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Berkeley, California

**Aller Hunter**

**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  
David Washburn  
in 2005

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Interview with Aller Hunter  
Interviewed by: David Washburn  
Transcriber: Julie Allen  
Interview #1: January 19, 2005]  
[Begin minidisc 1]

01:00:00:06

**Washburn:**

Okay, so I know you're nervous, Aller, so I want to make you feel as comfortable as possible

**Hunter:**

I'm not too nervous!

**Washburn:**

Oh good. I hope I'm not too intimidating. [laughter]

**Hunter:**

No. I'm not too nervous. But I just--

**Washburn:**

You've lived a long time and you've also done probably a lot of interesting things.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

I always tell everybody when I start off an interview, and I've done dozens of interviews, if you don't know the answer to a question that I ask, just say, "I don't know what the answer is."

**Hunter:**

I'll do that.

**Washburn:**

It's as easy as that. This isn't—you don't ever have to ever feel like you have to make something up, okay?

**Hunter:**

No. [laughs]

**Washburn:**

Okay. So tell me when and where were you born?

**Hunter:**

I was born in a little town called Gary, Texas.

**Washburn:**

In what year?

**Hunter:**

1902.

**Washburn:**

How do you spell Gary?

**Hunter:**

G-a-r-y. That was our post office because the largest town was Carthage, Texas.

**Washburn:**

How big of a town was Gary, Texas?

**Hunter:**

Oh it was a good size. They had a dentist, doctor, post office there.

**Washburn:**

Can you tell me your parents' names? What were their names? Full names.

**Hunter:**

Amelia Mary Ingram and Thomas Ingram, uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

Oh yes, I forgot. You were born in 1903—

**Hunter:**

Two!

**Washburn:**

1902, excuse me. I wasn't listening good enough. What did your parents name you?

**Hunter:**

My parents named me Ayla Anne Ingram. That was my name. But most people call me Aller. But my immediate family call me, my brothers and sisters, some of my cousins call me Amissus.

**Washburn:**

Why did they name you Ayla, do you know the story?

**Hunter:**

An elder lady that was my mother's friend, and I was the first girl, and she wanted to name me. I had four brothers older than myself. She let her name me. I wanted to change it—I have never liked it. [laughs] Most of the people not related to me call me Aller. They don't call me Ayla.

**Washburn:**

How many siblings did you have there in your family?

**Hunter:**

I had five brothers and two sisters.

**Washburn:**

That's quite a big family. All living in the same house, eh?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, for a while. Some of them finally married out.

**Washburn:**

Ayla, what did your father do for a living there in Gary, Texas?

**Hunter:**

He farmed.

**Washburn:**

He farmed. What did he farm?

**Hunter:**

What?

**Washburn:**

What did he farm? What crops did he farm? Cotton?

**Hunter:**

Corn, cotton, peas, peanuts. Potatoes.

**Washburn:**

Was he leasing the farm there in Gary?

**Hunter:**

Huh?

**Washburn:**

Was he leasing the farm in Gary?

**Hunter:**

Oh no, we had a home.

**Washburn:**

So this was your family farm?

**Hunter:**

Mm-hmm.

**Washburn:**

Did you guys help out on the farm?

**Hunter:**

Yes, sure did.

**Washburn:**

What can you remember doing? What were some of the worst jobs you can remember doing on the farm? [laughter]

**Hunter:**

[chuckling] The worst job I hated was getting the grass, weeding the cotton and the corn.

**Washburn:**

You didn't like weeding?

**Hunter:**

Oh no!

**Washburn:**

You had to get down on your hands and knees, is that why?

**Hunter:**

No, we had something to weed, a hoe you called it. You heard of that? That's what we had.

**Washburn:**

How long did you guys stay there in Gary? Did you live in this home your whole life growing up?

**Hunter:**

No—oh, yes. We lived there until all my brothers married. All of us lived there until they married. And I went to Longview and my sister taught school in the community, one of them. I went to Longview, we lived there with my other sister, my youngest one. I did, to take care of her children while she do in-home care.

**Washburn:**

Did your mother—can you describe a little bit about how your parents looked? What did your father look like? Was he a tall person?

**Hunter:**

Yes, he was tall and slender, uh-huh. And my mother, she was kind of heavy.

**Washburn:**

Did you guys—what were some of the fun things you did around the home when you weren't working all the time? What are some of the memories that stick out to you that you did at the home?

**Hunter:**

Well, we played hopscotch [chuckles] and went to a movie every once in a while, round the home. We played school. We had school—it was four of us, we'd have school within ourselves, just the four of us. Play school, church.

**Washburn:**

Did you go to school there in Gary proper?

**Hunter:**

Yes.

**Washburn:**

What was the school called? Do you remember?

**Hunter:**

Shady Grove.

**Washburn:**

Shady Grove School?

**Hunter:**

No, Salem. Salem School.

**Washburn:**

Salem School. How many students were in the school there?

**Hunter:**

Oh, I don't know. I mean, it was quite a few. When I began school, we just went to school in one room, but after I grew up about ten or eleven or something like that, we had a three room school, had three teachers.

**Washburn:**

Did you and your siblings walk to school together all as a group?

**Hunter:**

No, all of us didn't go at the same time. The oldest went before we did. The three sisters walked together to school.

**Washburn:**

What about church? Did you guys attend a church there every weekend?

**Hunter:**

Oh, yes.

**Washburn:**

What was the church name?

**Hunter:**

Shady Grove Baptist Church.

**Washburn:**

Tell me, what did the church look like? Was it all painted white on the outside?

