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Nancy Miramontes

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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Nancy Miramontes (second from the left, with the visible collar) at the shipyards.

Seated to her right (second from the right) is her sister.

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Interview 1: March 16, 2011

Begin Audiofile 1:

Redman: Today is March 16, 2011.

1-00:00:32

Miramontes: Yes, it is.

Redman: I am here with Nancy Dianda, and the first question I'd like to ask you is to explain to me your name and your date of birth.

1-00:00:45

Miramontes: Okay. So my name is Nancy Dianda, formerly Nancy Miramontes. M I R A
M O N T E S.

Redman: When were you born?

1-00:01:04

Miramontes: I was born January 17, 1925.

Redman: You were about five or six the Great Depression hit.

1-00:01:18

Miramontes: Um hmm.

Redman: You were born in Nebraska, is that correct?

1-00:01:22

Miramontes: Scotts Bluff, Nebraska.

Redman: What was that like growing up; how old were you when you left that area?

1-00:01:32

Miramontes: I was five.

Redman: Okay, so for your first five years—

1-00:01:35

Miramontes: I was there, we were there.

Redman: You maybe have some very early memories from there?

1-00:01:41

Miramontes: Very, very few because I didn't even attend school. I was too young. My older sister did.

Redman: Your oldest sister, what was her first name?

1-00:01:50

Miramontes: Her first name was Espiranza.

Redman: Did she talk about attending school in Nebraska at all in those—?

1-00:02:01

Miramontes: She did, yeah, kindergarten, started first grade I think when we left there. She only attended two months of the first grade there.

Redman: Where did your family move then?

1-00:02:15

Miramontes: We moved to, well, California. Used to be Decoto, but now it's Union City, which is only twenty miles from here.

Redman: Your parents were born in Mexico, is that correct?

1-00:02:28

Miramontes: They were born in Mexico.

Redman: What had brought them to Nebraska? Do you know? Did they talk about—?

1-00:02:33

Miramontes: Yes, I think my grandparents were in Mexico. There was also a depression going there from even before the thirties, so then they decided—my grandparents, my dad's parents, decided to come to the United States. In those days they went through Laredo, Texas. They only paid \$18 and came across.

Redman: So it was pretty easy.

1-00:02:58

Miramontes: Easy, they gave them a passport to come in. They had heard that in Nebraska there was a lot of work, so that's where they went.

Redman: In farming, in agriculture.

1-00:03:10

Miramontes: Yes, and then my dad also worked seasonal at the Holly Sugar Refinery there in Scotts Bluff.

Redman: What brought them out to Union City?

1-00:03:20

Miramontes: Well, because still in '35 the Depression was still on until '36, 1936, when President Roosevelt came in finally and Hoover was voted out.

Redman: Tell me about your parents, did they have, they had some political feelings about FDR. It sounds like they really were happy that—

1-00:03:46

Miramontes: Yes. My dad was sixteen when they emigrated from Mexico with his parents. Then when he became twenty-one, he became a citizen and encouraged my

mom to do the same, so they could vote. So that's why they voted for a Democratic president.

Redman: So there was a real attachment there to FDR. Tell me about then what it was like to grow up, what was your household like growing up?

1-00:04:20

Miramontes: Over there I remember our little house with all that snow; that I remember, the snow. Because, well, we had a lot of things—like the bathroom was outside, and my dad had to clean the snow from the door so we could open it so we can go to the ladies' room back there—

Redman: So it would be cold.

1-00:04:42

Miramontes: Very cold. But I think the main heating there was with coal. They used coal.

Redman: Did another work opportunity bring your father out to Union City?

1-00:05:02

Miramontes: Well, he just read in the papers and heard from people that in California there was a lot of new work, coming on, too, because there was Depression all over. So then he talked to his—his father was already passed away, but his mom was still here, so he and one of his brothers and the mother decided to try California.

Redman: So they moved as a group.

1-00:05:26

Miramontes: Well, no. My dad first came with his brother and checked it out.

Redman: To sort of get things established.

1-00:05:32

Miramontes: Um hmm. He came to Pleasanton. Pleasanton was just a little town. But there was some work there on the railroad.

Redman: So he started working for the railroad.

1-00:05:42

Miramontes: Working for the railroad.

Redman: Do you know what railroad?

1-00:05:47

Miramontes: No. They stayed in Pleasanton for about two years only. After he brought us, I think a couple of years only, and then they moved out here because there was more work out here.

Redman: Tell me what your life was like; it would have been around the time that you start kindergarten and first grade. You went to school around this area.

1-00:06:12

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: So what was your life like for you then?

1-00:06:12

Miramontes: Well, I didn't get to go to school in Nebraska. Like I say, at home we spoke Spanish, so it was pretty hard with my English, just with playmates around the neighborhood I used to speak some English, otherwise not too much.

Redman: So it was Spanish spoken at the home—

1-00:06:34

Miramontes: At home.

Redman: —pretty much exclusively, and then with your school and some of your schoolmates you would sort of learn to pick up some English.

1-00:06:44

Miramontes: Overhear, yeah, in kindergarten.

Redman: But did some of your playmates also speak Spanish?

1-00:06:48

Miramontes: Here they did. In Nebraska nobody spoke Spanish, only our family. It was mostly Russian and German people there.

Redman: To play with the other kids, you or your siblings would need to use English as a common language to—

1-00:07:05

Miramontes: Right.

Redman: So then here learning English, did your parents make an effort to learn English as well?

1-00:07:12

Miramontes: Oh, yeah, they did, especially my dad because when they became citizens they had to know some English.

Redman: Was that important to them?

1-00:07:21

Miramontes: It was very much, especially my dad. He was all for that. He says, "I love it here. It seems like we're going to stay here. Our kids are born here" and everything. So yeah, he learned English, and then he practiced with my mom.

Redman: I'm curious about your food that you may have had in the house growing up. What were some of the early meals that you remember sitting down to eat? Who would cook?

1-00:07:53

Miramontes: My mom.

Redman: What was she like as a cook?

1-00:07:57

Miramontes: She married very young. My dad was twenty-two years old, she was only seventeen. But she used to help her mother in Mexico, so she knew how to cook some, Mexican food mostly. She made tortillas, made the tortillas and cooked the beans and whatever, Mexican food. I think the hot chili was very popular in the kitchen, in their kitchen there.

Redman: It interesting to grow up, then, in a neighborhood that had diverse languages and from the sounds of it, different kinds of food than you may have experienced at home? What was that like?

1-00:08:39

Miramontes: You mean in Nebraska?

Redman: Well, in California.

1-00:08:43

Miramontes: Over here was different, a lot different, because in the first school that we went to there in Decoto there was a lot of Spaniards, families sent from Spain with their children. And Puerto Ricans, Portuguese, and Mexican people. Which in Nebraska you didn't see all that, see. So over here was exciting, more exciting.

Redman: So there were a lot of people that they could identify with, the same food you would eat, the same language.

1-00:09:16

Miramontes: Yeah, but in school they didn't want the other kids to talk to us in Spanish.

Redman: It was English only at school.

1-00:09:22

Miramontes: English only, so we could pick it up easier, faster.

Redman: Was learning English—was it frustrating, or was it exciting, or as a kid did you really sort of have a feeling about that?

1-00:09:35

Miramontes: I used to feel embarrassed. The teacher would say something, and we just couldn't get it, not right away. But then we had a teacher—in those days no teachers speak Spanish, only the one. She came from Newark to Union City to

help us after school with the ABCs and putting words together, small words, and then a little reading. That's how we got started with her.

Redman: So that really helped—

1-00:10:07

Miramontes: That really helped.

Redman: So it took a little bit of extra personal attention, but once you had that, then you were able to—

1-00:10:15

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: Growing up then in high school, or maybe up to middle school, becoming a little older as a child, did you have any favorite subjects in school or favorite things that were going on in high school?

1-00:10:32

Miramontes: I think math was one of my favorites, and history. History, especially the United States. I wanted to know more about it, so the books were so exciting to me. I'd bring them home and I read to my mom, too.

Redman: Were you and your mom pretty close?

1-00:11:01

Miramontes: We were pretty close because she became a young mother, so by the time we were older she was still a young lady.

Redman: How about your relationship with your father? What were your siblings, how was he into that?

