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**Irvin Shiosee**

**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  
Elizabeth Castle  
in 2005

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Interview 1: April 11, 2005  
Begin Audiofile Shiosee, Irvin. 01 04-11-05

01-00:00:05

**Irvin Shiosee:**

So where do you want me to start?

**Castle:**

Well, I'd like to start by if you could tell me your name and your tribe and your family, and it would be wonderful if you wanted to say anything—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Which family are you talking about, my own family, or--?

**Castle:**

Well, however you want, whether you want to talk about the ancestors that came right before you, like the grandma and grandpa, or just to find kind of a sense of who you are if someone were to ask you about your family, like where you're from. Maybe we could start by just, if you told me in English, and it would be wonderful if you also wanted to describe it in Laguna.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. So I can start, I guess, with my grandfather. I guess I'll introduce myself first. [laughs]

**Castle:**

Sure.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

My name is Irvin Shiosee and I'm a member of the Pueblo of Laguna. I have a grandfather, which I've learned quite a bit of history and things from him. My grandfather was a young man at age fourteen when the first railroad came through here. He was an orphan. He had another brother, and the grandmother took care of these two brothers, and my grandfather, being the oldest of the other one, he went to seek employment with the railroad. So when he got to the supervisor or the foreman and told him that he was looking for work, the supervisor or the foreman asked him how old he was, and he told him he was, I guess, fourteen years old. And the supervisor said, "Well, you're too young to be hired, because there's a law that states we can't hire teenagers with the heavy-duty work."

But then he told the foreman, says, "Well, why don't you just hire me as a water boy, and this way I can deliver the water, drinking water to the workmen. That way they don't have to leave the jobsite and come and get the water. This way I can take the water to them."

**Castle:**

That's pretty smart for a fourteen-year-old.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. So the foreman said, "Okay, you're hired," because that was light-duty work. Then after a while my grandfather became a railroad road inspector. He would go out and when it rains he'll

go out and check the road to see the condition of the road, and some places they had washouts. When this happened, then he would set up a flag to tell the railroad not to cross or come near that place, because there's a wash. Then he had to go back and get the men to come out and fix the road so the train can go by.

So two of his sons became railroad people. They were both working in Winslow, Arizona. Then one went to Southern Pacific and then was working down in Tucson, Arizona. And my father painted the jobs with the railroad, and so he went to work for the Santa Fe Railroad also, and started off at Mesita [phonetic] railroad section. He didn't live there, but he walked from the village to the railroad, to his jobsite.

Then later on he got transferred over to New Laguna, where there was a rooming house there—that's another railroad section—and lived there for three, four years, I believe. Then one day the governor called the Pueblo of Laguna men to come to his office, and he advised them that they have to go out and work for the railroad, because there were jobs available for them, and there was an agreement made between the railroad and the pueblo that the pueblo would provide water and the land to go through, and in return the Santa Fe Railroad was supposed to provide employment, plus housing, plus wood to burn in the wood stove, plus a railroad pass, and jobs that would be secure for a lifetime, and to the generation to come, too.

**Castle:**

What was the name of the agreement? Did it have a name?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No, just they were in good faith, just a handshake. There was really nothing written saying that.

**Castle:**

It was an oral agreement.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oral agreement, yes. And every year the tribal council would go to Los Angeles to what they called it, "water the flower," in other words, renew the agreement. So this went on for many years, and many of our younger members got hired on the railroad. And some of us, like me, I didn't want to work for the railroad, because I was one of the railroad children.

**Castle:**

Did you just know too much about it, and it just didn't interest you?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No. I wanted to work in an aircraft plant making airplanes, because that was my dream, so I joined the air force. But I got tired of working on airplanes, so I decided not to follow my dreams. [laughs]

**Castle:**

How young were you when you first started to have this fascination with airplanes?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, I used to have a grandmother which used to sit outside the barn there with me. I'd be playing around and what she did was broke off a corncob and made it into an airplane, because she always used to tell them that I'm going to fly one day, or go across, so she used to make airplanes for me and then she'll say, "There goes my grandson, flying across there." And so she told me just to, "Keep that in mind. One day you're going to fly." So that dream came true, where I joined the air force and then I flew.

**Castle:**

So before flying in the air force, how did you end up—you explained the agreement that led to, later on what became known as the Santa Fe Indian Village. Could you talk a little bit about how you came to live in Richmond, how that happened?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, the fathers went out there first to establish themselves, and later on they were going to call up the families to go out and be with them. So that's what happened. Once they got their selves established over there, they called for us, so we all went out there to be with them. And our house was a boxcar. We had to share with another family in that one boxcar, but later on they built us houses, which consist of two boxcars side by side, and then in the middle was the kitchen and the living room.

**Castle:**

So was it like an H, or was it a U, with corners?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

It was like an H.

**Castle:**

Okay. And the middle bit was the bit that had the—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Kitchen, and sometimes used as a living room.

**Castle:**

What were they like inside? What was it like to live in a boxcar?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, it was crowded, because not enough room. Especially it depends on the size of the family. There was five of us in our family, and others were probably more, or less, so that was our living quarters.

**Castle:**

Do you know when your father went out there?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I think he went out there in 1940; '40 or '41, I'm not too sure.

**Castle:**

And then you joined him not long after that?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

About 1942.

**Castle:**

Okay. So just kind of wartime beginning.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

How old were you when you were there?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I think I was about five, six; six years old, I think.