**Hunter:**

Yes, it was painted white, yes. We had a well, we had to draw the water, out of the earth. They had wells. It's not like it is now. They don't have to do that now. They had everything convenient like it is out here. At that time, when I was growing up, I had to pull the—I know you're young, but—we had a roller and a rope, you let the bucket down in the well, and draw it up, the water up. That's the way it was.

**Washburn:**

Did you participate in the church at all? Did you and any of your siblings—active in the church or sing in the choir?

**Hunter:**

Yes, I sang in the choir, and taught Sunday school.

01:00:10:04

My brother was—I had two brothers who were deacons. And my father, he wasn't no great minister, but he was a minister. We'd go to Sunday school and BTU every Sunday.

**Washburn:**

Your father did some ministering?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

What did he do?

**Hunter:**

He preached. My father passed away, I think he was young, I think I was about eleven years old. Because the year he passed I accepted Christ in church—that year he passed. My mother—I think the oldest son was eighteen. My mother reared eight children alone.

**Washburn:**

Wow, she was a very strong woman, huh?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

That's very hard. What do you think made her so able to do that? What made her so strong that she could raise eight kids all on her own?

**Hunter:**

Well, I don't know. It wasn't hard to do, I don't guess. It doesn't seem like it.

**Washburn:**

Were you very close to your mother?

**Hunter:**

Oh yes, sure. When she passed away in—when she passed away, well, we left. When she passed away, I didn't mind passing myself at that time, but I'm trying to live now.

[laughter] We left the year she passed—we left about—I think she passed in August and we left the first of December, I'm thinking. I know she passed in '43.

**Washburn:**

You're saying after she passed—what happened after she passed away? Where did you leave to? What happened?

**Hunter:**

When she passed? We came out here, we came to California. I had a sister that was already out here and we came out here. She was out here before. She came out here in '42.

**Washburn:**

Why didn't you—you couldn't leave until—why was it important for you to stay there with your mother?

**Hunter:**

Well, my mother was, she was seventy-two when she passed. We stayed there with her. And my sisters were working in the community, at the school. She lived with her, then after she passed, well, we left.

**Washburn:**

It must have been a sad time.

**Hunter:**

Mm-hmm.

**Washburn:**

What was going on for you then before, right before the war? What were you doing right before the war?

**Hunter:**

Not anything.

**Washburn:**

[pause] Were you working on the farm at all?

**Hunter:**

Uh-uh, no. After my brothers all left, well, we didn't farm anymore.

**Washburn:**

Tell me about that, what happened? Your father passed away when you were age eleven--

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

--And how did you guys keep farming at that time? What happened?

**Hunter:**

Well, I had brothers that would farm. We had two farms, one big plantation, then, a farm that we lived on. They continued, they knew how to farm. The oldest son, I think he was—I'm thinking, I don't know for sure--he was in his twenties. I don't remember that. But they farmed until they all married. After they all went we didn't do any more farming. And one thing, I think they cut that farming—I don't know what president it was, they said, that paid them not to farm. They raised cattle and hogs like that. Of course, I know after I came to California my brother didn't raise anything but peas and peanuts and potatoes like that. We didn't have no corn and cotton. They quit competing, the farming. I think all over practically in the South. I don't know which president—

**Washburn:**

Was this during the Depression?

**Hunter:**

I don't know what it was, but I know they couldn't farm. I don't know whether it was President Hoover or some of the others. I can remember him. Well, I think that's when the Depression, I think, when he was president. President Hoover, I'm thinking.

**Washburn:**

Ayla, so did you—what happened with your schooling? Did you end up going through the twelfth grade? Did you graduate what today is considered high school?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

Did you have any idea of what you might make of your life at that point? Did you have any kind of dreams or were you thinking about, reading stories about other people and seeing your life like theirs?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, I'd read stories about other people. I got different things—I was a seamstress, and needlepoint. I would do that. Needlepoint, you know what that is? And I got a certificate in penmanship when I went to college.

**Washburn:**

Where did you go to college?

**Hunter:**

Bishop College, Marshal, Texas.

**Washburn:**

How far was that from Gary?

**Hunter:**

Oh, it's about thirty or forty miles.

**Washburn:**

So at that point did you move away from home to go to college?

**Hunter:**

No, I went from Gary to college.

**Washburn:**

Every day?

**Hunter:**

Uh-uh, no, I went and stayed in the building{?}.

**Washburn:**

That's right, you stayed there on your own.

**Hunter:**

No, my brother's in—I had a brother living in Marshal, two brothers, lived in Marshal. But they wasn't living there then. I went and roomed in a dormitory, stayed on the campus, two years. I didn't finish.

**Washburn:**

What did you end up—what kind of classes did you take there?

**Hunter:**

I took Latin, geometry—no, I didn't take geometry I don't think--Algebra, and Latin, history, geography, spelling, reading, Bible. I took Bible class, I had a Bible teacher.

**Washburn:**

That sounds wonderful.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. She taught me twenty-third psalm and different scriptures in the Bible.

**Washburn:**

So who ran the college? Was it a religious affiliated college?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, but they had school, or we had some northern white folks from the North, his name was Maxim. I went to a—it was a white college. They had the college in Marshal, but black teachers saw that—I had some white teachers and some black ones.

**Washburn:**

So the college was racially mixed?

01:00:20:00

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. But the president, Maxim, he was something. He was from the North. I had a lot of good teachers that was from the North.

**Washburn:**

Was that—that strikes me as, this was still in the era of Jim Crow in Texas. It's still segregated at this time, right? Mostly.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, but that college wasn't. They had black and white. I had some black teachers and I had some white ones.