1-00:11:20

Miramontes: Very, very, very good. He always provided for us. Like I said, they first came to California to see what it was all about before they moved the family so we wouldn't suffer too much. He was always with us. In fact, when I went to the shipyards, he was already working there.

Redman: So he had a job, you said, for a couple of years working for the railroad, and then eventually he found a job at the shipyards, okay.

1-00:11:51

Miramontes: During the war.

Redman: So what shipyard? Was that Kaiser?

1-00:11:54

Miramontes: Moore's Dry Dock in Oakland.

Redman: Okay, at the Moore's Dry Dock in Oakland.

1-00:11:59

Miramontes: I'm sure it's in the history somewhere, huh?

Redman: Yes, that was one of the major places that people found work, so your father's story—it sounds like a lot of people found work there. Is that right?

1-00:12:12

Miramontes: Yes, yes. He was a flanger; they called them flangers, which was to put the jobs together for the welders to come in to weld, the walls, everything because he worked aboard the ship. But he said, "If you get a job there, I don't want you to work on the ship. Tell them that you want to work on the outside." In front where the ship was being built they had this they call it superstructure, skids, whatever. They build the superstructures for the ships. Once they were done, then they would take them with cranes, great big cranes, take them to the ship already—

Redman: So getting the materials as much of the ship constructed before even the welding would take place was an important part of the job getting things set up for the welders.

1-00:13:08

Miramontes: But on the ship itself they built from the double bottoms; they had to be built in ship. That's where my dad worked. He says, "It's very dangerous to be climbing and all that for you."

Redman: So he was okay with being in some of the dangerous places in the shipyard—

1-00:13:29

Miramontes: Him.

Redman: He wanted you to work in some of the safer parts.

1-00:13:33

Miramontes: More safe.

Redman: In particular, he felt like the outside of the ship was a safer place to work.

1-00:13:40

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: Let's talk about you finishing high school. Do you remember what year you graduated from high school?

1-00:13:45

Miramontes: I didn't graduate high school.

Redman: So you left. How long did you—?

1-00:13:50

Miramontes: Two years. Right here in Washington.

Redman: Then after that you decided to go get work?

1-00:13:59

Miramontes: To go to work.

Redman: There were opportunities already to go to work? Or what made you decide that that was the best thing for you?

1-00:14:07

Miramontes: You know why? Because I think that relocating from Nebraska over here we lost some time there. So they sold the little house in Nebraska—it was just a little house—and so here we were renting a little house, and so I felt that I should just leave the school and go to work to help my parents.

Redman: So you wanted to contribute to the family.

1-00:14:32

Miramontes: My sister and I.

Redman: Your sister was a couple of years older?

1-00:14:38

Miramontes: Right. She was two years older than me. She was born in '23; I was born in '25.

Redman: Tell me about finding work.

1-00:14:48

Miramontes: Okay. So I was sixteen then.

Redman: Do you remember how old, what year that would have been that you were starting to find work? Was that before or after Pearl Harbor?

1-00:15:03

Miramontes: Well, in those days in this area here it was a lot of agriculture work, lot of fruit orchards all over the place. All this right in here was orchards, apricots and peaches and pears and cherries, lot of cherries, strawberries. So we went to work in the cannery. You've heard about canneries?

Redman: Yes. So its fruit and vegetables would go through a process where they'd be preserved and then they can be shipped.

1-00:15:32

Miramontes: Canned, and so there was a big cannery right here, and it was the Centerville district of Fremont. There was a big cannery there. So they hired from sixteen and older.

Redman: So when you turned sixteen—

1-00:15:49

Miramontes: I was able to go to work then, my sister and I.

Redman: So were you working on all of the fruits and vegetables you just named. The cannery did everything, or did it focus on a couple of—?

1-00:15:59

Miramontes: Yeah, this one started with apricots, peaches and tomatoes.

Redman: My understanding with canneries is that it's somewhat seasonal, that some fruits or vegetables could come in and then would need to be canned when they were as fresh as possible.

1-00:16:16

Miramontes: Right, yes.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about that. Was the work busier at some times?

1-00:16:22

Miramontes: It was seasonal. Apricots, I think, come around June, July, and then peaches come in. Tomatoes are always the very last season that they done in this cannery. The one in Hayward, I think that one worked most of the year.

Redman: Do you remember the name of the cannery?

1-00:16:42

Miramontes: F. E. Booth? F. E. Booth Company, the cannery.

Redman: Where was that again?

1-00:16:47

Miramontes: Right here Fremont at Centerville. It was Centerville, California then. Because Fremont was incorporated I think in '58, '59.

Redman: So quite a bit later on.

1-00:16:58

Miramontes: Right, later on.

Redman: So tell me about Pearl Harbor happening. Do you recall?

1-00:17:04

Miramontes: I recall distinctly. This is in 1941, and I already had a boyfriend. We used to go to the baseball game in Union City, Decoto then. So you meet your friends or whatever, and he had a car, so he used to take us for a ride. This one Sunday we were traveling around and then had the radio on, and that's when they announced the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor.

Redman: What were some of your reactions and then your boyfriend's reactions? How did people react at the time?

1-00:17:41

Miramontes: Well, it was really sad. It was really sad. That's why now every time there's something like this I think about those days. Because now we have to go to war. President Roosevelt said then that we had to declare war right now.

Redman: So was there sadness as well as anger or frustration?

1-00:18:03

Miramontes: To me it was very sad. It didn't take too long before they took all the young fellows like you. Some were married with one child, and single ones went first. It was really sad.

Redman: How long were you at the cannery following Pearl Harbor?

1-00:18:26

Miramontes: Let's see, then to Holly Sugar was here in Union City, the same company my dad worked for in Nebraska. So then he was there, working there, and he said, "Well, they're going to start hiring women now because they took all the boys to the war." I said, "Well, I want to go to work there. I don't want to work in the cannery no more." It was all ladies, young and old. I wanted a better job.

Redman: So working at the sugar refinery was better work.

1-00:19:02

Miramontes: Better work.

Redman: Was it because the pay was better, or what was better about it?

1-00:19:05

Miramontes: Yeah, it was a union job. But I wasn't quite eighteen yet. My dad said you have to wait until you're eighteen.

Redman: To get a job there, or to join the union?

1-00:19:18

Miramontes: Yeah, to join the union. And then they said you need proof of your age, so you had to be eighteen. I had a Social Security as a young girl, but when I became of age I had to tell Social Security.

Redman: Okay. [loud ringing – tape pauses, then resumes]

1-00:19:42

Miramontes: Sugar with my dad, but it was three shifts, twenty-four hours.

Redman: So what shift were you working on?

1-00:19:45

Miramontes: Well, the job that I had was working the lab there. We had to change every two weeks, two weeks on days, then swing shift, then graveyard.

Redman: Did your pay change based on what shift you were on? Did the night shift make more than—?

1-00:20:03

Miramontes: I don't think so. I think it's the same.

Redman: But they rotated people through.

1-00:20:07

Miramontes: They rotated people, yeah.

Redman: Do you remember joining the union then? Did you just have to simply sign up, or—?

1-00:20:15

Miramontes: No, we had to pay; I forgot how much we had to pay, to be initiated into the union. There was a fee there, and it came out of your first paycheck there.

Redman: Do you remember any union activity, or what the union was like, or any sort of influence it may have?

1-00:20:36

Miramontes: Well, I think they were there only in case you had a complaint, or something that was not fair done to you, or something. Other than that, you just pay your dues monthly.

Redman: You didn't have any complaints.

1-00:20:52

Miramontes: No.

Redman: You were pretty happy there.

1-00:20:51

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: Because it was more money, and—

1-00:20:55

Miramontes: More money, and to me I was older, and I was independent from my mom and sister. My mother also worked in the cannery. And my sister.

Redman: So you were the first one, then, of the girls.

1-00:21:08

Miramontes: Of the three, yeah.

Redman: So that must have been pretty exciting.

1-00:21:10

Miramontes: It was, working with my dad.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about that environment of then working with men and women.

1-00:21:17

Miramontes: Yes, it was different because, well, the men had the harder jobs, heavier jobs. I worked in the lab, so it wasn't bad at all. Other girls had other jobs that they weren't too happy with, but that's where they were needed.