**Castle:**

What was it like? I mean, do you remember the first time you came into this place with the boxcars and the railroads? I mean, what was the journey like? Did you go on the railroad to the place?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. The boxcars were sitting on the railroad rail, and we had a ladder going up to the door. It was, I guess, a shock in a way, to see what kind of a home that we have over there, and then gradually we had to get used to it, living in the boxcar.

01-00:10:03

**Castle:**

How was it a shock? Like was it just rougher living, or just very different?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

It was different from the way we had lived here in the reservation. Over here we had a house, and then going into a boxcar was something new to us.

**Castle:**

Right. What were some of the differences? I mean, you just had more space here, but living in the boxcar was—I mean, how big was it across?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

We had a big room and then the kitchen there, and so we were more or less just had to share one bedroom with the mother and father.

**Castle:**

What did your dad do for the railroad?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, he had several different kind of jobs. He was a machinist, and then he was a car man. I think that was about it—two positions.

**Castle:**

So would he travel with the trains?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No, he was there at the shop. There's a little shop. They call it the roundhouse, and then there's other shops right beside it there, and a big [unclear] track, they call it, where they fixed the cars, repaired cars and put wheels on the boxcars.

**Castle:**

Did your mom have a job with the railroad?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No. My mother was a homemaker.

**Castle:**

And how many other brothers and sisters were there, too?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I had two brothers and two sisters, so there were five of us in the family.

**Castle:**

Are you a middle child?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I'm the oldest.

**Castle:**

Oldest, okay. What do you remember in terms of what the—so you had the boxcar where you lived. What were the grounds like, you know, the whole kind of space that you lived in?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, if I can remember, there was about fifty boxcars; no, sixty, I think. It was in one whole row there, and then another half of a row coming up, and all these boxcars were filled with families. We had our playground there, and there was a place where we called a swamp.

**Castle:**

What was that?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

The water would come down from the city on down into that area there, and us kids, we used to make rafts and go out into that little lake there; looked like a lake. Sometimes we would fall in

there and then get all wet, and get a spanking, I guess. We picked up some tadpoles. There was a lot of tadpoles in there.

**Castle:**

Sounds like just the kind of place that your parents would die to find you playing in.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. Well, our dad built an oven for us, so we didn't really lose any of our traditional food, because there was an oven there. They could bake bread and they could do a lot of things in their oven, outdoor oven.

**Castle:**

It was an outdoor oven?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

What kind of foods?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Traditional food. That was bread, and there was what they called Indian pudding, and then there was some, well, sort of like on different occasions, like Easter or Christmas and special days they would fix the meal and then cook it in the oven, and then seal it. Then in the morning they would go there and take it out, and by that time it's all well done. The meat just falls off the bone. It was good.

**Castle:**

I can tell that you're having a memory of how good the food was the morning after. What's Indian pudding? What's that made of? What's it like?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

It's made out of wheat and sugar, and it's mixed in with something called—what is it, {panocha?}—{panocha}, and they mix it like a dough, real smooth, and then they put it in the bucket lined with corn husks, and then put it in there and then put a lid on top, and then put it in the oven and let it cook for overnight. Next morning they'd take it out, nice and brown, and nice and sweet, very sweet.

**Castle:**

It reminds you of home, too, because you've got it all consistent. We were talking before about the schools that you went to, so how long after you got there did you start to school?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, as soon as we got there they had to take us to school and register us, and so forth.

**Castle:**

Did you start off in, like, kindergarten, or the first grade?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No, I started off in first grade.

**Castle:**

Okay. And what school was that that you went to?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Pierce [phonetic] Elementary School.

**Castle:**

How far was that, and how did you get there?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I would think maybe about a mile, or maybe less, just walking. It was in walking distance.

**Castle:**

I don't know, it's a long time to think back, but what was it like? So this was the first time you had gone to school anyway, so you hadn't been to school on the reservation. I don't know if you remember your first day, or what it was like to first be at the school. Was it very, very different from what—I mean, you hadn't known school before, but this is like all kinds of different people, not just Laguna people.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, I started school here on the reservation in what they call day school, and it was all members of the tribe that went to school, so it was almost like all-Indian school. So when I went out there, it was integrated with other ethnic race, and it was something different, something that I never was used to seeing, and didn't know there was other people like that.

Then my mother had to take me to school, and I told her I couldn't stay in school by myself, because at that time I didn't really know English. So I told her, I said, "You need to interpret for me as to what it's all about." So she stayed in school with me for three days, until I kind of got used to the idea that I had to be in there.

And then what else?

**Castle:**

Well, when you were here, you said you were in day school here.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

That's where I started from, just started and then didn't really go to school that long.

**B. Furey:**

Could I ask a quick question? Just for somebody who doesn't understand what res life was like in the thirties, could you just explain what a typical day going to school was like, the classes you would take, some of the games you'd play, what a typical day here would look like.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, well, it was—like I said, I started school here, and not really going for the whole semester or whatever. It was all somebody that you know from the same village, so we all got to know each other. So when I went to California and went to that school I really didn't know anybody, and it was sort of like a shock, I guess, being among different people and not really understanding their language, and not them speaking my language, so we had a communication gap, I guess you can say, until such time when I started—the main textbook was *Dick and Jane*, and that was what I learned to speak English with, *Dick and Jane*. And then, of course, it was something different, something new.

