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Josephina Ramirez

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
David Washburn
in 2002

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Interview with Josephina Ramirez
Interviewed by: David Washburn
Transcriber: Audrey Yu
[Interview #1: 10, 14, 2002]
[Begin Audio File Ramirez1.doc]

1-00:00:15

Washburn:

The date is October 14, 2002, and we are doing an interview with Josephina Ramirez, conducted by David Washburn in El Cerrito, California, at her home. So, Josephina Ramirez, I'll just start with some basic questions, just ask you where were you born?

1-00:00:39

Ramirez:

I was born in Texas.

1-00:00:43

Washburn:

Do you remember where in Texas?

1-00:00:47

Ramirez:

No.

1-00:00:49

Washburn:

Before, you said San Antonio.

1-00:00:52

Ramirez:

Oh, San Antonio, Tejas, uh-huh.

1-00:00:55

Washburn:

San Antonio. Do you remember what year it was?

1-00:01:07

Ramirez:

I don't remember, it's so many years.

1-00:01:12

Washburn:

I think you told me last time, when we first met, 1918.

1-00:01:15

Ramirez:

Yes.

1-00:01:18

Washburn:

Does that sound right?

1-00:01:15

Ramirez:

Uh-huh. Because when I married, it was—I wish you could have told me, so that I could write it.

1-00:01:34

Washburn:

It's not important; dates are not super-important.

1-00:01:37

Ramirez:

But I was born in Texas.

1-00:01:42

Washburn:

In San Antonio. So, the first time we met, you told me you were born in—I will, of course, ask you some questions right now which I already know, but because we haven't recorded them and because someone who may listen to this interview in the future doesn't know them, so I have to ask them again. If that make sense? So the first we met you, you did say you were born San Antonio.

1-00:02:15

Ramirez:

I was born in San Antonio Tejas.

1-00:02:16

Washburn:

Where were you raised?

1-00:02:19

Ramirez:

Raised in California, because they moved right away after I was born. I think maybe they were there about a month or so. My Dad came before my mother, and my mother and my grandmother came later and my cousins, you know, my mother's sisters. That's the way we came here, because all of my uncles came to Santa Barbara.

1-00:02:52

Washburn:

So you were raised in Santa Barbara?

1-00:02:53

Ramirez:

Yes.

1-00:02:59

Washburn:

Can you tell me one of your earliest memories of growing up in Santa Barbara?

1-00:03:06

Ramirez:

Well, it depends on which way it would be.

1-00:03:14

Washburn:

Sure. If you could tell me what life was like there as a child, you know, for instance, what was it like on the street you were raised or what the house was like, things like this.

1-00:03:27

Ramirez:

Well, it was something very beautiful because, at that time, we didn't have any problems like we do nowadays. And my cousins were all living together, I mean not in the same house, but I mean all around the place. My grandmother had a large family. Then we would be together going to the park, going to the river, because, you know, it's beautiful in Santa Barbara. And at that time, it was a lot more beautiful than it is now, because there weren't so many people. But all of my family and my Dad, and then my father's family came in to stay at Santa Barbara. In fact, I didn't come away from Santa Barbara until after I married, and it was during the war that I came over here.

1-00:04:23

Washburn:

So you had a rather large family in Santa Barbara?

1-00:04:27

Ramirez:

Oh, yeah. Very, very large. My grandmother had about sixteen or seventeen children, something like that.

1-00:04:39

Washburn:

You went to elementary school and junior high and high school in Santa Barbara?

1-00:04:44

Ramirez:

Yes, we went to the school. It was different, because it was small areas, but we did go.

1-00:04:59

Washburn:

And your brothers and sisters also went to the same school as you?

1-00:05:02

Ramirez:

Yes. They've all gone.

1-00:05:09

Washburn:

So, what was it like growing up in your house in Santa Barbara?

1-00:05:13

Ramirez:

Well, it's a lot of better than now [laughter] I can tell you that, because the families they were very nice, you know. We didn't have all the things we have now, but we enjoyed, because there was a lot of parks where my cousins live now. I have a lot of cousins there. It was nice, because we always went together to the beach, that is what I remember, and

they'd come out and all our families would be together. I mean we were very close, my grandparents were very close. My two grandparents were very close, because my grandparents, they had known each other since they were babies, little girls. When my father was married, then this grandma came to the other grandma, to Santa Barbara, so they all came and they followed each other. That's the way our grandparents were. They were very nice people. All the work was done in Santa Barbara was in the homes of the people that were very, how do you say, had a lot of money.

1-00:06:52

Washburn:

More wealthy.

1-00:06:53

Ramirez:

Yeah, the wealthy. They lived up on the mountain, it seems to me. There were certain areas that we couldn't go. Downtown, it was all the Spanish people and all the people like us. The only time we would see them was when they would come with cars, their beautiful cars, going some place. My dad worked in one those places as a gardener, I don't know how many years, until the lady that he was working for died, then he quit. But he stayed there with them until the very end.

It was very quiet. I mean we didn't have what it is now, you know, the cars were different. You did a lot of walking. You would go walking to church or downtown. I could go by myself and I wouldn't be afraid because it was so nice. Things like that nowadays we're having problems, you know. I mean, too many people and too many places to go and things like that.

Then when Richard was a little boy, then we came over here, because Richard had to—at that time, there was a lot of need for money and the government—we haven't had anything like that lately, you know, that you don't have enough money, because you can always go and charge it or whatever. But at that time, you didn't do things like that. Well, the places like here when I moved here, this was open and so it was the same way over there in the mountains and everything, so they made places so that we could go to another country. To us it was something different, because we had never seen so many cars and so many things going up and down.

But then during the war, they sent all the young people, like my husband was still young, my son must've been about five or four years old. They just told him, you go here. I mean, you didn't have any choice, because that was the war. So many they sent here, and so many another place, so many another place, and they just had them all over. But when we came over here, he came first, he couldn't find any place to live, because there weren't any houses, there weren't nothing. Then there were some people that had been there before, like once in a while you go down to the cities that are way low, they have their own little places. Well, that's the same way over here.

Then this family, it was a man and his wife and a little boy—but he wasn't their little son, but they were taking care of him. First, I was with Richard at the place where all the soldiers were. But you know, a lot of the soldiers were, well, they'd want their drinks and

things like that. To me, it was different, because we are not a family like that. So when you have a family that it's Christian and, you know, you talk the Christian way. All over here, you know, sometimes they get mad, and they fight and things like that. We never had seen that. But then there were a lot of good kids, you know. But I don't blame them, because some of them, they were afraid. So I can understand that now, but at that time, I didn't.

My husband said, "Well, we knew of this church here in Richmond." And I told him, "Well, let's try," because I found out that I knew the lady, and I said, "We can go." So we came one Sunday. And right away they say, "Well, you are gonna stay here even though we have to be close together. We have very little room in the church there." You know, where they were living. And so that's the way we came down to Richmond. He kept going every day over across the bay—which is far—to be under there. Because he worked in the, what do you call them?

1-00:12:27

Washburn:

The submarines?

1-00:12:29

Ramirez:

Yeah. The submarines—you go under, you know. Then he'd come in the afternoon or evening and they would take him in the buses. They would take him, but it's far, you know, from here to over there.

1-00:12:43

Washburn:

Where is over there?

1-00:12:46

Ramirez:

This where all these, well, how do you call it?

1-00:12:52

Washburn:

Is it the shipyard in Richmond or is it over in San Rafael?

1-00:12:56

Ramirez:

It was in San Rafael. It was farther up there, because in Richmond they had certain kind of things that in San Rafael, they had different kinds. And they didn't have only one, two things; they had blocks of things, so many things. Because, see, they had to work every day, you know. He was there—and he one of these that you go under, that's where they put him. He had been always afraid of things like that; he had to make up for it. But then he would come home at night or in the evening, they would bring him back and then I was living there at the church. Then finally we found a place that we could stay. Another man offered part of his house for us. So we lived there and we were just going up and up until we were able to get a place of our own. But it took time.

1-00:14:08

Washburn:

I want to get to all those places that you lived. I want to kind of ask you about each different one. But first I want to get an idea also of what life was like in Santa Barbara and then kind of compare that to what life was like in Richmond. Can you describe what your house was like in Santa Barbara?

1-00:14:37

Ramirez:

Well, in Santa Barbara we were a family, a very, very strong family. I mean my grandmother and my grandfather were the kind—we were always together. And there were about thirteen or fourteen or fifteen children, you know. They were all married and they were all there with their kids and we did everything together. In fact, we had all those things that she was telling you about—a family reunion—and all of us would go there. I mean we would come from every place, even if now we lived in New York that we would go. Because that's the way we were, we were together all the time, all the family. So that helped that.

1-00:15:35

Washburn:

But what was the actual house like, the physical house?

1-00:15:39

Ramirez:

The physical house?

1-00:15:42

Washburn:

The description of the house, one story or two stories or had front yard or back yard?

1-00:15:47

Ramirez:

They were all mostly one stories. At that time they didn't have those beautiful ones, you know, like this. It was one, but they probably would have one house in front and one little house in the back, you know, and things. Because that's where my grandparents, I mean, they lived in. But, see, all the people there had to do things around the houses. The rich people were away, so the Mexican people had to go clean the house over there or maybe wash clothes or do some shopping for them, you know, things like that. They did have that kind of a service, but of course, to me, it didn't mean anything, because I was a child then. But when I grew up, then I found out, because by then, you know, we didn't have the war any more. So we could be at home and not worry about it.

