got so bad in general quarters [sounds], so we just stayed on our battle stations and we'd take turns going getting' food and bringing back.

2-00:55:07
Wilmot: Mmm. Did you write letters? Did you write letters?

2-00:55:11
Huff: Yeah.

2-00:55:12
Wilmot: Who would you write to?

2-00:55:13
Huff: My mother. The Navy used to get on to me for not writing my mother.
[laughs]

2-00:55:19
Wilmot: Wait, they would supervise your writing and mailing?

2-00:55:22
Huff: Well, I don't know how they do it, but they did. I got some old V-mail letters, you know, that I wrote to her. I had an allotment made out to my mother when I was in the Navy, and she wouldn't cash the checks. The Navy have to get on her for cashing the checks.

2-00:55:37
Wilmot: You told me that.

2-00:55:38
Huff: She didn't think she was supposed to. Shoot.

2-00:55:43
Wilmot: Is an allotment something that you pay to your mom while you're in the Navy, or --

2-00:55:46
Huff: Yeah, you make it out to your wife in case you got killed or something, see. I had a \$10,000 insurance policy.

2-00:55:54
Huff's wife: I know there were monthly payments, too.

2-00:55:57
Huff: Yeah, monthly payments. They take part of your check and they put some with it, you know, if you had a dependent. See, my mother wasn't—her and my step dad divorced, and she didn't have no income other than—well, after she got down the road she had a little Social Security, but not much, you know.

2-00:56:13
Wilmot: So she became your dependent at that time?

2-00:56:20
Huff: Yeah, she still had some damn money, had Hawaii stamped on it. [laughs]

2-00:56:25
Wilmot: Say it again?

2-00:56:26
Huff: You know, during the war, all the money in Hawaii was like ours, but it had Hawaii stamped on it. That's in case the Japanese took over, they couldn't use the money, see? She still had some of that. [chuckles] Cash. \$20 bills. \$5 certificates—silver certificates.

2-00:56:50
Wilmot: Okay. Well, I think we can close today, unless you have anything else you want to share with me.

2-00:56:56
Huff: Never messed with no girls while I was over there. I can say that.

2-00:57:01
Wilmot: You didn't? Well, you were a young'un.

2-00:57:02
Huff: Yeah, I was a young'un. But in Australia when we was down there, man—hell, if they was married, hell, they'd take you home. They don't care if their husband was there.

2-00:57:10
Wilmot: Really? I think people talk about that wartime—I think you've kind of mentioned a couple of times that during the war there was a lot going on around those kinds of--

2-00:57:21
Huff: Well, in the shipyard. But I'm talking about over in, like, Australia. Boy, they loved us down there, boy. Jesus. Shoot, I was drunk—[laughs]. I'd get drunk.

2-00:57:33
Wilmot: Why did you stay away from that?

2-00:57:36
Huff: [his wife laughs in the background] You ought to see some of the film they show you! Venereal disease and stuff, baby.

2-00:57:43
Wilmot: They showed you those?

2-00:57:44
Huff: Oh, they show you what all can happen. And it ain't like it is now, and how they've got this HIV crap and everything. Them guys is gettin' just what they deserve, as far as I'm concerned. But no, during the war there was all kinds of diseases, you know? Everybody—or at least I was—I didn't want none of that.

2-00:58:10
Wilmot: Well, okay then. I think I'm going to --

2-00:58:16
Huff: Cruise, huh?

2-00:58:16
Wilmot: -- I think I'm going to close us out now, unless you have anything else you want to share. So that's it.

2-00:58:21
Huff: I don't want to tell too much. My wife'll get mad at me. [laughs]

2-00:58:26

Wilmot: She doesn't look mad to me.

[End of interview]