Redman: So you worked in the lab of the sugar refinery. Do you remember what your tasks were, what you did in the lab there?

1-00:21:41

Miramontes: We just went around taking samples from different areas, even the molasses, even that, and even when the sugar is already all processed, when they're breaking it up.

Redman: Then you would test it to make sure that it was okay.

1-00:21:54

Miramontes: Take it to the lab. We went all around, this other girl and I, on my shift.

Redman: You would collect the samples and then bring them back to the lab.

1-00:22:05

Miramontes: To the lab, yeah

Redman: That sounds like a good way to meet a lot of people.

1-00:22:10

Miramontes: Plus they gave us uniforms. They were real pretty uniforms. It was nice.

Redman: So that was a good job.

1-00:22:19

Miramontes: Um hmm.

Redman: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like to work with your father. Would you see your father working there every once in a while?

1-00:22:24

Miramontes: I didn't get to see him. He used to come up on his break sometimes to where I was sometimes, because he had a job outside on the bottom; it was like a basement. He had a job down there working with some chemicals, the kind that goes with the sugar or something. He worked the day shift only. He never changed shifts. My mother says, "Well, she can't go to work there because she has to go work in the night, and you don't go nights." She says, "Well, that's

fine. A lot of girls from Decoto, they're going to work there. They can get rides."

Redman: So they felt like that was not a safe environment for you and a good environment.

1-00:23:02

Miramontes: That's what my mother thought, yeah. But my dad says, "No, she'll be all right. She's doing great. There's a lot of girls her age."

Redman: Tell me about meeting those other girls. Was that also a good and exciting thing, or—?

1-00:23:18

Miramontes: Very, very exciting.

Redman: So were they different at all from your school friends that you had had growing up.

1-00:23:28

Miramontes: Well, some were a little older than I was, so they smoked. So they said, "Well, do you smoke?" "No." "You don't know? Well, let's try it during our break." You know, a little puff here, a little puff there. That's where I learned how to smoke. Which wasn't a good thing, but I did.

Redman: So that was seen as an adult thing.

1-00:23:49

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: People, of course, didn't know the health risks.

1-00:23:53

Miramontes: I know, not in those days.

Redman: It was more of something that you were just encouraged to do when you were taking a break.

1-00:24:04

Miramontes: That was nice working there.

Redman: So that was a good job.

1-00:24:07

Miramontes: It was. To me it was a promotion.

Redman: Tell me then what inspired you to leave that job to go work for the Dry Docks?

1-00:24:17

Miramontes: Well, then from there, of course, the war broke out.

Redman: So you were working there when the war broke out.

1-00:24:17

Miramontes: I was working there seasonal. That lasted about four or five months, the sugar season where they make the sugar from the sugar beets. So then my dad got a job at the shipyard. He says, "You know, they're hiring so many ladies there, so many girls," he says. "Well, I'd like to go to work there. My girlfriend—"

Redman: Do you want to hold up this picture here?

1-00:24:49

Miramontes: She's right there.

Redman: Here, why don't you hold it up just like this in front of your chest and point to me who these women are?

1-00:24:58

Miramontes: Okay.

Redman: This was a photograph taken at the shipyard.

1-00:25:02

Miramontes: At the shipyards, the Moore's Dry Dock.

Redman: If you could just point out who these different individuals are that would be great.

1-00:25:10

Miramontes: Okay, this is my girlfriend, that's {Sherry?}; she didn't come out too clear, but that was my girlfriend there. Then, of course, this is me.

Redman: You were a beautiful young woman.

1-00:25:21

Miramontes: Oh, thank you. This little girlfriend of mine—we became so close friends—she was from New Mexico, the state of New Mexico. This was my sister, my older sister.

Redman: Remind me of your older sister's name again.

1-00:25:36

Miramontes: That was Espiranza.

Redman: Your mother went to work there as well, is that correct? Or was it just you and your sister?

1-00:25:43

Miramontes: Just me—my sister made a mistake getting married at nineteen, and then she was going to deliver her first baby, and her husband had to go to the war. That was terrible. He went as a paratrooper. So then after she had the baby, then she said, “Well, I’m going to go to work.” Because the money that was coming in from the government was not enough or whatever. But then it was too hard for her to go to work, and then my mother had to take care of the baby. So she only worked there six months. She went to welding school because we had to have ninety-six hours of welding school.

Redman: I’d love to hear about that because my understanding is that some people got training at shipyards on-site for ninety-six hours, or some people went to colleges or high schools around for—so how did you, what was your course like?

1-00:26:47

Miramontes: No, school was in East Oakland. The shipyards were over there, like where Jack London [Square] is, a little further down, towards the bay.

Redman: So do you remember if it was on the site of a high school or a college or—?

1-00:27:03

Miramontes: No, I think they opened their own. It was their own building. Yes, because they had lot of booths where we were working.

Redman: You would go from booth to booth learning different welding techniques, sort of all the way down, or—?

1-00:27:20

Miramontes: No, we each were assigned to a booth. We’d practice there, practice there, and then, of course, the instructors were all around there telling us how we were doing and whatever. My girlfriend and I went to school there. Then my sister went after when she decided to go to work. Same place, ninety-six hours.

Redman: What was that like, learning how to weld?

1-00:27:41

Miramontes: It was very exciting. My uncle had an uncle that went to school at the same time. He was already married, and he used to get stuck with a torch. It would stick to the little piece of metal that we had to practice on. He’d come over, he says, “Well, I can’t do it.” He says, “My thing gets stuck all the time.”

Redman: So some people were able to pick it up easier than others.

1-00:28:06

Miramontes: Yeah, yeah. So then he finally caught on. He’d learned how to weld real good. He worked in the repair yard. Because the east yard was repairs. Where I worked was the new jobs.

Redman: So the way the dry docks were constructed was that they would repair old ships on one side.

1-00:28:26

Miramontes: Yeah, the east yard.

Redman: And on the west yard they were constructing new ships.

1-00:28:31

Miramontes: Right.

Redman: I have a very basic understanding of what that would be like, but my understanding is that some of the welders at the dry docks may have touched up mistakes that earlier portions of the—how exactly did it work? Your day-to-day job, how about, what sort of things would you do for a typical day?

1-00:28:56

Miramontes: Ours was all brand new material. When we completed our ninety-six hours they gave us a test there. If they thought that we were ready to go in the yard as trainees, they would let us; otherwise, they would give us more time at school because they needed the people.

Redman: So even if you needed a little more time, they were willing to work with you.

1-00:29:22

Miramontes: Yeah. So we went to the yard as trainees, and we were there six months as trainees doing just techs, touch up, techs mostly, teching something. Then in six months we had a test, and then if you passed the journeyman test you would become a regular welder. And I did, I passed my test.

Redman: Give me a timeframe of how long you were at the dry docks, total amount of time. How long were you at the shipyard?

1-00:29:56

Miramontes: Three years.

Redman: Your sister was there six months before deciding she needed to return home.

1-00:30:01

Miramontes: Only six months. To be home with the baby.

Redman: I'm going to jump away from your job as a welder just for a minute, and I'm going to ask a little bit about the Mexican-American community at that time. My understanding is that the area had a fairly small community of Mexican Americans, including places like Richmond, there would be a small community, but it was a pretty vibrant community, so there was pretty active community. Is that an accurate portrayal of what the Mexican-American community was like at that time?

1-00:30:36

Miramontes: You know in Richmond I couldn't tell you too much, but I knew about the shipyards.

Redman: Tell me about that.

1-00:30:37

Miramontes: They were booming with jobs over there. I haven't been to Richmond recently. But I understand there's a lot of Mexicans and Spanish-speaking people over there now.

Redman: So how about at the docks? Were there a lot of Spanish-speaking people there?

1-00:30:56

Miramontes: A lot of people came from out of the state. You never saw so many Mexican people in Oakland, and black people that came from the South. We used to have trolleys in Oakland, and they used to commute on the trolleys to go to work, so there'd be packed full with people every morning. They never went back to their states any more. Because they found California being so much more liberal. They were not discriminated. They got away with murder at the shipyards, my father said. Used to find them asleep in the double bottoms on there. Taking breaks, but anyway, that's why there's so many here now that never went back to their states, also Mexican people. From Colorado, a lot of people are from Colorado, and my girlfriend from New Mexico.