**Castle:**

When you were here in the day school, what happened when you spoke Indian?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, we weren't allowed to speak in our native language, because they wanted to convert us into the English language, and many of us, they weren't too acceptable to their idea that we should still speak our language, and then at the same time trying to learn their language. So we were punished for speaking our language. There was always somebody there that would squeal on us, and, you know, the teacher will come and call us in, and ask us if we were speaking our language. And, you know, we were taught to speak the truth, so naturally we had to tell them, "Yes, we were speaking it." So then we got punished for that, either stand against the wall, or go out there and chop wood, or break coal for the stove in the classroom, or either clean the bathroom or whatever chores that were there. That was our punishment for speaking our language.

01-00:20:18

**Castle:**

So even if you were like out at playground or something, it didn't matter. It wasn't just the classroom; it was if you were caught speaking just amongst yourselves, as like brothers or sisters, or a gang of friends.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

Who ran the school? Was it church run?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

That was the public school; government school, I guess. They had government teachers. There was only one, and she taught both—well, there was a teacher's aide, like, that would take care of the other part of it, and then just go back and forth.

**Castle:**

So then you go to school in Richmond, and you're not punished for speaking your language. It's just that you can't be understood, because there's no one else to speak to except the friends that you've gone with, and you bring your mom. What grade was it where you were first introduced to the class?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

First grade.

**Castle:**

How did the teacher introduce you to the class? You were telling before about how she described you to the class, and what that meant for you later on.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, on the very first day that we got into the classroom, my mother and I, the teacher was there. I can't remember her name, but anyway, she advised the class that, "We have a new student here, and I want to introduce you to a new student. His name is Irvin Chiotee [phonetic]." She couldn't pronounce my last name, but she tried. And then she says, "He's an American Indian boy." And then when she said American Indian boy, I looked at the classmates that was mine. They were all surprised, because during that time there was cowboy and Indian fighting. And so I guess in their mind I was sort of like an enemy, because Indians were enemy to the cowboys and frontiers.

**Castle:**

That's what they in the movies?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

So that's how they saw me, as a savage Indian, I guess. And then by that, the kids used to come up and touch me, and I used to get mad at them and I would slap their hands away. Then the teacher would see me, so I'd get sent to the principal's office, and the principal will ask me, "What happened?" So I'd tell him.

I said, "Well—." Then I would usually get the paddle for fighting.

[Side conversation about microphone. Reposition camera. Interview interruption.]

**Castle:**

—the principal, like, saying, "Wow, this is wrong," you get in trouble. How did that affect you, when you think about it?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, I guess I was used to being disciplined, because my grandfather would discipline me whenever I did something wrong. So it was really, I guess—what I saw was wrong, by slapping the kids, you know, "Don't touch me," or, "Don't—." Then, of course, the teacher saw me striking somebody, and then right away it's me that caused the problem.

**Castle:**

You were describing when we were talking earlier about times when you were talking about making sure to take off your kind of Indian costume, and have your Anglo costume on. [Shiosee chuckles] Can you describe that for me, what that was about?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, the colony that we lived in had a fence and a barn right there, and this is when I was going to, I guess, junior high, because right then I had to go into town, through town to get to school. Then usually I'd speak the language right there in the colony. I didn't really care for English language that well. My dad, my mother would try to tell me to speak English, but then I'd always tell them, I'd say, "Well, you know, when the time comes I'll speak it, but not right now."

So as a result I picture myself when I was going to junior high school that I had to take off my Indian costume and hang it on this fence that I had to go through, and then put on my street clothes so the other can recognize me as such.

**Castle:**

Are you talking about it kind of in a symbolic way?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. I mean, that's the way I'd picture myself. I just can't go out there with my Indian customs, because when I do that they might think, you know, oh, here's comes a savage Indian. So it's best that I leave it there and then put on my other street clothes. I just—even though I was wearing my street clothes, but I mean, I'd just picture it that way, so that way nobody will know me as being an Indian. [chuckles]

**Castle:**

So in some ways it's like when your first-grade teacher and the principal don't defend you or take your side for defending yourself against people who are thinking about you as savages, that kind of affects you as a kid.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

I mean, it sounds like you got this awareness of living in two worlds, or that you can't necessarily be yourself or be understood outside of the space of the colony.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

Is part of it, too, just speaking the language? That's one of the aspects of it, in terms of what might be recognized as part of the Indian costume. It sounds like you were talking also a lot about the—you were a very hard-working young man, all the different things that you were doing. What are some of the first things that you started to do to kind of—was it to make some money to do fun things, or what did you start doing around the colony?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I think that's part of growing up, where our parents, or like my dad, he was teaching me to be responsible to myself, that nothing is free. You have to earn a living, or earn to do whatever you want to do. So we'd go to that Saturday matinee, stand in line at the theater. We had a long line just waiting for the door to open. So in order to have some money in your pocket, we had to go out and do some work.

Like I used to cut grass for some people, and then after I got a little older I had a friend that his aunt had a car, so we used to borrow it, and we'd go out to the strawberry field, apricot, peaches field, and tomato. So we had to earn the money so we could share with our brothers and sisters. He had seven, or six sisters which the father was very strict with them, so we were chosen to be a chaperone, to take them to the dances in Oakland and San Francisco, big huge ballrooms there.

**B. Furey:**

What were the names of the ballrooms?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

The one in Oakland was called Sweet's Ballroom, and the one in San Francisco, I think it's called Sixteenth Street Ballroom, I guess, something like that, a real huge place.

