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**Reverend Andre Shumake, Sr.**

**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  
Nadine Wilmot  
in 2006

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Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project: An Oral History with Reverend Andre Shumake, Sr. conducted by Nadine Wilmot, 2006, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007.

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Interview 1: October 27, 2006

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01-00:00:00

Wilmot: Nadine Wilmot with Reverend Shumake on October 27, 2006 for the Regional Oral History Office. Good afternoon.

01-00:00:14

Shumake: Good afternoon.

01-00:00:15

Wilmot: We usually start off these things by asking when and where you were born.

01-00:00:20

Shumake: Born here in San Pablo, California, actually at what was formerly known as Brookside Hospital, known today as Doctor's Medical Center.

01-00:00:33

Wilmot: And, can you tell me your parents' names, and where were they from?

01-00:00:37

Shumake: David and Annie Shumake. They were from Lake Providence, Louisiana.

01-00:00:44

Wilmot: And, how long had they been in this area?

01-00:00:48

Shumake: They moved to Richmond during the early '50s, around '55 I believe it was, 1955. And they came out primarily to get work in the shipyards.

01-00:01:01

Wilmot: What did they tell you about this movement from Louisiana to Richmond?

01-00:01:07

Shumake: Well, it was centered around employment opportunities. There apparently wasn't a lot of opportunity there, and they saw opportunity here on the West Coast. So my father and mother moved out here and they set up shop here locally. And at the time, once they got established, then they start sending back for my father's brothers, who came out, and they all came out and stayed with them until they got employment and then purchased homes themselves. So that was interesting, to think that they all lived in one house together at one time was amazing, and it's something that unfortunately we don't see a lot of today, with families coming together like that.

01-00:01:50

Wilmot: And that was when they were here in Richmond?

01-00:01:52

Shumake: Yes, yes.

01-00:01:54

Wilmot:

So, tell me a little bit more about your family, your extended family, your aunts and uncles as they came out here as well.

01-00:02:02

Shumake:

Right, right, well, the thing that I remember the most is how together they were as a family. They tended to do things a lot together. I remember as a little boy brought up here in Richmond, right here in the Iron Triangle as a matter of fact. My mother still lives in the house where I grew up, which I think is really amazing. She actually gets around a lot better than some of these 25-26 year old women in the city. But I remember that connection. I remember them working at the Ford Motor Plant, my father and my uncle, you see? As a matter of fact, there's a photograph in the Richmond Museum that has a picture of my uncle Richard Shumake. They're working at the Ford Motor Plant when it was here locally. So just hearing stories about that and how they went from working with Ford, my father started working with the Concord Naval Weapon Station. It's just hearing how dangerous it was working in that environment and hearing stories from the time when they had that huge explosion out there...

01-00:03:06

Wilmot:

Port Chicago.

01-00:03:08

Shumake:

At Port Chicago, right—how my father had known some of those men and just to hear those experiences and why they refused to go back to work because of the dangerous atmosphere that existed is just fascinating to me.

01-00:03:24

Wilmot:

Did you read that book, the *Port Chicago Mutiny* by Robert Allen?

01-00:03:27

Shumake:

I haven't read it, no. I haven't read it.

Yeah, yeah, so it's been interesting. I mean, they shared some wonderful stories. I think it really gave me a good perspective on what life was like for them when they were growing up, and they saw this as an opportunity, the land of opportunity, if you will, here on the West Coast.

01-00:03:49

Wilmot:

What kind of work did they do in Louisiana? What was their occupation there?

01-00:03:53

Shumake:

My father worked primarily as a mechanic, and my mother attended school primarily, and did some housekeeping work primarily. She was an athlete. She was a basketball player, so that was her passion, and I still scratch my head when she talks about that, that she played forward and guard. And my mother, a basketball player, right...? So it was phenomenal, yeah.

01-00:04:19

Wilmot:

And your grandparents, did they also make the journey out here or did they stay?

01-00:04:25

Shumake:

My grandmother did. My grandfather actually passed there in Louisiana, so once they came out, I primarily spent a lot of time with my grandmother, because during that time period my mother went to work for the cannery: Hunt's Cannery I think the name of it was. Pretty much everyone around there, particularly the females, worked in the canneries, a lot of them, and I would have to spend time with my grandmother while my mother worked and my father was working. And so yeah, she was a beautiful person, very spiritual woman. I think that's why I have the love of God instilled in me through her primarily because of her belief of the importance of God being in our lives.

01-00:05:12

Wilmot:

What did that look like in her life?