**Washburn:**

Was that—let me adjust this thing right here. [adjusts microphone] Ayla, was that—did you make friends with some of the white students? Was that a new experience for you? Can you describe that?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, pretty good. It wasn't too many, it mostly was the teachers, not many—maybe one or two. I think President Maxim's children, he had a daughter and son. He taught mostly—it was a black college.

**Washburn:**

It was a black college.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, but it was ran by—

**Washburn:**

By many white instructors.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, and some black ones. The dean was a black man. I had some—and my Bible teacher was a white lady, and my Latin teacher, the Latin teacher was a white lady.

**Washburn:**

So did you have any idea at that point that you were going to ever—let's ask, when did some of your brothers and sisters start moving away from Gary? They went to Marshal, like you said, but when did they start moving out to find work? In what years?

**Hunter:**

I don't know, I don't know what year.

**Washburn:**

Can I ask you this, where did they start going?

**Hunter:**

Well, two of them—I didn't have but two and they went to Marshal, Texas. One worked on the railroad and the other one, some kind of—I think he called it {darker?} where they make coal, where they make coal, I think. One of them did. They didn't do no farming. One worked on the railroad till he passed, he--.

**Washburn:**

So Ayla, where were you when World War II started?

**Hunter:**

I'm thinking I was in Longview when it started. I don't know exactly whether I was in Longview or {Pinole County?}.

**Washburn:**

That's right. So you ended up moving to assist your sister.

**Hunter:**

In Longview, uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

So you moved from Marshal to Longview? Can you tell me how that worked?

**Hunter:**

I moved from Gary, Texas, to Longview, Texas. I moved for that. But I was at my home with my mother when I went to high school in Marshal, and then two years in college.

**Washburn:**

Who was the first of your family to move to California?

**Hunter:**

My brother-in-law and sister.

**Washburn:**

Where did they move to?

**Hunter:**

Richmond.

**Washburn:**

For what reason did they move to Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Well, my brother in law came out here to work in the shipyards. He came out here in '42. My sister I think she came in '42, but he came out here and worked and he went back home—[laughter]—and came out here and we told him, "Well, you talk like you can just come out here and pick money off the trees." So that's why a lot of people migrate out here, because it was better.

What work I did, I did work for one lady, when I was in laundry. It was better but when I left there I was just getting \$3.50 for a week's work. But it wasn't much, so it wasn't too hard. Came out here to pick some that money off the trees. [laughing] That's what they'd say. They'd think--you had to work for the money. They'd think 'We can just go out there and pick it off the trees.' That's what some of them said. But we, at least, I did make more money in California than I could in the South. Three dollars in a week, they make more than that in a day out here. I made more than that in the shipyard, a day.

**Washburn:**

What were people doing \$3 a week in Texas? What did they have to do to make \$3 a week?

**Hunter:**

Well, what I did, what I was doing—I was working like aid and in-home care for a Jewish lady. That's what I did, and I got \$3.50 a week.

**Washburn:**

What did \$3.50 a week pay for?

**Hunter:**

Well, you know, everything else was cheap too. The wages was cheap, but I could buy my clothes and different little things, and then give my mother a dollar out of that \$3.

**Washburn:**

So you got on okay?

**Hunter:**

Eh?

**Washburn:**

You got along okay on \$3.50?

**Hunter:**

Yes, sure did. I sure did.

**Washburn:**

Then how did you first hear about the Richmond, and moving out here? You said your brother was out here.

**Hunter:**

Yes, my brother was out here!

**Washburn:**

What did he say he was doing?

**Hunter:**

He was a ship fitter. He worked at the shipyard. Ship fitter. Then, my sister, when she came, she was a welder. So he came back home and was telling us about it. So we came

out here to get some of the work. Of course we didn't—I didn't—I guess I worked there about six months. It was just too cold for me on the Bay.

**Washburn:**

Tell me, Ayla, your mom passed away—

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

And then why did you decide to move out to California? Why was that the thing you decided to do? Why not stay in Texas?

**Hunter:**

Well, my brother came back and told my other sister, it was two sisters there. My youngest sister came out here with her husband. So we left and came out here with her. It wasn't no more—I had brothers back there, but the three sisters came to California. We wanted to be together.

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**Washburn:**

Did your step-brother come out and bring you guys back? How did you make the trip? Talk a little bit about that.

**Hunter:**

We came on a train. My brother-in-law sent for us, and we came on train out here.

**Washburn:**

Were you nervous, Ms. Hunter? Were you at all nervous about—had you been outside of Texas until this time?

**Hunter:**

No. No, uh-huh, I had been to Louisiana. Shreveport, Louisiana. I was just nervous coming on the train when you coming around those mountains. I was glad to get away.

**Washburn:**

So it was a big trip for you?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, sure was. Just around the mountains on the train, you'd see the other end. You'd be in the—could see the—you know about it.

**Washburn:**

How the train would curve around and you could see the—

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, the whole mountains. It seemed it was right on the edge, you could see down those canyons. [laughter]

**Washburn:**

It is kind of scary. [laughter]

**Hunter:**

Yes, it was.

**Washburn:**

I get a little scared of heights myself, so I know what you're talking about. What were you and your sisters talking about on the train? Were you guys dreaming together, or were you crying together? What were you guys talking about?

**Hunter:**

No, we wasn't crying together. [laughing] We just was sorry that we left our lunch. We made us a big lunch to bring, to have. You know—I think we was about two nights or something. I can't remember now how long it was. We just hate we left our lunch but people was nice. They shared with us. They shared their food with us.

**Washburn:**

What kind of train was it? Was it a Santa Fe?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. It came to this station down here.

