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Berkeley, California

**Mary Newson**

**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  
Esther Ehrlich  
in 2002

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Interview with Mary Newson  
Interviewed by: Esther Ehrlich  
Transcriber: Conor Casey  
[Interview #1: October, 2, 2002]  
[Begin Audio File Newson1 10-02-02]

1-00:00:22

**Ehrlich**

Today's October 2<sup>nd</sup> and I'm interviewing Mrs. Mary Newson at her home in San Jose, California. So why don't we start at the very beginning. Where and when were you born?

1-00:00:44

**Newson**

I was born in Teague, Texas.

1-00:00:46

**Ehrlich**

What's the name of the town?

1-00:00:48

**Newson**

Teague.

1-00:00:49

**Ehrlich**

How do you spell that?

1-00:00:51

**Newson**

T-E-A-G-U-E.

1-00:00:54

**Ehrlich**

Okay.

1-00:00:55

**Newson**

In 19-- January 13, 1922.

1-00:00:57

**Ehrlich**

And who was in your family?

1-00:01:03

**Newson**

It was four of us: two girls and two boys.

1-00:01:06

**Ehrlich**

And your mom?

1-00:01:08

**Newson**

My mom, dad, it was six in the family.

1-00:01:16

**Ehrlich**

And where were you in the lineup?

1-00:01:17

**Newson**

I was the second oldest.

1-00:01:21

**Ehrlich**

And did you have any other family?

1-00:01:26

**Newson**

Yes, I had a grandfather, grandmother, and on the other side, I had a grandfather and a step-grandmother.

1-00:01:39

**Ehrlich**

And did you grow up knowing your grandparents?

1-00:01:41

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:01:44

**Ehrlich**

Do you know where they came from?

1-00:01:49

**Newson**

Well, my grandfather-- my dad's dad, came from Louisiana and I didn't know his dad.

1-00:02:03

**Ehrlich**

And do you know on your mom--mother's side where the family came from?

1-00:02:09

**Newson**

Well--my mother was from Mexica, Texas. She was-- no, first she was born in Rocky Branch, Texas. Her mother-- Want to know that?

1-00:02:24

**Ehrlich**

Yes.

1-00:02:26

**Newson**

Her mother died in childbirth.

1-00:02:26

**Ehrlich**

Oh.

1-00:02:29

**Newson**

They saw that she was in the casket with her mother. They thought that she wasn't going to live, but they saw her breathing.

1-00:02:38

**Ehrlich**

She was actually in the casket?

1-00:02:40

**Newson**

Yes. Because after her mother had passed they thought the baby--that was my mother--that she wasn't going to live. Then they saw her breathing, and they took her out of the casket. And her grandmother raised her until her father remarried. And her father was a teacher.

1-00:03:06

**Ehrlich**

Your mother's father?

1-00:03:08

**Newson**

--Was a schoolteacher. He taught school and he married a young lady that he taught. So one day after he married her, he asked her if he could bring his children to see her. And so she agreed, and then he wasn't seeming to want to carry them back home. She said, "When are you gonna carry your children back home?" He starts, tears fell in his eyes, and he said, "I thought they were already home." And that's how she got to live with her stepmother, and she lived there until she got married.

1-00:03:52

**Ehrlich**

To your father? No--to your--to--

1-00:03:58

**Newson**

To my father, yes, that's right.

1-00:04:03

**Ehrlich**

That's an amazing story. Wow. So did you grow up in the same home as a child? Did you move around or were you just in one house?

1-00:04:18

**Newson**

Oh. We lived in one house because my father's father, he owned a lot of land. My mother's father was a schoolteacher, and in those days and times they liked for their children to marry somebody who had goals in mind and so they got a chance to marry. My father, after he married my mother, he brought her down. She wanted to live on her father's place, but his daddy wanted

him to live on his place. And so, naturally, the man has the most saying, and she moved down to Teague, Texas where my father's father's land was. Her father was trying to sell her some land where he lived up in Mexica, Texas and they didn't want to live there--my dad didn't. And soon they found oil on that land, and my mother said she was sorry that they didn't move there or stay there. So we used to tell her, "Oh, we would have been rich now if you had stayed there!" But anyway we moved to our father's place, and on the way down to our father's place my mother had never been in the rural before.

1-00:05:54

**Ehrlich**

She was used to the city?

1-00:05:55

**Newson**

Yes. And at that day and time, they built log cabins and she saw this lady looking out the door, and she said, "What is she doing in there?" And my daddy said, "That's her home, where she lives."

Anyway, she grew up on the farm and raised--it was four--she gave birth to four. But when she was pregnant, my father's mother asked her, "Would you give me that baby?" and she told her, "Yes, you can have the baby." And so when the baby was born--my mother's health wasn't too good. And her mother-in-law came to the hospital to get the clothing-- had the clothing for the baby, and she took the baby home. That was my oldest brother. And she raised him and it was three of us raised together. Me and my sister, and baby brother, and our oldest brother was raised by our grandparents.

1-00:07:02

**Ehrlich**

So did you treat him as a brother? Did he feel like a brother? Or was he--what was that relationship like?

1-00:07:04

**Newson**

Yes, he was treated as a brother, only he didn't have to work. We had to work on the farm.

1-00:07:10

**Ehrlich**

What kind of work did you do?

1-00:07:16

**Newson**

My oldest brother?

1-00:07:17

**Ehrlich**

No, on the farm what kind of work did you do?

1-00:07:19

**Newson**

Oh, we raised cotton, corn, sugar cane, potatoes, peanuts, peas--you name it--it was all types of vegetables. We had plenty of land.

1-00:07:35

**Ehrlich**

So when did you work?

1-00:07:39

**Newson**

We worked after we grew up. Of age--our daddy had us working. We would chop cotton, pick cotton and do all that.

1-00:07:52

**Ehrlich**

So what about schooling? What kind of schooling did you have?

1-00:07:55

**Newson**

Well, we went to school, but our daddy always kept us out of school two or three weeks to work--finish working, so we could buy our school clothes. My sister didn't like him for that after she grew up. She said, "Why did you have to keep us out of school?" But we would finally catch up with the children.

1-00:08:14

**Ehrlich**

What are your memories of school?

1-00:08:20

**Newson**

It was good. We liked it. But we had to walk a long ways to school. We had to walk about five miles to school. Whenever it would rain, we had these canals to cross, and the water would rise and we had little walkways, bridgeways to walk across. But whenever it rained our daddy would let us ride horses to school, and we didn't too much like that 'cause, a lot of children they didn't have horses to ride to school, and we would ride our horses to school. At school, there was a little store there and our daddy had an account open so we could go and get our lunch whenever we wanted to buy something.

1-00:09:11

**Ehrlich**

So you'd buy your lunch.

1-00:09:13

**Newson**

Sometime we'd buy it; sometime we'd take it. But we knew about how to judge our finance because he'd tell us. But it was always open there for us.

1-00:09:26

**Ehrlich**

So what do you--do you have memories of school? How about of-- Were you in the same school for grammar school through high school, or was it two separate schools?

1-00:09:36

**Newson**

Well, grammar school, it was a separate school. After we went to school so long until about the seventh grade, so then we went to--they moved to another school. They tore the other school down--the grammar school, and moved it up in a different area. That's why we had to walk a little farther to school.

1-00:09:59

**Ehrlich**

What kind of memories do you have of grammar school?

1-00:10:09

**Newson**

Oh, I have good memories. I remember one day--this was wasn't so good. There was a young man, and he liked me--a boy--he liked me. And he would pick at me, and I didn't like him. I didn't want him to pick at me. And so I went and told my oldest brother that he was bothering me. My oldest brother was out playing ball, so he just stopped playing ball, and he went out there and hit him side the head and a big knot came on it. I said, "Oh I didn't want you to hurt him!" He said, "Well you shouldn't have never came and told me!" So, I remember that. But other than that, we got along pretty good in school.

1-00:11:02

**Ehrlich**

And what grade school did you go up until? When did you stop school?

1-00:11:07

**Newson**

I stopped school when I was in the tenth grade.

1-00:11:11

**Ehrlich**

And was that before graduating?

1-00:11:12

**Newson**

Yes, that was before graduating.

1-00:11:17

**Ehrlich**

And why did you stop?

1-00:11:21

**Newson**

Because there was a young man came down in my hometown, that used to live there and he asked his aunt about some ladies. He came from California. He said, "I want to get married. I want a nice young lady." And she told him that Mr. Garvins had some nice girls. He came down

there and we were working, working on the farm, and we saw this car. It was driving real fast and he came and he said, "Is Mary Lee there?" And of course my daddy, he went out to meet him--asking about his daughter. So he asked could he carry us to a picnic that evening, that night. So my dad said, "Well," he just wanted to carry me and my dad said, "No, you have to carry them both." And that was my sister and I. It's just a year's difference in our age.

1-00:12:26

**Ehrlich**

What's her name?

1-00:12:27

**Newson**

Her name is Dorothy. And so we went to this picnic of an association, and he asked me to marry him that night.

1-00:12:38

**Ehrlich**

The same night?

1-00:12:40

**Newson**

The same night. And so I said, "Oh I can't do that. My daddy won't allow that." So he said, "I'm gonna ask him." Say, "I'm going back to California and fruit grows wild." He showed me a lot of money, and it kinda fascinated me, because I was working hard on the farm then. He came down the next day and asked my daddy if he could marry me and carry me back to California. My dad said, "I don't think she knows what she's doing." So he called me in and asked me. Of course, I said, "Yes," because I was excited about not working anymore. But I really didn't know what I was doing.

1-00:13:34

**Ehrlich**

So you'd known him for one day?

1-00:13:35

**Newson**

Three days.

1-00:13:36

**Ehrlich**

Three days!

1-00:13:39

**Newson**

Yes. And then I came back to California. We got married.

1-00:13:44

**Ehrlich**

You got married in Texas?

1-00:13:45

**Newsom**

Yes, and I came back to California and we came back to California. We had to stop and he had to work, because he was a carpenter doing electrician or something, and to work to make some money to get back here. He brought another couple back with him--his cousins. And after that, we came out to California and it was the WPA at that time. He stopped to get some commodities. And I said, "I'm going to write and tell my daddy that you are getting--" I thought it was welfare. I didn't know what it was. "I'm gonna write and tell my daddy." And he said, "No, don't do that. He don't have know about it." And so I didn't write him. But it was a letdown to me because we never got any aid or help, because we lived on our own farm and my father wasn't qualified for it. From then on I just stayed there and my dad came out to see us.

1-00:15:01

**Ehrlich**

What was the journey like from--how did you get from Texas to California?

1-00:15:08

**Newsom**

We were in a car. He drove a car.

1-00:15:13

**Ehrlich**

So he had a car?

1-00:15:14

**Newsom**

Yes, he had a car. He stopped in Arizona did some work, got some gas, come on out here. Then when he got to California, we stopped and got some aid there.

1-00:15:33

**Ehrlich**

Which you didn't feel very good about.

1-00:15:34

**Newsom**

That's it.

1-00:15:35

**Ehrlich**

What was it like leaving your family?

1-00:15:38

**Newsom**

Well, I missed them, but I was glad that I didn't have to do any more work.

1-00:15:45

**Ehrlich**

So the work was pretty hard.

1-00:15:46

**Newsom**

Yes.

1-00:15:54

**Ehrlich**

So tell me about what it was like when you first got to California. You were starting to say that your father came and visited.

1-00:15:55

**Newson**

Yeah, my dad came out to visit us, and then the next year or so, my sister came out. She had finished high school then. So my dad, after she came out she got married, and my dad asked us to go back to Texas with him. And we told him that we didn't have any money to go. And he said, "Well, you ladies, why don't you go and get you a job? And then you will have some money when you get ready to go when I get ready to go home." So we went and got a job. And our husbands, they didn't like for us to work because they hadn't told us to go to work. But as years rolled by they were glad we was working. [Laughing] And that's how we started to work, because we wanted to go back to Texas with our daddy.