But since I came over here, I never went back. I stayed here because my husband started to work there at the school. And first few times, when, you know, everything was turned on after the war, then he wanted to find a job and so started cleaning all the offices and things like that, you know. I don't know how he got to some place. Anyway, some friend of his, and they got him into the schools. So then after that, he was the cleaner at the high school.

1-00:17:39

Washburn:

Was this after working on the submarines?

1-00:17:42

Ramirez:

Oh yeah! The submarine ended when the war ended. Yeah, because then they all came. You can imagine millions of men and women that had come.

1-00:17:56

Washburn:

Right. So he started working as a janitor after that, as a custodian in Richmond High School?

1-00:18:05

Ramirez:

Yeah. And her uncle was one of them. See, I worked in the offices there. In fact, I didn't know that I knew what they told me I knew. [laughs] During the war, that was now here in the city. Her mother went, because her mother was one of them went to this place. I didn't even know what they were gonna give us. And Frank was the same way, you know, but him being a man, he knew he could get a job. So anyway, you went and I said, Okay. So I was doing some stuff—they gave me a lot of paperwork, because they had to be spending a lot of paper things and things like that. I went as high as this, up and down, up and down, up and down. But of course, I was young. Because we had to put everything in place. We couldn't put them down, because you were just so crowded.

1-00:19:16

Washburn:

This was your job at the Kaiser office?

1-00:19:18

Ramirez:

Yes.

1-00:19:20

Washburn:

Let me ask you, how did you find the job at the Kaiser office?

1-00:19:28

Ramirez:

How did I find it?

1-00:19:30

Washburn:

Yeah.

1-00:19:31

Ramirez:

Well, someone told us when we were talking. I think my husband was the one that said, "You know, why don't you try something like that?" And I said, "Well, I better," because we didn't have enough money. So I don't know. Someone told me, I don't know if it was

the church. My American girls were very nice too. So when I went there, I didn't even know the girls that called me. My sister and I, we went to work and I went up there, climb up and down—the tenth time, I could do it.

So finally, when one of them came, and she says, “Come on, we have something for you.” And I says, “What do you mean, you have something for me?” “Oh, we have another place better for you.” And I said, “Okay. Well, what is it? Here, she goes to this office, because they had all little offices. It was two gentlemen. I can remember one was thin and one was a little bit heavy, but they were so interested—where had I gone, what had I done, you know, things like this, where did I come from? And he said, “You know how to write?” And I said, “Well, I think I do.” So they brought things out for me to write. I thought, “Well, that's kind of funny that they are asking me about writing.” I thought maybe she wanted for me clean the place or something. No. That's how I started writing. They said, “Okay, you're all right.”

And I did a lot of writing, because that's the only way you could get along, you know, with them, you know. They never said I did something wrong or anything like that. Of course, I was young and all that; that makes a lot of difference.

1-00:21:47

Washburn:

So you did a lot of office work then?

1-00:21:49

Ramirez:

A lot of office work. Then when the war ended, then I went right ahead and looked for work in the office.

1-00:21:57

Washburn:

Well, let me ask you when they asked you, you know, who you were, what you had done, where you were from—what did you tell them?

1-00:22:05

Ramirez:

Well, they asked me where I had lived. I told them that we were in Santa Barbara; that's where I was born and I was there all this time. And they said—I don't know. They just trusted me. That's all. But I had to do everything to prove it. And of course at my age then, I mean I could do it, I can't do it now. But at that age, you know. And Richard was still young, he must've been about seven, maybe, or less.

1-00:22:48

Washburn:

Did they know you spoke Spanish?

1-00:22:51

Ramirez:

Yeah, they did.

1-00:22:51

Washburn:

They did?

1-00:22:55

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. It was all in English; we didn't have nothing in Spanish. But they knew that I was. I don't know how these girls found out about me. Maybe they were from some church and they noticed what I did. Because that's all I can think of. They were so wonderful. These two men, they taught me so many things. They taught me how to do this, how to do that. If you want to do this and do it this way. I mean they just went through and through, you know, to help me for my own self, you know. So as soon as we finished there, I went back to school, because I hadn't finished schooling anyway.

1-00:23:43

Washburn:

Let's talk about it. You told me this the first time, that you hadn't finished school. In Santa Barbara, how far did you go in school?

1-00:23:51

Ramirez:

Well, until I married. Then I came over, because I was very young.

1-00:23:57

Washburn:

So what does that mean? I don't know when you married.

1-00:23:59

Ramirez:

Oh, golly.

1-00:24:01

Washburn:

Did you graduate high school in Santa Barbara?

1-00:24:08

Ramirez:

Yeah, Santa Barbara.

1-00:24:09

Washburn:

You did? So you completed high school?

1-00:24:13

Ramirez:

Yeah. But see after the war ended, everything else, you know, it just threw you. I didn't know like now you can go like next door here and find work to do or go to school. And they'll say even if you're a hundred years old, you can go in there, and you can be a teacher the next day. But at that time, it wasn't like that.

1-00:24:37

Washburn:

So you graduated from high school, and then did you work during high school or did you just study?

1-00:24:46

Ramirez:

No. I was married. I finished my school when I was married in Santa Barbara. I had my son, and then during the war, I had to come over here. And then after that, when I went back, then I looked for how to start again. And that's when I went to the schools here, because then I was using other kind of material that I had never seen before. Then I started a business after that, because I knew what I was doing.

1-00:25:26

Washburn:

So you didn't work in Santa Barbara?

1-00:25:29

Ramirez:

No. I just had Richard. I mean, that's it. I mean after that, I didn't follow through. Because that's when we came.

1-00:25:46

Washburn:

Yes. So tell me about that decision. What can you remember about your guys' decision to move here to the Bay Area?

1-00:25:56

Ramirez:

It wasn't my idea. [laughs] I mean, I had never left my mother, or my dad or my friends, because all my family was there. I think my sister, her mother must've been the same way, because she went to same place that I went. She had the same kind of work that I had before, but I was doing these all writing, all writing and I did have very good writing. I'll admit it. [laughs] I don't have it now.

1-00:26:35

Washburn:

So it was your husband's decision to come here. What was your husband's name again?

1-00:26:48

Ramirez:

Abram. Richard is the son.

1-00:26:51

Washburn:

So it was Abram, your husband's decision to come here.

1-00:26:57

Ramirez:

Well, he said it was either going to Santa Barbara and in Santa Barbara, there is one thing that was wrong. There was so many rich, rich people, and they didn't want noise, they

didn't want this, they didn't want that. I guess maybe that's why our families were, they knew what they were doing. Well, because they were rich people, and they wanted everything to be just so. Now I go back there, you know, when I see my grandmother and my sisters over there, it's really a mess like you would see here. But at that time, it wasn't like that. All the rich people were up in the mountains and enclosed. All of us poor people, we had all these stores that we wanted. We had all the place that we wanted to go. Go to the beach, go every place. They didn't do that. They had their areas where they went and that. And they would send the fellows that drive huge things, you know. They would come and pick up what they were to take back to the rich people.

1-00:28:24

Washburn:

Meaning what? Laundry?

1-00:28:28

Ramirez:

My sister or my cousins, my aunts, their backyard was like a laundry, because you didn't find them in the street. Santa Barbara was very, very different, you didn't see nothing dirty. You know, nothing. Everything in its place, everything. When they used to come down, I mean, because they had to come down to go through another place. They wanted that place to be clean and that was it.

1-00:29:15

Washburn:

So how would you describe the opportunity then that your husband had to find work?

1-00:29:31

Ramirez:

My husband when he came, he found work over here. When he was over there, it was during the war then or coming or something like that. So what they did, I think the president or someone, called all the men. Because they didn't have any more money, because even the rich people didn't have enough money. So then they started building all the—like right now, this house wasn't here and nothing was over there. So then they started building, and that's when all these came up to the mountain, the higher mountains. And rich people didn't like it, but there wasn't anywhere else. Because they had to find some place to find the money for the children and everything else for us people.

Now, if you were my rich guy there and I was working for you, I would know that I would have everything I needed. Because usually what they ate, many times, they didn't eat everything, so that you would take it home, things like that. Well, at least, as far as my aunts and my uncle used to say, "Well, at least we have something today," or whatever. Then, I don't know, it wasn't so high either, to buy or things like that. Then my uncles, they always—what do they say? When they put things—fruit and other. I remember my grandfather, he had everything just packed with stuff. Then my uncles, they were working for the city, and they would bring a lot of things that some of the rich people didn't want. I mean, the rich people would say, "Well, why don't you take this home with you? Why don't you take this home with you?" That was the way; that was during the war, just before the war. Then they had started building, because they didn't

have this like here. When we got this house, it was in 1950, something like that when we got his place. But before that, this house wasn't here; none of these houses. Nothing. Nothing you could see, just the mountains over there. It was when I came.

1-00:32:19

Washburn:

Let me ask you more specifically then, when your husband made the decision to come here, why didn't he find work in Santa Barbara?

1-00:32:32

Ramirez:

For the same thing that it was they would have to go and do things that didn't pay.