01-00:05:14

Shumake:

Oh, it was just wonderful. I mean, I can recall a time period where, like most young boys and girls, they grew up in the church and they become teenagers and they tend to start experimenting outside. I can remember a time when I was going back and forth to church, I would always have dinner with my grandmother on Sundays, and I'll never forget sitting in her house, we were watching a segment on 60 Minutes. And they were talking about a nuclear bomb exploding, the great threat of Russia attacking the United States, and I can remember asking her what would she do in the case of a bomb—you know, Russia shooting a bomb off on the United States—and she looked me in the eye and she said, "Baby, I'm not worried about that. The moment it would hit," she said, like that [snaps], she knew that she would be called up to Glory. And what I recall about that was the peace that she had.

You see, it didn't matter what kind of threat the government was putting out there, real or imaginary, she wasn't concerned about that because of the faith and the belief she had in God. And I'll never forget that day saying, "That's the kind of peace that I want in my life." You know, and it was then that I really started getting back on track, studying the Word of God, certainly had my moments back and forth running from the calling if you will, but I never forgot that peace. And it doesn't matter how much money you have, you can't buy that kind of peace. You can't find it in alcohol, and certainly you can't find it in drugs.

01-00:07:09

Wilmot:

Can you tell me your grandmother's name?

01-00:07:10

Shumake:

Eliza Brown.

01-00:07:11

Wilmot: Eliza Brown, and that's on your mom's side?

01-00:07:14

Shumake: Yes, my mom's mother.

01-00:07:15

Wilmot: Okay, and you said running from the calling, so was there a time when you knew that this is what you were going to be doing—you were to be a reverend?

01-00:07:27

Shumake: Yeah, I mean growing up we would always have speaking opportunities within the church where we'd have tournaments and things like that taking place, sponsored by the elders of the church, and many would always say, "Andre, you should be a preacher." I'm like, "No, no, no, not me," and as I got older, certainly I didn't want to subscribe or submit, if you will, because I knew the scrutiny that ministers come up under. You know, the way you walk, the way you talk, who you talk to, where you go, how long you're there—you know, just crazy kind of scrutiny, and I'm like, "Man, I didn't want any part of that." Plus, I thought I was having fun doing what I was doing. I loved to party and loved to dance, and still dance by the way. I think David danced in the Bible, so I feel good about that. But that was me. I mean, and I just didn't see where the two blended together—where I have a deeper appreciation for that now, however. But yeah, I just ran from it. I mean, it was like, "No, no, I'm having too much fun. I just don't see myself, you know, giving it up, if you will."

01-00:08:42

Wilmot: And when did that time come when you said, "Okay, I'm ready to embrace this?"

01-00:08:48

Shumake: It was an interesting event that occurred in Nashville, Tennessee. Back in 1996 I was attending a National Baptist Conference and there was a series of events that occurred that basically really spoke to me and to my spirit and to my heart that truly God was calling me to do what I was called to do. And I oftentimes asked other ministers, "How is it that you know you've been called to preach the Word of God?" and they all would tell me, "You'll know." You know, and being somewhat inquisitive, that just wasn't enough for me. So I would go another minister, "How do you know? How do you really know that you've been called to preach the Word of God?" and each one would say, "You'll know," and in Nashville, Tennessee, June 14, 1996, there was a series of incidents that occurred that truly, truly led me to believe and understand that it was time for me to humble myself and say, "Here I am, Lord. Use me," and it was one of the most humbling experiences I've ever experienced because when you submit, you have no idea where that calling would lead you.

I think we as men and women tend to want to be in control of our destiny, making a decision whether you're going to go right or to the left. And when you're called into the ministry, you don't know where that's going to lead you. And so, I can recall feeling so humbled by it, and yet afraid at the same time, afraid to the extent that I didn't share with anyone that on that night in the wee hours of the morning, I had surrendered, if you will, and accepted that call. And I didn't share it with anyone.

We were on the plane about three days later returning from Nashville to California. And I was sitting in an aisle seat in one of the three-row seats on the plane. A little old lady was sitting—bless her heart—in the middle. So I was up reading a magazine, and the woman looked over to me to the right and she asked me, she said, "Young man, are you a preacher?" Now keep in mind I had just humbled myself and submitted and accepted that call, and I can recall taking my glasses off and I turned to her and it was like, "Why did you ask me that?" because again, I hadn't said anything to anyone. And she said, "It's just something about you, your presence that makes me feel that you are a man of God." And I cried, a grown man sitting on the plane boohooing, you know? And it was out of, like, "How does she know?" and for me it was a confirmation. So that's how it all got started.

01-00:12:08

Wilmot:

Wow. When you returned home, then, and you began taking this calling and externalizing it in your life, what did that look like?