**Castle:**

How old were you?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

That's just like people from all parts of the world were—well, mostly Spanish. They'd bring musicians from South America, Mexico, and they'd play all kinds of music. But we learned how to dance, and nobody was a wallflower. Everybody was willing to dance, so it was real neat.

**Castle:**

So you were the chaperone to these—these were younger—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No. Well, there was an older sister, and then one was about same age, and then less than that, I think it was. It's just that the father didn't want them to be straying off with somebody, that they want us to be there to make sure they don't get themselves in trouble, or something like that. But once we get in the ballroom, well, we cut loose. They go their way and we go our way. [laughter] So that was it. It was neat. I really enjoyed it.

**Castle:**

That'd be an amazing experience for anyone. It's a big city. How did you get over there? Did someone drive you?

01-00:30:06

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No. My friend's aunt had a car, so she would trust him to use the car. So we'd all pile in that car and take off, or sometimes we'll catch a bus, street bus, and then go down to Oakland or San Francisco.

**Castle:**

See, that's—I mean, that's pretty savvy for anyone, you know, to take a bus at that age. I mean, are you like sixteen or fifteen?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes, we were teenagers then.

**Castle:**

Okay. I mean, I'm still intimidated going into San Francisco. So what kind of dancing did you do inside the—what was going on at that time? What did you learn to do?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, we had rumba, mambo, zamba, and waltz, you know, Spanish waltz, that kind of dance, and I guess you might call it a chicken scratch, I call it.

**Castle:**

Well, speaking of dancing, did you do also, you know, outside of the social activities that you did with maybe friends, what type of dancing did you do as a Laguna person in the colony? Did you do traditional dancing?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

And then what different venues did you do it?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes, we had a traditional dance which was a corn dance, and deer dance, buffalo dance, eagle dance, and Kiowa dance, and I think some of those like that.

**Castle:**

Where would you do them? Would you do them just in the colony, or did you ever do them outside for other people?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. We used to have a parade. I can't remember what day or when the parade was on, but anyway, we were invited to participate in that parade. So the colonies, we had different dances. Like the buffalo dance, the eagle dance, and the Kiowa dance, those were about three or four dances that we performed. One year we got the first place and got a big trophy for entertaining the people.

**Castle:**

This was during the parade?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes, in the parade.

**Castle:**

What time of year was the parade? It was every year? It was an annual—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

It was an annual event that they have, yes.

**Castle:**

That wasn't the May Day one, was it?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No, no. That's a different one.

**Castle:**

Did doing these kind of things, I mean, did you kind of feel it helped you maintain—what helped you while you were there, kind of maintain a sense of identity or family? I mean, was going home during the summers, or the colony—you know, it's kind of a big thing to move to that space.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, every summer when the school was out, the colony families would travel back to the reservation to be with members of the family during the summer, and that's about three months, I believe. During this time when we used to come home, my grandfather would use us a labor to help him with his corn field or sheep or cattle, and he would assign us to different chores to do. The main thing that I took was the farming, because I didn't want to be a cowboy or sheep herder. I figure those kind of job was a very lonely life. They're out there by themselves. But if you're a farmer, at least you're in the village, and you still have time to mingle with other people, friends. Then during the summer they usually have social dances or feasts, fiestas, and other things taking place.

**Castle:**

Did you ever notice as you grew older and were coming back—you know, a lot of times people talk about how people have—urban Indians come back to the reservation, and people treat them differently, or there's this kind of like, "Oh, you've changed in some way." Did you notice anything like that?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. There's a difference between the urban Indians and the reservation Indians. The difference was that we urban Indians were exposed to outside world off the reservation, and the ones that live on the reservation were more or less confined to the reservation. Of course they were free to get out, like go to Albuquerque, Grants [New Mexico] and so forth, but that's just a trip and then

back. But some of us, we live out in the urban area. We live among different people, different cultures, different traditions, customs and so forth, so we had that kind of knowledge.

**Castle:**

So you were talking about like the way it sets boundaries, and even though people could maybe travel to Albuquerque, but your experience—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Was very broad.

**Castle:**

—opened your mind as well.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes, because when you live out there you were exposed to a lot of things, and there weren't many things that they could keep things confidential. It was pretty open, but whereas on the reservation there's a lot of confidentiality because of the restriction that the government has imposed on us.

**Castle:**

You were describing one of the things, especially when you got into high school, was the experience around—you experienced all these different people, but there was quite a lot of segregation in terms of where people lived. Is that something you noticed in the high schools, or was this what you noticed about Richmond itself? And could you describe that.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, one thing I noticed when I got to Richmond, that there was segregation of different ethnic race. There was Spanish living in one section; the Germans lived in one section; and the French or German, other, I think, races were separate. They weren't together, and Negroes had their own section. But we all went to the same school, and there was really no problem with the different races. We all got along well. I think it's mostly the old people from the old country that they had this kind of a setting.

**Castle:**

In what way? You mean like people had some conflicts, like maybe European immigrant families or communities had conflicts with each other?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, I think mostly they liked to be together, you know, as opposed to integrating with other races, other people. They more or less were comfortable in the way that they were living, you know, like they can speak freely among themselves in their language, like the Germans speak their German language, Spanish speak the Spanish language, and then every different nationality had their different diet. So that was one thing that was good for them, and it was good for us, too, because we have our own diet, too. Everything's made out of corn.