1-00:32:41

Washburn:

Things like?

1-00:32:44

Ramirez:

Yeah, because usually what they wanted them just to go clean the place or wash the things that they had or whatever. Well, like my aunts, they were washing clothes all day; every day they were washing clothes. I don't know if she remembers, but in one little house, they had to press all the other things because they want it to be perfect. So then they worked every day.

1-00:33:24

Washburn:

It seems like you're describing that there wasn't the opportunity that he wanted in Santa Barbara and he looked elsewhere outside of Santa Barbara for opportunity. What I'm trying to understand is why did he look to Richmond rather than Los Angeles for a better job?

1-00:33:49

Ramirez:

I don't know, but I think maybe some of the ministers and some of the church friends talked to us. Then it gave him—at that time, you know they talked about the schools, because schools were coming up then higher and higher. Doctors that wanted places for the fellows to come and clean the yards and everything else. Somehow, he made friends with someone. Anyway, and he said, "Well, we'll try and if doesn't work out we'll just have to go home." But we never went home, because I started going to the school and things like that, and he worked for the schools. And then when he graduated and everything else, and made all change, my son took over, he was the one that was in the schools. He was a school teacher.

1-00:34:59

Washburn:

Can you describe what you remember about your trip from Santa Barbara to Richmond the first time?

1-00:35:08

Ramirez:

I cried. [laughs] I cried and cried, “I don’t want to go! I don’t want to go!” Then when I got there and I saw all these things—I had never seen anything so horrible. Boy, it was just terrible!

1-00:35:31

Washburn:

What things?

1-00:35:34

Ramirez:

Well. When you don’t know the people, you are afraid, you know. There weren’t enough houses; there weren’t enough bathrooms. There weren’t nothing. Even in the churches, they were having little things, you know, and then they would go in and they had something outside. They didn’t have anything that you can say it was nice. See? It was just nothing here. So when they came, they had to put something in. So I cried a lot of times, don’t worry. [laughs]

1-00:36:12

Washburn:

How did that compare to what you thought Richmond was going to be like? When you were leaving Santa Barbara, what were your ideas about what Richmond was going to be like?

1-00:36:26

Ramirez:

My husband?

1-00:36:27

Washburn:

No, when you were coming—did you drive or did you take a train from Santa Barbara?

1-00:36:35

Ramirez:

We had a car. Because, before he brought me up here, he would just write to me. I mean, there wasn’t even telephones.

1-00:36:50

Washburn:

So he came before you?

1-00:36:53

Ramirez:

Yeah.

1-00:36:54

Washburn:

So describe that. I didn’t understand that he came before you did. When did he leave?

1-00:37:03

Ramirez:

Well, when he came, he was working already under the water. But I didn't like that, because he would leave me alone.

1-00:37:20

Washburn:

In Santa Barbara?

1-00:37:21

Ramirez:

No, no. Over here where he was.

1-00:37:23

Washburn:

I want to interrupt for one second. I'm under the impression that he came to Richmond before you did. Did you guys all come as one family or did he come first and you came later?

1-00:37:40

Ramirez:

Came from where?

1-00:37:41

Washburn:

From Santa Barbara?

1-00:37:44

Ramirez:

He went, because you had to go where they wanted you to go. So then they brought him in. First it wasn't cars, you know, that they went, not our car or anything. They went in trucks, but then they had the little, we don't have them now.

1-00:38:15

Washburn:

Streetcars?

1-00:38:17

Ramirez:

Yeah, the little cars that take you up and down?

1-00:38:38

Washburn:

It's okay, it's not important. What I'm trying to understand is did he leave Santa Barbara before you did?

1-00:38:46

Ramirez:

Oh yeah. Yes, because the government took them, the whole bunch. "You have to go here, you have to go there, you have to go there."

1-00:38:59

Washburn:

So the government took him? Was he in the army or was he contracted?

1-00:39:00

Ramirez:

No. But when it's a war and you were working over there where it was up on the hills, then—I can't remember, who was the president that couldn't walk? Roosevelt said that they were to go where they were told, and that was it. So then they got all these people from this areas and they took, not the wives, just the men, and they took them over there.

1-00:39:56

Washburn:

To Richmond?

1-00:39:57

Ramirez:

Over to across the bay. So that was something to us unknown, you know, because I had never even known anything like that happened. Because Santa Barbara was always so clean and so quiet. It wasn't like over here. In fact, he didn't even want me to go in, you know, to the place I worked after, because he was afraid that someone would hurt or tell me something and I wouldn't know what to do. But it didn't happen. When he came, then he lived with this lady that I tell you and gentleman. Then he called me and he said, "I'm going to pick you up and bring you." So then we came in his car. I only had Richard. I never had any more family.

1-00:41:01

Washburn:

Do you remember what year was that? It was during the war?

1-00:41:10

Ramirez:

I can't remember when the war was.

1-00:41:12

Washburn:

The war was from '41 to '45.

1-00:41:17

Ramirez:

Well, it took about that time.

1-00:41:19

Washburn:

So, it was some time during the war. That's okay, the date is not important.

1-00:41:24

Ramirez:

There were just hundreds and hundreds of people. They came from all over. They came from New York, they came from Mexico, they came from I don't know where. They came from all over. That's what he was afraid of, because I had the baby. It was a little

boy and me, so he was afraid of that. But then when I started to work, I went over and I started to work there and I got my job and everything there. Then it was okay, because there were people that tell us what to do and where to go. And when we went, we knew exactly where we were going. But it was pretty—I had never been in something like that.

1-00:42:12

Washburn:

So tell me when he picked you up and you drove here, where did you stay for the first month or so? Do you remember the house you stayed in and what it was like?

1-00:42:26

Ramirez:

That was a nice house, I tell you that. We stayed with this American man and his wife and the little boy. They had their bedroom and then my son and the little boy and my husband and I slept in the other bedroom. At that time, I hadn't gone into the, you know, to find out what I was going to do, because that was when I was new. But when I came to church and the church family were friends of mine and my husband. And they said, "Stay with us, just stay with us." So then he went along all the time, and then I came to this other one place. Pablo went too. That's where I met him, Pablo Gonzalez, is that his name? Frank Gonzalez. That's when I met him. He was sitting a car and he talked to me or something and I said, "Where are you staying?" He says, "In the car." [laughs] And that was just here, not across the bay. So you can imagine, what it was like. But you know, a lot of younger people, I guess, or older people, I can't remember—the government started putting buildings right away. Then they knocked them down after the war. Do you remember that?

1-00:44:10

Niece:

I remember there was a lot of housing over here by Cutting Boulevard.

1-00:44:13

Ramirez:

See? They started doing it; they didn't have any place to live. You were out in the open. That's why, when he met this lady he asked her if I could come with Richard and stay with them. And I did. I used to do their cooking for them and the cleaning of the house and everything.

1-00:44:31

Washburn:

Did you do that before you started work in the Kaiser office?

1-00:44:34

Ramirez:

Yeah. Because then when we found out about this part over here, because this is closer—he still had to go a long way, but I could go over here. So then I rent and my sister—her mother—came with me too.

1-00:44:53

Washburn:

Let me ask you, when you went to church, was the Mass in Spanish or in English.

1-00:45:01

Ramirez:

No, it was in Spanish. We're a Baptist Church there.

1-00:45:05

Washburn:

So you met someone like Frank Gonzalez, who was, I think he said he was from Mexico but grew up in Arizona. Can you describe what it was like coming to this church and meeting people and making friends?

1-00:45:35

Ramirez:

Well, to start with, it was crowded, because we didn't have a big church. Then we stayed with the family there. We didn't know where to go, because we didn't have a house. Then they found a place, close by, so that we could stay so we stayed there. Then from there on, I was working and I could do things and have some money and my husband would have some money. So it was a lot easier. The churches were very kind, because everybody was having trouble. You know, I mean not enough to eat and what are we gonna do and everything else. But it grew and grew somehow.

1-00:46:38

Washburn:

Did you make friends at the church?

1-00:46:39

Ramirez:

Oh yeah. Everybody knew me, because I played the piano. [laughter]

1-00:46:43

Washburn:

Oh, you played the piano.

1-00:46:45

Ramirez:

I played the piano, and then we had—the ministers, I had known them before in Santa Barbara. I had met them, so I knew who they were and the wife of one them, I knew her very well. In fact, she used to come over to our house when I was in Santa Barbara. So it was very nice. I did meet an English lady and her husband, I can't remember the name right now. When I started over there across the bay, I went to the American church and that's the first I went to. She always said, "Stay here with us." I said, "Well, I can't be there." [to niece] You don't remember her? She died a long time ago. So she became like my lady, because I didn't feel frightened. Because I felt alone, you know.

1-00:48:07

Washburn:

This was the wife of the minister at your church?

1-00:48:09

Ramirez:

At the American Baptist Church. But then the Mexican Baptist Church is where we stayed—we slept there with them until we found a place.

1-00:48:23

Washburn:

After you stayed with the American family for a while?

1-00:48:27

Ramirez:

See the American Baptist Church, she was my friend and I met her there. I don't know why, well, I guess her husband was a minister. I found out that was so when I went to the church. But then I'm used to playing the piano, and I'm used to being with Spanish people, so then I looked around and we looked around until we found the other church. Then we stayed with them until we found a house or a place. It wasn't our house. It was one gentleman that he was alone and he rented the place for us until we could find a better place.