01-00:12:25

Shumake:

Well, it was real interesting, because I can recall feeling undone, if you will, I mean recognizing I had had no real professional training in ministry, and feeling somewhat inadequate like, you know, "God, why me?" you know? Why not someone who had spent years in Bible college, if you will, who have gone to seminary? And so I just felt like I just wasn't equipped to do the job. And while lying in bed one night, about three or four days after I had returned from Nashville, I can recall just raising those questions within myself, and the spirit of God just said to me, "Preach the gospel," you see, and the gospel is the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible says if you believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that he died for your sins, he was buried, and he rose on the third day, that thou shall be saved. That's the gospel. And for me, it's that simple. That's not a complicated thing, you see? I don't have to go to divinity school or some seminary to share that. And that's the peace, again. It goes back to that experience with my grandmother. That's the peace that God had given me that night, lying up there, that, "Do that."

And for me, ministry is more than bouncing off the walls on Sunday morning. I've always been a person that's been active, outgoing, interacting with different people. I've been blessed to have been able to travel across the world. I've been to several different countries, so I've interacted with people outside of California, outside the United States, and it's sort of broadened my

horizons, and it gave me a whole different perspective, you see, and particularly being an African American, some of the experiences that I've had in other countries was just wonderful. I mean, that's something that I pray I'll be able to do in my ministry is get some of these youngsters out of the Bay Area, you know, out of the state, out of the country, let them experience what it's like in other countries, and just being received warmly. And I think that helped me to come back and deal with some of the racism that still exists within the United States because of the wonderful experiences I had outside the country. And so what that taught me is that not everyone is the same, you see, and that was just a beautiful experience for me to have had that. And it helped me to shape my ministry and what I do now in terms of trying to create an environment where people can thrive: all races, creeds, and colors.

01-00:15:34

Wilmot:

I want to ask you also, I'm going to just go back now to your younger years. You mentioned that you came up in the church. Which church was your family a member of?

01-00:15:46

Shumake:

The North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church.

01-00:15:48

Wilmot:

OK, where you're still—

01-00:15:50

Shumake:

Yeah, still an Associate Minister there.

01-00:15:54

Wilmot:

OK, wow. And I also wanted to ask you, what do you feel that you got of your culture that is Louisiana, that is more Louisiana than California? I wanted to ask you, what do you feel like you grew up with that always reminds you that your family was from some place else? If that is something that you experience...

01-00:16:23

Shumake:

Well, I think it's a love for people, respect, you know, trying to be someone of integrity and to have compassion for others, not to be judgmental of others, understanding what's in the Bible where it says, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," and just a love for humanity. I think it's really helped me. And I grew up, my parents—although they separated when I was young, one of the things that I loved them for dearly is that I never heard my mother say anything negative about my father, nor did I ever hear my father say anything negative about my mother. And what I recalled was any time there were situations where they had to come together to take care of business within the household they came together. And I can recollect that as clear in my mind of how they handled their affairs together. And that did a lot for me. So, I wasn't as victimized, I don't believe, as some say kids are when their parents split up. Because I always felt the love that they had for me as well as I felt they may have had for each other. But they just couldn't live together.

01-00:17:55

Wilmot: Did they both stay in the Richmond area?

01-00:17:57

Shumake: Yeah.

01-00:17:58

Wilmot: They did? Did you have brothers and sisters?

01-00:18:01

Shumake: Yeah, I have two older brothers and an older sister, so that was interesting in itself, being the baby of the bunch growing up, But there were benefits in that also because I had an opportunity to be exposed to a lot that perhaps some young men or boys don't get exposed to until later in their lives. So it helped me to form opinions about certain things at an early age and to know how to say no and mean no, and how to stand and not be someone that's easily led into situations.

01-00:18:40

Wilmot: And what was the address of this house that you grew up in?

01-00:18:44

Shumake: 524 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Richmond. And it's still there, and mother dear still residing right there doing the landscaping which she shouldn't be doing that much of now, but that's her. She's a worker. And that's another aspect that I think I got from them was the value of work and the value of education, and the importance of that. So that meant a lot, and I think unfortunately today in many of our homes, we don't have that because now, I believe, within the past two decades, we've had babies who had babies who were not trained, and so if you weren't trained, then I think it's very difficult to provide the appropriate training that's required in families.

01-00:19:36

Wilmot: And where did you go to elementary school, high school...?

01-00:19:48

Shumake: I went to [Peories?] Elementary School, Walter T. Helms Junior High School, and Richmond High School.

01-00:20:01

Wilmot: And, when you got out of high school, what did your horizon look like? Were you thinking about going to college? Were you thinking about military? What kind of things were you interested in getting into as far as professionally in your life?