1-00:17:04

**Ehrlich**

But you didn't--or did you?

1-00:17:07

**Newson**

Yeah, we went to work. We got a job--

1-00:17:08

**Ehrlich**

But did you end up going back to Texas?

1-00:17:08

**Newson**

Yes we went back to Texas with him.

1-00:17:11

**Ehrlich**

Oh.

1-00:17:12

**Newson**

We made some money and went back to Texas with him.

1-00:17:15

**Ehrlich**

Okay, so this is the part now I need to understand. So you came to California with your brand-new husband--

1-00:17:23

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:17:20

**Ehrlich**

And where did you live when you first got here?

1-00:17:27

**Newson**

Lived in Merced, California.

1-00:17:28

**Ehrlich**

In Merced, and then how did you end up--you ended up working in Richmond. How did you get from Merced to your job--what--Tell me that story--

1-00:17:41

**Newson**

We moved, during the wartime, after we left Merced and moved to Oakland.

1-00:17:50

**Ehrlich**

And why did you do that?

1-00:17:51

**Newson**

Because it was a wartime job. A big city in Oakland, you could get work.

1-00:18:00

**Ehrlich**

And what kind of work did your husband get?

1-00:18:03

**Newson**

Uh, he started working at the Ford Motor Company.

1-00:18:07

**Ehrlich**

Doing what?

1-00:18:07

**Newson**

Uh, he was working on the dock, unloading cars and jeep trucks and things. He was an unloader.

1-00:18:20

**Ehrlich**

And when did you start working?

1-00:18:24

**Newson**

I started working there--I first started working at the Naval Air Station where they build planes.

1-00:18:34

**Ehrlich**

Oh.

1-00:18:32

**Newson**

As a riveter.

1-00:18:35

**Ehrlich**

You did? How did you get that job?

1-00:18:38

**Newson**

I just went out and applied for it and I got it.

1-00:18:42

**Ehrlich**

Had you heard that there were lots of wartime jobs in the Bay Area?

1-00:18:47

**Newson**

Well, my husband had. I just followed him.

1-00:18:54

**Ehrlich**

So he heard about it when he was in Merced?

1-00:18:55

**Newson**

Yes--and he moved to Oakland--

1-00:18:57

**Ehrlich**

And you went with him?

1-00:18:59

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:18:59

**Ehrlich**

Did you want to move to Oakland?

1-00:19:01

**Newson**

Yes. I didn't mind it.

1-00:19:05

**Ehrlich**

So he's--so you applied to the Naval--

1-00:19:10

**Newson**

--Air Station.

1-00:19:10

**Ehrlich**

--Air Station. To work as a riveter.

1-00:19:13

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:19:13

**Ehrlich**

Tell me about how, if you can remember, what the application process was like.

1-00:19:18

**Newson**

At the Naval Air Station?

1-00:19:21

**Ehrlich**

Yeah. How did that work?

1-00:19:25

**Newson**

Well it would be building on planes, and we would go in the side of the plane and they had a bar. One would shoot the motor, and it would hold this bar against it and that was a riveter. To rivet the planes together. The planes and all various parts about the plane.

1-00:19:45

**Ehrlich**

Did you have to wear a special uniform?

1-00:19:49

**Newson**

I think we did have to have--special glasses.

1-00:19:55

**Ehrlich**

Special glasses?

1-00:19:51

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:19:47

**Ehrlich**

And do you remember when you went to get the job? How did that work? Did you just show up and they hired you, or do you remember?

1-00:20:03

**Newson**

Well, I think they did. At first, the first job, backing up, we went to work for the Southern Pacific.

1-00:20:18

**Ehrlich**

Oh really?

1-00:20:18

**Newson**

I worked for Southern Pacific for a little while. And then I left there and went to the Naval Air Station.

1-00:20:26

**Ehrlich**

What did you do at Southern Pacific?

1-00:20:25

**Newson**

We used to clean the cars. Clean cars. Sweep them out.

1-00:20:36

**Ehrlich**

Where was that?

1-00:20:38

**Newson**

That was in Oakland.

1-00:20:41

**Ehrlich**

And do you remember applying for that job?

1-00:20:39

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:20:40

**Ehrlich**

What was that? When you went to get the job, did you just show up and they hired you or--

1-00:20:50

**Newson**

Yeah, we showed up and they just hired us.

1-00:20:53

**Ehrlich**

And who were your co-workers? Who were the people you worked with?

1-00:21:00

**Newson**

Oh, it was just a lot of ladies that worked there.

1-00:20:57

**Ehrlich**

Lot of ladies? And what about different racial groups? Was it black and white?

1-00:21:03

**Newson**

Yes. Black and white.

1-00:21:03

**Ehrlich**

What do you remember?

1-00:21:07

**Newson**

Oh, we would work and sweep out the cars, and then the Pullman porters and all would come in after we done cleaning the cars. They would get the train all prepared to go out, you know, and sometimes they would fix a little food on the train and we could get a sandwich. So, we ladies, we kinda liked that. It's just--our employers--foremen, they didn't know that.

1-00:21:39

**Ehrlich**

They didn't know that you got a little snack?

1-00:21:48

**Newson**

After the cooks came on the train. So I worked there about, oh, I guess about six months, maybe, then I went to the Naval Air Station.

1-00:21:54

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember working on the trains? Were there men? Did you--were there men who cleaned, too, or were the people who cleaned just the women?

1-00:22:02

**Newson**

Mostly it was the ladies.

1-00:22:04

**Ehrlich**

And do you remember, was it mostly black, mostly white? How was the mix? Do you remember?

1-00:22:13

**Newson**

It was mostly black.

1-00:22:16

**Ehrlich**

And do you remember whether the black workers and white workers worked together well or--

1-00:22:22

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:22:22

**Ehrlich**

Was there a tension between them, do you remember?

1-00:22:25

**Newson**

No, not at that time.

1-00:22:26

**Ehrlich**

Not at that time? So then you went from there to the Naval Air Station?

1-00:22:33

**Newson**

To the Naval Air Station--

1-00:22:30

**Ehrlich**

So tell me anything you can about that job. I mean--

1-00:22:37

**Newson**

Naval Air Station? Oh that was a good job. The only thing about the Naval Air Station, they would change you. You'd have to work three, maybe three months, and you'd have to go on the night shift. And at this time, I had a child and I didn't--

1-00:23:01

**Ehrlich**

You had your first child?

1-00:23:03

**Newson**

Yes, and he had whooping cough, and I didn't like to work on nightshift. I didn't want to be transferred on the night shift. I told them that my baby had whooping cough, and so when it came time to change us back, they let me work on days. When it came back to change back on the nightshift, I told them my baby still had the whooping cough, and they said they'd never heard of a baby having whooping cough that long. Anyway, in the meantime, my husband was working at Ford. So he said, "Would you like to come work at Ford?" And I said, "Yes," because I didn't want to go on nightshift.

1-00:23:43

**Ehrlich**

They were going to make you go back to--

1-00:23:43

**Newson**

Yeah, they were going to make me go back to nightshift. And so he got me a job at Ford. That's how I managed to get there.

1-00:23:49

**Ehrlich**

So what was that job like?

1-00:23:55

**Newson**

The Ford Motor Company?

1-00:23:55

**Ehrlich**

Yes.

1-00:23:57

**Newson**

Oh, that was--I was hired in as a janitor. So I worked there and as a janitor. I worked in the cafeteria, cleaning, mopping the cafeteria. So one day, I--somebody got my pail what I mopped with, and I couldn't find it. And I'd go up to the restroom--it was a good job. I'd go up to the restroom and sit and talk with the janitor up there, and this particular morning, I couldn't find my pail. I went up there and stayed all the morning. So by noontime--in the meantime, my boss was looking for me, and he didn't know where I was. And so, when I came down at lunchtime, my husband, they had come in from the dock out there, working. They would come in at different shifts and eat. And my boss, he gave me a good talk, you know, "Where were I?" And I told him I was at the restroom, and I couldn't find my mop bucket. He really made me feel bad, you know. I started crying, and my husband said, "Why are you crying?" I said, "Well, my boss gave me a good talk about-- up at the restroom, and I couldn't find my mop pail, and I didn't know what else to do." And so my husband said, "Well don't be crying. Go on up and quit. If you don't like it, then quit." So I went up to the office and quit, and turned my badge in, and told them I was quitting. So one of the higher-up bosses heard that I was quitting, and he came and met me. I had got outside the office, turned my badge in. He said, "No, no, we're not gonna do this." He went in there and got my badge, and brought it back and gave it to me. So I thanked him a many times, because if he hadn't went in there and got my badge, I wouldn't be drawing pension today. So I was so grateful to him after that.

1-00:26:26

**Ehrlich**

So you recovered from being yelled at and it turned out that the job worked out okay.

1-00:26:33

**Newson**

Yes, and I'm drawing a pension right today.

1-00:26:37

**Ehrlich**

What kind of pay did you get? Do you remember?

1-00:26:34

**Newson**

At that time?

1-00:26:34

**Ehrlich**

Um-hmm.

1-00:26:39

**Newson**

We used to get paid every week, or two weeks I think. We'd get paid cash in an envelope. And as the years rolled by, they started paying us checks.

1-00:26:55

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember how much you made every week?

1-00:27:02

**Newson**

Not really.

1-00:27:01

**Ehrlich**

Could you guess? I know it was a long time ago now--

1-00:27:07

**Newson**

Yes! It's been a long time. I don't know whether it was uh--fifty-something dollars? I don't really know how much it was. But we got paid every week, every two weeks.

1-00:27:25

**Ehrlich**

Every two weeks. Were you part of a union?

1-00:27:26

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:27:30

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember how that all worked? Did everybody join?

1-00:27:33

**Newson**

The union? Yes, you had to join the union.

1-00:27:39

**Ehrlich**

So everybody joined.

1-00:27:40

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:27:49

**Ehrlich**

And was it a different union for--were blacks and whites in the same union together?

1-00:27:53

**Newson**

Yes, they were.

1-00:27:53

**Ehrlich**

And there was no problem with that?

1-00:27:57

**Newson**

No problem.

1-00:27:58

**Ehrlich**

Because I've heard that in some of the unions, blacks had a very hard time getting in--

1-00:28:04

**Newson**

Um--no--

1-00:28:04

**Ehrlich**

But you didn't have that problem?

1-00:28:06

**Newson**

No, no. I think we got paid every two weeks about a hundred dollars or something, and I'm just guessing.

1-00:28:11

**Ehrlich**

So about fifty dollars a week.

1-00:28:15

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:28:15

**Ehrlich**

Was that good money in those days?

1-00:28:19

**Newson**

At that time, at that time it was because you could get a loaf of bread, I'm sure for about 10 to 15 cents.

1-00:28:22

**Ehrlich**

So do you remember for you that it felt like a satisfying amount of money?

1-00:28:24

**Newson**

At that time.

1-00:28:31

**Ehrlich**

Yeah. So what other memories do you have of your work at Ford?

1-00:28:37

**Newson**

Well, at Ford I remember that I started working on the assembly line, and making floorboards that go in the bottom of the cars, and I worked on park lights. I worked on the chrome.

1-00:28:58

**Ehrlich**

Oh, so you didn't just work as a janitor you also worked on the line.

1-00:29:01

**Newson**

Yes, I--

1-00:29:06

**Ehrlich**

How did you make the transition from the janitor work to the working on line?

1-00:29:09

**Newson**

You get a little more money. I wanted to get more money.

1-00:29:12

**Ehrlich**

So you just had to apply for it or did someone promote you, how did it work? Do you remember?

1-00:29:13

**Newson**

Yes, well I applied for it.