1-00:49:11

Washburn:

I understand. So you did know some people who moved up from Santa Barbara? You met them in Santa Barbara?

1-00:49:20

Ramirez:

Yeah. Well, in Santa Barbara, we have a lot of family. So we have a lot of people.

1-00:49:26

Washburn:

So who else did you know up here in Richmond before you came?

1-00:49:32

Ramirez:

Nobody.

1-00:49:35

Washburn:

But you said you met the minister and his wife.

1-00:49:36

Ramirez:

When I came, I went over to the American Baptist Church and I made friends with her right away. She said, who I was, and everything else. She was a very, very known lady and her husband too. I always worked between our American Baptist Church and then the Spanish American Baptist Church; I've always worked both places. And I've gone and I've been treated, they've given me places to go. I've gone across the bay, I've gone down across the cities. I've been every place during my life after the war was—. It was something different, because I made friends very easily. Now they are all gone, a lot of them.

1-00:50:31

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand how you met the minister at the American Baptist Church and his wife?

1-00:50:38

Ramirez:

Let see. Oh, I asked the Mexican minister, the Spanish one, Romano. I can't remember his name either. I can see his face right now. She was a lovely lady. I went to that church because my husband evidently knew that there was a church there where he was working. He's the one who told me to go over there and talk to them, and what not. But this was on Sunday only.

1-00:51:27

Washburn:

I'm confused. Did you meet them in Santa Barbara, you said?

1-00:51:33

Ramirez:

No.

1-00:51:34

Washburn:

No. You didn't meet them in Santa Barbara. Okay, I was under the impression that you had met the American minister and his wife in Santa Barbara.

1-00:51:45

Ramirez:

No. No.

1-00:51:46

Washburn:

Okay, I was confused. It's okay.

1-00:51:47

Ramirez:

And then the Mexican people, the Spanish speaking, I knew them from Santa Barbara. I knew her anyway. I didn't know the husband, but I knew her.

1-00:52:03

Washburn:

That was the connection?

1-00:52:04

Ramirez:

Yeah, that was the connection.

1-00:52:08

Washburn:

How did you meet her in Santa Barbara?

1-00:52:11

Ramirez:

By the same way that all the ministers, they had their cousins and nieces and everything, they wanted to come to the places that they are, to help. Then that's when she married this pastor, you know. She married him and that's why she was over here.

1-00:52:33

Washburn:

But was she born in Santa Barbara?

1-00:52:35

Ramirez:

No. She was born in Mexico.

1-00:52:40

Washburn:

I guess I should say, did she lived in Santa Barbara when you went there?

1-00:52:43

Ramirez:

Oh yeah.

1-00:52:45

Washburn:

So you knew her from the community in Santa Barbara?

1-00:52:49

Ramirez:

Oh, yeah. Mm-hmm. But see, her uncle, that she was living with the family. They were in Santa Barbara, then she met this other man—another minister—and then they married, and had children. I just happened to know that she was over here. I didn't know who her husband was, but I said, "Well, let's try it." So we went and tried it, and we found her.

1-00:53:19

Washburn:

So that's something you came here knowing she was here. So you searched her out? You tried to find her because you knew no one else other than her.

1-00:53:31

Ramirez:

Yeah.

1-00:53:32

Washburn:

Okay.

1-00:53:34

Ramirez:

So that's where we stayed when she was a little girl.

1-00:53:38

Washburn:

I'm trying to find the connection, because people come here like you said from all over and I'm just trying to understand who you knew. But because you knew her here, that didn't affect your guys' decision to move here?

1-00:53:57

Ramirez:

No.

1-00:53:58

Washburn:

I guess I should ask—the better question is, what did it mean to you at that time to know that she was here? What was it like for you to see her, somebody from Santa Barbara here in Richmond?

1-00:54:16

Ramirez:

Oh I knew her, like I tell you, because you know her uncle was the pastor in Santa Barbara. Oh, the moment we got there, she says, “We are going to move upstairs and you can stay here.” And that was it. [laughs] And that was just like her, you know. She had, I think, one or two children by then. With the Mexican people, you know, they were very helpful. They moved from the living room so that we could sleep there and they went upstairs where they had another little place, and things like that. Soon later, we got a house. You just can’t go in and go out. So that’s the way we started over here. Then I didn’t go home.

1-00:55:13

Washburn:

So how long did you stay with, what was her name? Do you remember her name?

1-00:55:18

Ramirez:

Oh gosh. What was her name?

1-00:55:32

Washburn:

That’s okay, her name is not necessarily important. But how long did you stay with her?

1-00:55:37

Ramirez:

I think maybe about a week or two.

1-00:55:43

Washburn:

Not very long at all.

1-00:55:45

Ramirez:

Because my husband, right away, looked around if there was a place that we could go. Well, there was one man that was coming to church, and he says, “Well, I have a house and I’m alone, if you want to come here so you won’t be so pressed there,” with the children and myself, our son. So that helped, and it was just very close to the church. Then after that, I had to move away because one of my friends from church, he was working—I don’t know what he was doing anyway, but he was from the church and he was always saying for me to take care of her daughter, “Take care of my daughter, my wife has died. Take care of her.” And I said, “Yes, I’ll take care of her.” I was so young

then, why does he have to be telling me to take care of her? But anyway, she became a very lovely girl. It was the old girl, a boy, and another girl. And the mother had died. Well, if I had lived in that house with this gentleman that I said, he always used to go to wherever he was working, driving even though—he had something wrong with his leg. I don't know what. But every time he saw me, he says, "Don't forget to take care of my little girl." Oh, this man! But anyway, that was at church, you know, so—I didn't do nothing, because I didn't know where they lived then. But then, all of a sudden, we were like here, and it was a building, and then where he was crossing—

1-00:58:04

Washburn:

Railroad tracks?

1-00:58:05

Ramirez:

He had his car, and you know how they go one way and the other one's coming the other way. He didn't notice one and he went and he's killed.

1-00:58:20

Washburn:

The train hit him?

1-00:58:21

Ramirez:

Yeah. And it was just like if I was walking right there.

1-00:58:26

Washburn:

Very close.

1-00:58:28

Ramirez:

So then we went and stayed with the kids to take care of them.

1-00:58:34

Washburn:

Did you move or stay in the same house?

1-00:58:36

Ramirez:

We moved away from that house to take care of the children. Until their uncles came, you know, other families came to take care of them. But we stayed there about four or five—no, a good time we stayed. We fixed the house so that I could see them and everything else. In fact, they became just like a family.

1-00:59:09

Washburn:

And they were a Mexican American family?

1-00:59:12

Ramirez:

They were. But I used to think of that man, “Why does he tell me, every little while, to take care of his daughter?”

1-00:59:21

Washburn:

Wow. But he understood what was gonna happen.

1-00:59:23

Ramirez:

Then from there, we moved around where her mother was [indicating niece]. By then, her mother was over—again, I don’t know where she was before. But we kinda lived close together, maybe like here and then across.

1-00:59:40

Washburn:

That’s great, you know, we are gonna have to switch tapes, so we have to stop there and we can take a break and pick up the story at that point. Okay?

1-00:59:51

Ramirez:

Okay.

[Begin Audio File 2]

2-00:00:03

Washburn:

Okay, we’re starting again. We left off talking about the kind of community you made through the church. You described to me that in Santa Barbara you had a large family, and it seemed like the family and the Mexican American community you were a part of in Santa Barbara seemed very strong. What kind of took its place, or what community did you make in Richmond that was like what you had in Santa Barbara?

2-00:00:51

Ramirez:

Well, like I said, the minister that came—we didn’t know him but we knew his wife, because I think it was her grandfather or father, anyway, had been a preacher in Santa Barbara. So that’s why I knew her. I found that they were very nice. I mean, if we needed anything they were kind enough to help us. Finally, like I said, when we had to move away, we couldn’t stay there forever. Then, after that, Mr. Gonzalez came in, and that’s when I met the bigger families. The Frank Gonzalez family.

2-00:01:42

Washburn:

So yeah, you met Frank Gonzalez at the church.

2-00:01:46

Ramirez:

At the church, yes. Well, no, I met him over there at the war—remember? When we first came in and I told you that I was working at the office? I told you that he was there and Frank was there. That's where I met him.

2-00:02:13

Washburn:

So he was working at the shipyards at the same time that you were.

2-00:02:15

Ramirez:

Yeah, uh-huh. So that's when I learned who he was, because he was driving a car and he was sitting in it. When I said, "When did you come?" He told me he was—I don't know where he had come from. First there wasn't anything known to her because they didn't exist then. I told him we were going to church and that's when we became—by then we were on this side, we weren't on the Richmond side.

2-00:02:56

Washburn:

The Richmond side?

2-00:02:58

Ramirez:

We were on this side.

2-00:02:59

Washburn:

The El Cerrito side.

2-00:03:01

Ramirez:

Uh-huh, because that's where I met him. That's where we did all the work, my work when I was with my husband. He had to go and finish everything across the bay, but I didn't because I was over on this side.

2-00:03:14

Washburn:

How did you and Frank meet?

2-00:03:17

Ramirez:

There.