01-00:20:14

Shumake: Well, I just went on to college and I graduated from Contra Costa College and ran track, because I was into football and track during that time, then transferred from there and went to Cal State Hayward, where we ran track and had a real tough team during that time period. And for me during that time it

became a point where I had to get into the work force, and it's a situation where I left with maybe two quarters to complete, and it's still on me now to go back and complete those two quarters, you know, because I just at the time had to go to work and it was commanding. And I often tell young people today, because of that, don't stop. Continue to get that education, and the importance of doing that. But I've also been one who is pretty much self taught in many ways. But that's something that I just think I need to complete is those two quarters.

01-00:21:11  
Wilmot:

For yourself?

01-00:21:11  
Shumake:

Yeah, just for myself, right. And that was good. So I've been able to work in a variety of areas. I've done work in the travel industry. I've done work in the law field where I worked as a paralegal, had work where I've been in the real estate industry, a loan officer, account executive, underwriter, so I've had a variety of experiences that I think really helped shape the work that I do now. And many of those backgrounds that I've had, I've been able to call on that experience to do the work effectively that's being done at this point.

01-00:21:55  
Wilmot:

Well let's turn now to the Tent City, yeah? Can you tell me what was the catalyst for the Tent Cities, that is the vigil that was—we're in day 33?

01-00:22:12  
Shumake:

Yes.

01-00:22:12  
Wilmot:

Yeah, the vigil that was started 33 days ago to kind of draw attention to and cease the violence that is occurring in Richmond.

01-00:22:21  
Shumake:

Well, it sort of goes back about two years ago. There was a week that I had here in Richmond where I went to four funerals in one week of young men under the age of 25, and it was at that point that I said, "You know, this is crazy. This madness has got to end." So, I started talking with several clergy and telling them that we need to start attending the city council and saying to the leadership of the city that, one, we have a problem with homicides in the city and that we need to have some form of leadership coming from them to address this issue because these young men were dying. For me, it was very frustrating because when there's a homicide in the city, I usually get a phone call about it. And so when I respond, I go out on the scene. I'm seeing these young men's brains blown out on the streets, and then I'm there when their mother comes up on the scene and sees their baby boy lying out there with all this blood everywhere, and the hysteria that comes as a result of that. And then to see it happening on a consistent basis, and it appeared back then, two years ago, nothing was being done about it. It was as if, "Well, it's just the way it is. It's always that way. It has been that way in low income

communities of color, and that's just the way it is." Well, I submit that it's not the way it is. It's the way that we've allowed it to be.

And so we started organizing back then, going to the city and trying to solicit help from the leadership from the current mayor to no avail. So at that point, it became clear that we in the faith community had to take the leadership on this issue, and so we started hosting town hall meetings last year with the idea that it would culminate in a larger gathering, which it did, on June 4, 2005, which was the Black On Black Crime Summit. And out of that summit came seven different strategies that we decided it was important to implement within the African American community that could ultimately spill over into other communities to solve the problem. So while we had been going through that process, certainly the homicides have continued. We started reaching out and one of the things that we launched at the summit was a Zero Homicide campaign in Richmond. It's a three year campaign, which we just launched starting June of this year, recognizing it will take a variety of strategies to solve the problem, but we are looking at what was done in East Palo Alto as a best practice model of a community that was once designated the most dangerous city in the United States, how that community came together and formed the appropriate partnerships to solve that problem. And that's what we're attempting to do here in Richmond.

What occurred and what led to Tent City recently was there was a shooting that occurred in a mortuary where a family member shot another family member, and at the time the president of the Richmond branch of the NAACP, Reverend Charles Newsome had contacted me and asked had I heard about it. I said, "Yeah, I got the call." He said, "Well, we need to get involved and do something." During that same time period, a gentleman, community activist, gentleman who was raised right here in the city, right in the same area where I was raised, called Mr. Newsome and myself and say, "Hey, I was at the funeral, saw what had happened. We've got to do something." And so it was at that point that Reverend Newsome said, "Well, what do you guys think about doing a sit-in for peace?" an idea that was similar to what came out of the Civil Rights Movement, where back then they did sit-ins to gain access to public facilities. Our goal was to do a sit-in for peace to save our children, and we came out of that black on black crime summit with a theme of "we want them to live" and that was the theme of the sit-ins. We want our children to live, and to build their capacity around that.

01-00:26:29

Wilmot:

Have you lost people in your family to violence in Richmond?

01-00:26:34

Shumake:

I've had cousins that have been murdered. My own nephew was murdered. However, his murder occurred while being incarcerated on a probation violation where he had a tooth pulled, and they failed to provide him with the antibiotics to treat the tooth. It became infected. His whole jaw, neck, and area

swole up, and they transported him. When they finally decided to treat him, they transported him two and a half hours away, from Vacaville to Manteca when they could have sent him 15 minutes away to Vaca Valley Hospital, and so for me, that's all the more reason why these young people want to stay out of the prison system, you see, because the medical neglect is rampant. It's a common practice that occurs within the prison system, and so for them to think that perhaps doing what they do is cool and to wind up in prison is cool: no. You have people that are dying in prison as well, and so for me it's personal to try to detract them or steer them in a different area as opposed to living a life which could ultimately go on to a prison term.