1-00:29:21

**Ehrlich**

So what was working--

1-00:29:22

**Newson**

On the line? What was that like?

1-00:29:23

**Ehrlich**

Yeah, what was that like?

1-00:29:24

**Newson**

Oh, you had to work steadier. Because when I was doing janitorial work, I would go up to the restroom, sit down, talk, crochet, you know.

1-00:29:42

**Ehrlich**

Because you could take a little break?

1-00:29:39

**Newson**

Yeah. Take breaks. But then, when I started on the line, I couldn't do that.

1-00:29:45

**Ehrlich**

When you were working, doing the janitor work did you make friends? Did you have co-workers that were friends?

1-00:29:55

**Newson**

Uh-huh, I had a few. Yes.

1-00:29:58

**Ehrlich**

And you'd find little ways--

1-00:29:57

**Newson**

--because the lady, the lady in the restroom, she was my friend.

1-00:30:06

**Ehrlich**

So she worked up there?

1-00:30:01

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:30:06

**Ehrlich**

So you'd go up and visit.

1-00:30:13

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:30:12

**Ehrlich**

What about when you worked up on the line, what was that like?

1-00:30:16

**Newson**

Yeah, I had friends on the line. One lady told me, after the war was over, she said, "Mary," said, "I have to work because I don't have a husband." They were really trying to get rid of us ladies after the war. They made the work hard for us. Gave us more work. And she said, "I have to work. But you don't have to work, you have a husband." So I made up my mind I thought, "Well she can work." She doing--working on the left handed side and I was working on the right.

1-00:30:50

**Ehrlich**

And what were you doing?

1-00:30:53

**Newson**

Putting the floorboards with the motor guns. These high-powered guns--and I said, "If she can do this work, I can too." And so I stuck there. Two ladies quit on the job that I was on, and I held on to it.

1-00:31:16

**Ehrlich**

That was after the war ended?

1-00:31:16

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:31:17

**Ehrlich**

You kept working.

1-00:31:18

**Newson**

Yes, yes. They tried to run us out of there because the men were coming back from the war.

1-00:31:23

**Ehrlich**

How did they try?

1-00:31:26

**Newson**

By giving us harder work.

1-00:31:28

**Ehrlich**

Like what?

1-00:31:30

**Newson**

Uh--more work, you know.

1-00:31:36

**Ehrlich**

So did they expect you to do the same amount of work--

1-00:31:36

**Newson**

As a man.

1-00:31:38

**Ehrlich**

--in the same amount of time?

1-00:31:38

**Newson**

Yes, yes, and if you didn't, they'd fire you. You'd just hang in there--I did--just a few of us. Most of them, they would quit.

1-00:31:53

**Ehrlich**

How long did you stay?

1-00:31:56

**Newson**

I stayed there all the while. And I remember one day I was working, there was a relief man. He had to relieve me, and he had got thirteen people to relieve. Every day he would ask me for chewing gum, and this particular day I didn't feel like giving him any chewing gum. I felt he ought to be able to buy his own gum. So he made me the very last person to relieve. It was thirteen. By this time, I was really, really upset. And when you get upset, you get nervous. I was nervous, and the main bosses was standing up there. Two or three of the bosses were standing up talking. So I went to put the chrome across the--I had a different job at that time. I was laying bumpers across the line, the assembly line, and I went to lay the bumper across there. Maybe one of the bumper guards or something, and I dropped it. And so, the boss said, "We're not gonna have you damaging our stock around here." So I said, "Well, I didn't mean to drop your stock." I was nervous. So it was close to lunchtime, I went upstairs. At this time I had become a Christian, because I met this gentleman on the job and he asked me about studying the bible, and he told me the Bible was truth. My father always taught us the Bible was truth, and so I went upstairs and I said, "If anybody bothers me or say anything to me, I'm going to give them a piece of my mind." I went upstairs and I opened my Bible, and I turned to James the third chapter, and I started reading it, and it said, "that a horse has bits." I don't know if you know what that is, has bits in his mouth and he can pull a line, and the horse will go right or the horse will go left. And the ship, the large ship has a small helmet and wherever the government want it to go, they can guide that little helmet and the ship will go any country. He said, "the wildest animal, the beast, man has been able to tame it, because they carry it to the zoo, but the son of man the little tongue is a deadly poison and no one can tame it." So when I read that it made me humble, and I didn't feel like--have the attitude that I had before I read that. And I went back downstairs and that was on a Friday evening so I was very quiet. I didn't say anything to anybody, and then Monday, when I came to work, I went to this boss and told him that I was sorry that I had dropped the stock. I didn't mean to drop the stock and he said, "Oh-go ahead, go ahead." I think he might have forgotten it. But I hadn't because I was really upset. So that was one incident that happened to me, and I learned to control myself by reading this in the Bible, in the third chapter of James.

1-00:35:49

**Ehrlich**

Did you grow up with a religious upbringing?

1-00:35:48

**Newson**

Yes, I did.

1-00:35:54

**Ehrlich**

Can we go backwards a little bit in time, and can you tell me about that?

1-00:35:56

**Newson**

Well, my father's father owned a church because it was on his farm. He built this church and we would--my dad would always take us to church and we grew up being Christian. I can remember my auntie, my uncle, he lived about twenty-something miles--my father's sister-- and they had a beautiful car. My daddy never owned a beautiful car but they had a beautiful car. And they came down to take us to a picnic to spend some time with them. And I didn't want to go because my--they were having or starting a meeting, a revival at my home, and I didn't want to go because I wanted to go to this revival. And in the meantime, my sister, she was twelve years old, she had given her heart to the Lord.

1-00:36:58

**Ehrlich**

How old were you?

1-00:36:58

**Newson**

Fifteen.

1-00:37:00

**Ehrlich**

You were fifteen.

1-00:37:02

**Newson**

And one day me and her got into--we'd get into little scribbles. We'd hit each other and tag each other and wouldn't want to take the last lick. So she said--so I was hitting her and she was hitting me and then I ran out in front and fell down--we were over at our grandmother's house. I said, "You not a Christian!" And my grandmother saw me and she said--my grandmother, when they baptized her she was happy, baptizing my sister and she was happy and she fell, because we was down by a pool and she fell. And I run from my sister and fall down, you know, pretending that she wasn't happy because she wasn't converted. So my grandmother saw me and said, "You better wish somebody--you had a conversion, somebody could fall down in front of you." So I stopped doing that and then I started thinking about that.

1-00:38:09

**Ehrlich**

Just so I understand--you fall down because you're so happy. Is that right?

1-00:38:12

**Newson**

That's something my grandmother--she--

1-00:38:12

**Ehrlich**

She fell down because she was so happy that your sister was being baptized.

1-00:38:18

**Newson**

Was being baptized. And she stumbled and fell, and it was out in the country, on the road.

1-00:38:21

**Ehrlich**

And then you used to just fool around with your sister, pretending to fall, right?

1-00:38:24

**Newson**

Yeah, and my grandmother saw me--

1-00:38:26

**Ehrlich**

And said, "Uh"--

1-00:38:27

**Newson**

"You better wish you had something"--

1-00:38:30

**Ehrlich**

Okay.

1-00:38:29

**Newson**

So anyway, I started thinking about that, and I never fell down before her after that. When they started these meetings at my home, I wanted to find the Lord. So I went to--that's the way we were taught, you know, "pray and find Jesus," you know. I didn't go to the picnic; my sister couldn't go because I didn't go. So some of the children said, "Well we all-- let's go--we can go to the picnic and then come back and go to church and find Jesus. Get conversion." I said, "No I don't want to do that." So I stayed home. When the picnic was over that week I still was going to church. I hadn't found Jesus. And they said, "See I told you we could come back and get our religion." So my father said, "I thought you were really praying, Mary. But I don't think you praying now." And I said, "Well, every time I want to pray my mother wants me to sweep the yard or do something." Because we lived in the country then and he said, "Well you know if you wasn't around she wouldn't ask you to do it."

And that day we went to church at eleven o'clock and we'd go back in the evening and I made up my mind that I was going to go out and pray. And so I went down by where my daddy would water his horses, and I kneeled down and I started praying. I wasn't at no church. And I've heard people say, "Well, to know Jesus you've gotta have some kind of sign." And I've heard them say that they pray to heard doves moan. I guess the thing about the dove that Noah sent out. And I didn't know nothing about a dove moaning. I was afraid to ask the Lord to let me hear a dove moan. So I was praying and asking the Lord to forgive me of my sins, to come into my life. And finally, the spirit just said, "What do you want the

Lord to do?” And I said, “I want the Lord to just come and shake me with the spirit.” And so I began to pray and I began to sing and the song that I’d sing-- [sings]

*I am coming Lord*

*Trusting in your word*

*Keep me from the path of sin*

*Hide me in your love*

*Lord write my name above*

And then I go, “Well, I can sing!” I said, “Well, I’m not down here for fun. I’m down here for business.” And I started praying and then I got a little jolt--like that--and I felt myself. So finally, I got another jolt and I couldn’t stop from shaking. And I got up and I run to the house and my mother said, “What’s wrong with you?” I wouldn’t say anything because I was afraid if I say something, I’d start crying because the spirit was on me. So, she started singing. And I said, “Mother--” I said “The Lord has forgiven me of my sins and I’m going to tell Gladys.” That was another girl that was on the base where we was praying at. So I went to Gladys’ house and I told Gladys that the Lord had come into my life and then I wanted to go and tell Clara. I went and told Clara. And then I left there and I went to tell Helen. And then another family that the Lord had came into my life. So--I don’t know if you want to hear all of this or not.

1-00:43:02

**Ehrlich**

It’s interesting--

1-00:43:04

**Newsom**

So I told Helen and her sisters and they wanted me to stay up ‘til that night with them ‘til when we went back to church. And I just wanted to go, go. And my grandmother, she was quite a religious--religious that’s my grandfather’s wife.

1-00:43:33

**Ehrlich**

Yeah?

1-00:43:33

**Newsom**

And so, in the meantime, I passed by my uncle’s and I told him that the Lord had came into my life and how the spirit had come over me. And he said, “Well just keep on praying!” So I said to myself, “Why you want me to keep praying?”

1-00:43:47

**Ehrlich**

[Laughs]

1-00:43:51

**Newsom**

[Laughing] So I went by another aunt's house. I wanted to see my grandmother, 'cause she was the warrior in our family and I wanted to see her. I came by another auntie's house and I wouldn't say nothing 'cause I was filled with the spirit. I didn't want to start crying. And they lived about a block and a half from my grandmother. So when I got over to my grandmother's house-- that's where the minister lived and he ran this revival there and we call it Evangelist now.

1-00:44:29

**Ehrlich**

Yeah.

1-00:44:33

**Newsom**

And so I said, "Where's grandmother?" And my aunt was there doing my sister's hair so she said, "What do you want with her?" I said, "I want my grandmother!" And they say, "Well, she went to get some water." We had-- at that time, they had a well, you know, you dig water. You find water down deep into the ground. And she had gone down to get some water. And I went over through the house there and I saw my grandmother comin' from the well. She had two pails of water-- one in each hand. I said, "Grandmother, the Lord has come into my heart. And I am happy." Grandmother set those two pails of water down! [Laughing]

1-00:45:18

**Ehrlich**

[Laughing]

1-00:45:19

**Newsom**

She starts shouting and hollering, and you could hear her voice echo through the woods, you know, like it's a song that you could hear echoing through the woods-- the little voices. So that night, the church was packed 'cause Grandmother was happy. And so--

1-00:45:39

**Ehrlich**

Did she tell all her friends and they came, or were they --

1-00:45:42

**Newsom**

They heard her voice echoing--

1-00:45:44

**Ehrlich**

So they knew something--

1-00:45:46

**Newsom**

Some convert was happy and the spirit of God was upon them. And so, in the meantime, I hadn't seen my daddy because he was out doin' the wood-- cuttin' the wood-- something. That night the church was full, and they had two or three young people give their heart to God that night. And I

had a cousin say, "I didn't believe any of it, Mary." [Laughing] Anyway, that night I saw my dad and he asked me if I would trade my conversion for his. And I told him "no."