2-00:03:19

Washburn:

No, but I mean how; you could meet a lot of different people, why did you meet Frank Gonzalez?

2-00:03:26

Ramirez:

Frank was a friendly person, he's always been like that. Let me tell you. Frank and—what's your father's name?

2-00:03:56

Niece:

Bob.

2-00:03:57

Ramirez:

Bob? Your mother was over here by then, because she was working. She was working with me. Then she married her father, you know. That was Frank's youngest brother. So that's how I met him. He came to the same church that we were going, but like new people. Because after we finished that other part, we could go to our homes. Then you noticed the ones that came to the church because they liked it.

2-00:04:51

Washburn:

I'm not clear. Did you meet Frank first at the church or at the shipyards?

2-00:04:56

Ramirez:

I met him at the shipyard first.

2-00:04:59

Washburn:

How did you meet him? Did you meet him on a street, on a bus, while walking to work? Do you remember?

2-00:05:11

Ramirez:

At that time I'm sure that Katie was working with me. Do you remember that, honey?

2-00:05:28

Niece:

I know that Mom didn't meet Dad until she was going to sing one day at church. Uncle Frank invited him to come and listen to her sing. That's how they met. But how you met Uncle Frank, I don't know.

2-00:05:43

Ramirez:

She stayed with us for a while, but then she—that's when she married him. But I don't remember when that was. That was the brother, isn't it?

2-00:06:05

Washburn:

Let me ask you, I guess, a more direct question. Do you think—and this is because I'm not Mexican American and this question may seem a bit strange—but do you think that because Frank was Mexican and you were Mexican American, that had a part to your guy's meeting at the shipyards? Do you understand what I'm asking?

2-00:06:40

Ramirez:

No.

2-00:06:41

Washburn:

Do you think because you spoke Spanish and he spoke Spanish that was an important part of you guys meeting?

2-00:06:47

Ramirez:

It was, because he was speaking more Spanish than English, and we were in a place where it was all English. But he was always a friendly guy, you know, and I guess when he saw me—and then later on my sister met him because he came to church, and then later on we met her father. It was in time, like that, and they were married, and that was it. I can't remember very much, but Frank was always friendly, you know, very much so. When he knew that I was going to a Baptist Mexican church he said, "Where is it?" and he came right away.

2-00:07:44

Washburn:

Did you speak Spanish with him at the shipyards often? When you saw him there, did you speak Spanish with him?

2-00:07:52

Ramirez:

Yeah, it was on the street. Because my place where I was working was up high, and he was down here. Evidently he saw that we looked alike, or maybe like I was Spanish and he was Spanish, he talked to me. Because we're all kinds of people.

2-00:08:18

Washburn:

I'm just trying to understand. I spoke with someone else who said she never spoke Spanish at the shipyards or even near the shipyards, and I'm trying to understand the different stories.

2-00:08:32

Ramirez:

To me if you speak to me in Spanish I'll answer in Spanish, but it doesn't affect me in any way, because I speak both languages.

2-00:08:44

Washburn:

Do you remember speaking Spanish at the shipyards with anybody other than Frank?

2-00:08:51

Ramirez:

No, because like I said I was really in the office and I had to do everything in English.

2-00:08:58

Washburn:

Right.

2-00:08:59

Ramirez:

We were separated, because he was working on one end and I was working on another end.

2-00:09:07

Niece:

We also had other aunts who were working at the shipyard. My aunt Evelyn and my aunt Rose, they were working at the shipyard.

2-00:09:14

Ramirez:

Yeah, but they were in different areas. You had to speak English. To me, that was natural. I knew I had to speak English even though I knew both of them. I can do English and Spanish, too. But a lot of Spanish people came. They didn't go to the big places but, you know, buildings and things like that, they came.

2-00:09:49

Washburn:

How do you know that?

2-00:09:51

Ramirez:

Because I saw them.

2-00:09:54

Washburn:

You saw them?

2-00:09:55

Ramirez:

Yes. All this area down below [motions], not here, but down below way over there, they had—how do they call this that they put a house that looks like a plaything. Because people were coming so fast, they had to have something to live in.

2-00:10:18

Niece:

You mean the mobile units?

2-00:10:19

Ramirez:

Yeah, you know it was all full before you knew it. They had to. They put these people to work, because how could they bring the people and live out in the open?

2-00:10:35

Washburn:

How do you know that there were more Mexican and Mexican American people who came here to work? You said you saw them, but how did you know they were of Mexican descent?

2-00:10:50

Ramirez:

Because of the church.

2-00:10:52

Washburn:

Because of the church.

2-00:10:53

Ramirez:

The church. Other ones from across the bay, we knew a lot of them. I think we had two or three churches already started over here at different places. I was always the kind that liked to know what was going on. [laughs]

2-00:11:14

Washburn:

So the people at the church, when you met them, what jobs did they say they were doing?

2-00:11:20

Ramirez:

Mostly the men were doing things around like trees, or fixing everything for people. I don't remember how many or where, but we did have them.

2-00:11:42

Washburn:

That's interesting. From your account, would you say that more of the people at the church were not working in the shipyards or were working in the shipyards?

2-00:11:56

Ramirez:

Oh, they were working.

2-00:11:58

Washburn:

The majority were working in the shipyards?

2-00:12:00

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. They were working. See, they came from all over the country. They weren't from here. Where was your uncle when he came? Where did he come from?

2-00:12:12

Niece:

My Uncle Frank?

2-00:12:15

Washburn:

He came from Arizona.

2-00:12:16

Niece:

Arizona.

2-00:12:16

Ramirez:

Arizona, see? We had a lot of people from Arizona, from New York, from I don't know where.

2-00:12:26

Washburn:

Yeah.

2-00:12:27

Niece:

In the early times my Uncle Frank sold Mexican products. So he knew the Mexican people very well. There was only two or three Mexican restaurants in the whole area. My father used to say, "I can tell the *mexicanos* because you can tell from their clothes. You can tell from the way they dress who they are."

2-00:12:56

Ramirez:

It's interesting. I had never known people like that. To me, in our church we were well dressed, but over here they were having—well, when we were up here the place was still being used for the—what do they call it?

2-00:13:28

Washburn:

It's okay, it's okay

2-00:13:33

Ramirez:

Let's see. They came and they didn't have anything so they slept in their cars, they ate in their cars. It's a good thing that we had rooms that they could go in and probably wait there for a while. But it was terrible.

2-00:13:57

Washburn:

You mentioned in Santa Barbara how the relationship between the poor people and the rich people seemed like a big part of life in Santa Barbara. But there weren't so many rich people in Richmond during that time, so you didn't experience—I shouldn't put words in your mouth. What's a good way to ask that?

2-00:14:29

Niece:

Everybody was in the same boat.

2-00:14:31

Washburn:

Yeah, that's what you're describing. Everybody was kind of the same, which is a lot different, kind of, than what you described in Santa Barbara, how there were rich and poor. How would you describe most of the people who you associated with, who you were friends with? Do you understand what I'm asking, kind of?

2-00:14:59

Ramirez:

No, I don't know. The only thing I can tell you is, we were taught to be very polite with other people. So we knew like my cousins or my uncles—that you saw the pictures of—they worked inside of where the rich people were. My dad was a gardener, so he was there. He did the gardening for this person, this lady, but I never—he did a lot of extra things for her. That's why she liked him. She was very nice to him, too, even to the end when she was so sick and she died, and she left money and everything for him. So I think it depends on that. That was in the city, and so we would learn that we were to be very nice to all these people. That's the way we were taught. They are people that are busy, they have businesses and you have to be like this, you have to be like that. So I never knew anymore about them, like that.

2-00:16:32

Washburn:

Did you continue that same tradition in Richmond also?

2-00:16:38

Ramirez:

Oh yeah, we just kept it right through. We've had very good people. Very good people, haven't we? Of course, we change from different churches, you know, because we came over here, so we have a church over here now. To us, it has been something very good.

2-00:17:02

Washburn:

Let me ask you about your work. You did office work at the Kaiser shipyards until the war ended. Can you describe to me how your job ended and what you did after the war?

2-00:17:23

Ramirez:

Well, I went back to school because I wanted to get—at that time you didn't have to do the things that you do now—to learn how to do things because I wanted to work in a building. I liked it, so that's where I started. I wasn't there all day long, but half-day. That's the way I started there, taking a lot of it. Then as I started to work—because I started to work right there in the middle of the city—there was a fellow who, I think had one of those little things. Anyway he was a little guy, I can remember him. When I went the first day to that place, then he asked me—I think I told you that before. He says, "We'll try you for one week. If you don't work out, then you can't work here." Well I did that, I worked there and he gave me my check at the end of the week. So I asked my friend, "Do I come out, do I stay home, or what do I do?" She started to laugh, so she yelled to him and says, "Come in and tell her if she can stay or if she can't stay!" "Oh, I

didn't think anything about that. Sure you're gonna stay." I stayed there until he died. [laughs].

2-00:19:14

Washburn:

Describe to me— I know, but I think we need to talk about it again. What was the school you went to and what did you study?

2-00:19:22

Ramirez:

The school? Oh, no, it was a class that they used to have. I was already married and I had Richard, my son. It was in the afternoon. I could go to this class and study with them. The helped me with a lot of things.