**B. Furey:**

Can you share some memories of personal experiences you had with specific ethnicities? Take your pick. I mean, Germans. Did you have any German friends in Richmond at the time?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, I guess you can say we had friends while we're at school, but once we get into our own setting we would more or less go with our own people.

**B. Furey:**

Do you remember any specific instances of friendships with the children, of kids?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh yes.

**B. Furey:**

Do you remember their names? Going to kids' houses?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I had Spanish friends which I'd mostly run around with, because of their diet. Ours is similar to theirs. And then I had some Anglo friends, also some black friends. There's time and different places that we'd get together.

**B. Furey:**

Do you remember any specific—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, like we had a basketball team and we had a baseball team, and during those times that we have meets, you know, challenge each other, we got a chance to be together again, only as a, what do you call it, an opposite teammate or whatever.

**Castle:**

So these were all-Indian teams, or was it mixed?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No, we had maybe two or three Anglos on our team. I guess we sort of converted them. [laughs] Our baseball team or our team name was Warriors, and we had Warrior jackets, and so proud of it. We played with all different races then.

**Castle:**

Were most of the teams made up of like kind of one race, primarily?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes, like the Spanish had their own Spanish team. The Anglos had their own team, and then the blacks had their own team, too. So it was just something like that.

**Castle:**

So that'd be one of the social places that you all would meet up and could do things. Was it always friendly, you know, like playing each other, I mean other than—you know, sportsmanship can—

01-00:40:10

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, we were rivals when we were playing, but afterwards it was okay. May the best team win. [laughs]

**Castle:**

That's good. I was trying to think, Brendan, when you were talking about some times—so basically you could hang out with people at school or sports. Were there other social events where people from different backgrounds and races would get together that you can think of? I mean, like the dances? Did people integrate the dances?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, we had proms and different types of school activities that we can go and [unclear] with them, like high school basketball games, football games, and things like that.

**Castle:**

The team that you played for, was that sponsored by—that wasn't tied to the school, was it?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

No. It was just the group that lived in the colony, and then, of course, we had three Anglos that came to play with us. They wanted to play with us.

**Castle:**

They came to you, they wanted to play with you.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

They came to us and played with us.

**Castle:**

Would you ever sit with any of these people; would you sit together at lunch, or would you usually just sit as a group of Lagunas, or did people sit together?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh no, we all had different lunch breaks, different periods, you know, so we'd pretty much eat with our classmates or whomever we can eat with. We weren't like anti-social. We just socialized with everybody.

**Castle:**

You were talking a little bit also about—when we were talking about World War II, or when servicemen were in the area, what happened? You know, during that period there was just a lot of energy going on, from what I understand. A lot of things were happening in Richmond. Is that something—I mean, you were quite young then, so you might not have noticed that per se. When was it that you were describing kind of almost like it was a port town, you know, that people

were kind of coming through and there were a lot of maybe marriages made, in terms of how people met; could you describe that?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. The town that I lived in, which was Richmond, there was a lot of military that were coming to our town there, because it's so close right there, where Treasure Island sits right there, and Alameda Naval Base, and then across the ocean was another air force base called Hamilton Air Force Base. It was during that time that where they have like and R and R, or leave, you know, they would come to our town and sort of visit us, I guess. And then, of course, we had a few relatives that were in the armed forces that would come to our colony, and then also they would invite their friends to come, to introduce us, who we are and also what kind of food we eat. So it was a pretty busy town then, at that time when the war was on.

Then, of course, a few of us guys were shining shoes. We had a shoebox and put some shoe polish and stuff inside it, and we'd go carry it downtown and then sit in one corner and start shining shoes, and then the military people, we'd shine their shoes, and then they would tip us sometimes.

**Castle:**

Did you shine a lot of military shoes?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes.

**Castle:**

You also mentioned the experience of what it took to get a paper route. What was this like, because you've described yourself at times as a pretty shy person, so this is pretty outgoing stuff to do.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. Well, I was very shy and didn't really speak English that well, so I needed a paper route. The colony, there were some guys there that we all decided to get a paper route. So before we got a paper route, we had to sell papers on the street corner, and we had to holler out the headlines and tell them what it's all about. And I was one of the shyest guys. I couldn't really holler and say the words and all that, but somehow, some way I made it through, though, and then finally I got a paper route. Paper route you don't have to talk to anybody except on collection day, when you have to collect the money from them. That was the only time that you—or sometimes somebody will invite you in and give you some cookies or milk. Usually the elders would do that.

**Castle:**

So you got through the hard part, so you could get to the part where you didn't have to yell on a street corner, because that's pretty intimidating for anyone.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

That's about my experience with a paper route.

**Castle:**

When it's not your language. I'm interested in talking about language, because we talked a lot about some of your challenges in terms of you deciding when you were going to learn English and use it on your own terms. You're fluent in your own language, but don't always get a chance to use it. Can you maybe start with the experience of learning another language on top of Laguna, when you learned Japanese? Maybe you could explain how you ended up in Japan, learning Japanese.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. My first language was my own language, which was the Keresan and then the second language would be English, and then the third language will be Spanish, which I picked up during high school. I wasn't really fluent in Spanish, but I'd try to speak it, and then I went into the military. Before then, when I was growing up, my grandfather used to tell me to respect my elders, and to be courteous, respectful, and to treat them well.