1-00:46:21

**Ehrlich**

What does that mean? To trade a conversion?

1-00:46:26

**Newson**

He was just asking me if I would give up my spiritual life for him, y'know--

1-00:46:29

**Ehrlich**

He wanted to know how important it was to you?

1-00:46:31

**Newson**

Yes, yes.

1-00:46:33

**Ehrlich**

Oh, I see.

1-00:46:34

**Newson**

That's what he meant. So I said, "No."

1-00:46:40

**Ehrlich**

So--

1-00:46:40

**Newson**

Ever since then, I really knew the Lord. But when I worked Ford's. Back to Ford's now.

1-00:46:49

**Ehrlich**

Right--

1-00:46:49

**Newson**

I met this young man and he asked me about studying the Bible. And he said, "The Bible is truth." My dad always taught me that the bible was truth. And when I started studying with him, I found out about which was the Sabbath day, in studying. So, I joined the Adventist Church. Have you ever heard of Seventh Day Adventists?

1-00:47:16

**Ehrlich**

Yes.

1-00:47:17

**Newson**

And that's why I gave my heart to God.

1-00:47:19

**Ehrlich**

So you'd already-- You were already a Christian.

1-00:47:24

**Newson**

I was already a Christian, but I was not a Sabbath-keeper.

1-00:47:28

**Ehrlich**

So that was the difference when you got to the Ford plant and you met this co-worker.

1-00:47:33

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:47:36

**Ehrlich**

He got you interested in bible study?

1-00:47:39

**Newson**

And then I became a Seventh Day Adventist--

1-00:47:40

**Ehrlich**

A Seventh Day Adventist.

1-00:47:43

**Newson**

Yes. And the--Seventh Day Adventists-- used to be once a year they would ask for a donation, you know, to oversea, send boys and girls to camp. We would always have end gathering but they don't do it now.

1-00:48:00

**Ehrlich**

What does that mean?

1-00:48:02

**Newson**

End gathering-- gathering means to help supply and send money to help those who don't know about Jesus. Send boys and girls to camp and to build hospitals, where they help out in hospitals and things. And so, we'd do this once a year.

1-00:48:26

**Ehrlich**

So were you doing this while you were working in Richmond?

1-00:48:26

**Newson**

Working at the Ford plant, yes.

1-00:48:28

**Ehrlich**

Did you have other co-workers who were religious too?

1-00:48:31

**Newson**

Yes. But they wasn't -- it was two or three men who was Seventh Day Adventist. And they would ask for donations 'cause the men they would always give the donations to me. They said, "No, we want to give it to Mary." [Laughing]

1-00:48:52

**Ehrlich**

[Laughing] Why was that? Why was that?

1-00:48:54

**Newson**

[Laughing] 'Cause I'd go around and ask them for a donation and ask them to give me a dollar or so, and when someone would get sick or retire, I would take up offerings and order cake and serve them coffee.

1-00:49:10

**Ehrlich**

For people who were sick at work?

1-00:49:11

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:49:11

**Ehrlich**

Oh--

1-00:49:14

**Newson**

And by this time, I was working inside of the office, running off papers for the cars, you know. And I'd get a chance to stay long on my lunch period and I could--

1-00:49:28

**Ehrlich**

Was working in the office considered a better job than working on the line?

1-00:49:31

**Newson**

Yes. Because you didn't have to walk and keep up with the line, then. I had a big machine I'd run papers--hundreds and hundreds of papers off. And that would go in the cars.

1-00:49:48

**Ehrlich**

What do you mean you'd "run them off?" You'd copy them, or?

1-00:49:48

**Newson**

Yeah--I had a copy machine.

1-00:49:49

**Ehrlich**

Oh.

1-00:49:51

**Newson**

Mmm-hmm. And so--

1-00:49:53

**Ehrlich**

You got to take a little bit longer lunch breaks?

1-00:49:57

**Newson**

Yes. Yes. And then, when I was just on my lunch break I would go and ask them before I went into the office. And so one day I was asking them to give me a donation and one of them said, "Mary, we don't ever see you smile. But once a year."

1-00:50:17

**Ehrlich**

[Laughing] What did you say to that?

1-00:50:22

**Newson**

I didn't say anything, but I learned to smile. I learned to smile.

1-00:50:27

**Ehrlich**

You smile plenty now.

1-00:50:27

**Newson**

Yeah-- I learned that. I started when I was 22, working at Ford and I learned to have a different attitude-- a personality, you know. And uh--but it helped me to grow up-- be that way.

1-00:50:42

**Ehrlich**

It sounds like there were some really-- you made some good friendships, working there.

1-00:50:45

**Newson**

I did. I still have friends, we call and talk to each other. I talked to one yesterday.

1-00:50:53

**Ehrlich**

Who worked at Ford with you?

1-00:50:55

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:50:55

**Ehrlich**

A man or a woman?

1-00:50:57

**Newson**

Oh. This is a man. But it was women, there, too. But most of them left there during the war. Either they died.

1-00:51:09

**Ehrlich**

So most of the women that you worked with left but you stayed.

1-00:51:12

**Newson**

Yes. Yes. And I have men friends, now.

1-00:51:16

**Ehrlich**

Who worked there for a long time?

1-00:51:17

**Newson**

Yes. Some live in Richmond, some live in Oakland.

1-00:51:22

**Ehrlich**

Can you tell me what the Ford plant actually looked like since I don't have any picture in my head of what it looked like? Do you remember? Could you describe it?

1-00:51:35

**Newson**

Well, it was a building and the train would come in on the dock and they would unload stock. They had assembly lines where cars rolled down the assembly line. And it was just a large place.

1-00:51:57

**Ehrlich**

What did it smell like?

1-00:52:00

**Newson**

Well, I didn't worry about the smell, I don't know. [Laughing]

1-00:52:02

**Ehrlich**

So it didn't smell bad-- I mean-- do you have any memories of --of--

1-00:52:06

**Newson**

Of smell?

1-00:52:05

**Ehrlich**

Did it feel clean in there? What did it feel like to work there?

1-00:52:10

**Newson**

Yeah it felt all right. It was a factory, you know.

1-00:52:16

**Ehrlich**

Was it loud?

1-00:52:12

**Newson**

Yeah, yeah it was loud. You'd hear these guns going, these electrical guns and things going.

1-00:52:25

**Ehrlich**

Did you wear ear protection? Did people wear ear protection?

1-00:52:31

**Newson**

Um--I don't think-- you had to wear shoes. The right type of shoes to work there.

1-00:52:39

**Ehrlich**

And you said that you had to wear special glasses.

1-00:52:42

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:52:42

**Ehrlich**

And what about--anything to protect your ears?

1-00:52:45

**Newson**

No--you didn't have to wear that.

1-00:52:48

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember getting special training? How did you--how did you learn how to do all those jobs?

1-00:52:57

**Newson**

Well, they had someone to train you. Two or three days and if you didn't have it by then, well, I don't know you had to learn.

1-00:53:09

**Ehrlich**

So you had to learn fast, it sounds like.

1-00:53:11

**Newson**

Yes. And when I got to be an inspector I had to take a little test. One year it was a lady--she was a white lady--she had took this test and she didn't pass it. She gave up on it. And the next time it came around, they had an opening for women, and a man. One of our union men told me, he said, "Mary they have an opening for an inspector. Would you like to take the test?" And I said, "Yes. So I took the test and passed. And they didn't--they really--if they didn't want you to work, ladies, they'd try to make it hard for you. And they tried to make it hard for me after I passed the inspection. But I hung in there then. Because I said, "I hung in there during the war, I can hang here doing inspections."

1-00:54:04

**Ehrlich**

How'd they make it hard for you?

1-00:54:06

**Newson**

They'd put you on one of the toughest jobs. You had to inspect the headlights, the taillights, and the car would be moving, you know. You had to move fast, you know. And just make the work a little difficult for you. So I hung in there. But I can remember one day I was trying to do the job and inspect the job and I stooped over and bust my pants!

1-00:54:41

**Ehrlich**

Oh no!

1-00:54:44

**Newson**

[Laughing] So one of the guys, he said-- I had moved up from the fender department, I was working on the fenders and went into inspecting. And they put me on this tough job and the man, he didn't want the job, but I took the job, you know. And I was working so hard. I didn't realize I had ripped my pants and one of the foremen came up and said, "Mary, I think you need to go to the bathroom." He said, "Your pants are ripped." [Laughing] So I fell back and I went to the restroom, and the lady had a needle and thread. I sewed it up and I come back, and I still held onto the job. And so this--one of the young men that worked in the fender department, he went down the line. He said, "Mary's up there working so hard she's busted her pants!" And oh, he got a bang out of that! That was on a Friday, too. So I came on home, I said, "That's all right. I'm gonna hang onto the job." I said, "Two or three days, they'd be done and forgot it. And I still will have my job." And so I told him when I saw him that Monday, I said, "Why you didn't come and tell me?" I said, "That's okay." I said, "I'm gonna hang on to my job." I said, "Maybe

they done forgot about it.” And he was so sorry that he went down the line and had a laugh about it. But that that’s what that happened about--

1-00:56:27

**Ehrlich**

Sounds like hanging on to this job at Ford was very important to you.

1-00:56:30

**Newson**

It was, it was.

1-00:56:32

**Ehrlich**

How many years did you work there, altogether?

1-00:56:33

**Newson**

Thirty-two.

1-00:56:33

**Ehrlich**

Thirty-two years.

1-00:56:36

**Newson**

And I can recall-- my sister was -- she made her job for herself. She started out working in a cafeteria, I think. But then she entered into the care home business and all. And she said, “Why don’t you come and work for me?” And I said, “No. I didn’t have but five or six more years.” I said, “Maybe not that many.” I said, “No, I’m gonna hang onto my job and if you still have your care home, then I’ll come and work for you.” But in that length of time, she had done gave up her care home and I still had my job. And I’m still drawing my pension. But she has homes now she has peoples in. She had a hospital, like, but she has a home now. But it’s not like in a hospital or nursing home. And so I just hung on there. I wouldn’t let them run me out. I wouldn’t stop. I wouldn’t quit. My husband said, “Why don’t you quit and come to Oakland and get another job?” Because I lived in Oakland and commuted to Richmond.

1-00:58:00

**Ehrlich**

How did you get to Richmond?

1-00:58:01

**Newson**

We’d drive.

1-00:58:03

**Ehrlich**

You had a car.

1-00:58:04

**Newson**

Had a car, yes. I would commute. I had a car, and then I'd ride with some of the workers. We'd drive our cars. We'd change around and drive cars. So that's how I-- And then, when the plant moved down here. Well, we was commuting and --

1-00:58:26

**Ehrlich**

The plant moved to Milpitas, right?

1-00:58:30

**Newson**

Yes.

1-00:58:31

**Ehrlich**

Well, do you know what year that was?

1-00:58:34

**Newson**

I think that was in 1955. And so, when we came to Milpitas, the little town there, the population was 600. Now it's in the thousands.

1-00:58:49

**Ehrlich**

So you moved because --and-- you moved with the Ford plant.

1-00:58:53

**Newson**

Yes, I moved out here. Got a place out here.

1-00:58:56

**Ehrlich**

That seems like a good spot for us to stop just for now, and take a break. And then come back. Let me just turn this off.

1-00:59:04

**Newson**

All right.

1-00:59:11

**Ehrlich**

Off. Great. That's great. How does this feel to you?

1-00:59:15

**Newson**

Oh--

1-00:59:15

**Ehrlich**

Great you're doing great!

1-00:59:16

**Newson**

You think so?