2-00:19:41

Washburn:

What did you study?

2-00:19:43

Ramirez:

Because I had already—well, I already knew how to do things, but I wanted to learn how to do more things.

2-00:19:48

Washburn:

Office work.

2-00:19:50

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. Like I say, I went to this place and the ladies were so good and so was the gentleman. They took me in right away.

2-00:20:01

Washburn:

What was the work that you did?

00:20:06

Ramirez:

The same thing that I was doing over there in the other place, because it was all, everything was just seeing—

2-00:20:19

Washburn:

Describe what you did.

2-00:20:22

Ramirez:

I was an accountant.

2-00:20:24

Washburn:

You were an accountant.

2-00:20:26

Ramirez:

The lady there was next to me, she was the leader, and there was another one who had something wrong with her eyes, I don't know what. I can't remember. She always sat in the back part. They had one fellow that used to come and he used to tease me. He would change my papers. He'd say, "Let's see if you know how to do the right thing," and he'd do that. Finally I was glad he left. [laughs] I can remember that because I'd say, "I didn't put them like this." Because you have to be careful when you're doing things for people. So that's how I started my business.

2-00:21:10

Washburn:

Did you learn how to do a little bit of accounting at the Kaiser office?

2-00:21:20

Ramirez:

Oh, yeah. You learn it just by working, mm-hmm. I was quick about that. I had good things then, not like now. I could do a lot of things, I could be writing checks and I could be talking to the telephone, and I could do anything. I'd know what I was doing. But as you get older you don't do that.

2-00:21:50

Washburn:

Was the job at the Kaiser office your first job?

2-00:21:53

Ramirez:

Well, yes. The other one was during the war. That was the first one.

2-00:22:04

Washburn:

At the Kaiser office?

2-00:22:06

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. And then the second one was up here, across the bay here. That's where I started with these other two ladies and two men, again, but one of them quit and the other one stayed. We worked, these two ladies and I, until this man died and then we took over.

2-00:22:35

Washburn:

I want to first ask you about your job at Kaiser and then maybe compare it to your job after working at Kaiser, at the shipyards. Can you describe for me how you got to work at the Kaiser office. For instance, how you went from your home to work during the war.

2-00:23:05

Ramirez:

There was a school there. I don't know where it is now [chuckles], but there was a school right in the center, just about right in the center. In fact, they still have one. There's a school some place around there. High school or something.

2-00:23:27

Washburn:

My question is, during the war when you worked at your first job at the Kaiser office, how did you go from your house to work?

2-00:23:42

Ramirez:

Walking.

2-00:23:44

Washburn:

You walked.

2-00:23:46

Ramirez:

Walking, because it was close. We lived right in that area. [to niece] I don't know if you remember. You don't remember?

2-00:23:55

Washburn:

So you walked to work. What was the scene on the street like when you were walking from your house to work?

2-00:24:05

Ramirez:

From our house to this—it was upstairs, but it was right in, like, the center of this place there in—

2-00:24:28

Washburn:

In the shipyards.

2-00:24:29

Ramirez:

Yes. So I used to walk.

2-00:24:31

Washburn:

Were there a lot of people going to work when you went to work?

2-00:24:37

Ramirez:

Yes.

2-00:24:38

Washburn:

Were there a lot of other people walking to work at the same time?

2-00:24:40

Ramirez:

Oh yeah. I never was afraid of walking. I am now. [laughs] You could go any place, even at night, and nobody would mind you, but nowadays you can't try it.

2-00:24:55

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand, for somebody who didn't know what it was like to go to work at that time, what the people looked like, what it felt like to be walking to work at that time? Can you describe what you saw when you walked from your house to work?

2-00:25:23

Ramirez:

Well, like I say, at that time people were very honest with everybody for some reason. We were—[to niece] your mother was just behind me, I think. Do you remember how it was?

2-00:25:44

Niece:

On B Street? On B Street and Market Street?

2-00:25:46

Ramirez:

Where I had that house. Where I had that picture.

2-00:25:50

Niece:

Where Mrs. Rios lived?

2-00:25:58

Ramirez:

Something along there. Anyway, it was close to the middle, you know. I didn't have to go so far wherever I went, so I didn't take the car. I could drive then, but I didn't take it.

2-00:26:22

Washburn:

Can you describe what you saw on the street when you walked to work? Did you see other men and women walking to work also? And if so, what were they wearing? What was it like?

2-00:26:36

Ramirez:

That's so long ago. A lot of the people walked. At that time, we didn't have a lot of the things that they have now, you know. It was different. I remember just going up the stairs in the morning, and in the afternoon, when you were finished, getting down and going home.

2-00:27:04

Washburn:

When you went home, did a lot of people get off work at the same time?

2-00:27:10

Ramirez:

Most of them.

2-00:27:11

Washburn:

Was it crowded in the street when you got off work?

2-00:27:15

Ramirez:

No. We didn't have that like now. Nowhere. But I can't remember anything else. [to niece] Your mother was working too, remember?

2-00:27:33

Washburn:

You had friends who were women who were also working in the shipyards?

2-00:27:38

Ramirez:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

2-00:27:41

Washburn:

Were they doing office work also?

2-00:27:45

Ramirez:

Well usually if you're doing work like that, you have to have, doing both things.

2-00:27:56

Washburn:

Were they welding, these women?

2-00:27:59

Ramirez:

No, I don't think it was welding. We did everything by hand. At that time it wasn't like now, and that's why you had to be careful. The other lady that had been the head of the business there when I first started—when I first went to work there—she told me what to do. She showed me, "Don't do this; don't do that. Because you're going to have to go back and do it again." They had a fella there who was forever making us laugh, and he'd go and change it like this. It was just to be funny. But finally he went away, thank God. It's a difference.

2-00:28:55

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand if you had any—there were a lot of women working in the shipyards who weren't doing the office work, who were welding and doing more manual labor. I'm just trying to see if you were friends with any of them or knew any of them.

2-00:29:18

Ramirez:

Where I worked, I was alone with the two men. Where I was then. The other girls worked in other things, but I was there. They would come and take whatever they needed, and then they would bring me another batch, like that. Girls or men, they would have their

places and when they needed something they would come, because they would bring all these things to me to do.

2-00:29:53

Washburn:

So you didn't have friends who worked in the shipyards doing welding and that sort of thing?

2-00:29:59

Ramirez:

No. I don't know what they did. Those places were so big, and some were doing one thing, another one was doing another thing, and things like that.

2-00:30:13

Washburn:

But you did say that you met Frank Gonzalez, and I know he worked as a welder and worked in the shipyards.

2-00:30:22

Ramirez:

But he worked downstairs and I was upstairs.

2-00:30:26

Washburn:

So he worked right below you?

2-00:30:29

Ramirez:

Well, not in the same place, because all this—

2-00:30:34

Washburn:

Because downstairs, upstairs, I understand.

2-00:30:35

Ramirez:

Yeah, uh-huh. All the work we were doing was desks; a desk here and a desk there, the telephone here. And they don't do that if you're in that other kind of work. That's different.

2-00:30:50

Washburn:

Do you ever remember any excitement around when a ship was going to be finished and launched?

2-00:30:59

Ramirez:

Oh gosh, yes. When they were, everybody stopped for a minute just to see the ships and everything, especially if they were made there. They were right there.

2-00:31:12

Washburn:

Describe that. Everybody stopped their work?

2-00:31:14

Ramirez:

Not everybody, but it's just like right now. You can be right here and watching over there, and maybe I could be sitting there and watching over there.

2-00:31:26

Washburn:

So would you stop your working for a moment and watch the ship go off?

2-00:31:31

Ramirez:

If it was in the daytime. I mean if it was like when you were going to eat, sometimes they would have something like that. They always showed us when they were going.

2-00:31:45

Washburn:

Would you leave the office and go outside to watch go it into the water?

2-00:31:50

Ramirez:

It depended who was to stay with the work that you were doing, and if they would let you go. Many times people would go outside to see the ships go out.

2-00:32:03

Washburn:

Did you go outside to see the ships go out?

2-00:32:04

Ramirez:

No. I was afraid. [laughs]

2-00:32:07

Washburn:

Why were you afraid?

2-00:32:07

Ramirez:

I didn't want to go up on board.

2-00:32:10

Washburn:

Why were you afraid?

2-00:32:12

Ramirez:

Because you know, we were upstairs real high and if I had to go down there—no! Might as well see them another day. [laughs]

2-00:32:19

Washburn:

So you didn't see the ship?

2-00:32:20

Ramirez:

I saw some, but it was sometimes in the evening when we were coming out and they were making a big deal about it because it was slowly going into the ocean and all that.

2-00:32:36

Washburn:

Do you remember one time that you saw a ship go off and how you felt? Can you describe one of those times when you saw a ship go off into the water?

2-00:32:48

Ramirez:

Well it hurt you in a sense, because the fellows that were in that boat or whatever it was, we knew that they were going. Everybody just would clap, and they would say, "We're praying for you, we're thinking of you." They were all the families. It's very—people became very close. I saw some of that. I won't say it was every time. Then they had another thing that when they were leaving, with the soldiers and everything, they gave you a chance to say goodbye. Just like that, even from the open window. So that they would know that we were saying goodbye.