Redman: I've heard that a lot of people would come from New Mexico from rail yards like Santa Fe, and then they would drop off right in Oakland, so then they'd be able to get jobs.

1-00:32:01

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: You were pretty well established in—you were still living with your parents at that time?

1-00:32:08

Miramontes: Oh, yes.

Redman: One of the things that I've heard from a lot of people is that housing suddenly became really hard to come by, that finding apartments or houses suddenly became next to impossible. Did any of your friends talk about trying to find an apartment early on, or—?

1-00:32:24

Miramontes: No, well, she used to have five girls that were sharing an apartment in downtown Oakland closer to where we work on the shipyards, see. So they were all single girls. But other than that, no, because where we lived there was no problem that way. It's a smaller town.

Redman: Tell me how you would get to work each day.

1-00:32:52

Miramontes: Well, at first I was riding with my father. Because he had a pickup truck. My girlfriend and I used to ride with him. But he said, “You know, I’m going to leave this job because”—I was there a year by the time he said, “I’m going to leave this job because when the war ends the job is going to end because they won’t be building ships no more, and I want a steady job. I don’t want to—.” So he applied over here at Newark at the Morton Salt. There was Morton and Leslie Salt Refineries right here in Newark, and he went and got hired at the Morton Salt.

Redman: That’s interesting because someone might want the higher paying job at the shipyard. But this knowledge that these jobs were going to end at the end of the war—but for you it probably was—

1-00:33:54

Miramontes: For me it was fine because—

Redman: You were young and making money.

1-00:33:55

Miramontes: Yeah, and then we were living at home. In those days you didn’t move out of your home. Or we didn’t.

Redman: Right, so you stayed—

1-00:34:02

Miramontes: We stayed at home.

Redman: You were bringing in money and being able to contribute. Other people have told me at this time that they felt sort of more independence because they were making their own money, and they could go out with their friends, or, were you doing anything like that? So did you just mostly save your money when you were that age?

1-00:34:27

Miramontes: No, my money went to the house.

Redman: Then she would—

1-00:34:34

Miramontes: Oh, yeah, I was able to buy new clothes and whatever, whatever I wanted to. My girlfriend and I used to go shopping. Downtown Oakland was the only big shopping we had in those days; there was nothing here. But then there was some money; she kept it. She was a very good manager with the money. My dad was very strict as far as I was going out. We could go in the afternoon some, but not at night. Never.

Redman: Okay, so there was no going out to night clubs or bars or dancing or things like that.

1-00:35:08

Miramontes: No, no. My girlfriend used to say how, “You should come over on Saturday nights; there’s so many places to go in Oakland. You meet all kinds of servicemen, so many men from—boys from all over the place.” Yeah, we were not allowed to go.

Redman: You were not allowed to do things like that.

1-00:35:21

Miramontes: My dad was from the old country.

Redman: Were you ever envious of that or did you sort of understand that there were some—?

1-00:35:29

Miramontes: No, my sister and I, we wanted to go to dances and all of that. The theaters, or whatever.

Redman: You were young, sure. So there was some desire to go. Okay. One of the things I was going to ask about was canning, and if you did any canning at home during—I know you had experience, but did you have a garden of any sorts or—?

1-00:35:54

Miramontes: My mom used to can. She used to can in jars. My dad would buy the fruits in the boxes, and then she knew what to do with—we used to help her.

Redman: You’d buy sort of in bulk when things were season and then save there. Would your mother manage the rationing? Because I know there were ration stamps for things like—

1-00:36:25

Miramontes: Very much.

Redman: There’d only be so much meat or dairy or the different supplies. Sugar, or butter, or things that they may need. So she would go to the grocery store and deal with the rationing?

1-00:36:37

Miramontes: Well, I think the county used to get a big supply of say butter, the big packages of butter. In those days Challenge was very, very popular, that brand of butter. They used to announce that there’s going to be a line, so we had to get in line. It was only two pounds to a family, so we used to go with my mom, stand in line to get something like that, powdered milk. And there was a lot of things that you couldn’t buy at the store.

Redman: You'd have to wait in line to get a handout for it. Would you hand over your ration book, and they would just take out the appropriate coupons, do you remember that?

1-00:37:23

Miramontes: Yes, for certain things, yes, we had coupons.

Redman: I know this is going to sound like a completely mundane question, but in the ration books the little blue stamps have things like tanks on them, or they have like a picture of an airplane, or things like that. Then on the front it would say your name and you'd write in your age or your different information. It doesn't have like a picture of a milk jar; it's got like a picture of a tank on it, so how would you know what was used for what? Do you remember?

1-00:37:54

Miramontes: I think what I remember was the American flag on some of the stamps.

Redman: So how did you know that say that was used for butter or for—

1-00:38:10

Miramontes: Powdered milk, we got a lot of powdered milk and prunes, dried prunes, raisins we used to get. Sometimes oranges in the bag, yeah. But another time we had to get in line was for nylons. You couldn't find any nylons.

Redman: Yeah, people say that that was a big problem.

1-00:38:35

Miramontes: Everybody wore hose. No pants. Only on the job, like at the shipyard, and then Holly Sugar. But we wore skirts and dresses all the time, so you needed nylons.

Redman: They just weren't available.

1-00:38:49

Miramontes: No, and Castro Valley was a place where they used to announce it for weeks ahead of time; there'd be nylons, but you should have seen the line. Then they let you have two pair.

Redman: So you had to make those last.

1-00:39:03

Miramontes: Yes, right.

Redman: I'd like to shift back to the shipyards. Did you receive health care, and do you recall how much you were paid? What were some of the benefits of working there? Its okay if you don't remember, but—

1-00:39:20

Miramontes: You know, I don't remember. I know we had benefits, but I don't remember if it was coming out of our pay, or I guess they did. I don't remember how much.

Redman: So you were probably pretty young and healthy at that time, so—

1-00:39:35

Miramontes: I was, yeah.

Redman: You maybe didn't need to go see the doctor.

1-00:39:41

Miramontes: No, I was pretty healthy.

Redman: Would you be willing to share your impressions—we got into this a little bit—your impressions of the other workers, of people arriving from around the country, and some of them were different in terms of their race or their religion. What were your impressions of these different people that were coming from all around?

1-00:40:00

Miramontes: Well, it was pretty—like this Marge and the other girl that worked with me from Colorado, they hardly knew Spanish because they were born here, and I guess they always spoke English in their homes. But she learned working with me for three years. She learned Spanish so good. She said, "Wait until I go home to New Mexico and talk to my mom in Spanish." She was so proud. The one from Colorado also, they didn't use Spanish too much the girls that I knew.

Redman: So even some of the women whose parents may have been Mexican, they maybe didn't use very much Spanish.

1-00:40:43

Miramontes: No.

Redman: Then they'd learn Spanish. So this woman who was your friend, she was excited to talk to her mother, who was Mexican.

1-00:40:51

Miramontes: Right. See, my dad and my mom they spoke Spanish at home all the time, but when my dad wanted so bad to learn English, "Don't talk to me in Spanish anymore; let's talk in English. I got to practice my English."

Redman: Did he end up becoming pretty good at it?

1-00:41:09

Miramontes: Yes, he did. He did.

Redman: How about your mom. I know your dad was really dedicated to it, but—

1-00:41:13

Miramontes: My mom, not as well. Not as well as my dad. He used to scold her, “When we go for a test for citizenship, they’re going to ask you questions, so you have to understand your question and answer in English.”

Redman: But she was more content to speak Spanish.

1-00:41:36

Miramontes: But she made her citizenship in San Francisco.

Redman: There was, I assume, an increasingly large number of women at the docks. It seems like most of your friends were women. But then as the war progressed, more and more men went away, so were more women being hired?

1-00:41:55

Miramontes: Yeah. The men that worked with us, they had the hard jobs. Burning, they needed more welders than they did burners. I found out that maybe I could get as a burner, but they didn’t let me transfer. They needed the welders more so. But most of the men that worked with us they didn’t pass the military. Or they were married with children. Those were the ones who were employed.

Redman: Was there any sort of feeling about what the men were like at that time in terms of they hadn’t been able to pass a physical test. Was it just sort of understood that some people have flat feet or bad vision, and they can’t join the military? Or was there a little bit of sort of a lot, did people feel a little sense of guilt, do you think, at all?