1-00:59:15

**Ehrlich**

So when we took our little break you mentioned a woman named Ella who you said did really heavy work at Ford and you were describing that whole--how that all worked. You were telling me about that.

1-00:59:53

**Newson**

She worked where the frames in the cars first start off. You have to--They'd send those frames in on the train and she would take this motor and weld parts onto the frame, weld it together. And after they'd get the frames together, then they would have one of those lifts that carry it over to the line. They would put fenders on, they would put the cab part on, and the back part of the car-- [phone rings] --all put on the frame. [phone ringing] And that's what she'd do. Just one lady did this. She was the only lady that I knew--[phone ringing] -- worked in this department. She was a heavysset lady. And she worked with those men [phone ringing].

1-01:00:59

**Ehrlich**

And she had to be--[answering machine picks up] Oh. Okay. We can just keep talking. The phone's done. now.

1-01:01:04

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:01:06

**Ehrlich**

So she was a big-- a big woman, huh?

1-01:01:08

**Newson**

Yes, she was.

1-01:01:09

**Ehrlich**

And it was heavy work?

1-01:01:11

**Newson**

Yes, it was.

1-01:01:11

**Ehrlich**

Was your work heavy work?

1-01:01:14

**Newson**

No.

1-01:01:14

**Ehrlich**

None of it was? Even the bumpers?

1-01:01:19

**Newson**

No, it was just fast. You had to be moving fast. It wasn't heavy.

1-01:01:23

**Ehrlich**

None of it was heavy.

1-01:01:24

**Newson**

No.

1-01:01:26

**Ehrlich**

Was it dirty? Were the parts greasy and--

1-01:01:29

**Newson**

Yeah, they had greasy parts and-- I had to work in gloves--

1-01:01:35

**Ehrlich**

You wore gloves?

1-01:01:37

**Newson**

Yes. When I worked on the screws and nuts and bolts.

1-01:01:40

**Ehrlich**

So compared to the farm work that you did back home, did it feel like hard work to you?

1-01:01:44

**Newson**

Well, it was just fast because we were taught and trained to work. And I learned the work on the farm. And so--

1-01:01:57

**Ehrlich**

So you were used to--

1-01:01:58

**Newson**

Working.

1-01:01:58

**Ehrlich**

Working-- long.

1-01:02:03

**Newsom**

Yeah. I can remember on the farm once my daddy told my sister and I if we would keep up with him, I don't know whether we was chopping cotton or picking cotton--he would pay us. He'd give us an amount of money. And we kept up with him. And when he got out to the end of the row he said, "Now if you don't keep up with me, you know what you're gonna get. You're gonna get a switch."

1-01:02:34

**Ehrlich**

[Gasps]

1-01:02:33

**Newsom**

[Laughs] And so he was trying our strength in our work. And that's why we learned how to work.

1-01:02:42

**Ehrlich**

And what did you end up getting at the end of that day?

1-01:02:45

**Newsom**

Well, he might have paid us, but we learned that we couldn't lag behind him anymore. We had to keep up with him.

1-01:02:54

**Ehrlich**

So it was training for working in the assembly line.

1-01:02:57

**Newsom**

Yes. Yes. You would be trained.

1-01:03:04

**Ehrlich**

Were there other--were there other people that you worked with who had a hard time? Other women who had a hard time with the hard work?

1-01:03:11

**Newsom**

On the assembly line?

1-01:03:10

**Ehrlich**

People who couldn't keep up or--

1-01:03:13

**Newsom**

It was two ladies quit on the job that I stuck with.

1-01:03:17

**Ehrlich**

What do you remember? Was it too hard for them?

1-01:03:19

**Newson**

Yeah, they just gave up. Yeah. It was too hard for them. They just gave up.

1-01:03:26

**Ehrlich**

What kind of background did they come from, do you know?

1-01:03:28

**Newson**

No, I don't know what kind of backgrounds they came from.

1-01:03:32

**Ehrlich**

On the assembly line, were the people that you worked with white and black and other races, too?

1-01:03:41

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:03:42

**Ehrlich**

What do you remember?

1-01:03:43

**Newson**

It was one white lady that, as I had said, one year that had her to check out the inspectors. She gave up. But the next time we took it, after I stuck, she had too. And she used to make candies, *See's* candy, every Christmas for some of the fellas there. And she said, "Mary," said, "When I'm gone, I'm gonna give you this recipe. And I want you to make candy for them." And she gave me the *See's* recipe. I don't know where it is now, but anyway I would make candy after she passed. I would make candy for the guys.

1-01:04:31

**Ehrlich**

And on the assembly line, were most of the people men or women?

1-01:04:37

**Newson**

They were men.

1-01:04:40

**Ehrlich**

So there weren't too many women?

1-01:04:42

**Newson**

No, they didn't have a lot of them.

1-01:04:44

**Ehrlich**

You--there was you--

1-01:04:47

**Newson**

Yes--

1-01:04:47

**Ehrlich**

--and a few other, or?

1-01:04:48

**Newson**

Yes. I have pictures of a few.

1-01:04:49

**Ehrlich**

Oh--maybe next time you can show. We can get the pictures on the camera.

1-01:04:56

**Newson**

All right.

1-01:04:56

**Ehrlich**

Um--so I wanted to hear a little bit more about housing. When you first came to Oakland-- Well, first of all why did you live in Oakland and not in Richmond, since your job was in Richmond?

1-01:05:14

**Newson**

Well that's the first place I came--to Oakland.

1-01:05:18

**Ehrlich**

How come you ended up in Oakland?

1-01:05:18

**Newson**

Because I wasn't working at Ford at that time. I just went to Oakland, wanted to go to, my husband wanted to go to a larger city where he could find a job.

1-01:05:29

**Ehrlich**

So he chose Oakland?

1-01:05:30

**Newson**

Yes, because in Merced they were small towns and farm towns around there. Not too much defense work was going on.

1-01:05:41

**Ehrlich**

When you first got to Oakland, what do you remember it looking like?

1-01:05:46

**Newson**

Well, it was tall buildings. And the house was tall-- two story house.

1-01:06:00

**Ehrlich**

Had you seen that before?

1-01:06:00

**Newson**

No. And on the bus, I noticed people wasn't very friendly in the city. And I was trying to speak to some of them and they wouldn't say anything and I finally learned that people don't speak to you in the cities because they'd be always--have to talk-- they speak. And I once got on the bus and I wasn't familiar with the fares. They had these little coins or tokens you'd put in to ride the bus, and I was trying to put a piece of money in there. It wouldn't fit in there, and I was embarrassed.

1-01:06:49

**Ehrlich**

What else do you remember?

1-01:06:52

**Newson**

In Oakland?

1-01:06:53

**Ehrlich**

Yeah. Did the people look the same as back home?

1-01:06:55

**Newson**

Yeah, they looked the same but they wasn't friendly.

1-01:06:59

**Ehrlich**

Weren't friendly.

1-01:07:02

**Newson**

No.

1-01:07:02

**Ehrlich**

And what about looking for housing? How was looking for housing? Because what I've heard is that it was difficult at the time of the war to find--

1-01:07:10

**Newson**

Oh, during the time of the war it really was different. People would rent rooms and not apartments or house you had to rent-- And I remember we had a house up in Oakland and we had about three or four ladies that lived in our house we had rooms for. Because it was hard to find, and they were coming out here to work.

1-01:07:45

**Ehrlich**

So you rented them rooms in your house?

1-01:07:47

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:07:47

**Ehrlich**

How did you find your house?

1-01:07:50

**Newson**

Umm, it was a lady that told my husband about it. She had a rental. Then we found another house that was a rental, it was larger. So we got--we got there.

1-01:08:11

**Ehrlich**

And then when the war came you would rent out rooms to women who were coming for work?

1-01:08:15

**Newson**

Yes. And we had a man who lived there, too, also. We had a two story house and upstairs it was -- it was three rooms but we made a partition and we made five, I think, five rooms.

1-01:08:46

**Ehrlich**

Wow.

1-01:08:48

**Newson**

We had different people living there.

1-01:08:49

**Ehrlich**

And you rented all those rooms out?

1-01:08:52

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:08:51

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember some of the people who stayed in the rooms? Who they--where they came from and what kinds of work they did?

1-01:08:57

**Newson**

Some came from Louisiana, Texas, I don't know where else. Louisiana and Texas, as far as I can remember.

1-01:09:12

**Ehrlich**

And were they people that you knew before or they just--

1-01:09:13

**Newson**

No, no. Just people we rented rooms to.

1-01:09:17

**Ehrlich**

And how did they find--how did they find your rooms?

1-01:09:20

**Newson**

They saw a sign we had up: "Room for Rent."

1-01:09:27

**Ehrlich**

And were there some people who couldn't find anyplace to live?

1-01:09:31

**Newson**

Might have been, I don't know, but I know these people they found us. And they would tell others if, you know, you had a room for rent or something they'd come up and contact us. But we rented rooms.

1-01:09:56

**Ehrlich**

Did most of the people that you worked with at Ford, did they have--did they live in Richmond?

1-01:10:02

**Newson**

Most of the people, they lived in Richmond.

1-01:10:05

**Ehrlich**

But you and your husband decided to just stay put in Oakland, because that was--

1-01:10:09

**Newson**

Some lived in Oakland, too.

1-01:10:12

**Ehrlich**

And how would they get there?

1-01:10:13

**Newson**

They would drive cars to work.

1-01:10:16

**Ehrlich**

Was there other ways to get from Oakland to Richmond?

1-01:10:21

**Newson**

No more than driving cars.

1-01:10:21

**Ehrlich**

That was the only way?

1-01:10:23

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:10:23

**Ehrlich**

So there was nothing like a bus or a rail, a train or--

1-01:10:28

**Newson**

No, we would commute together. Three or four people would ride in a car.

1-01:10:35

**Ehrlich**

Together?

1-01:10:34

**Newson**

Yes, to work.

1-01:10:39

**Ehrlich**

So tell me what your neighborhood--where in Oakland did you live?

1-01:10:41

**Newson**

Right behind the California Hotel.

1-01:10:44

**Ehrlich**

What street was it on?

1-01:10:45

**Newson**

On Chestnut Street.

1-01:10:48

**Ehrlich**

Chestnut and--

1-01:10:52

**Newson**

It's right off San Pablo.

1-01:10:53

**Ehrlich**

Right off of San Pablo? Now, what was the neighborhood like?

1-01:10:56

**Newson**

It was all right. We didn't have a lot of drugs like they have now.

1-01:11:03

**Ehrlich**

Who were your neighbors?

1-01:11:05

**Newson**

They were mixed. Mixed neighbors.

1-01:11:07

**Ehrlich**

Mixed?

1-01:11:08

**Newson**

White and black.

1-01:11:09

**Ehrlich**

So white and black in the same neighborhood.

1-01:11:12

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:11:13

**Ehrlich**

And how did it seem that people got along?

1-01:11:16

**Newson**

Everybody got along fine because they were--they didn't have time to visit. Everybody was working, trying to make money, trying to survive.

1-01:11:30

**Ehrlich**

So people were working hard.

1-01:11:31

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:11:32

**Ehrlich**

And what about your memories of Richmond? What was Richmond like?

1-01:11:38

**Newson**

Richmond--I didn't live in Richmond. I would just go to work there. And as far as I know--it was all right, but I did hear a tragedy that happened over in Richmond one time.

1-01:11:55

**Ehrlich**

What was that?

1-01:11:56

**Newson**

A lady got her head cut off at one of the nightclubs there. I heard about that, but I never knew her.

1-01:12:06

**Ehrlich**

What happened, do you know?

1-01:12:08

**Newson**

No. I don't know what happened-- a man did it. But that's all the tragedy I heard about Richmond. And they'd be at these nightclubs out there.

1-01:12:20

**Ehrlich**

Did you ever go to the nightclubs?