01-00:27:56

Wilmot:

And, why do you think violence is occurring in such a high volume right now in Richmond? What do you think is going on with our young people in particular?

01-00:28:09

Shumake:

A number of reasons. I mean, it begins, I believe, in the home. And we've had situations where our families are devastated. As I indicated, we've had over the past two decades babies who had babies who were not trained. And so, the simple standards that you and I may operate by, they don't operate by those standards. The quality of the education that the kids are receiving, particularly here in the Richmond area, when you look at the elementary schools with the test scores from one to ten, one being the lowest, the elementary schools in this area is one. The middle schools that they are tracked to is a one. The high schools in the area that they are tracked to is a one. That's criminal! And it's *been* that way. And so you look at a lack of a quality of education. You look at the breakdown within the families, you look at the lack of recreational activities that we used to have in the city. During the time when I came up, there was so much going on in Richmond where you just got tired because there was so much to do. These youngsters don't have that now when you look at the lack of employment opportunities that's out there.

And I think that's one of the reasons why I've gotten involved in the whole social justice movement is around that. We recognize that employment is the key for many of these youngsters to transition out of the lifestyle that they're in. However, you've got to have some reliable transportation to get to these jobs. So when you look at how the region operates, and I think how you take the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which is responsible for allocating resources for public transit, where that money is going and how they spend those dollars and how local public transit is AC Transit, which reached into those neighborhoods, how they're having to cut services and scale back services because they can't get the appropriate funding from the MTC, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. It impacts what's going on in these low income communities of color. So, I've had to get engaged in that process to try to attract dollars into the city of Richmond via AC Transit to provide those services, so those individuals in Parchester and North

Richmond can gain access to reliable and affordable transit to get to those jobs.

So, it's just one fight on so many different fronts, but what I've learned in the process is that you have to be engaged in the process, and it is a process. It takes time, but you have to have a commitment to do what is right.

01-00:30:47

Wilmot:

It's been about four weeks now of the Tent City. How much further will it go? How many months—?

01-00:30:58

Shumake:

Initially, the idea was that we would only do it for one week, the idea being we wanted to bring on North Richmond, Central, and the South Side together to have these sit ins where they would bring the elders and the young people together to identify what's needed in each respective neighborhood to sustain a movement for peace. What has come out of this, this being day 33, and if nothing else comes out of Tent City, what has come out as an outcome, if you will, is the dialogue that's taken place between the young people in North, Central, and the South side to reach a truce. That's significant, because the individuals in my age group, we're not pulling the trigger. It's the younger men, and what we're hearing, as a result of creating the environment where they can come forth is that they're tired. They're tired of seeing their family members gunned down. They're tired of seeing their friends gunned down on the street of the city. And they're tired of living in fear, where if a car comes around a corner, they're having to duck, not knowing if someone is going to reach out and fire an automatic weapon. Many of them can't go to the local grocery store. They have to go all out of the way with fear of being shot by a rival set, if you will, a group of guys who may be hanging out in a particular area. They're tired of it, and what Tent City has done: it has created the environment where those young men and women can now come forward and share their frustration, and the fact that they want out.

So, day 33, again, we've had two homicides which is two too many, and certainly that's a result of the dialogue that's taken place that's not being publicized, which has enabled us to maintain the level of peace that we've had. The last time we've experienced such an extended period of time with so few homicides is back in June of 2006, excuse me, June 2005, when we had the call for the state of emergency, where the city of Richmond brought in the highway patrol, the sheriff's department, along with the Richmond Police Department to patrol the streets of the city. And in doing so, they were pulling over cars, confiscating weapons, confiscating drugs, and we experienced 45 days of zero homicides in Richmond: phenomenal.

But that was because of a strong police presence, and what you see today taking place is a strong community presence because what we figured out in Richmond is that in order for us to maintain peace, in order for us to reach the

goal of zero homicides in the city, around the umbrella in the theme of, "We want them to live," is you have to have a partnership between the church, the faith community, and the community. The faith community hasn't been able to do it by itself, the community hasn't been able to do it by itself, and certainly we know that the municipalities can't do it, the police and other governmental agencies. So what we figured out in Richmond is that you have to have a sincere partnership between the faith community, and the community, which brings about different challenges in and of itself.

01-00:34:24

Wilmot:

Which are...? What kinds of challenges are you encountering?