So while I was in the military I had the privilege or opportunity to go to Japan, and then while I was over there I didn't want to speak the language, but then some elders used to come up and talk to me. Then I would tell them, "I don't speak your language," and they'd kind of feel shocked or whatever. Here's somebody that's one of their relatives or somewhat looks like them, can't speak the language.

So then it seemed like my grandfather was sitting on my shoulder, and he said, "Remember what I told you. Respect your elders."

So then right then I thought, okay, Grandpa, I know what you're talking about, so I have to know the language, which I didn't want to learn the language, because you have more fun not speaking or knowing their language. [Castle laughs.] But after I learned to speak the language, that was it, so I spoke the language fluently, and I got to use it while I was there. Then when I came to Hawaii I got to use that language again.

**Castle:**

How long did it take you to learn it, and how did you learn it?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, some of the words that were used in Japanese were also used in my language, and then, of course, the vowels were similar, so I didn't have a problem as far as the accent or anything going. It was almost the same thing.

**Castle:**

Can you think of some examples of things? I mean, when we were talking earlier you had some phrasing that was similar, or the words that sounded the same.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, the recent word that I heard was this earthquake that took place over in {*Tesami?*}, and when I heard that word it almost sounded like my language, {*hanami?*}. {*Hanami*} means naked, you

know, in my language. And then, of course, in Japanese there's words that we use in our language in there, too.

**Castle:**

What are the sounds? You mentioned the vowels, and then you also made other sounds that you said are similar between the languages, and you ran through them, the vowels or consonants, or just other sounds. Do you remember what those sounds were that we talked about earlier?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. Well, I could have forgotten a lot of words, but anyway, the few words that I remember now are like if you want to ask the time, what time is it? In Japanese you would say {*Amelanjadeska?*}, and in my language {*ima*} means to go. Then there's one of my relatives whose last name is {*Kanako*}, and it sounds like Japanese, too, {*kanajo*}. The other words I can't remember right now offhand, but anyway, it's almost similar that the language itself is in there.

01-00:50:03

**Castle:**

Why don't we stop now?

**B. Furey:**

Okay. We're right about at the end of the tape, too.

**Castle:**

I'm just thinking, I wanted to make sure we started to talk about the language, and then I have all trails of where I'm going to come back to, so I've got all these little markers of story here, story here, but I figure nobody really—you can't talk too much longer than this. So is that okay to stop now, and talk more later?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay.

**Castle:**

Oh, that's wonderful. I'm so glad that we talked first about—does that help to sometimes remind you?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

It's better that way, because it's hard to remember when you get interviewed like this here, to think of everything, and then it's something different when you have to face the camera.

**Castle:**

Does it make you feel—because I'm trying to kind of like block the camera out, you know, so that you feel—because this is really—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

I'm talking to somebody that's not there.

**Castle:**

Yes, that's the problem. I can't lie about that. I mean, I always say this, but I hate to be on camera. But I have this great cheat sheet, because I know all these—you know, I don't want to kind of lead the stories, but you've brought up a lot of really good things, and then even with us talking, now I've thought of more questions that would really—there's just a lot of different ways that this interview can—

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, let me just share something with you. This is off the record.

**Castle:**

Okay. Is this off?

**B. Furey:**

Well, you can decide later. You have a chance to review.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Oh, I do? Okay.

**B. Furey:**

Why don't you say it, and then you have a chance to check it out later.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Okay. You know, English language to me is like I'm copying somebody. It's not my natural language. The language that I speak comes from my heart on to you, you know. But to imitate somebody is not really from the heart. It's coming from the mouth. That's the way I view—and like today, most of our young children, we're trying to teach them how to speak Keresan. Okay, they learn it in kindergarten, but when they go home they really don't have anybody at home talking their language, because I'm talking about young, young couples. Their tongue has been cut off, and all they could do is speak English. And then also with the elders, they try to speak English so they could learn a little more from their grandchildren, so there is a communication gap right there.

**Castle:**

Well, that's one of the things that we wanted to do, and maybe we can do that. I really feel we wanted to conduct the interviews—you know, I could ask a question in English and you could answer in {korisen}.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Well, here's another thing, too. Being, living out in California, I always hear Germans talking to the little ones in their language, or Spanish or whatever. Then how come I was restricted from speaking my language, even to my kids or my friends or anybody? Why is it only me? Because they speak their language. But again, I guess we're—was meant to be that way, I guess; I don't know.

So we have a very interesting history, which I feel that they tried to, especially the archeologists, they're trying to make me extinct, that I no longer existed. And if you notice these cliff dwellings up there, that's where my ancestors were. That's where we came from. And now I'm sitting here in Laguna; they're saying those people that lived there are no longer living. But here I am. I'm still living here. So I think by doing this, there's a lot of things that we could learn from each other, because you don't know me, and I don't know you, and like I said before, I'm a savage Indian to you, you know, like all because of the pictures that was made by Hollywood, where the cowboys was killing Indians, or cavalryman killing Indians to gain more land, and stuff like that.

But I think, well, the story of it is that at one time we were all in one. That's what my grandfathers or great-grandparents used to teach us, that we all came from one house, until we started to build the stairway up the tower of Babel. Then that's when our creator said, "What are these kids trying to do? It's not their time to know me, so I might as well zap them with a different language and different tongue, different pigment." So out of that we became different people, and different languages were spoken. But we all bleed. We're all— [laughs]

**B. Furey:**

Could you give us an example of Laguna—could you just for the record say your name, speak and say who you are and where you're from?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

In Laguna? {*Laguna phrase*} That's it. That's my name, the place where I live, and the place where I'm from. Is that what you wanted?