1-01:12:22

**Newson**

I went to-- but I chose the place I went.

1-01:12:28

**Ehrlich**

Where did you go?

1-01:12:30

**Newson**

I went to a place in Oakland called the Elk's Club. It was a club. It was a nicer place.

1-01:12:37

**Ehrlich**

What was it like there?

1-01:12:38

**Newson**

It was nice.

1-01:12:42

**Ehrlich**

What did you do there?

1-01:12:43

**Newson**

They had drinks and shows.

1-01:12:47

**Ehrlich**

What kind of music? Was it music?

1-01:12:51

**Newson**

Yes, they had music.

1-01:12:51

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember any of the music that you used to listen to?

1-01:12:55

**Newson**

Well, I--I don't remember all the music but it was nice music. I don't remember the name of the music at that time.

1-01:13:12

**Ehrlich**

Was it blues?

1-01:13:12

**Newson**

Yes, it was blues.

1-01:13:17

**Ehrlich**

For somebody who's never been inside one of those blues clubs could you describe what it was like at the club that you went to?

1-01:13:24

**Newsom**

Well, they would have a place, tables, where you could drink and you could socialize. I don't remember now whether we danced in there or not. But it was a nice club and I didn't mind going there because it was nice. The other places were little bars and side bars, and people would just go in and drink, but you could sit down and I think they served food, but I'm not too sure. It's been a long time. But it was nice, and you had to dress neatly.

1-01:14:10

**Ehrlich**

And what would you wear?

**Newsom**

Oh, I would wear a dress. We didn't wear as many pants now as we do nowadays.

1-01:14:21

**Ehrlich**

And would you go with friends from work or--

1-01:14:25

**Newsom**

I'd go with friends my husband was acquainted with and I was acquainted with. We'd go as couples.

1-01:14:34

**Ehrlich**

So couples would go together--

1-01:14:36

**Newsom**

Yes.

1-01:14:37

**Ehrlich**

Did you have friends who weren't married?

1-01:14:41

**Newsom**

No, not really. I would have couples that were married, because we were married.

1-01:14:50

**Ehrlich**

So most of the people that you spent time with were married couples.

1-01:14:54

**Newsom**

Yes.

1-01:14:54

**Ehrlich**

Do you think--did you know of any single women?

1-01:14:59

**Newson**

Did I know of any single women at that time? Well, not really. No more than--it was a single lady that used to live in our back house there in Oakland. But as far as going out with single women, I didn't do that.

1-01:15:25

**Ehrlich**

So your friends were all couples.

1-01:15:25

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:15:27

**Ehrlich**

And you said you weren't sure that you danced at that club, but did people dance? What kind of dancing did people do?

1-01:15:36

**Newson**

They would do the couple dance; you know, dance together.

1-01:15:41

**Ehrlich**

Did you like to dance?

1-01:15:43

**Newson**

Yes, I liked to dance.

1-01:15:47

**Ehrlich**

Would you and your husband go out dancing?

1-01:15:46

**Newson**

Sometimes.

1-01:15:45

**Ehrlich**

Where would you go?

1-01:15:47

**Newson**

If we would go it would be to the Elk's Club.

1-01:15:52

**Ehrlich**

So you think that there was probably dancing there.

1-01:15:53

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:15:55

**Ehrlich**

What about--I've heard people say that there--when the war started and lots of people came to the East Bay and it got so crowded that there was some trouble with violence between the people who had lived here before and the new people coming in. Do you remember any stories, aside from the one you said in the nightclub? Did you feel safe on the streets?

1-01:16:25

**Newson**

[Phone rings] At that time--

1-01:16:27

**Ehrlich**

Maybe we should just wait one minute until this. Hold on just one sec. Do you want to check your machine?

1-01:17:03

**Newson**

Well--

1-01:17:03

**Ehrlich**

It's okay. I can put it on pause. Let's take a little break? So I was just asking you if you felt safe walking the streets alone at night in Oakland or Richmond during the war.

1-01:17:37

**Newson**

Well, I don't remember walking the street alone at night, but I did remember going to church once and a car passed me. And he slowed down, and I turned in as if I was living at that house and he went on by. But it wasn't nothing like it is now. I wouldn't dare walk to church now, even if I lived in that place.

1-01:18:04

**Ehrlich**

So you don't--do you remember hearing stories of people, or crime during the war years?

1-01:18:11

**Newson**

Not like they have now, no, I don't remember that.

1-01:18:20

**Ehrlich**

What else did you do for fun? Besides going to the blues club?

1-01:18:27

**Newson**

Um--well after awhile, I joined the church and I was affiliating in the church.

1-01:18:33

**Ehrlich**

You were what?

1-01:18:35

**Newson**

I joined the church and I would socialize with friends that's in the church. We'd have house parties and play games together and--

1-01:18:48

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember what kinds of games you would play?

1-01:18:50

**Newson**

We'd play dominoes and we'd played some type of whist game and that's how we'd socialize. We wouldn't go out nightclubbing and drinking anymore.

1-01:19:05

**Ehrlich**

So once you--was that once you became a Seventh Day Adventist?

1-01:19:07

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:19:09

**Ehrlich**

So that changed you life, then.

1-01:19:10

**Newson**

Yes, it did.

1-01:19:11

**Ehrlich**

How else did it change? Do Seventh Day Adventists drink?

1-01:19:17

**Newson**

No. They didn't drink, and they didn't gamble. We would just go to each other's homes and have dinners, and we'd go fishing sometimes. That's the type of life we would live.

1-01:19:43

**Ehrlich**

What kind of hours--I'm wondering how much free time you had. What kind of hours did you work at the Ford plant?

1-01:19:49

**Newson**

Oh, we worked eight hours a day.

1-01:19:52

**Ehrlich**

And did you have to work on weekends?

1-01:19:55

**Newson**

No--we just worked 'til Friday.

1-01:19:58

**Ehrlich**

What--so during the war there wasn't pressure on you to work overtime?

1-01:20:03

**Newson**

Not a whole lot, no.

1-01:20:09

**Ehrlich**

So you didn't have to work overtime?

1-01:20:07

**Newson**

No.

1-01:20:08

**Ehrlich**

No? What about when you worked riveting?

1-01:20:13

**Newson**

At the Naval Air Station?

1-01:20:13

**Ehrlich**

Yeah. Do you remember what kind of hours you had to work there?

1-01:20:17

**Newson**

Oh, we worked eight hours.

1-01:20:19

**Ehrlich**

Okay. So you did have some time for a social life.

1-01:20:21

**Newson**

Right.

1-01:20:22

**Ehrlich**

And what about--you--how many children did you end up having?

1-01:20:27

**Newson**

Well, when I moved here -- you see that young lady that was here?

1-01:20:37

**Ehrlich**

Yes.

1-01:20:41

**Newson**

I didn't get her by birth. I'd taken them when they were young. Their mother--I had a friend who testified one night at church about these two little girls that live in Pennsylvania. Their mother was alcoholic and their father was dead and she wished she had someone to keep them. And my husband and I--we had went up to adopt a child because at the time I only had one. We talked it over and he said, "Well how about sending for these little girls and keeping them."

1-01:21:25

**Ehrlich**

So you were in Oakland and they were in Texas?

1-01:21:29

**Newson**

They were in Pennsylvania.

1-01:21:30

**Ehrlich**

In Pennsylvania.

1-01:21:32

**Newson**

We had moved to San Jose at that time. And so he decided that, okay, we'll send and get them. We told the aunt that we would like to keep them, and we sent back to Pennsylvania and got them. They were six and seven, I think or seven and eight I just remembered. And they came out, well, I didn't plan to keep but one but when they came here my husband said, "You wouldn't want to separate you and your sister, would you?" And so I said, "No." That's how ended up with these girls and we reared them up until now.

1-01:22:21

**Ehrlich**

So that wasn't until you moved to San Jose?

1-01:22:25

**Newson**

San Jose.

1-01:22:25

**Ehrlich**

So when you live in Oakland, did you have any children?

1-01:22:28

**Newson**

No more than the one.

1-01:22:29

**Ehrlich**

You had the one, and who's-- was that a--who was that one child? That's your son?

1-01:22:34

**Newson**

He--yes. He lives with me here, now.

1-01:22:35

**Ehrlich**

So when you went to work, who took care of whom?

1-01:22:43

**Newson**

Well, when I went to work he would always go to-- One time, he was in boarding school and then he grew up. But I don't think, I had no one to take care of him.

1-01:23:07

**Ehrlich**

So during the day--so when you were working all day, he was at school.

1-01:23:10

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:23:12

**Ehrlich**

He was at boarding school.

1-01:23:12

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:23:15

**Ehrlich**

Would he come home on the weekends?

1-01:23:19

**Newson**

Well as he grew up--he'd come home sometimes. You know he'd stay away 'til vacation time, and I--my mother kept him until he was eight.

1-01:23:33

**Ehrlich**

Oh--

1-01:23:34

**Newson**

And so he was big enough to go to school, you know.

1-01:23:40

**Ehrlich**

So when you were working say, at Ford, during the war years, he'd just go off to school during the day.

1-01:23:45

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:23:45

**Ehrlich**

And then what about in the afternoons when you were still working? Do you remember what he would do?

1-01:23:50

**Newson**

Well, he would come home. And he was not supposed to let anyone in the house.

1-01:23:55

**Ehrlich**

So he'd just wait for you to come home.

1-01:24:00

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:23:59

**Ehrlich**

I think that was more common, then because things were--

1-01:24:02

**Newson**

Different from now.

1-01:24:02

**Ehrlich**

Right, right. And do you remember how--what his schooling was like?

1-01:24:12

**Newson**

Yes. He went to Adventist school. Was this all right?

1-01:24:21

**Ehrlich**

Yeah.

1-01:24:21

**Newson**

[Inaudible]

1-01:24:24

**Ehrlich**

Um--what about in terms of --do you remember whether any of your friends at the Ford Motor Company--were there childcare centers that you remember where you could bring your children that were on the job?

1-01:24:43

**Newson**

Yes, yes. I have a picture of it. They would have parent's day and they would allow you to bring your children to the plant.

1-01:24:52

**Ehrlich**

Oh to parent's day.

1-01:24:52

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:24:54

**Ehrlich**

What about having a place at the plant where people could bring their kids every day to watch them, like a childcare center?

1-01:25:03

**Newson**

No, they didn't have that.

1-01:25:03

**Ehrlich**

They didn't have that at Ford? Did you hear about them?

1-01:25:12

**Newson**

No.

1-01:25:11

**Ehrlich**

I'm wondering in terms of the household chores--were those--who took care of all those chores at your house? Cleaning, cooking, laundry, whose responsibility were those?

1-01:25:24

**Newson**

Well my husband and I, we would do that ourselves.

1-01:25:27

**Ehrlich**

Who would do what?

1-01:25:30

**Newson**

The household chores?

1-01:25:30

**Ehrlich**

Who would do which? Would you both cook? Did he cook, too?

1-01:25:34

**Newson**

He would help cook. And he would help me wash some.

1-01:25:41

**Ehrlich**

Do you think most of the men also helped with those kinds of chores?

1-01:25:44

**Newson**

I would think so.

1-01:25:45

**Ehrlich**

But you don't know for sure?

1-01:25:47

**Newson**

No.

1-01:25:47

**Ehrlich**

I'm just thinking because the women--everybody was out working hard.

1-01:25:51

**Newson**

Yes, and at that time, I can recall that we didn't have washing machines like we do now. And we used to have to wash with--it's called a "rub-bowl". You'd wash your clothes.

1-01:26:11

**Ehrlich**

Tell me, what did that look like?

1-01:26:11

**Newson**

That--

1-01:26:13

**Ehrlich**

How would you do that?

1-01:26:14

**Newson**

It was a board that you could just rub with your hand--your clothing on that. You had a tub--you ever heard of a tub?