1-00:42:57

Miramontes: I think the younger men did. They didn’t really want to say that they were 4-Fs—they called each other 4-Fs and all—but well, there was a reason. Like there were some from, I think, Colorado that because of the snow—they worked on the snow somewhere up in Colorado—their feet were troubled, so they didn’t pass the medical physical.

Redman: But they could work in the defense industry. So some people saw that as a way of contributing, in fact, a lot of people would have seen that as a way of contributing, yeah, okay.

1-00:43:38

Miramontes: Yes. We had a young male man that worked with us. He was our helper. Because when we got almost ready with those things, they didn’t want us to go down. If we needed to adjust our welding machine, or we needed supplies or something, he would go for us. He hadn’t passed the medical. [Pause tape]

Redman: We were talking a little bit about the relationship between men and women at the factory and how they worked together and what they thought about each other. Did you ever feel like there was any sexism against the women, that maybe the men would treat women differently, or—?

1-00:44:26

Miramontes: I never experienced it. I think there was one of the reasons why my dad didn't want me to work aboard the ship. He told my mom. He didn't tell me. The women went for it, see. He says, "I don't want her to work over there."

Redman: So maybe some of the men might have been ruder.

1-00:44:49

Miramontes: Yeah, or the women, too. They invited friendship, and pretty soon they had—you know, they went overboard. But where we worked, no, there was nothing like that.

Redman: I'd like to ask if there was any hanky panky between the workers. Did you ever—?

1-00:45:06

Miramontes: No. One of my girlfriends from Hayward—we had the leaderman, the foreman, they had the {hammer with the stars?}. She, my girlfriend, was single, and she started to date the quarterman. Yeah. But he was also single. He was more mature than her, but he was single. They ended up getting married. I think time for—there was a lot more women especially, there was a lot more decency, so men respected you.

Redman: They wouldn't make comments or say anything like that.

1-00:45:53

Miramontes: The men that we worked with—whenever things got slow, we had to wait between jobs. They used to tell us to go to the ladies room for ten-fifteen minutes and that way, but I never experienced anything like that.

Redman: The last question kind of along that line is, were there any rumors, or did you know of anyone personally that we might today consider gay or homosexual?

1-00:46:23

Miramontes: No.

Redman: That was something that was totally unfamiliar?

1-00:46:29

Miramontes: There probably was, but it was on the outside; like I say, they hardly came out of the closet so it's known all over, not in those days.

Redman: So that was nothing that was sort of a rumor or innuendo. I'd like to talk a little bit about the servicemen and the servicewomen in the Bay Area at that time who were—many of them traveled through here and then left for the Pacific.

1-00:46:57

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: Did you have any impression of what they were like?

1-00:46:59

Miramontes: We were friends because the ships come in to the east yard for repairs, well they had days and jobs, and then cigarettes were hard to buy. Very much, but they could get them, see. They would come by and sell us; we'd buy a carton and divide it on all the girls. Then if another one came, we asked them to bring us another, so we had enough cigarettes.

Redman: They would sometimes share their cigarettes with you. So you think that they were pretty friendly then, the people who would sell—?

1-00:47:39

Miramontes: I think they would come to us. I met this one, I think he was from, I think, Arkansas; he was in the Navy. He kept coming around; he said he wanted us to get to know each other while he was stationed here in Oakland. So we were friendly and that, but when he wanted to come and take me out, then my dad wouldn't allow it. I told him so. He says, "But you're of age already." He couldn't see it. Because my dad—

Redman: Your dad was still pretty strict about going out with boys.

1-00:48:17

Miramontes: No sense of even trying to. So then the ship went away, he went away. Then he wrote to me there to the place. He wrote to me, but then I didn't answer no more because I knew I couldn't—

Redman: Your father wasn't ready for you to date.

1-00:48:35

Miramontes: But yet I ended up marrying a sailor.

Redman: Is that right? Tell me about how that came to be. When did you—?

1-00:48:41

Miramontes: Well, I met him because I used to go in the afternoons to a dance. We were allowed to go in the afternoon. From 1:00 to 6:00.

Redman: So on your days off of work before 6:00 o'clock, before the night time might come around, you could go to a dance.

1-00:48:59

Miramontes: Before 6:00, by 6:00 we had to be home.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about what those dances were like.

1-00:49:03

Miramontes: They were very nice.

Redman: Who would go to those dances?

1-00:49:06

Miramontes: Well, there was a whole bunch of us friends including this little girlfriend of mine. We used to take the bus, which used to come from San Jose all the way to Oakland to the Greyhound. It was stopped there at Mission Boulevard in Decoto, and we would wait for the bus there. He used to stop right in front of the Sweet Ballroom; it was a beautiful place. Oh, it was round like this, and then lights going around, different colors, so pretty. All the military came there, and they were home on leave.

Redman: So was it called a USO dance, or—?

1-00:49:47

Miramontes: No. Just a nice afternoon dance.

Redman: You would go with your friends.

1-00:49:58

Miramontes: With a girlfriend, no boyfriends. We would meet the boys there.

Redman: And what were the boys like?

1-00:50:04

Miramontes: Nice.

Redman: They were very nice, and they were from all over.

1-00:50:07

Miramontes: From all over.

Redman: One of the things that I find interesting is because there were so many people from all over, and I've heard again and again people would say, "Oh, he was from Arkansas" or, "Here's where he was from." Did people introduce themselves like that? They might say, "Oh, I'm Sam, I'm from Minnesota," or, "I'm from this area."

1-00:50:26

Miramontes: Oh, yeah. I met my husband. He was originally from Houston, Texas, born and raised there. He enlisted there, and then he was stationed in San Francisco at the Ferry Building, and he used to come to the dances in Oakland.

Redman: So he was in the Navy.

1-00:50:46

Miramontes: In the Navy.

Redman: Was he Mexican?

1-00:50:48

Miramontes: Yes. Spoke very little Spanish.

Redman: Did you have to teach him some Spanish?

1-00:50:54

Miramontes: Yeah, I had to, and then his English also, he had like the way they speak in the South. “Y’all.”

Redman: Yes, right!

1-00:51:02

Miramontes: We used to make fun of him. He finally after we got married, we decided to live here. He liked the Bay Area, so then he kind of left a lot of that, but there was always—they spoke, I think they still do.

Redman: He was assigned in the Navy, and did he ever have to go overseas, or did the war come to an end?

1-00:51:28

Miramontes: Oh, yeah, he went overseas; he was aboard ship. The reason why he was stationed in San Francisco at the Ferry Building because before he went in the service he learned the jewelry business, watch repair and jewelry repair, see. He was like an apprentice, so when he went in the Navy. He volunteered; he told them what he was doing as a civilian. Always on the ship they put him to work in a shop like that, see.

Redman: He could repair small equipment.

1-00:51:58

Miramontes: Right, yes. So then he went on shore duty here at the Ferry Building doing that.

Redman: So ships might come in, and when they were being repaired, some of their instruments would be repaired as well.

1-00:52:09

Miramontes: Yeah. That’s what he did. So but he used to come to the dances, and then they used to go in the afternoon dances and then wait for the night dances, see, but we couldn’t stay.

Redman: What did you like about this person? What was his first name?

1-00:52:24

Miramontes: Charles.

Redman: What did you like about Charles?

1-00:52:29

Miramontes: I liked Charles. He was nice and tall. I was very tall myself then, and I just liked him, but all this time my real boyfriend was in the Army, the war.

Redman: Oh, so you had another boyfriend.

1-00:52:45

Miramontes: In the Japan area.

Redman: And what happened to him?

1-00:52:50

Miramontes: Poor guy, he was wounded in action. We were sweethearts since I was in school. He was older than me, but we became sweethearts. But he was away three and a half years, and in the meantime I met Charles, and I liked him better. I just fell in love with him.

Redman: At the end of the war was Charles discharged?

1-00:53:24

Miramontes: No.

Redman: He stayed in for a while.

1-00:53:25

Miramontes: He was still there, and about that time—Joe was the one that was in the Army, my boyfriend—he came home, and instead of going to his parents' house in Newark, he went straight to our house. Because he wanted us to get married before he went overseas, and my dad says, "No, it's not a good thing." "I think you better go do your duty, and let her grow up, be more of a lady."