01-00:34:27

Shumake:

During the first three days of Tent City at 4th and Macdonald, which is the original site, I spent the first three days intervening with members of the faith community coming in and judging the young men who were participating with us primarily, as opposed to working with them and receiving them on the level where they were. They were putting them down, and basically forcing them out, and so I had to intervene and say, "Look, when you come across the threshold here, we're not doing business like that. We recognize that we need these young men to be part of this process. Yes, they might be drug dealers. They might even be using drugs. They might even be alcoholics. But we're not here to address that particular issue at this particular time. We're here to stop the killing, and these men are part of that process, and they can play an integral part in making that real in the city of Richmond. So, it was about getting the members of the faith community to recognize that, "Yes, it may be true these men and women may not be what we feel they should be," but also to remember that we too had a past, you see, we all come from somewhere and have done some things in our lives, and so unfortunately what happens is sometimes we can become so heavenly bound to where we're not earthly good, and so our position in Richmond is that we need everyone at the table. They may not be where we want them to be, but they'll never get there if we keep pushing them away and don't create an environment for them to participate.

01-00:36:16

Wilmot:

And the young people themselves, what has reaching out to them looked like, and also what has been their reactions on a very personal level? Like, how have the young people responded? I noticed when we went to that Tent City, that there were many young people there.

01-00:37:40

Shumake:

They've been waiting on this for a long time, you see, but no one has created the environment for this to happen. And that's all that was needed, for the environment to be created, and that's what Tent City has done. And what we recognize is that we have to listen to them. See, our problem has been, we've been pushing them away. They're not where we feel they ought to be so therefore we don't want to have any dialogue with them. It's them against us,

and we're saying in Richmond that we are no longer going to do business that way, that we need them. We need to understand and feel their pain, and what their frustrations are, and how can you do that if you don't welcome them to the table, you see? You can't continue to isolate the young people and then criticize them for what they're doing. If you're serious about helping them and turning the situation of violence around in the city, you have to create an environment where those young people are welcome to the table. And like Jesus, you have to reach them where they are, and then you can help elevate them to wherever you feel they should go or be.

01-00:37:40

Wilmot:

You have to be somewhere in five minutes, so just to close out this segment, is there a piece of scripture that is staying with you this week or today that has been on your mind in relation to these events?

01-00:37:55

Shumake:

Simply is this: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but empowering of love and of a sound mind." And what that says to me is that fear is something that has kept the church indoors far too long. It's the fear of the unknown, fear of what's out on the streets of the city, and the sad thing is, those are our sons and our daughters. And we are afraid of them, and we know that God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but empowering of love and of a sound mind. And it is with that, that we move forward, recognizing that we have to move in the power of the Holy Spirit and reach out to these young men and bring them in, because they're lost. And I believe the Jesus that I serve came to seek and to save those who were lost. You see, so we just need to be mindful of that and pay attention to what our young people are saying, because they're tired. They've experienced a lot. They're worn out, and we have to create the environment to make that real.

01-00:39:04

Wilmot:

Okay, let's pause here, Okay?

01-00:39:08

Shumake:

Okay.

[End of Interview 1]

Interview #2: <<10-30-06>>

Begin Audio File 2 10-30-2006.wav

02-00:00:00

Wilmot: October 30, 2006, interview two with Reverend Shumake, Regional Oral History Office, National Park Service, Rose the Riveter, Oral History Project. Good afternoon.

02-00:00:30

Shumake: Good afternoon.

02-00:00:31

Wilmot: I had some follow up questions from our last interview, and I went back and reviewed it. One was centered, again, on your early life. I wanted to know, what year were you born?

02-00:00:42

Shumake: That's a secret. No, no, I'm just kidding. I was born on March 26, 1958 right here in San Pablo at Brookside Hospital.

02-00:00:52

Wilmot: You did say that. And I was wondering also, you said that your family came from Lake Providence in Louisiana. What kind of community was that? What did you know about that? And did you go back and forth?

02-00:01:03

Shumake: Well, pretty much a rural community. They never talked too much about it, pretty much a rural community, which is one of the reasons why they saw to move out west following the work that was taking place within the shipyards. And that's the gist of it. You never talk much about it. I did have an opportunity to go back, fly to Louisiana, and we went into Lake Providence and Shreveport back in 1979, which was the last time that I've actually visited my relatives there, and that was an interesting experience.

02-00:01:38

Wilmot: Really?

02-00:01:38

Shumake: Yeah, I mean the way that southern hospitality, if you will—and I think a lot of that is what carried over in my parents in their rearing of me and my brothers and sisters. The warmth that was there, I mean, I had never eaten so much in all my life. I mean, everywhere we went people was feeding you and, "Yes, sir." "Yes, ma'am." It was just mind-boggling but it was wonderful. It was just a wonderful experience.

02-00:02:10

Wilmot: And the other thing I wanted to ask you, which was the origins of your name: Shumake.