**Washburn:**

It came right into Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Right into Richmond.

**Washburn:**

So tell me, you guys step off the train, and what did you do?

**Hunter:**

A cab picked us up and he didn't understand the—the communication—we had to write out. We told him where our sister was living on Alamo in Richmond and everything but he just couldn't find it. So we went to another person's home and they took us in that night. When morning, he took us—he didn't know the town, the cabman. That's what, we got us a cab at the Santa Fe station down there.

**Washburn:**

Do you guys drove around it sounds like, a little bit, around town. What did you see? What did you see, what did you smell? What were you thinking about this new place that you were going to live in?

**Hunter:**

You're talking about out here? Well I hate—when I first came out here, I was sorry that I left but, it just so muddy and cold and raining. I was sorry. I wished I'd have stayed there and continued to get that \$3.50 a week. [laughing] But later on I was glad. Yes, it's just

cold, I never will forget the night, we drove around all night. I had what you call the flu. The next week it got so cold.

**Washburn:**

Did you come in winter? Is that why it was so cold?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. I guess we was here about a week before Christmas, the last of November. I think that's when we got here, about a week, I think, before Christmas.

**Washburn:**

What year was that?

**Hunter:**

I don't know. We left in—yes, 1943.

**Washburn:**

1943?

**Hunter:**

Yes, that's when it was.

**Washburn:**

So you stayed at someone's house that night?

**Hunter:**

Yes. We went by there and I think it might have been—it's been quite a while, I don't know exactly how everything was at that time—anyway the taxi rode, he couldn't find the street. Couldn't find Alamo. So he went to someone's house, and he knew my people, because we was just right—he lived right down the street. He said, "Well, y'all can spend the rest of the night here with us. Then, I'll take you down there in the morning and show you." And so he took us. He didn't know exactly the town, I guess he might have been new.

**Washburn:**

That was nice of that person to take you in. Do you remember his or her name?

**Hunter:**

Yes, it was. They was Brown. You know, when we first came out here, you couldn't get a—they all piled up. They got out of they bed and laid on the floor and let us get in they bed. A lot of people lived in the same house. It wasn't nothing like it is now.

**Washburn:**

It was very crowded in Richmond.

**Hunter:**

Yes, several lived together at that time.

**Washburn:**

So the next day you did go and finally find Alamo?

**Hunter:**

[laughter] The man knew where it was, the people, the Browns. It wasn't far down the street, but he wasn't used to it, I guess, new in this town.

**Washburn:**

So Ayla, did you—the next day, the next morning, you woke up, what part of Richmond was this? Was this in north Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

What did you think of north Richmond? How did it look to you? Did you think, “Texas is more pretty than this place, what am I doing here?” What did you think? [laughter]

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, yes, I said I wished I had stayed there. Muddy, cold, goats, dogs passed by. They say it was one of the worst spots. People had dogs out there and goats, horses. I hated that I left, but later I didn't mind.

**Washburn:**

Were people friendly to you? It sounds like the Browns were pretty friendly?

**Hunter:**

Yes, they was nice. The ladies that we roomed with when we first came out here, they nice. The ladies living nice. Her name is Norveline Harris. She still alive.

**Washburn:**

How soon was it until you went over to the shipyards for work? Did you do it the next day?

**Hunter:**

Oh, no.

**Washburn:**

Tell me what happened.

**Hunter:**

It was about a week. We went to the hiring hall, where they were hiring people on Sixth Street, downtown Richmond. They had a place down there were you had to go and sign up.

01:00:40:05

They take your finger prints and everything I think.

**Washburn:**

Was this exciting for you? Were you thinking about the new job? What did you think you were going to do? Did you have any idea?

**Hunter:**

I sure didn't know what I was going to do.

**Washburn:**

So what did they end up assigning you to?

**Hunter:**

Keeping the different rooms clean, sweeping. You called it "labor." Labor, what we did kept the, where the people would go down, go and weld, as they build we'd have to keep the rooms clean.

**Washburn:**

What were you cleaning? What was there that needed to be cleaned up?

**Hunter:**

Just like this room. They had different, I don't know what you'd call them. I guess you'd call them rooms. Like this we had to keep—you know, when they weld, that steel would come off, would be on the floor, and they'd use water. We had to take the water up and throw it in the Bay.

**Washburn:**

That sounds like—so you were cleaning up metal scraps and water?

**Hunter:**

Yes. I don't know what they used the water for, but sometimes they had a shovel with a long handle, and you take your broom and you sweep the water up and put it in a pail, and throw it in the Bay.

**Washburn:**

So, who were you working with? Did you work with your sisters or did you work with people you didn't know?

**Hunter:**

No, they didn't let two work together, two sisters. She had a different leaderman, and I had a different leaderman.

**Washburn:**

So describe how that worked. Why did they assign you to different jobs? Because you were doing housekeeping—it sounds like you were crafty with your hands, you said you were doing needlepoint before and all this. Did you think you could have made a good welder also at that time? What did you think?

**Hunter:**

You're talking about welding?

**Washburn:**

Mm-hmm.

**Hunter:**

Uh-uh, I wouldn't like that, you have to carry heavy lines. I was very thin. I wasn't as large as I am now when I came out here. You had to carry heavy lines, pull them to different places and wear a hood over your head. Uh-uh, I didn't like that. I liked what I was doing. Then they—let me see, welding and then you had to go around sometimes. I liked that better than I did anything, be in all that smoke, the welders did.

**Washburn:**

Breathing all the smoke.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. But they had some you know, to come down, but you had to stay all the way down, under.