Redman: Right, and then come back. So this is despite the fact that your dad married your mother at a young age. He wanted you to grow up and mature a little bit.

1-00:54:06

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: Do you think that played a role, just in his own experience?

1-00:54:11

Miramontes: I think so, I think so. So then Joe came over in a cab dressed still in his Army uniform and all that thinking that we have to pick up where we left off. My mother says, "You better give him a ride home because he came home in a cab." So I drove him home, and then I told him about it that I had changed my mind about getting married. He says, "Why?" He says, "That's all I thought about when we were over there fighting the Japs and everything," so—. That was a terrible war.

Redman: Yes, and it's tough to be separated from people for a long time.

1-00:54:48

Miramontes: Yeah. I think what made me think, changed my mind, was that I met a couple of girls, and they said, "Does Joe write to you?" And, I says, "Yeah, yeah. No, he doesn't write to me actually." Oh, he does me, we communicate all the

time.” Because I’m waiting for him. One told me, I’m waiting for him. So that did it.

Redman: And if it wasn’t special.

1-00:55:18

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: I’m going to change the tape, and then ask a few more questions.

1-00:55:25

Miramontes: I can go on forever about my boyfriends, so—

Audiofile 2:

Redman: We were talking a little bit when I was changing tapes about how the cities of Oakland and Richmond changed. Can you maybe compare Oakland for me, or even the area around your home closer to here, before the war? You were talking about how there were orchards in this area. And then during the war there was this massive influx of people, and the Kaiser Shipyards, the Moore Dry Docks, and all these different places have these new workers from all over, so the cities must have changed a lot. Tell me about what that was like.

2-00:00:56

Miramontes: Like East {inaudible?}, which is on this side of downtown, right, the east. That used to be such a beautiful neighborhood. Because some of the ladies my age worked in the shipyards, too, and lived in San Leandro.

Redman: So people would live maybe out like in San Leandro out in this area and commute in.

2-00:01:22

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: But you’d also go in to do your shopping, so you’d spent quite a bit of time in Oakland.

2-00:01:28

Miramontes: Yes, in Oakland. We used to do the main shopping in Oakland, like for clothing. There used to be this Palmers Supermarket, it had everything from clothes to groceries to—so my dad and my mom used to love to go there, even a place to eat. It was on Washington Avenue, which is right now—you don’t go to, oh, my gosh. But then all these people from different states came, and first they settled in West Oakland. But after a while, when they got jobs and all there, they were able to start moving to the East Oakland, buy homes there. And look at it now.

Redman: Do you think part of the problem was then at the end of the war a lot of people lost their jobs because like your dad had predicted—

2-00:02:24

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: —this wasn't going to be a stable occupation forever.

2-00:02:25

Miramontes: Right.

Redman: Let's talk a little bit, then, about the end of the war. A lot of people were handed their pink slips. Was that the case for you? Were you let go?

2-00:02:41

Miramontes: Yes. We got laid off almost—Armistice Day came, and the war ended. Right now they stopped everything at the shipyards.

Redman: So it was a pretty quick transition.

2-00:02:57

Miramontes: Yes, but then Moore Dry Dock had a place here in San Leandro on 105th Avenue, San Leandro; they had a place there where they used to repair their ambulance that belongs to the government, the Jeeps, and all this. So they sent some of us to go to work there. Right after the shipyards.

Redman: So you got a new job.

2-00:03:22

Miramontes: I had a new job, and I had to waste no time; I got hired over there right away.

Redman: What was the name of that again?

2-00:03:29

Miramontes: Gosh, I know it was run through—it was all government work.

Redman: So do you remember what you called it, like "I'm going to work—"

2-00:03:44

Miramontes: Let's see, because they had—

Redman: This was in San Leandro?

2-00:03:46

Miramontes: In San Leandro, yeah. One side was all the garage, where they used to repair all these trucks, Army trucks and all that. So all the military personnel would come over because they had a big parts department, all kind of parts for vehicles for the government.

Redman: People could bring the vehicles to get repaired at this garage.

2-00:04:12

Miramontes: Yes. Then from the Presidio in San Francisco they would come to get parts to take with them.

Redman: From as far away as from the Presidio.

2-00:04:22

Miramontes: Yeah, and this is the kind of work, but I can't remember the name of it. But I know it was a government job.

Redman: There was a question I forgot to ask you from all the way back in 1944. There was a disaster at the place called Port Chicago where there was a huge explosion.

2-00:04:39

Miramontes: Yeah, yeah.

Redman: Do you remember anything about that?

2-00:04:41

Miramontes: I remember about it, but I don't remember exactly what transpired.

Redman: My understanding is that there was a massive explosion at the Naval Magazine out there that was so large that it shook windows and broke windows in places like Berkeley and Walnut Creek and Oakland, so do you remember hearing—?

2-00:05:06

Miramontes: I remember hearing about it, but I don't think I know too much about it. I would talk about it, but I don't really remember.

Redman: Okay, A lot of the men who died were African-American servicemen, so it became a pretty important event later on when people started to recognize that.

2-00:05:20

Miramontes: Oh, yes.

Redman: I would like to also ask another question about late in the war. Do you remember the death of FDR, when FDR died? Your father, I know, had been an ardent supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, and he had voted for him. I presume that support kept up, and then when FDR died, I'm trying to imagine what it would be like, because he had been President for most of your life, it must have seemed like, because he was elected when you were fairly young. Do you remember FDR dying?

2-00:06:02

Miramontes: He was only a President for a couple of years from the time he died.

Redman: Do you have any recollections of what Truman was like, this new President that came in at the end of the war?

2-00:06:16

Miramontes: Well, I remember that people like my parents, they didn't care for the way Truman was doing things. We had so much confidence in Franklin Roosevelt, how he started to open up jobs. You should have seen all the government jobs that were out here. They called it WPA.

Redman: Yeah, so there were programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps.

2-00:06:41

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: And the National Youth Administration, or the Works Progress [Administration]. Do you remember some of those projects?

2-00:06:50

Miramontes: I remember some—I know my dad worked for the WPA, also. I think about it, and I talked to my brother about it; how come they don't open up jobs like the way President Roosevelt did?

Redman: So you'd like to see—

2-00:07:06

Miramontes: Yeah, because right after the Depression in '36, 1936, and we could see all these jobs that were coming in.

Redman: It was pretty tangible that you could see, and your father worked for the WPA for a little while.

2-00:07:20

Miramontes: Yes, he did, different jobs.

Redman: Did that sort of complement his seasonal work at the other places?

2-00:07:29

Miramontes: Oh, yeah.

Redman: So he would go to the WPA and find work?

2-00:07:33

Miramontes: Yes, and then it was steady work until Dad finished, and then they would send him to another place.

Redman: Do you recall any of the different jobs he did for the WPA?

2-00:07:44

Miramontes: Well, I know one was railroad.

Redman: When he worked for the railroad that was a WPA project, and he really liked that work, from the sounds of it.

2-00:07:52

Miramontes: He really liked that work because we moved out here, so they used to say, because over there during the snow season there was hardly any work. See? I guess for a college graduate it's easy to find jobs that way. But not for them because they were immigrants.

Redman: So finding work through the WPA really helped him.

2-00:08:22

Miramontes: It really helped him.

Redman: Do you recall hearing about what was happening to Japanese Americans who lived in the United States during the war? Did you have any friends who were Japanese growing up, or—?

2-00:08:39

Miramontes: We only had two girls. They were going to school with us. There was a lot of Japanese here in Union City, that was this Kitayama? They owned the biggest nursery right here in Niles-Alvarado; all this was owned by the Kitayama. They're always hard working people.

Redman: So tell me about that nursery.

2-00:09:01

Miramontes: Well, that nursery hired a lot of people that was left without jobs after the war. They were hired at the Kitayama Nursery.

Redman: So after Japanese internment ended, they came back and continued running this nursery.

2-00:09:21

Miramontes: Okay, before then, during the war they put them in concentration camps.

Redman: So do you remember hearing about that during the war?

2-00:09:30

Miramontes: Oh, yes, because the nursery was closed.