- 02-00:02:16  
Shumake: The original spelling of the name, and the way they spell it back in Louisiana is S-H-O-E-M-A-K-E-R, Shoemaker. However, when my father and his brothers entered into the military, they shortened the name to S-H-U-M-A-K-E, and one of the brothers wanted to be uniquely different, and he spelled it S-H-U-E-M-A-K-E. Thus, you have the shorter version of the actual spelling of the name.
- 02-00:02:45  
Wilmot: What do you think was behind that change?
- 02-00:02:48  
Shumake: Well, I was told by my father that they said that the name was too long to put on the name badge, so they had to shorten the name down from Shoemaker, and so that's how they came about using S-H-U and S-H-U-E-M-A-K-E.
- 02-00:03:05  
Wilmot: And which military engagement was your father in?
- 02-00:03:05  
Shumake: It was during the World War II engagement.
- 02-00:03:15  
Wilmot: So, he and his brothers went into the military at that time. Do you know if it was the Army or the Navy?
- 02-00:03:18  
Shumake: Army. It was the Army.
- 02-00:03:20  
Wilmot: Army, and do you know what their experience was like, or where did they go, or where did your father go?
- 02-00:03:26  
Shumake: You know, there wasn't a lot of talk about it other than the fact that they were there, and particularly later on, my older brother took part in the Vietnam War. And, I'd say insofar as the wars are concerned, the most experience, direct experience, I have was with my older brother. That's when more conversation was taking place in the family. My father didn't talk a whole lot about his experience there. But much of it did come out during my brother's tenure while he was in Vietnam.
- 02-00:03:58  
Wilmot: That's when your father started talking about his military time?
- 02-00:04:03  
Shumake: No, that's when my brother did. He was more open about the experience as opposed to my father.

02-00:04:13

Wilmot:

And the other thing is, you mentioned that when your parents came here, while your mother worked in the cannery and your father worked at Ford Motor Company, what did he do at Ford?

02-00:04:31

Shumake:

He was an assembly line worker at Ford, and he actually had risen to the point to where he was a supervisor at Ford operating the line. He would be the one that would come in, in the mornings, and start up the lot. So I guess that was apparently a key role in the plant.

02-00:04:55

Wilmot:

And how many years was he working there?

02-00:04:58

Shumake:

Oh, about 10-12 years I believe.

02-00:05:03

Wilmot:

And how long did your mother work at the cannery?

02-00:05:06

Shumake:

Oh man, 12-13 years. It's interesting, because most of the women here in this area worked either at the cannery or worked at a company called Fairchild. And so it wasn't uncommon to see in the mornings cars rolling up carpoools picking the women up and going to the various locations where they worked, and the cannery was certainly one of them.

02-00:05:34

Wilmot:

Let's pause for a minute and see if you're—okay, so and then I also wanted to ask you a little bit about the neighborhood you grew up in, and you said it was right here in Iron Triangle?

02-00:05:54

Shumake:

Yes.

02-00:05:54

Wilmot:

And who else lived in the neighborhood? What was the neighborhood like?

02-00:05:59

Shumake:

It was wonderful. I mean, we had families that worked together, played together, we looked out for one another. You often hear talk with the older men and women how if you were doing something bad in the neighborhood at one end of the street, not only would that adult get on you, but someone in the middle of the block would be getting on you, and by the time you got home you would have received maybe two or three spankings, if you will, back during that time. And it was that village era where everyone knew one another, so you knew you couldn't be down the street doing too much or Ms. Williams would get on the phone and call your mother or your father to let them know what you were doing. So it had that real community flavor, if you will, and that sense of togetherness. I mean, we walked to the elementary

school together, mostly kids that went and lived in area, went to [Peories?] Elementary School, and it was a wonderful time where there was a lot of activities in the park in the recreations departments during that time period. The part that I grew up, right here on the 4<sup>th</sup> and Barrett there was always activities taking place after school. It was just a wonderful neighborhood to live in.

02-00:07:24

Wilmot:

And were most of the residents African American, your neighbors...?

02-00:07:29

Shumake:

African American and Latino, and you had a few Caucasian families that were in the area, but primarily African American and Latino.

02-00:07:38

Wilmot:

What people mostly had arrived before the war or after the war? Was there a range?

02-00:07:44

Shumake:

Combination of the two, combination of the two... Most of them were the ones that came after the war.

02-00:07:52

Wilmot:

And did you have, like, friends who had been there since before the war? Or maybe you wouldn't at your age group, but their families had been there since before the war?

02-00:08:02

Shumake:

Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, and I think that sort of enhanced what was taking place within the community because you had families who had been there who had received the newer families, so it wasn't in isolation taking place where because you were new to the community, people didn't receive you. They did, and they received you well. And I think that's really something that really helped us grow up and mature, into the adults that most of us turned out to be.