**Washburn:**

What did you think of all the shipyards, then? Was it all this commotion? When you first arrived, how did you make sense of the whole thing? [laughs]

**Hunter:**

All those—see, we worked the swing, but it was plenty of people getting off of swing shift, woo-wee! All that commotion. It just kind of hard, but I got kind of used to it. But you had to climb. Like this, we had to go up ladders to the next floor, and take a pail and a broom.

**Washburn:**

Were you working in a segregated crew? Were you working with other black women? Who were you working with?

**Hunter:**

I don't remember any. I can't remember any, we just had a leaderman, was caucasian. I think all us was black. In the group would be so many, and they grouped about five I think.

**Washburn:**

Did you become friends with these people?

**Hunter:**

Oh yes, I had a—I really did.

**Washburn:**

What was her name?

**Hunter:**

Ernestine B. Jones, from Arkansas. One was from Oklahoma. I can't think of her name right now. Oh, we was—they nice! The group that worked together was nice to each

other. We shared food together, sit down and talk. We had, you know, close friends. We was close, me and this girl.

**Washburn:**

Mrs. Jones?

**Hunter:**

Mm-hmm.

**Washburn:**

Did you guys end up spending time together outside of the shipyards?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. Sure did.

**Washburn:**

What did you guys do together?

**Hunter:**

We didn't do anything together, but we'd meet up on each other—see, she lived on the south side and I lived on this side. We'd meet up with each other, conversate.

**Washburn:**

How often would you do that?

**Hunter:**

Not too often. I just was planning on looking in the papers, seeing is she still alive?

**Washburn:**

Oh, you lost track of her?

**Hunter:**

Hmm?

**Washburn:**

You lost track of her?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. Sure did.

**Washburn:**

So, Ms. Hunter, that must have been kind of fun for you. I mean, you're meeting somebody who's from a totally different state. That sounds like a lot of fun.

**Hunter:**

Mmhmm! Yes.

**Washburn:**

Why was that special? What was special about that?

**Hunter:**

Meeting someone I had never seen before, and nice. I met several people that I hadn't seen before who was nice. Just seemed like we was related. I have some now, feel like we related, and didn't know them until I came to California.

**Washburn:**

That's wonderful. Did you guys share stories about where you were from?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh! We'd tell where we was from. Good church friends, some of them, one of them called me yesterday and asked me how was I doing. One of my church friends.

**Washburn:**

Well, tell me about that. Did you start going to church right when you came to Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Yes, the next week. But I didn't belong. I had joined another church. Then, me and my sister went to the church where our brother-in-law—we joined a smaller church in Richmond, north Richmond. We joined another small church, but later we went to—when we first came, I think the next week, we joined the church.

**Washburn:**

What was the church's name?

**Hunter:**

Macedonia Baptist Church.

**Washburn:**

Say that again?

**Hunter:**

Macedonia Baptist Church.

**Washburn:**

Macedonia Baptist Church. Were the services that were at this Baptist church different than the ones in Gary?

**Hunter:**

I enjoyed Gary services. Sure did. [laughter]

**Washburn:**

But what happened here in Richmond? Can you describe what it was like going to church there? Did you meet up with people there? Did you walk with people on the way?

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**Hunter:**

In the church?

**Washburn:**

Yup.

**Hunter:**

Yes! I had friends at both of the churches! I can't think of the friend that I had at the first church that I joined. But I know the ones, the later church I joined I can remember—I can't remember any—of course I didn't stay at this church as long as I did this one.

**Washburn:**

How important was that for you to go to church in terms of—how important was it for you to go to church for your own spirituality.

**Hunter:**

I enjoyed it.

**Washburn:**

What if you didn't have church? Did you feel like, "I have to have this to live,?" Tell me about why, how meaningful it was for you as a person and as a good Christian?

**Hunter:**

Well, I enjoyed it. See, I was reared up and it wasn't hard to—I enjoyed it. I was reared up in church, that's all the people in rural [areas?] had, every once in a while they would go to a movie. That's all they—that was their enjoyment, was going—

**Washburn:**

Their enjoyment was going to church?

**Hunter:**

Yes.

**Washburn:**

Did you continue that enjoyment here in Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Oh, yes. Uh-huh. I worked in church at my home in the South, and I worked in church out here. I enjoyed going.

**Washburn:**

Did you work in church that first year that you joined? What did you do there?

**Hunter:**

Well, I sang in the choir at Macedonia. And I ushered also. I sang about two Sundays and I'd usher. They didn't have it like it was at the second one I joined. I didn't usher in the last one. I just sang in the choir. But when I first came out here, I sang and ushered, seat the people.

**Washburn:**

Miss Hunter, what was some of the—did you sing the same songs that you sang in Gary?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, some of them.

**Washburn:**

Did you learn any new ones?

**Hunter:**

Out here?

**Washburn:**

Yes.

**Hunter:**

Yes, I learned some. [laughter] Mostly out here we sang out of our books. Back there they didn't hardly—they didn't have song books like they do out here.

**Washburn:**

You were laughing when you said you learned some songs. Is there a funny story about you learning a song that you have? I think there's one there. Why are you laughing?

**Hunter:**

Because you asked me did I learn any songs, I did. [laughing] Sure did. Yes, we'd have our programs, had to learn them, but sometimes we'd be looking in the book, singing something I learned by memory.

**Washburn:**

[music in background] She's singing there, too. Can you still sing any of the songs that you learned? What was the most favorite song you sang at church?

**Hunter:**

Ooo! All of them, don't tell me to sing. [laughter]

**Washburn:**

Come on, you don't want to sing for me? Did you learn any instruments also?

**Hunter:**

Huh?