Redman: So there were pretty visible signs that people had been taken away.

2-00:09:38

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: Tell me about how you felt about that at the time. Have your feelings changed about that at all?

2-00:09:45

Miramontes: Well, we didn't have TV then, but we had the radio, and they used to talk about they had found out that they caught a lot of the Japanese, wealthy Japanese—I don't about the Kitayamas—but they caught them with, they were traitors.

Redman: So there was some fear and skepticism about the community at the time.

2-00:10:07

Miramontes: Because it didn't happen with Germans. It didn't. But it did with Japanese. Because they're like this with their country.

Redman: So you felt like there was a closer connection between the Japanese Americans and the country of Japan.

2-00:10:20

Miramontes: And their country, yeah.

Redman: And say the Germans and what was going on in Nazi Germany.

2-00:10:27

Miramontes: Because their nursery was closed. It was so quiet there because, and then over here, Mission San Jose. Now it's a very expensive area; they own all that land. They used to have strawberry patches. All there where the Lake Elizabeth is, it was owned by Japanese right there, and all that, they were gone.

Redman: When they came back they hired a lot of people?

2-00:10:50

Miramontes: Yeah, they did.

Redman: Did any feelings change then about this family in particular, or was it always sort of a good attitude towards this family?

2-00:10:58

Miramontes: No, I think because the Kitayamas—there was a set of brothers, I think there was four of them—they were all a business, so they hired all these people to go to work in the nursery, so I think the one became a Mayor of Union City. So I think kind of people forgot about what happened with Japan and all that.

Redman: People moved it aside. Now I'd like to ask then about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dropping of the atomic weapons and then the end of the war, what sort of feelings did you have as the war was coming to an end?

2-00:11:40

Miramontes: Well, it was a beautiful thing to hear. I know that so many people died when they used that bomb over there, but that stopped the war right there. I think that Germany had already surrendered? The Japanese were still going strong.

Redman: You were happy to see the war come to an end, even if this meant losing your job at the—?

2-00:12:08

Miramontes: Oh, yes, they were happy days, and 1942 was the last year they built cars. 1942. All you see was just older cars or whatever. You couldn't buy a new car. You couldn't buy a new stove, refrigerator, nothing like that. Everything was going for war materials.

Redman: So at the very end of the war I understand that maybe even just a couple of months before the end of the war or right at the end of the war you started to see those things in shops in on auto lots and stuff like that, these new goods that you hadn't seen for years.

2-00:12:47

Miramontes: Oh, yes, for years.

Redman: Tell me about that feeling. Did that sort of make you think, wow, we really are winning the war?

2-00:12:57

Miramontes: Yes. It was happy times now, like from Union City there was no single boys left. They were all gone, and some never came back. Okinawa lost a lot of our boys from Union City.

Redman: Did some of your friends from high school—did you get word through other people that some boys weren't coming back?

2-00:13:17

Miramontes: Yes. Spanish boys, I knew about two of them that didn't make it back, and then some Mexican boys, also. That we knew didn't come back. It was a very sad time. That's why when the war ended, "Ah, great!"

Redman: One of the things that I'd like to ask you just one more question about is, we talked a little bit about the war as being both a happy time, a very happy time, and then a very sad time.

2-00:13:45

Miramontes: At the same time.

Redman: Tell me about what that was like trying to deal with that mix of emotions. Did anybody struggle trying to deal with those sort of extreme opposites in emotions?

2-00:13:54

Miramontes: We got so used to it right away, I guess, because even the gas—we had coupons because we worked far—we used to have what they called the C-book. They were allowed more gasoline because we commute to Oakland to work. But the regular for home use was the A-book, it was limited. So we

were riding getting together with other people riding to work so we could save on our gas. We couldn't go Sunday ride at any time, no.

Redman: So there might be some tough times, and it sounds like at the end of the war it was sad for you to break up with this boyfriend who you had been romantic with for a long time.

2-00:14:40

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: But you were also happy because you'd met your future husband.

2-00:14:45

Miramontes: Oh, yes.

Redman: One question I'd like to go back and ask, did you grow up attending church services at all? Did your parents attend church?

2-00:14:55

Miramontes: Catholic.

Redman: Okay, and then did you continue attending church throughout the war, or did you at some point attend church less often?

2-00:15:03

Miramontes: Well, I don't think that I attended church too much when I was working the shipyards because a lot of times we worked the sixth day, Saturday.

Redman: So then your Sunday you might have to like you said go wait in line for hosiery and all that.

2-00:15:21

Miramontes: Yes, and to get our hair ready and all that to go to the afternoon dance every Sunday.

Redman: Sundays you would go to the afternoon dance.

2-00:15:32

Miramontes: Yes.

Redman: So tell me about then what your life was like at the end of the war. As the war came to an end you had this new job, and your husband came home, and you were married, and then what was your life like?

2-00:15:42

Miramontes: The war ended in July of 1945, and we got married on Valentine's Day of 1946. So I was already seeing him, and I was already thick, made up my mind we were going to get married, whatever. But I didn't like Texas because the summer came on; it was so hot over there. Being used to the Bay Area, but he liked it out here, so we came out here.

Redman: Did you go visit Texas and meet his family?

2-00:16:17

Miramontes: Oh, yes.

Redman: How was that experience?

2-00:16:22

Miramontes: They were very, very nice, nice people, yes.

Redman: Right, so you were happy that you were joining their family as well, okay.

2-00:16:30

Miramontes: Oh, yes. When I bore my first child, I made up my mind that my in-laws baptize the baby, so I flew over there with the baby because my husband was already working. I took the baby, and they baptized the baby.

Redman: In 1946 there was a big event, but it was only a couple days long; there was a strike called the Oakland General Strike where a lot of the people in unions in this area went on strike. Do you remember that at all?

2-00:17:05

Miramontes: In '46.

Redman: In '46.

2-00:17:09

Miramontes: I was over there in Houston for about six months.

Redman: Oh, okay, that might have happened when—

2-00:17:13

Miramontes: I don't remember that.

Redman: Then you guys decided to come back here, and did you stay working at that garage for some time, or did you find new work, or—?

2-00:17:25

Miramontes: Oh, no, that ended. Eventually the Army closed the garage, the repair garage, and all this material that we used to give to the soldiers when they come to get the order different parts, and it eventually closed. Then I got married. I was not working any more.

Redman: So then we talked about how Richmond and Oakland, some parts of it sort of decayed after the war when people lost jobs.

2-00:17:54

Miramontes: Oh, yes.

Redman: How about this area? How did it change after the war?

2-00:17:58

Miramontes: Over here it didn't change bad like that.

Redman: There were a lot of GIs coming back in who may have had the GI Bill, right? Did they buy houses, or—?

2-00:18:08

Miramontes: Yes, a lot of them did.

Redman: A lot of them went to school.

2-00:18:10

Miramontes: I know we bought our first little house there in Union City. My dad gave us \$8,800 for the house, brand new. My dad told my husband, "I'm going to give you \$1,000 for your down payment," because that's what they were asking for as a down payment. "Then if you're going to use your GI, so that should be a helpful." "Oh, yeah, yes." Brand new little house, yeah.

Redman: So your father did a nice job of getting you set up.

2-00:18:49

Miramontes: Because he knew that I had worked for so long. My sister got married too young, see? She wasn't able to work too much. Like I say, because of her baby and all that and her husband in the war.

Redman: So you think having a little extra time was really beneficial.

2-00:19:02

Miramontes: I think so, and he knew that my money went to the house.

Redman: You didn't have personal savings saved up. You were just contributing to the household.

2-00:19:14

Miramontes: Yes. They had like a credit union; I don't know what they called it then. At the shipyards I had a little saving bond, that's what it was.

Redman: Did you, jumping back to the war just for a second, did you buy war bonds?

2-00:19:26

Miramontes: That's what I mean, that's what, yes.

Redman: Oh, okay, so those bonds you would buy, war bonds pretty regularly.

2-00:19:31

Miramontes: Yeah, [I believe] they took the money out of your pay.

Redman: Then after the war then you used that money towards the house?

2-00:19:39

Miramontes: Yes, we had a younger brother. My mother had him when she was already forty, and ooh we loved that kid so much, so my saving bonds went on my name and his name. So when he went to school I told my mom to use it for school.