1-01:26:27

**Ehrlich**

Yeah.

1-01:26:28

**Newson**

Yeah. You'd put your water in there and you'd use soap and you'd rub. There was a rub-board in there, and you would rub it. And we would wash--we would--my husband and I, we had a tub apiece. [Laughing] He didn't like it, and he'd be talking, he'd say, "I don't like this!" And I wouldn't dare to say anything until we finished. I was afraid I'd say something, and make him angry, and he might stop.

1-01:27:00

**Ehrlich**

[Laughing] And you needed him to keep washing.

1-01:27:02

**Newson**

[Laughing] Yes. And we'd use that. Then we had to hang our clothes on a line, to dry. We didn't have no dryer like we do now.

1-01:27:12

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember when you first got a dryer? When was that?

1-01:27:19

**Newson**

I think it was in, probably in the sixties, maybe. I'm just guessing now.

1-01:27:31

**Ehrlich**

Yeah? So I'm wondering about your--what you remember about hearing that the war had ended.

1-01:27:44

**Newson**

Oh, yes. We heard that it was ended. And when it was ended, my husband had left the Ford Motor Company because he left--I heard a young man speaking out there, one of the gentlemen who worked there at the plant. He said he's going into cement work because he could make more money. So I came home and asked my husband did he know about cement work. He said, "Yes." He did construction work and he knew about cement. I said, "They say you can make more money." So he went and joined the union. He got a job making more money, because he was a cement finisher.

1-01:28:36

**Ehrlich**

And what do you remember? Do you remember where you were the day you heard that the war was over?

1-01:28:44

**Newson**

I was working at Ford. I don't know where I was.

1-01:28:49

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember the actual moment when you heard?

1-01:28:52

**Newson**

No, I don't remember.

1-01:28:52

**Ehrlich**

Did you have any friends or family who were actually fighting? Who were in the combat?

1-01:28:58

**Newson**

In the service?

1-01:28:59

**Ehrlich**

Yeah.

1-01:28:59

**Newson**

I had a brother.

1-01:29:02

**Ehrlich**

You had a brother in the service?

1-01:29:03

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:29:03

**Ehrlich**

And what did you hear from him?

1-01:29:05

**Newson**

Oh, well he-- After the war was over, he came home. I mean, he came to California where we were at that time.

1-01:29:16

**Ehrlich**

Did you hear from him while he was in the service?

1-01:29:19

**Newson**

No, I didn't hear from him while he was in the service.

1-01:29:22

**Ehrlich**

Do you remember feeling worried for him?

1-01:29:27

**Newson**

Well, not really. I don't remember.

1-01:29:32

**Ehrlich**

Did the people you know have loved ones--

1-01:29:35

**Newson**

In the service? At that time, I don't recall whether they-- Because all my friends, all the ones I knew that I'd work at the Ford plant with had come home.

1-01:29:51

**Ehrlich**

So that was pretty--you had your friends there, and then you'd come home and then you'd socialize with people from church, mostly.

1-01:29:57

**Newson**

Yes. Yes.

1-01:29:58

**Ehrlich**

What do you remember about your feelings about the war?

1-01:30:04

**Newson**

Well, I had a friend who was in the service, and I went to visit my father and mother and I heard that he had got killed in Vietnam. And I was there when they was bringing his body home.

1-01:30:30

**Ehrlich**

That was Vietnam, right?

1-01:30:33

**Newson**

Was it Vietnam?

1-01:30:34

**Ehrlich**

Or was that World War II.

1-01:30:40

**Newson**

It might have been Vietnam, I think. Because --what year was that World War II--in the forties, wasn't it?

1-01:30:54

**Ehrlich**

In the forties.

1-01:30:54

**Newson**

Yes. Well, it could have been in World War II that they brought his body home, and I wasn't able to stay because my vacation was up. And during V-day--Vietnam Day--what's the "V"?

1-01:31:11

**Ehrlich**  
Victory.

1-01:31:13

**Newson**  
Yeah.

1-01:31:13

**Ehrlich**  
Victory Day.

1-01:31:17

**Newson**  
Yeah. Yeah. He was standing out in the water, and he caught pneumonia and he didn't survive.

1-01:31:31

**Ehrlich**  
So are there any other memories that you have from the time--that time period of World War II when you lived in Oakland? Anything that we--that would be a good story for you to tell, any memories you haven't shared yet?

1-01:31:56

**Newson**  
I don't remember, not that I recall.

1-01:32:00

**Ehrlich**  
Have you been back to the Ford--have you been back to Richmond since you left there?

1-01:32:06

**Newson**  
Yes. I come back there. But I haven't been back over to the plant here.

1-01:32:13

**Ehrlich**  
Would it ever interest you to see it again?

1-01:32:14

**Newson**  
Yes, it would. Yes it would.

1-01:32:18

**Ehrlich**  
It sounds like you have some interesting stories and memories from then.

1-01:32:24

**Newson**  
Yes, I belong to a mister and missus club and I have heard a couple that live there in Richmond. Some of my co-workers live there in Richmond, now. And I was up there about two months ago and I went by our home and that was interesting. And also, since the war, we get together. Some of the men, we get together, and for the last couple years we've been having dinners together.

1-01:33:08

**Ehrlich**

Oh that's interesting--of men that worked with in the plant?

1-01:33:10

**Newson**

Yes. One time, I went up to Richmond and I went to a funeral and I said, "You know it would be good if we'd get together just for a social gathering instead of coming together for a sad occasion."

1-01:33:26

**Ehrlich**

Yes.

1-01:33:27

**Newson**

And they thought that was nice. And that's where we-- This is going on our second year now. We come together and have lunch together.

1-01:33:36

**Ehrlich**

That's so nice. How is that for you?

1-01:33:39

**Newson**

It's nice.

1-01:33:39

**Ehrlich**

Do you share stories from--do you want to show me a picture of them now, you can.

1-01:33:45

**Newson**

This is a picture of where we came together. We even had a video taken.

1-01:33:52

**Ehrlich**

Maybe I'll see--

1-01:33:54

**Newson**

These are picture here of when we --

1-01:33:57

**Ehrlich**

Let me try to take the--I'm going to take the camera off and come close and see how I can do-- how I do with this.

1-01:34:05

**Newson**

Some of the pictures that I--

1-01:34:05

**Ehrlich**

Yeah, and I think probably I'll come back to look at more of the pictures, but let's catch just a few of them now. Let's see.

1-01:34:20

**Newson**

This is one of the fellas that decided to get together to have a dinner together.

1-01:34:28

**Ehrlich**

Let's see if I can get that. Oh, so that's you in the middle--

1-01:34:36

**Newson**

Uh-huh.

1-01:34:40

**Ehrlich**

And who's this?

1-01:34:40

**Newson**

That's R.C.

1-01:34:45

**Ehrlich**

On the left?

1-01:34:45

**Newson**

Yes. And this is Mac-MacAlister.

1-01:34:55

**Ehrlich**

You hold it real still and I'll try to--try to--let's see--I'm not so steady it might be a little--

1-01:35:02

**Newson**

I may have a better picture.

1-01:35:07

**Ehrlich**

Do you want to tell us who the people in the picture are?

1-01:35:07

**Newson**

Mike MacAlister, and R.C., and myself, and Mason.

1-01:35:15

**Ehrlich**

And what kind of jobs did they have?

1-01:35:17

**Newson**

They worked in the assembly line.

1-01:35:21

**Ehrlich**

So do you know what they're doing now?

1-01:35:23

**Newson**

Oh, they're not doing anything now. They retired.

1-01:35:28

**Ehrlich**

They stayed living--

1-01:35:30

**Newson**

They live in Oakland.

1-01:35:32

**Ehrlich**

All of-- the three of them live in Oakland?

1-01:35:34

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:35:34

**Ehrlich**

And have the three of them stayed friends?

1-01:35:36

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:35:38

**Ehrlich**

So when you all got together, did you talk about the good old days?

1-01:35:40

**Newson**

Yes. They have mobile homes and they go fishing and party.

1-01:35:49

**Ehrlich**

Are there any other pictures you want to show?

1-01:35:56

**Newson**

[Flipping through book] Same guys, there. Now, this is picture of he and his wife--they've been married fifty-six years ago. He worked at Ford and they was at our dinner out at Richmond there. I mean out in Milpitas. This some more of the ladies--their husband are dead.

1-01:36:34

**Ehrlich**

Now do you remember--did these women--you knew from Richmond?

1-01:36:37

**Newson**

They worked at Ford plant.

1-01:36:41

**Ehrlich**

Oh. And what was this dinner you were at?

1-01:36:43

**Newson**

Out in Milpitas. We just got together and had this dinner together. This is our second year of having this.

1-01:36:50

**Ehrlich**

That's wonderful.

1-01:36:54

**Newson**

And this is the man and wife that's been married for fifty-six years and he said--he was good to his wife--and he was talking about how good he was and he said, "Yes I was very good to her." So I said, "Well, she must have been very good to you to stay with you that long." They all got a laugh from it. This is our dinner--there was quite a few of us who was there.

1-01:37:39

**Ehrlich**

Okay, well maybe that's good for now, with the pictures.

1-01:37:43

**Newson**

All right now--here's--here's--let me show you [ruffling through photo album]. That's when our children used to be able to go out to the plant to visit.

1-01:38:03

**Ehrlich**

Actually, you know--why don't you just put it in your lap and let's see--let's see. Yeah that seems like a good way to do it. You don't have to cover you face--if you put it there. Okay. Yeah--this isn't working too well.

1-01:38:23

**Newson**

Okay, this is me, and some of the men showing you how many women--you don't see many women there.

1-01:38:40

**Ehrlich**

That's you in the middle?

1-01:38:44

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:38:44

**Ehrlich**

Oh-that's a great picture.

1-01:38:51

**Newson**

This is when I had twenty-five years at the Ford plant.

1-01:38:58

**Ehrlich**

Show me where you are?

1-01:39:03

**Newson**

That's my boss--one of my bosses. This is when I had twenty-five years at the plant.

1-01:39:10

**Ehrlich**

Wow.

1-01:39:12

**Newson**

You got it?

1-01:39:14

**Ehrlich**

Yeah, I think maybe what we'll do is get, if we can, try to get copies of some of these pictures. Or maybe you just look through it and tell me about them, and I won't worry about getting them perfectly on the camera. In fact, maybe I'll just sit back down and you can just talk to me about them.

1-01:39:31

**Newson**

Oh- here's when I was--taken with the offering for FECP[Fair Employment Practice Committee] contest.

1-01:39:39

**Ehrlich**

What's FECP mean?

1-01:39:39

**Newson**

The Fair Employment contest. We was raising money and I won. It was three ladies of us, and I won the highest. It was \$500.

1-01:40:08

**Ehrlich**

So what did you have to do to win the contest?

1-01:40:10

**Newson**

You'd go around and ask the gentlemen to contribute to this, and they'd take their money for fair employment, you know. So one of them had five something and I had five thirty-something. I think she had about \$515.

1-01:40:27

**Ehrlich**

How much money--that's how much money you could collect?

1-01:40:31

**Newson**

That's how much money we raised for this contest.

1-01:40:31

**Ehrlich**

Wow. And tell me again what did the money go for?

1-01:40:37

**Newson**

Well, you read it--you read it here--

1-01:40:39

**Ehrlich**

Yeah, I'll come over. I'll come over.

1-01:40:39

**Newson**

Can you read it with your eyes?

1-01:40:43

**Ehrlich**

Yeah. I don't know what to do with the camera, exactly. But here, I'll just read it. It says, "The Fair Employment Practice Committee would like to thank all the members of Local 560, who supported the contestants in the recent 'Miss UAW Local 560, 1972 Contest'"

1-01:41:04

**Newson**

Yes. And I won.

1-01:41:06

**Ehrlich**

That's great.