**Washburn:**

Were you just a singer? Did you ever learn how to play a piano at all?

**Hunter:**

No, I couldn't play but one song, and that's "Jesus know all about our struggle, he will guide us till the day is done." My brother had a piano but I never did learn. My sister could play. I never could. I didn't learn that, because I didn't take lessons.

**Washburn:**

How often were you going to church then at that time?

**Hunter:**

When?

**Washburn:**

During the war.

**Hunter:**

Oh, I practically go every Sunday. Mmhmm. Every Sunday I'd go.

**Washburn:**

Can you tell me, your church in Gary was small, people were probably related, people knew each other for a long, long time.

**Hunter:**

Yes, most, all the community—it wasn't hardly any people that we didn't know down there where I went to church.

**Washburn:**

Tell me, how did the church come together here when people were from all these different states, from Texas and Oklahoma and Arkansas—how did it end up coming together?

**Hunter:**

Well, they just come together!. It was just churchfolks went to church. I guess.

**Washburn:**

Did you guys ever have any—what were you going to say?

**Hunter:**

Eh?

**Washburn:**

Were you going to say something?

**Hunter:**

Uh-uh.

**Washburn:**

Did you guys ever have any picnics in local, in parks around the area?

**Hunter:**

Where?

**Washburn:**

The church, Macedonia Church, did you ever have any picnics?

**Hunter:**

I'm sure they did. I know north Richmond had picnics. I did know the main place where they go. I think it's the Marina where they mostly go, the young ones mostly go there.

They have different things there. That's the reason I like that, it was more active, at that time, than Macedonia. See, it was the largest church in Richmond.

**Washburn:**

Was Macedonia?

**Hunter:**

North Richmond, north Richmond called it north Richmond Baptist, it's about the largest. They had more activities than Macedonia did.

**Washburn:**

So you also went to church at North Richmond Baptist?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. That's my church.

**Washburn:**

During the war you went there as well, or after the war?

**Hunter:**

During the war.

**Washburn:**

It was a very big church.

**Hunter:**

Yes, it was pretty good. It grew after I—it was kind of small, and they built a nicer church. It wasn't no big building at that time. But it was plenty of room for the people. It wasn't as large as—

**Washburn:**

As it is today.

**Hunter:**

Mm-mm. They talk like it ain't so large. Our membership, a lot of them passed on, a lot of them left. It used to be, you had to stand. They had a balcony in there, a big auditorium where you assemble to worship. Then they had one up in {?} they didn't have all that at the other church.

**Washburn:**

Well, I think—how long have we got here? We'll talk for another minute and—we're going to take a break, okay? We'll go for about another half and hour and then we'll be done. Sound good?

**Hunter:**

[giggles]

[begin minidisc 2]

02:00:00:00

**Washburn:**

I wanted to talk a little bit more about work in the shipyards and the union that you joined.

**Hunter:**

No, I can't remember my union, really. I've been thinking. See, when I moved, I left a lot—I had my hat, my shipyard hat, and my union button. But when I moved—when I came out here I had a trunk, and I left a lot of that in the trunk. I gave the trunk away. I left a lot in there. I should have kept—I think about it now, I should have kept all my little, you know, little badges I got from different needlework, from working different things, so people could see it and know I wasn't just talking.

**Washburn:**

[laughter]

**Hunter:**

I lost a lot of that.

**Washburn:**

Was that on your trip from Texas out here?

**Hunter:**

Mm-mm.

**Washburn:**

What are you talking about? Is this when you moved into this home here?

**Hunter:**

No. I had a—you know what you get—

**Washburn:**

Yes, the awards.

**Hunter:**

The awards, you see. I got an award to a different thing. I got an award for reading something in church. I was just careless. I haven't got my penmanship certificate. You know, you move and you lose, when you leave things.

**Washburn:**

So you don't remember being involved in the union here?

**Hunter:**

No, I can't remember my union. I had one. I had to wear that to get in the shipyard. And I left it when I moved. When we came out here I brought a big trunk. So I just threw a lot of junk in there and left it, gave it to someplace. I can't even remember.

**Washburn:**

Were you involved at all in any other organizations during the war? You were involved in church, your work in the shipyards, were you involved—

**Hunter:**

And then I was—but I didn't get anything from that. I just worked in the government laundry in San Francisco after I quit the shipyard.

**Washburn:**

So tell me about that, how long were you working at the shipyards for?

**Hunter:**

Hmm?

**Washburn:**

How long did you work at the shipyards?

**Hunter:**

I guess I worked about six months.

**Washburn:**

Why so short? Why not—

**Hunter:**

Well, it was just too much for me. Out there on the Bay, and it was cold and I had to walk those on the outside, you had to walk those boards, you know, scaffolds is what they call them. What they build beside the ship for you to walk on and climb those ladders. It was just too hard. In the laundry I didn't work that long. I didn't do that much of that kind of work out here.

**Washburn:**

Did you end up—how did you end up working in San Francisco after quitting the shipyards?

**Hunter:**

Well, I just went to San Francisco, just me and my sister went to San Francisco. We met a lady at the bus terminal. We were just sitting there looking, and she came up to you and say, "You all want to work in the laundry?" We said, "Yes, we'll try." So that's the way I got that in there. That's where they'd send the soldiers' clothes, that's the kind they called it. But they changed the name now, it is out from San Francisco.

**Washburn:**

How long did you work there, then?

**Hunter:**

Not too long. It was hard, you know it's cold in San Francisco.

**Washburn:**

It's cold out here! [laughter]

**Hunter:**

Yes, and working in all that heat and then when you come out to go home, to come home, well, you'd be real cold. So I had a touch of flu.