Redman: Oh, wow, okay, that's a great story. That's a great story.

2-00:19:59

Miramontes: Yeah, that's what I did.

Redman: So tell me then a little bit about the life you set up here. We talked about getting the house. Did your husband find work then?

2-00:20:11

Miramontes: He found work in the Niles. Used to be the Jewelry Store there.

Redman: So he continued on as a jeweler.

Miramontes: He continued with that.

Redman: Then what did you do? You said you had your first child.

2-00:20:21

Miramontes: Yeah, well, I, let's see, no, I didn't have it right away, but I went to work when I came home from Texas. We settled down in our new home. My younger sister—I have a younger sister—still lives in Oakland, and she—

Redman: What's her first name?

2-00:20:37

Miramontes: Elizabeth. She was working in west Oakland with Kraft Mayonnaise Company. So she got a job there. So when we came back from Houston, then she says, "Well, if you want a job I can help you get a job over there in the Mayonnaise." I says, "Fine." Because now I needed pretty things for the new house. So I went to work over there with my sister. Three years. Until I got pregnant myself.

Redman: How would you compare that to working at the sugar refinery or the canning facility, working at Kraft in the mayonnaise—how was that different? Or was that similar?

2-00:21:17

Miramontes: I liked that Kraft Mayonnaise job because they also made the biscuits. These biscuits are ready made in tubes. They used to wrap up right there, too. So they put me to work on the mayonnaise side, as a supervisor. Running in the machines inside and all that—

Redman: Was that because you had experience at places like the sugar refinery or the shipyards?

2-00:21:46

Miramontes: I think so, or the shipyards. I think so.

Redman: So they liked the fact that you had worked at places like that.

2-00:21:53

Miramontes: They gave me the job, and it was a little better pay there, and my sister, she was working on the biscuits, yeah. So I was there until I was expecting my baby.

Redman: And that's when you took some time, okay.

2-00:22:05

Miramontes: Yeah.

Redman: One of the things that we talked a little bit about is you have a Rosie-the-Riveter mug with the We-Can-Do-It poster, and we talked a little bit about that. I wonder if you could sort of reflect on that image or the idea of Rosie the Riveter and considering yourself one of these many girls who then became women working at the shipyards.

2-00:22:31

Miramontes: I used to see them in the shipyard. I wondered, "How can they work?"

Redman: With the giant riveting guns. So tell me about that sort of iconic image of; it sort of reflects women working in shipyards and airplane factories in defense at that time. Do you have any sort of special attachment to that, or do you feel like things over the last few years people have talked about that image more?

2-00:22:59

Miramontes: No, I think it was a great thing that they have. Because we up to around now you'd see women working in all different jobs, and I think it started then.

Redman: Even though people lost their jobs, a lot of people lost their jobs, they saw that women could productively assume these roles and then afterwards it made them want to—

2-00:23:26

Miramontes: Yes, and then stay in school so you can pick office jobs or whatever. Not only factory jobs because those are hard jobs.

Redman: It's hard work, yes. So sort of the last question I'd like to ask is, well, first if there's anything else you'd like to share with me, but then also to just sort of reflect on this time in your life, the war time, it seems like there were a lot of different emotions and a lot of different experiences.

2-00:23:56

Miramontes: It was beautiful times, great times, but there were sad times because you read in the paper about all the bombings over there. My cousins in San Francisco, they lost two of their brothers there in Germany, and then in Decoto a lot of the boys didn't come back either. It was sad times. But my sister's husband came back okay, and then, of course, my husband. He was okay, but he was mostly on the ship, working in the shop. But it was happy times, and then working, you had money. Even though you couldn't buy a lot of things.

Redman: But you still felt like it was pretty stable. Well, I'd like to thank you so much for sitting down with me.

2-00:24:58

Miramontes: Okay, I enjoyed it very much. Yeah, because I talked to my sons about it, and they sit here and they ask questions because, well, they can only imagine the times in those days. In Decoto we didn't even have stores in those days until about two years that we came from Nebraska.

Redman: I can imagine the roads continued to come in more and more and more.

2-00:25:24

Miramontes: Yeah, it was two-lane, two-lane, there was no freeway. No freeways.

Redman: Took a lot longer to get from one place to another.

2-00:25:32

Miramontes: We needed to go through San Leandro Boulevard all the way to Oakland, but we already knew it so good. My dad, he was a great person. I love my mom very much because you always love your mom so much, but my dad was my favorite. He was my favorite, I don't know why.

Redman: Despite the fact that he was strict, it sounds like he was a very good, very good dad.

2-00:25:54

Miramontes: Because all in all—

Redman: But you can let that go sometimes if they're strict, yeah.

2-00:25:58

Miramontes: Now that I'm older and I see a lot of the kids, the parents don't pay attention to their kids the way really they should. I think back, and I tell my boys, "I'm glad my dad was as strict as he was." We were never allowed to—like my guy Joe that I was supposed to marry him. He asked for permission to come over and visit me at home. He says because "Nancy's my girlfriend," and he told my dad, and he says we always have to meet on the street. "I'd like to come over and visit her." My dad says, "Okay, I'm going to tell her mother to expect you over. But don't invite her out." "Please don't, just come over, visit, that's it."

But you don't see that any more. Everything is loose, loose, loose, even in boys. My boys never had to leave the house until they got married. I didn't expect them to. They went to work after school; they got jobs and all that.

Redman: But they could stay in the home for—

2-00:27:13

Miramontes: Yes, yeah.

Redman: Would they contribute a little to the—?

2-00:27:17

Miramontes: They contribute to the house, and they learned how to do help in the house, the yards and everything.

Redman: So you sort of you modeled the upbringing of your children in a similar sort of—

2-00:27:28

Miramontes: I did. My sister did, too.

Redman: Was there anything that was sort of different in the next generation, or did you try to mimic pretty closely the, other than well, maybe the language things have changed a little bit. Did you speak English in the house?

2-00:27:40

Miramontes: Yes, mostly English after, because the boys, that's all they spoke. But with my mom, my dad, Spanish.

Redman: I assume your husband picked up more and more Spanish.

2-00:27:52

Miramontes: Yes, he did. No more "y'all."

Redman: You had to correct some of the Southern accent.

2-00:28:03

Miramontes: But now my son driving through all the states; he was in Connecticut last week. He said, "You should see over there how they speak." He said in Connecticut—it was his first time there—he said, "You should see, you don't see no black people there at all."

Redman: It must have been different for him growing up here, so and it changed so much during the war, so many African Americans coming in, yeah, very interesting.

Well, I'd like to say thank you again.

2-00:28:53

Miramontes: I heard something else on TV last time the news about Japan. It says that it's so bad over there right now with this—

Redman: Earthquake, yeah, and tsunami and the nuclear meltdown.

2-00:29:07

Miramontes: {stop here} The nuclear, yeah, there's no end in the future with that thing there, but they said one thing—this guy in Washington was saying this; he'd just come back from there—he says, "It's amazing to see those people. You don't hear them complaining. They're so united helping each other. There's no looting." Then they think of us over here. Look at Oakland. I mean, a lot of places.

Redman: It's not quite the same.

2-00:29:40

Miramontes: That's what's sad.

Redman: You wish there was more of a community—

2-00:29:43

Miramontes: Yes. But another thing that I think, in Japan I think that most of those people are Japanese. Here in our country, look about how many nationalities we have here.

Redman: It's everyone. So do you think that affects the sort of united front, whether or not we can present that or not, yeah.

2-00:30:04

Miramontes: I think that has a lot to do—

Redman: How about during the war? Do you feel that those sort of differences were then subverted underneath the patriotism that—

2-00:30:11

Miramontes: I think so.

Redman: People got along a little better, do you think?

2-00:30:15

Miramontes: Yeah. So that's the difference, like this one, and then the minister was speaking there in his own language, but they had an interpreter, and he was saying that they have to unite, especially in a tragedy like this. Nobody complains. The ladies cry because they lost their loved ones, but that's all. They try to help each other. That's why I like it here in this area here. I'm kind of thinking of moving out of here because the property taxes are really expensive here. But if I go to another place then I don't know the people. Over here I know what I have.

Redman: You know your neighbors. Well, once again I'd like to say thank you for contributing.

[End of Interview]