**Castle:**

I'm too busy being stunned by stories. [Shiosee laughs] Sometimes you just learn to be quiet. That's the problem as an interviewer, is I don't always want to ask a question, because I just want to learn. Because one of the things that you said is when you're talking about like archeologists trying to kind of make you a gone or dead peoples, are you talking about what people are now calling the Anasazi, and making it like that's another peoples, instead of the fact that you're the living descendants; you are the Anasazi. Is that what you were talking about at that point?

**Irvin Shiosee:**

Yes. The really story behind this that I know because of my grandfather's teaching me and so forth, it's almost biblical. If you know your Bible you'll probably understand what I'm saying, okay. There were twelve tribes in Israel. So one of the tribes didn't go along with the eleven, so the eleven tribes said, "What are we going to do with this twelfth tribe here? Never comes along with us, and with our suggestions, ideas, and so forth."

So they said, "Well, why don't we get rid of them? Send them away, as far as east is east, and hopefully we'll never run into them again."

So they called them in and said, "Okay. The twelfth tribe, you're going to have to go away from here, and go as far as from east to east," and that's it. So they left. So they migrated all the way across Asia and all the way across the Bering Straits, and then all the way down to South

America. Okay. So that's where, if you want to find a linkage of the Native American, you have to start from South America, go all the way back over to Israel. And the history shows that, like the artifacts that they find throughout the countries, is our history.

My grandfather used to tell me, "There's a bridge that you're going to have to come across," and that bridge, he didn't really explain what kind of bridge. I looked up at Alaska and Russia. I said maybe there was a bridge across there somewhere, and that's the bridge that he's talking about. Then he said, "Don't feel bad if not all of them cross over that bridge, because there's only going to be a few that will probably cross over."

So this puzzled me for a long time. I said, "Well, I wonder what he's talking about, bridge, bridge." So one day I was sitting there reading the word, and I picked it up and I just happened to open it like this [demonstrates], and there it was, the bridge. The Old Testament and the New Testament. And that's what he was referring to. So I said, "Wow. This I have to—I can't believe it. I'm going to have to have my grandfather evaluate it." Which I did. I went to a clergyman and asked him. I said, "I want you to evaluate my grandfather, because he told me some interesting story, and I want to know just who he is and what he's saying." I said, "Don't stop me until I finish—."

[interview interruption, recording media changed]

02-00:00:02

**Irvin Shiosee:**

And then, so finally a thought came into my mind. I wanted to work for Sherwin Williams Paint Company over in Emeryville, that big globe? So I was going there filling out an application. I think about the third or fourth time that I went there, I told that personnel officer, I says, "I want to see the personnel—or the clerk. I want to talk to the personnel officer." I said, "Don't bother getting up." I said I'd only take a minute or so. The reason for that, I saw a coat rack there. She had an Air Force uniform on, and it had an oak-leaf cluster, so I said, this is my chance to go in there and talk to him.

So I walked in and I said, "Excuse me, sir. I've been filling out applications, and so far I haven't heard anything from you or this company." I said, "Today I stand on military preference." I said, "While I have no experience in making paint or anything, but I'm willing to learn. While others were learning how to make paint or have some kind of vocational training, I was serving my country overseas, so that you and everybody else can have the freedom." I said, "Thank you, sir. Have a good day." I walked out. I walked just a little ways and he called me back. He said, "Go take your physical. Are you ready to work?" I said, "Yeah. Why do you think I'm here for?" So he gave me the address to go and take my physical, and I went and got my physical, passed it, and then I got hired. So I got hired in the shipping and receiving, and one of the guys that was working in the paint factory I call it, where they make paint, he was an Anglo guy. He came over during the break time. They have that catering wagon come around and serve some food.

He said, "How would you like to trade places with me?" And I said, "I'd be more than glad to." I said, "Well, if you can talk to your supervisor, maybe he'll approve." So finally he went to talk to the supervisor, and the supervisor asked him, "What nationality is he?" He said, "I don't

know. He's brown skin." So right then they told him, said, "No, we can't do that. You're going to have to work here."

So right then I said, "Well, one of these days I'm going to be working either under you or above you." So I went by way of going into different departments, and pretty soon I ended up under him, and I was a paint mixer.

Then we have this racism problem, so I told one of the shop stewards—he was a Spanish guy from Ojo Caliente. I said, "You know, Carl," I said, "we're not going to get anywhere in this company. What you need to do is go to Berkeley and study labor law for two years, and by the time you finish we should be electing a new president for the paint makers' union, and you could run for that. In the meantime I'm going back to school myself, over here at Merritt College. I'm changing my career field." I said, "I want to be a probation officer, so I'm taking a police science course."

So while I was going to school we were able to share different things, and so finally he finished, and I was his campaign manager, and then lo and behold he won with flying colors, because he had his résumé and everything, so they made him the president. Then right then I got to like my supervisor. He was a German. His name was {Lornroth?}, and he had another brother that was working there. So anyway, poor guy, he was supposed to get a promotion, but he didn't get that promotion because of the way the company policy and all these things.

But it happened that I was a foreman, and they called me in one day and they said, "Mr. Shiosee," he said, "you're going to have to leave the job." I go, "Why? What have I done wrong?" And they said, "Well, the company had changed the policies." I said, "What kind of policy?"