**Washburn:**

It sounds like you were getting sick from the cold pretty often.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

You know, they say it's warm in California, but the Bay Area can get awfully cold sometimes.

**Hunter:**

It can. It stays cold over there, really. They said—when we first came out here they said that you couldn't wear white shoes.

**Washburn:**

Why is that?

**Hunter:**

I don't know. They said—I don't know why you couldn't wear white shoes. But it's just cold over there—because when we had went over there, working in that laundry, working over the heat. It's just cold. I wasn't—you know when a person leaves a warm climate, the seasons, weather, warm climate change is kind of hard. That's the way we had—different seasons, back in the South, and wasn't surrounded with water like here.

**Washburn:**

Ms. Hunter, I've talked with other folks your age before and tried to talk about social issues, and some people feel comfortable and some don't. Would you feel comfortable talking about the racial climate in Richmond at that time?

**Hunter:**

Do what?

**Washburn:**

The segregation that was going on in Richmond at that time?

**Hunter:**

No, I don't mind that. I'll just tell you what I know.

**Washburn:**

Tell me what you observed. What a lot of people say that I've heard is that when they moved out from places in the South where there was segregation, they thought they were coming to something different in California.

**Hunter:**

[laughter]

**Washburn:**

And it wasn't so much that way. Why don't you describe what your thoughts were when you came out here?

**Hunter:**

Well, I'll tell you, I didn't think about it. Back at my home I know—but we didn't have no trouble. Back there with the different races, we didn't never did have no trouble, and you know the South is really racist. We didn't ever have no trouble. So they said—I heard some of them say in South they let you know that they were racist but out here they was sneaky with it. That's what a lady told us—a caucasian, said, "Y'all talk about the South being racist, Y'all just as racist as the South, you just," they let you know back there. Of course, I never did. The lady I worked for, I went in her front door. But you'd have to go in they back door down there. She leave her key in the mailbox, had the mailbox on her front porch, for me, because they had a store. She'd go to the store and help her husband. So she'd leave the key out. I'd just work in the afternoon, through the week from 1:00 to 6:00. And I would go in her—she'd leave the key in the mailbox and leave me there. So I couldn't tell no difference, but they said, some of them out here, just like some of them back there—all of them wasn't that way back there.

02:00:10:10

**Washburn:**

Now this is—you're talking about the Jewish woman you worked for in Texas?

**Hunter:**

Yes.

**Washburn:**

She let you go in the front door.

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

But many women like yourself who were working for white families—

**Hunter:**

Had to go in—

**Washburn:**

Had to go in the back.

**Hunter:**

Mm-hmm.

**Washburn:**

Why do you think she said she wanted you to go in through the front door?

**Hunter:**

Well, they considered to be nice people, Jewish people. I don't know. I don't know, but that's the way she was, and I know she'd leave me there and I would sew on a machine. And ride—they'd take me to town, and her son-in-law would take me home. I couldn't tell—I don't know about, I ain't had no trouble, never, back there. That's the truth, back in the South. We didn't have no trouble with the different races.

**Washburn:**

Ms. Hunter, that family sounds like they took you in pretty well.

**Hunter:**

They did, she hated when I left. She really hated it. When I first went back there, her daughter told me, "Well, Mother's gone." First I went to work for her daughter, and her daughter told me, she said, "You too heavy to work for me." She had a son, and she wanted me to—she had a help, of course they call them maids back there—she had a maid that she had to be there and fix the breakfast. Her maid, though, stayed in. She said, "I'll tell you what you do, you work for my mother and dad, they're just two elderly people, and you won't have so much to do." I never did have no trouble. And I know when I take a vacation, leave my sister there to work in my place, they would call me and say, "I'll be glad when you come back." The lady was just worried about, "You coming back?" I liked her. They was nice to me, take me home, and take me to town to take the bus in the daytime.

**Washburn:**

Did they ever teach you anything about—I'm Jewish as well.

**Hunter:**

You're a Jew?

**Washburn:**

I'm Jewish.

**Hunter:**

Well I like all Jewish folks. You don't look like you—[laughter]

**Washburn:**

I don't look it, but I am. Did they teach you about Judaism at all? Did you ever make challah with them?

**Hunter:**

No, they had to go to Dallas about—I don't know how many miles. And I tried to read their Bible, I couldn't. I couldn't read their Bible. They had a Bible.

**Washburn:**

Do you think—did Jewish folks in the South have a reputation for being more open to the black people in the South? Is that the reputation they had, or is that just something that came from your experience?

**Hunter:**

Well, I tell you, I don't know, I just worked for that one and her daughter. They and the daughter lived in another town which is called Dallas, Texas, where she bring me hats, dresses down there and tell her mother. Whenever I hear of one, it's the truth, I just like her. That woman and them people were so nice, give me tips whenever—I didn't have to do nothing but fix their lunch.

**Washburn:**

So it sounds like you left something pretty good in Texas to come out to California.

**Hunter:**

I did.

**Washburn:**

Yes.

**Hunter:**

I said, I wish I had stayed there with Ms. Rifman { ? } and got that \$3.50. [laughter] Yeah, they hated to see me leave. I hated to leave, but I wanted to come out here with my sister, they was nice. Really nice.

**Washburn:**

So what about—did you ever have any problems out here? You said that people in the South, they're racist but they let you know it, so you just know not to cross that person's path because they're not nice—but what about out here? In Texas there were signs at the soda fountain saying—were there signs that said, "No blacks allowed"?