2-00:33:42

Washburn:

From the office window, you'd wave.

2-00:33:43

Ramirez:

Yeah, we did that.

2-00:33:45

Washburn:

That's very nice.

2-00:33:45

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. But we never went close to them, we were always a little bit—like across the street here.

2-00:33:55

Washburn:

So was that one of the only times that the people in the office rubbed elbows with people down on the yards working on the ships?

2-00:34:06

Ramirez:

I don't know because I was up high. We never went down.

2-00:34:11

Washburn:

Never went down.

2-00:34:13

Ramirez:

Uh-huh. The only time that for a chance in the evening, as we were going home, we could see some of the fellas in the boats, then it would be different. But we just saw them and that was it.

2-00:34:30

Washburn:

Do you ever remember in the evening time when you left your job, feeling different than some of the other people working there as you left—feeling different because you worked in the office and they worked on the boats?

2-00:34:47

Ramirez:

No, that didn't bother me. I was glad to get home, that was the only thing. It worked all right because I learned a lot.

2-00:35:02

Washburn:

You learned a lot, and then you used that same stuff, that same information, that same things there for your job as an accountant afterwards.

2-00:35:08

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. Yeah, it came in handy. It came right in handy.

2-00:35:17

Washburn:

So a lot of people were out of work after the shipyards closed, yet you found work right afterwards?

2-00:35:26

Ramirez:

Yes, I found work because there weren't very many accountants, and that's why I found it. Then we worked together for years and years and years until one of them married, one of them died, and things like that. There was one other fellow there when we started and he died, and then we took over his place. I had a girl, another lady, and the two of us took over.

2-00:36:09

Washburn:

Did your husband ever object to you working?

2-00:36:13

Ramirez:

No, he died before. Well, he didn't die during the time I was working there, but by the time I was at the other place. He died in 1942? Something like that. It was when Richard married. My son married, and a week later he died.

2-00:36:48

Washburn:

So when did your son marry? Did your son marry in the fifties?

2-00:36:51

Ramirez:

Uh-huh. Something like that. After that, then I was alone, because my dad came to stay here with me.

2-00:37:08

Washburn:

But you said that your husband never objected to you working in the office, in the shipyards, or afterwards?

2-00:37:15

Ramirez:

No, I think he liked it. [laughs]

2-00:37:19

Washburn:

Why did he like it?

2-00:37:20

Ramirez:

Well, because I always wanted to be—and I would have been very sad had he said that I couldn't work. He wouldn't do that. He was okay. He went to work in the morning and I went to work, again. My son was already big, a big boy, and going to high school or whatever it was, so I wasn't going to stay here. And it's good, because after he died and my son married, well then I had a place to be.

2-00:37:58

Washburn:

You had a profession.

2-00:38:00

Ramirez:

Yes. So that makes a difference.

2-00:38:05

Washburn:

But you said you would have been sad had your husband objected to you—

2-00:38:12

Ramirez:

Well, because some Mexican people don't like their wives to go out because they might get a boyfriend or something like. To me, he never said anything like that.

2-00:38:26

Washburn:

So you think that you were breaking with tradition a little bit by working in the office and as an accountant afterwards?

2-00:38:36

Ramirez:

No, because it was my business.

2-00:38:39

Washburn:

No, but you just said that some Mexican people didn't like the women working, and yet here you are working yourself. That's why I say do you think you were breaking with tradition a little bit.

2-00:38:57

Ramirez:

Maybe I misunderstood you, because my husband never tried to stop me, he never did. He always—he was happy, I guess, that I was working, because I didn't want to stay here alone either, you know, all day long. It's very long when you stay here alone and nobody is here with you. But he was never against me. Whatever I said was okay.

2-00:39:33

Washburn:

Did you have other friends at the church, other women at the church, that you knew who weren't working?

2-00:39:40

Ramirez:

I didn't understand that.

2-00:39:43

Washburn:

Did you know other women at the Baptist church who were not working, who were staying at home?

2-00:39:50

Ramirez:

I don't remember.

2-00:39:52

Washburn:

You don't remember?

2-00:39:54

Ramirez:

Unh-uh. Do you remember? Who?

2-00:39:56

Niece:

Maria Martina never worked, she always stayed home. And maybe Patsy Ortiz, I don't know. It was kind of at that cross of the tradition breaking. We were at the age where everybody has to work now. It was half and half.

2-00:40:20

Washburn:

You mentioned the Mexican tradition, and I'm trying to understand what you meant by that. In a way, you're kind of comparing yourself to other women in your family that you knew, and it sounds like it was a different kind of work.

2-00:40:46

Ramirez:

Mexicans?

2-00:40:50

Washburn:

I'm just trying to understand what you meant by that.

2-00:40:53

Niece:

In the Hispanic families, the wife is usually at home. But from her mother on, her mother was very progressive. My grandmother was very progressive. They just worked, all the family.

2-00:41:08

Washburn:

So your mother worked?

2-00:41:11

Ramirez:

My mother worked?

2-00:41:12

Washburn:

Yeah.

2-00:41:14

Ramirez:

Well, she worked at homes.

2-00:41:16

Washburn:

She worked at homes? Right. Doing what?

2-00:41:23

Ramirez:

Taking care of the rest of the family. I'm the oldest.

2-00:41:30

Washburn:

You were the oldest of all the kids?

2-00:41:39

Ramirez:

Yeah, I'm the oldest in my family. I was the first one to get out of there. [laughs] I married before the rest of them.

2-00:41:50

Washburn:

So you worked at this, as an accountant, actually until you retired, right? Then you eventually opened up your own business, you said. Or you were given your own business?

2-00:42:09

Ramirez:

It was the same thing, because he was sick and he died. He knew he was going to die, so then he gave us—well, we paid part of it, let's say, because we saw if he had anything left there. So the other girl and I, then we started the business in Albany. And then I closed it this last couple of years or so. About a year ago, wasn't it, that I closed it? Because I was getting too tired, and I knew that I was getting too old.

2-00:42:59

Washburn:

When did you move from your house in Richmond?

2-00:43:08

Ramirez:

From my house?

2-00:43:11

Washburn:

Yeah. When did you come to this house in El Cerrito?

2-00:43:14

Ramirez:

When did we buy it? I can't remember.

2-00:43:17

Niece:

I think it was in the 1960s. Or the fifties. You were living there when Richard got married, and my uncle was alive here. So that would be in the fifties.

2-00:43:36

Ramirez:

So that would be about the same time, I guess. Then my dad came and stayed.

2-00:43:43

Washburn:

Your dad came from Santa Barbara to stay here?

2-00:43:45

Ramirez:
Mm-hmm.

2-00:43:47

Washburn:
And did he stay here for the rest of his life after that?

2-00:43:50

Ramirez:
Until he died.

2-00:43:51

Washburn:
So why did he come here from Santa Barbara?

2-00:43:55

Ramirez:
My father had always, that was where his sister lived. She had lost her husband, too, so they had been together.

2-00:44:13

Niece:
That was in Salinas.

2-00:44:25

Ramirez:
My Aunt Cira was younger, but then she found a place where she could be taking care of him. But my dad came to live with me after my husband died. I told him that whenever he wanted to he could come. He always felt that I had a husband and that he should stay away and be with his sister. But eventually he wanted to come and he stayed with me. And he stayed quite a while.

2-00:44:59

Washburn:
Did you have other family that moved from Santa Barbara to live here during the war or afterwards? After you moved here?

2-00:45:09

Ramirez:
I had a lot of students that have come from other places, and they stay here until they finish their classes. Then they finish their classes and go back.

2-00:45:18

Washburn:
I mean other of your family.

2-00:45:21

Ramirez:
I don't think so. Well, your mom and Aunt Dale.

2-00:45:27

Washburn:

So one of your sisters moved here from Santa Barbara?

2-00:45:30

Niece:

And Charley, Charley lived here, too.

2-00:45:34

Ramirez:

I didn't hear what you said.

2-00:45:37

Washburn:

What other family members moved from Santa Barbara to Richmond?

2-00:45:44

Ramirez:

Well her mother and Dale, like she was saying. That's my other sister.

2-00:45:51

Niece:

Charley.

2-00:45:54

Ramirez:

And Charley, uh-huh.

2-00:45:57

Niece:

That's the baby of the boys.

2-00:45:58

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm.

2-00:46:00

Washburn:

Did they move here because you lived here? Did you help them move here?

2-00:46:07

Ramirez:

No. They came on their own.

2-00:46:09

Washburn:

But I'm trying to understand why they came here rather than, say, Sacramento, or something.

2-00:46:16

Niece:

Well my mother came, if you don't mind my saying. My mother came because she married my dad, who was part of the Gonzalez family. The Gonzalez family was here at

the church where she was playing the piano. So it was like an intertwining. My mother came here. Okay, now my Aunt Dale, her husband is a minister, and so he would come to the church to preach. So they came here. They moved away, but they came. Charley was the youngest, and he came to stay with my mom and dad. I think he stayed with my Aunt Josie also when my grandma died.

2-00:46:56

Washburn:

I'm just trying to understand how other family members came to—why other family members came to Richmond.

2-00:47:01

Niece:

Mostly it was the church. The connection is the church.

2-00:47:06

Washburn:

The connection is from the Mexican Baptist church here and one in Santa Barbara?