He said, "Well, we have to make some changes here." And by that time NWCPA [phonetic] came into the company, and they want all the black race to become supervisors in key positions. So I lost my job, and I said, "Can I go see the supervisor, or the personnel?" "Sure."

So I went over there and I told him, I said, "Well, what are you guys going to do with me? I just lost my position. Are you going to terminate me and get rid of me, or what?" Then the personnel officer said, "Well, the only reason why we're doing this is because the company changed policies." "Oh, well that's the reason behind it?" I said. "Yeah." I said, "Can I paint you a picture?" "Sure."

So I made him a pyramid like this [demonstrates]. I said, "Here's the blacks. Here's the white, and here's me in between, and other races. Do you know what we're doing? We're holding you guys up. It shouldn't be that way. It should all be the same." I said, "Go ahead and do whatever you want to do with me. You want to fire me or get rid of me?" I said, "I've been very dedicated to this company."

So he says, "Well, what would you like to do?" So I told him, I said, "I'd like to work in quality control." See, I've had that experience while I was a supervisor. So he said, "Well, the job is yours." So when I walked into that place, guess who is sitting there? The main one that didn't want to see me from the beginning. And so when I walked in there, it was only supposed to be

non-Anglos. That was the position. So when I walked in it seemed like I broke the sound barrier, and everybody was shocked to see me in that position.

And so they said, “How did you get that position?” I just put my hand up and said, “Up there. He’s the one that’s controlling my life. If you want to work in here, you could just go directly to him and ask him, and he’ll get you that job.” So I was a quality control man, which I furthered my education there, because we were attending a meeting every month, from that position on up to the president of the company. We had meetings in different places. We had a person that was setting up the meeting, and sometimes we’d visit University of [California at] Berkeley to tour the places and to expand our knowledge in making paint and other things.

And even then I was having problems, because they were using sixty-dollar words. [laughs] But I was very fortunate. I had one guy that had gone to college, and I was working with him. He sat right beside me, and I said, “What are you guys talking about?” “Oh, we’re talking about this and that.”

[Side conversation]

But anyway, so there I learned a lot of things about the future, and I got concerned. I thought, ‘Gee, reservation’s still sleeping, and here they’re talking about us right now, what’s going to happen.’ So right then it was good that I changed my career here, because I was studying white-collar crime and other stuff, which I’d never thought I would use. But when I got into council it was right there, lo and behold. Wow!

**Castle:**

You didn’t know how well that was going to come into play. We’ll have to talk about that tomorrow.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

And you know my supervisor, Mr. Lornroth—his name was Ryan—one day he called me. He said, “Cheotee!”

“What?”

“You’re an aborigine.”

“An aborigine?”

He said, “Yeah.”

And I said, “Aborigine.” The first thought that came to my mind was those New Zealands. I thought, why is he calling me that? I looked at myself. Do I have kinky hair? Do I have dark skin? So I went home and I told my wife.

She said, “What’s the matter?”

I said, “Oh, I’ve got to talk to Mr. Webster. My boss just gave me a title.”

She said, “What did he say?”

“Called me an aborigine. So I’m going to ask Mr. Webster, see what that word means.”

02-00:10:00

So when I turned it to that place it said “native of a country.” So next day I went back in there, I shook his hand. I said, “Thank you for giving me a recognition.” [laughter] “You finally know who I am.” I said, “Don’t forget, I was the first one here. You came later.” Oh, it was always

battling back and forth, you know, with him. He liked that. But I learned a lot from this person, and I think he was the main one that kind of pushed me, because of his attitude or the words that he used, you know.

One day I got so mad at him I walked into his office. I said, “You know what, Mr. Ryan?” I says, “I could be sitting where you’re sitting at, because every time I come in asking you questions about certain things, you always tell me, ‘I’ll tell you later.’ And I watched you,” I said. “You just reach back here and grab that volume, you turn the page over and then you’ll get your answer. Then you’ll come and tell me.” I said, “I could do the same thing, and have your job.” [laughs]

**Castle:**

Absolutely.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

And the other thing that my grandfather told me one time, he says, “Okay, Grandson. When you leave the reservation,” he said, “make sure you have a piece of paper in your hand, and a pencil, because that’s what the person out there is going to believe, that you’re working. If you don’t have that, you’re not working.”

I said, “Wow.”

“And then if you ever want to defeat him, take his paper and pencil away, and he’s lost.” So one day I wanted to tour the plant, so I got my clipboard and I scribbled some numbers on there. I went from one department to the other one.

Then right away this supervisor would come and ask me, “What are you doing in here? You don’t belong here,” and blah, blah, blah.

I said, “Now wait a minute. Hold on. I’m looking for some material. You got this one here?” “No, you’ll probably find next one, all the way around.” I went like that, and he started right back from where I started from.

I said, “Grandpa, you’re right. They believe the paper, and I’m working.” Now the next thing to do is just take his pencil and paper away; maybe later on, not right now. [laughter] Yes, that’s what he—he was a wise man, my grandfather.

**Castle:**

That’s very true.

**Irvin Shiosee:**

So that’s another thing I wanted to show.

**Castle:**

Go ahead and try and turn it off.

**B. Furey:**

They taught me in school that you end an oral history interview when the conversation actually ends, because if I turn this camera off, I know he's going to start telling another story.

**Castle:**

Conversation begins again.