**Hunter:**

I know in one place in Texas, they didn't like people to stop, said something about reading, "If you can't read, run anyway." The one place I know in Texas that was that way. But that's the truth, we didn't ever have no trouble. I liked them, we had good ones. They would visit my brother, my mother. Down there, when my mother would go to town, she'd go in the white folks' house, and she'd be—you know, down there it was a long time before they had cars. They would go different places than whites. Well, the difference, I know one or two families would warm iron—you know about that?

**Washburn:**

You warm the iron?

**Hunter:**

Yes, and put them in the wagon, for them to put their feet on? Her feet? Uh-huh. We had some nice people around there.

**Washburn:**

What about California? There weren't signs in windows in California, there wasn't the kind of segregation—there wasn't supposed to be the kind of segregation that there was in Texas. That's what people say. But what did you find was going on in Richmond when you arrived? North Richmond is pretty much all a black neighborhood, right?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh, some places.

**Washburn:**

And there are other places in Richmond where no blacks lived at all. Can you describe what you experienced then?

**Hunter:**

Well, when I lived in Richmond, we were surrounded by what's it called—Mexicans. They was—we lived right in the front of a Mexican family. We associated with them because their children taught my nephew and niece how to speak Spanish. They'd visit. I know my sister used to—she let her children bring them a sewing machine for her to sew on. See, she didn't have no machine when we first came out here. We used to get goat milk from another—we were surrounded with Spanish folks. Wasn't many black folks there. I think one or two families were left. And we didn't have no trouble with the Spanish.

**Washburn:**

Wait, one or two black folks were left where are you talking? In North Richmond?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh. It's a few lived there, but most of them were Spanish. North Richmond was mostly that kind of town, that kind of place where we lived, mostly it was Spanish people. Of course they had goats and dogs and everything, but we didn't have no trouble. We lived right across the street, in front of one family.

**Washburn:**

When you earned the money from the shipyard, how much were you making there?

**Hunter:**

Well, I think it was about—I think every two weeks it was just about \$35, something like that.

02:00:20:01

I just remember—exactly how much. But it was more than \$3. [laughter]

**Washburn:**

Did you go shopping with that money? What did you do with all the money you were making?

**Hunter:**

Shopped with some of it. And start to buy me a home with some of it.

**Washburn:**

Tell me about that. What do you mean, buying a home with some of it?

**Hunter:**

With the money. But I sold it back to—I didn't have no one to help me. No, didn't like the location. It was a gambling casino right across the street from it and my husband didn't like that. He sold it back to the man and the man passed and didn't finish paying for it. That's what I did with some of it.

**Washburn:**

So you did end up marrying, then?

**Hunter:**

Uh-huh.

**Washburn:**

Where did you meet your husband?

**Hunter:**

Out here.

**Washburn:**

Where did you meet him?

**Hunter:**

At Macedonia church.

**Washburn:**

What was his name?

**Hunter:**

James Johnson, the first one.

**Washburn:**

Was he a really nice man? What did you think when you first met him at Macedonia church?

**Hunter:**

Well, he was nice but he wasn't prosperous. He wasn't like the last one. See, I had a—if he'd have been prosperous, I'd have had that home now. [laughter] He took care of me all right otherwise, but he sure wasn't prosperous like the last, like Hunter.

**Washburn:**

Did you meet you first husband during the war?

**Hunter:**  
Mm-hmm.

**Washburn:**  
What was he doing?

**Hunter:**  
Working at the shipyard in Alameda.

**Washburn:**  
He was living in Richmond and working all the way down in Alameda?

**Hunter:**  
Uh-huh. He was living on the south side.

**Washburn:**  
Did you move in with him pretty soon after that?

**Hunter:**  
No.

**Washburn:**  
How long did it take for you to get married?

**Hunter:**  
I don't know, it took a good while.

**Washburn:**  
So you guys dated for some time?

**Hunter:**  
Yes, a good while.

**Washburn:**  
Why don't we finish up with you telling me about some of the fun things you guys did for fun. Did you guys ever go out dancing in Oakland ever?

**Hunter:**  
Oh no. I didn't care for that. I didn't go to anything but to movies, mostly drive-in movies, movie theatres. Go out to, you know, site-seeing in San Francisco, Oakland. Because I can't dance, no way.

**Washburn:**  
[laughter]

**Hunter:**  
They paid me to dance when I was in school, they liked that dance, when I could dance, but I wasn't no big dancer.

**Washburn:**

So, what did you guys do other than movies, you went out site-seeing? Did you have any other relatives?

**Hunter:**

Yes! We'd go to San Francisco, Sacramento, to the—let me see, what was that they had? You know where they have—I can't call the name—elephants and—

**Washburn:**

The zoo?

**Hunter:**

They didn't call it—we'd go to San Francisco to the zoo. Every year, we'd go to Sacramento to whatever you call it, I can't call the name right now. Uh-huh, we'd go places, I just didn't go to dances or nothing.

**Washburn:**

That's wonderful. I think we should finish up here in five minutes. Do you remember what you were doing when the war ended? Where were you when you heard about the war in Germany ending?

**Hunter:**

What war was that?

**Washburn:**

World War II.

**Hunter:**

Hm-mm. I remember when they said—my nephew, I had a nephew—went in World War II, came home. I remember that. He came back fine, but he was stationed in—I don't know if it's a state I knew. I don't remember. I remember when it was over because he came home.

**Washburn:**

Okay, I think we'll end. Thank you very much for sharing your stories, Ms. Hunter.

**Hunter:**

You're welcome.

**Washburn:**

It was—I think there was some really nice things that you had to share there and I want to thank you very much.

**Hunter:**

Thank you.

[End of Interview]