2-00:47:11

Niece:

Well, no. My Uncle Robert was the pastor here. My father was his brother. So the family stayed together. All the Gonzalez family is here. My father married my mom when she came up to be with my aunt. Then she stayed.

2-00:47:27

Washburn:

That's what I mean. [to Ramirez] So your sister came up to be with you?

2-00:47:31

Niece:

No, she married my dad.

2-00:47:34

Washburn:

But she didn't marry your dad in Santa Barbara?

2-00:47:37

Niece:

No, in Reno.

2-00:47:40

Washburn:

Where did they meet?

2-00:47:42

Niece:

At the church. I told you earlier.

2-00:47:43

Washburn:

The church here?

2-00:47:44

Niece:
Yeah.

2-00:47:46

Washburn:
So how did she come to Richmond for the first time?

2-00:47:48

Niece:
She came to sing at the church.

2-00:47:51

Washburn:
On a visit, or permanently?

2-00:47:52

Niece:
Yes, she was visiting.

2-00:47:53

Washburn:
Oh, your sister came to visit you.

2-00:47:56

Ramirez
Mm-hmm. The two girls: Dale and her mom.

2-00:48:02

Washburn:
So you had sisters who came to visit you, and then they met people at the church.

2-00:48:09

Niece:
My mom and my dad. But my Aunt Dale met my Uncle Jim someplace else, I don't know where.

2-00:48:14

Ramirez:
At home with me.

2-00:48:16

Niece:
But they got married at the same time, I know that.

2-00:48:19

Ramirez:
Mm-hmm, yeah. He was visiting and he saw her picture and said, "Who's that?" "That's my sister." "Oh boy, I'm gonna get married with her!" [chuckles]

2-00:48:34

Washburn:

He liked her, he liked the way she looked, huh? You had a desk job at the shipyards and afterwards, and you said your mom worked in people's homes.

2-00:48:57

Ramirez:

My mom never worked.

2-00:49:03

Washburn:

Oh, your mom never worked. Your mom worked in the home, I'm saying. Taking care of the house.

2-00:49:05

Ramirez:

Uh-huh.

2-00:49:04

Washburn:

Thank you. Sorry. And your father worked on people's gardens in Santa Barbara.

2-00:49:13

Ramirez:

Mm-hmm. One place.

2-00:49:15

Washburn:

Were you one of the first in your family to have a desk job like that, as an accountant?

2-00:49:22

Ramirez:

To have a what?

2-00:49:23

Washburn:

To have a job at a desk, to have a more white-collar kind of job.

2-00:49:31

Ramirez:

I don't know what it is.

2-00:49:33

Washburn:

Okay, meaning your father had to work with his hands a lot, and you—

2-00:49:40

Niece:

My grandpa had a printing press. He used to print newsletters in his garage.

2-00:49:48

Washburn:

Your dad used to print newsletters in your garage.

2-00:49:51

Ramirez:

Uh-huh. For the church also. All my cousins, my uncles had them.

2-00:50:01

Washburn:

What I'm trying to get out, I guess, is the first time we met and talked, you said that you felt very fortunate to have the job you did considering how much you went to school.

2-00:50:15

Ramirez:

Well, I wanted to go to colleges and all kinds of things, but I had a baby. Then the war, and then all this; I didn't go farther than that. I mean, I went back to school just to learn what I was doing. Because when you go one place it's one thing, when you go another place it's another thing. Everything turned out just right. I got all these things done, then I started to work, and my friend, she died, and then I had another girl after my friend died. Then my sister—her mother—became ill and then I quit to take care of her.

2-00:51:14

Washburn:

I'm trying to understand why you said the first time we met, you felt fortunate that you had the job you had considering how much school you had.

2-00:51:26

Ramirez:

Oh yeah, you see because I never had college. I had only had, what do they call it?

2-00:51:34

Washburn:

High school.

2-00:51:35

Ramirez:

I had a high school and that's all. It was known at places, years and years, that the eldest girl always had to take care of the children and take care of the mother if she got sick, and the father, and all that. I didn't have a lot of that, but then when I came over here with my husband, I had to find out what I could do. I had him here, and Richard, and nobody else. I stayed here. But I found out it was easy. Well, right there, in that place, they taught me a lot that I didn't know. When they called me and expected me to type—not type but write—everything, it made me feel very comfortable because I could do those things even though I hadn't gone to college or anything like that. It's just like music. You learn it because you have to study it, you have to do this, you have to do that. As a girl, I started to play the piano very young and so I was able to do that and things like that. I didn't have to go out any place. I had friends that would help me and say, do this or do that. I kept on playing the piano for the churches. Those are things that come in as you grow. I feel that I've had a lot of things that have happened to me. Even with the American Baptist churches, I worked with them through the churches. They paid my way, they paid for wherever I was, and for many, many years. I went two or three times a year with them.

2-00:53:51

Washburn:
Where?

2-00:53:54

Ramirez:
New York. Farther than New York, I can't remember it. It's a Mexican place up there.

2-00:54:02

Niece:
Puerto Rico?

2-00:54:04

Ramirez:
Puerto Rico, I think it's that one.

2-00:54:07

Washburn:
You went travelling with the minister?

2-00:54:10

Niece:
Missionaries.

2-00:54:11

Ramirez:
In some, I went by myself. I used to go by myself, but with these other things that we've had with the different things in the different places, we would be in the office, we would eat there, we would do whatever we had to do. We could go any place we wanted to, so I would call my friends and then they would pick me up and I would get to see my friends. So I went all across the bay several times and enjoyed it. That was after my husband died, that I did most of it.

2-00:54:56

Washburn:
You said that you felt that you've been fortunate in the things that you've done. Do you think that's because you only had one kid that that gave you more time to do these things?

2-00:55:16

Ramirez:
No, I don't think it's that, because I used to—when I was doing this, I was going away from him but he was away in college or someplace. We didn't say you come back, or whatever, no. By then he was in college.

2-00:55:42

Washburn:
But say you had four or five children, you would have had to spend much more time at home.

2-00:55:49

Ramirez:
Oh, yeah.

2-00:55:50

Washburn:
And so then you wouldn't have been able to work at the shipyards, or go to school after working at the shipyards.

2-00:56:00

Ramirez:
No, I know. But I was very—well, I think the Lord did it, because otherwise I wouldn't have known the many things I know. I've gone across the bay, I've gone to—what do you call it? Where did I go?

2-00:56:23

Niece:
Japan, I know you went to Japan.

2-00:56:26

Ramirez:
I went to Japan.

2-00:56:29

Niece:
Israel.

2-00:56:31

Ramirez:
Israel several times. I've gone all around. I've seen a lot of things, but of course I've forgotten a lot of it because as you get older you forget things. Unless I'm working and I find something, then it comes back to me. Richard never followed me. He wanted to have a good—with the boys, be with the boys. I said "Fine." He went to high school. He went to some school very far away with his friends, and that's where he graduated. Then he married and that was it. I really have had a good time, a good life. I've traveled a lot. We used to go to different churches. It was really important, you know, through our American Baptist, not the Mexican. American Baptist, I always worked with them, right along with them.

2-00:57:39

Washburn:
Was your mom Baptist also?

2-00:57:42

Ramirez:
Oh yeah. My dad too. All my family, grandma and everybody.

2-00:57:47

Washburn:
Do you know where the Baptist tradition came from in your family?

2-00:57:53

Ramirez:

It came from my grandfather. Some fellow that was selling the Bible stopped at this place where my parents were living then. It was a very big place and they had this—let's see, what was I going to say? Tell me again.

2-00:58:29

Washburn:

Was this back with your grandfather?

2-00:58:33

Ramirez:

Oh yeah, my grandfather told my grandmother that this man was coming and she would have to listen to him now. They weren't Baptists then.

2-00:58:42

Washburn:

What were they?

2-00:58:44

Ramirez:

I don't know.

2-00:58:45

Washburn:

Were they Catholic?

2-00:58:47

Ramirez:

Evidently. So then when this fellow came he prayed, or he did something. Anyway, my grandfather accepted the Lord, and my grandmother wasn't happy. My other aunt wasn't happy because she liked to dance. That's what she used to say, that they wouldn't let her dance. She married a minister later. Anyway, the Mexican people are very—usually the husband is the one that says "We're gonna do it this way," and that's it. Now of course, nowadays it's different. But it used to be like that. So my grandmother finally made up—because my grandfather couldn't read so he wanted to talk to, to preach to the fellows there after he had accepted the Lord. He used to say, "Here you see this, you see this, you see this in the Bible. This is what it says here, and if you don't believe me—here! You read it yourself." And that's the way he did it. But my grandmother, who knew how to write and who knew everything; my grandfather didn't. So they joined the Baptist church in New York, wasn't it?

2-01:00:20

Niece:

I don't know where they were.

2-01:00:22

Washburn:

Was it in Tejas?

2-01:00:23

Ramirez:

Where I was born.

2-01:00:25

Washburn:

In San Antonio.

2-01:00:26

Ramirez:

In San Antonio. They changed, and that's where it started. And all our family became Baptists. Of course, they had a bunch of kids. They had seventeen or eighteen kids. My mom was in the lower part.

2-01:00:55

Washburn:

That's great. Actually, the tape's going to end.

[End of interview]