1-01:41:09

**Newson**

Now, here's some of the women that used to work at the Ford plant, but they're all dead now.

1-01:41:15

**Ehrlich**

Oh. And is that you?

1-01:41:21

**Newson**

No. I don't think I'm there. I don't think I'm there. No, no. No, I'm not there. Gladys, one of them, asked me to make the *See's* candy.

1-01:41:33

**Ehrlich**

Oh-that's the woman you talked about.

1-01:41:37

**Newson**

When the guys retired--"Fair Employment." Oh that's me at different times, you see, I'm dressed in different clothing.

1-01:42:07

**Ehrlich**

Can you describe it a little bit?

1-01:42:06

**Newson**

Whenever someone would retire, I would order the cake and the coffee and serve them. At various times, I'm dressed in different costumes. Different clothing. That's how many people would be there. I'd be serving the menfolk, so they thought quite a bit about me. [laughing]

1-01:42:38

**Ehrlich**

Because you would do that? That's great.

1-01:42:44

**Newson**

I know that when I retired--let me show you. They gave me a camera.

1-01:42:57

**Ehrlich**

When you retired?

1-01:42:57

**Newson**

Yes. And that's me when I retired.

1-01:43:03

**Ehrlich**

Let's see if I can--if you hold it still, I'll see if I can zoom in on that. Now it doesn't work with the light, because it just reflects it. That's fine. It's nice just seeing you look at them.

1-01:43:16

**Newson**

Here's our retirement--when I retired.

1-01:43:18

**Ehrlich**

What did it feel like to retire?

1-01:43:19

**Newsom**

Oh, it felt great.

1-01:43:22

**Ehrlich**

[Laughs] You were proud. It felt good?

1-01:43:22

**Newsom**

[Laughing] This is the main boss at the Ford plant. When I retired, he took his picture with me. But the funniest thing is when I retired; I took these pictures to show my brother in the service. I had on this here outfit here, and when I took these pictures something happened to the pictures. But the foreman, I told him somebody had taken my pictures--I had gained weight, but he took it again with me. [Laughing] I thought that was unique.

1-01:44:00

**Ehrlich**

Yeah.

1-01:44:03

**Newsom**

Well, and this is one year I won the award for being a community service, I guess they thought I was qualified for that. When they'd get sick or something, I'd take up for them and we'd send them a donation home. Then I worked in my church and that's when I won--

1-01:44:30

**Ehrlich**

Oh that's wonderful. Do you still have your badge? You were saying that when you almost quit your Ford job, you almost turned in your badge and then you didn't. Do you still have that?

1-01:44:39

**Newsom**

I don't know whether they let us keep those, or whether they took them back, or what happened afterwards. No, I don't still have it. I don't have that.

1-01:44:54

**Ehrlich**

So are there any more pictures that you want to show or talk about?

1-01:44:56

**Newsom**

(inaudible)

1-01:45:02

**Ehrlich**

Will you hand me that picture?

1-01:45:03

**Newsom**

Which? This--

1-01:45:03

**Ehrlich**

That one, and I want to just read it to see what it says. It says-- so these are--these are--

1-01:45:13

**Newson**

The ladies--

1-01:45:17

**Ehrlich**

--the ladies that you worked with at one of these--

1-01:45:18

**Newson**

--at Ford plant.

1-01:45:18

**Ehrlich**

--at one of these retirement--

1-01:45:19

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:45:19

**Ehrlich**

So you clipped this out of the paper?

1-01:45:23

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:45:25

**Ehrlich**

So you keep track of what's happening--

1-01:45:30

**Newson**

And this is my husband and I when we had our anniversary.

1-01:45:36

**Ehrlich**

Oh, yeah. Which anniversary was that, do you know?

1-01:45:37

**Newson**

Our fiftieth anniversary.

1-01:45:39

**Ehrlich**

Wow. And he passed away?

1-01:45:41

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:45:43

**Ehrlich**

When was that?

1-01:45:46

**Newson**

In 1979.

1-01:45:49

**Ehrlich**

So even though you just knew him for three days before you married him, it worked out. Is that right?

1-01:45:56

**Newson**

Well, that isn't exactly right. I didn't tell you about my first husband.

1-01:46:01

**Ehrlich**

Ah! So this is not the same man that you married when you were sixteen?

1-01:46:06

**Newson**

No, no, no. Yes. No, I have to be truthful about that.

1-01:46:14

**Ehrlich**

Was he the same--the first husband you did come to Oakland with, right?

1-01:46:20

**Newson**

Right, yes.

1-01:46:20

**Ehrlich**

And how long did that marriage last?

1-01:46:26

**Newson**

I came to Oakland with my--

1-01:46:38

**Ehrlich**

--first husband?

1-01:46:31

**Newson**

--with my second husband. I moved to Merced with my first husband.

1-01:46:39

**Ehrlich**

Okay, okay.

1-01:47:02

**Newson**

I just left that part out.

1-01:47:03

**Ehrlich**

That's okay.

1-01:47:03

**Newson**

Because we didn't stay together that long.

1-01:47:06

**Ehrlich**

You were so young.

1-01:47:07

**Newson**

Mmm-hmm.

1-01:47:10

**Ehrlich**

So anything we didn't talk about?

1-01:47:19

**Newson**

Well--I don't recall [inaudible]. We didn't talk about other than that.

1-01:47:28

**Ehrlich**

When you think back on that time of the war, living in Oakland and working in Richmond--

1-01:47:36

**Newson**

Yes?

1-01:47:36

**Ehrlich**

Do you have good memories?

1-01:47:37

**Newson**

Yes. Pretty good. I'd been very ill, though and the doctors thought one time that I had a stroke. But I didn't recall if that had anything to do with my memory or not, but I was involved in an accident and --

1-01:48:04

**Ehrlich**

When you worked up in Richmond?

1-01:48:06

**Newson**

No, after I retired.

1-01:48:09

**Ehrlich**

Oh, after you retired.

1-01:48:10

**Newson**

Yes.

1-01:48:12

**Ehrlich**

Well, my impression is that your memory is just fine.

1-01:48:16

**Newson**

Thank you.

1-01:48:16

**Ehrlich**

I really appreciate all these wonderful stories, and having had the chance to share this all with you.

1-01:48:25

**Newson**

Thank you.

1-01:48:25

**Ehrlich**

--it's wonderful.

1-01:48:27

**Newson**

Thank you.

1-01:48:27

**Ehrlich**

And thank you so much.

1-01:48:26

**Newson**

And thank you!

[Tape Interruption]

1-01:48:36

**Ehrlich**

What do you think?

1-01:48:38

**Newson**

Well, I know--it was one fella--I'm just talking now.

1-01:48:41

**Ehrlich**

Yeah, yeah.

1-01:48:42

**Newson**

One fella at Ford plant, after he found out my husband had passed--he lives in Arkansas, and he came out here to visit this year. I took him around to see some of the people here in San Jose that he worked with. His wife is dead, also. So he said, "Mary, I want to propose to you. I'd like to get married to you." I said [laughing], "Oh not this late in the year!" So he calls me every so often. He admires me, but I don't want to get married at my age now.

1-01:49:20

**Ehrlich**

That's a very sweet story, though. And he was someone you met--

1-01:49:26

**Newson**

At the Ford plant. He worked at the Ford plant.

1-01:49:27

**Ehrlich**

What did he do?

1-01:49:29

**Newson**

He used to work on an assembly line, also. And I remember one time we was--

1-01:49:38

**Ehrlich**

I'm gonna put the camera back on, is that okay?

1-01:49:39

**Newson**

Well, I don't know.

1-01:49:43

**Ehrlich**

That's a great--

1-01:49:43

**Newson**

Do I put this on?

1-01:49:42

**Ehrlich**

No, no, no, no. I'm just gonna hold it in my hand. I -- that's a very--were you--that was a great little story you just told me. Will you tell me again?

1-01:49:50

**Newsom**

When we had our get-together, you know, for dinner. Like we said, we was gonna keep it going now every year we're going to come together and have lunch. And they enjoyed it. It was about thirty-two of us--thirty four of us here this past June. And they enjoyed it, and I gave out fountain pens to all of the fellas there.

1-01:50:17

**Ehrlich**

How many people were there?

1-01:50:19

**Newsom**

About thirty-something--

1-01:50:19

**Ehrlich**

Wow.

1-01:50:20

**Newsom**

--was there and we was out here in Milpitas at the buffet, Home Buffet. You ever heard of Home Buffet?

1-01:50:25

**Ehrlich**

No.

1-01:50:29

**Newsom**

It's an eating place, and it has a section in there and we all--they let us all come together. And I asked, "How long can we stay here?" They said, "You can stay here as long as you want to!" So we just had a good time, and I gave them all fountain pens and little tracts to read and they enjoyed that. And one of the mens that worked at Ford plant, he is ninety-two years old, and he was there with us. I carried him there with us. And so we just had a great time together, laughing and talking. And wasn't no set occasion.

1-01:51:06

**Ehrlich**

That's wonderful.

1-01:51:07

**Newsom**

Yes. And this fella that admired me, he wanted me to wait until he come. He said, "Mary, because I'd like to propose to you, and I know you couldn't turn me down." [Laughing] So I said, "Oh?" But we didn't wait for him, he didn't come until September so we got married, I mean we got our dinner together in June.

1-01:51:35

**Ehrlich**

But he did propose to you when he came, right?

1-01:51:35

**Newson**

Oh, he just written me and asked me as he--

1-01:51:41

**Ehrlich**

And what did you say to him?

1-01:51:41

**Newson**

I told him no. I wasn't really interested in getting married. So he told--some of them said, "Mary don't want to marry me." But he's sicker than I. [laughing]

1-01:51:54

**Ehrlich**

How long did you work with him at the Ford plant?

1-01:51:55

**Newson**

Oh, a number of years.

1-01:51:58

**Ehrlich**

And were you friends?

1-01:51:58

**Newson**

Yes, we were friends. We all used to sit at the table and eat together. He was married then, at that time, too.

1-01:52:06

**Ehrlich**

But when he heard that your husband passed away--

1-01:52:10

**Newson**

Yeah, he--

1-01:52:08

**Ehrlich**

--he wrote and proposed to you?

1-01:52:11

**Newson**

Yeah. He wanted to propose to me. He didn't write, he called me. He calls me now, sometimes. And so he told me, he said, "Mary, I come by a little money, I'd like to carry you to the Caribbean." I told my sister. She said, she said, "Don't." I said, "He asked if he could call me sometime." She said, "Don't even let him call you." She's always tried to boss me, you know.

1-01:52:39

**Ehrlich**

She said, "Don't even let him call?"

1-01:52:41

**Newson**

Yeah. And so, anyway-- she was cooking broccoli for dinner that night. I said, "Go ahead and finish cooking your broccoli." [Laughing] She wasn't too happy about it. So anyway, we just friends.

1-01:52:54

**Ehrlich**

But it seems like those connections from the Ford plant days, they have stayed strong.

1-01:53:00

**Newson**

Oh yes, yes, yes.

1-01:53:01

**Ehrlich**

That's wonderful.

1-01:53:02

**Newson**

Yes. And I think how they--they--someone in Richmond--I asked how did they get my name and someone in Richmond--Smith or someone called one of the fellas, and he told them to contact Mary. So that's how--

1-01:53:22

**Ehrlich**

Well that was very good advice.

1-01:53:22

**Newson**

Yes. That's how they got in touch with me. All of them like me and I like them. And we just keep in touch with each other every so often.

1-01:53:36

**Ehrlich**

That's wonderful.

1-01:53:36

**Newson**

Some of them is deceased, some of us still alive. So that's the good part.

1-01:53:46

**Ehrlich**

Thanks so much. I really appreciate it.

1-01:53:50

**Newson**

Um-hmm. Okay.

1-01:53:54

**Ehrlich**

Great.