02-00:08:38

Wilmot:

Were there other families from Louisiana?

02-00:08:41

Shumake:

Oh, I often kidded my parents, "Was there anyone left in Louisiana?" I mean, everyone that was in the area was either from Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, you know, all of who had migrated out west to be part of what was taking place here on the west coast. So that was very interesting, that whole migration period that took place in the United States during that time period.

02-00:09:15

Wilmot:

It's interesting that you raised, you know, that you were received by a community. People often talk about the tensions between newcomers who came during the war and after, and people who had been there before in

Richmond, in Oakland, and in Berkeley. Did you have any perspective on that or any experience around that?

02-00:09:42  
Shumake:

Nothing other than knowing and hearing conversations that my parents had where they were received well. I mean, I had never heard them talk about not being accepted in an area, and again, where my mother lived, it's the house that they bought when they first came out to California. So, that was interesting, and that's something that has always stayed with me as the way that the community received and dealt with one another during that time period, as challenging as it may have been.

02-00:10:17  
Wilmot:

One of the things that you often hear about also during that time was kind of tensions between African Americans and the white people who were there. And I know this is predating you at some point because you were born in 1958. But you might have seen some of how that played out in your lifetime in the 1960s when you were old enough to know.

02-00:10:47  
Shumake:

Yeah. Well, we would experience that quite a bit when it was thriving downtown. And some of the stores that you would go in, you'd notice how you would be treated differently. As an African American, I remember walking into stores and I could have a pocket full of money coming in to purchase whatever it is that I wanted to purchase. And yet you'd see the sales clerks watching you as though you were labeled or branded a criminal, and not knowing anything about me as a person. And so those are feelings that I had growing up here in the city. Particularly in the downtown area, you could be walking down the street, and I can remember as a teenager, if a white woman, Caucasian woman, saw you walking behind her, how they would immediately clutch their bags thinking that we were going to come up and snatch their purse. So those kinds of experiences I do recall, not only there, but even coming up within the school district, how having ideas and ambition to do certain things and talking with teachers and how they tended, if you said that you wanted to be an attorney as an example, lawyer, would try to sway you to auto mechanics or other types of trades where you were good with your hands, not necessarily where you had to use your head. So those kinds of experiences I recall going through here in the area. And, I think again, because of my parents, the work ethic that they had, and that which they instilled in us that we could achieve whatever it is we chose as long as we stayed the course, stayed focused, and paid our dues, you know, in terms of getting a good education and what have you.

02-00:12:43  
Wilmot:

That was my next question I was going to ask you. What kind of training or instruction did you get in the home about dealing with racism when you encountered it out in the world? How did your mother or father tell you how

you were to kind of take in these experiences or not take them in, or how did they help you engage with that or disengage from it?

02-00:13:05  
Shumake:

Well, I mean, it was always because my family was a religious family. It was always, love your neighbor as you love yourself. That was always taught in the home, and also that whole idea about sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me kind of thing, didn't make any sense at the time. But as I got older, it made more sense that regardless of what someone says about you and how they attempt to describe you or label you, that does not mean that's who you are, and for us not to internalize that—if you see it, come home and talk about it, and in doing so we learned how to deal with it. And that was helpful, and learning how to deal with it when it would come your way so that when we did experience it, we didn't freak out or flip out. It was something that we knew existed for whatever the reason was. But then again, you had the Civil Rights Movement taking place during that time also, and that whole thing about, you know, we're all God's children and that there's no one race superior over another race... So, all of that was instilled in the home and it gave us a sense of confidence to not feel inferior as we continued on this journey of life.

02-00:14:39  
Wilmot:

I wanted to just also, just to kind of come up to the present day—actually, let me ask you this question. You mentioned the Civil Rights Movement. How did the black power era kind of strike you, you know, when the Black Panthers were coming to the fore? You must have been a teenager at that time in the late '60s, early—actually no, you weren't even—you were a young person. You were probably in your early teens.

02-00:15:10  
Shumake:

Well, I remember watching even the Civil Rights Movement and listening to some of the speeches, Dr. King and some of the other civil rights leaders during that time period and Malcolm X and then hearing the purpose for which the Black Panthers were formed. And a lot of it, it just sort of reinforced that which we were being taught in the home about working together, the importance of knowing who you are, and how to conduct oneself, and how to reach out and help others. I think that was the thing that really stuck with me, was the need that there was always those who were worse off than you are, and then to look at, "How can you build capacity, if you will, and bring people together to solve the problems within the community?" and that's what I saw taking place with the Black Panthers, was, "We have a problem in the neighborhood, then we need to come together as a community to try to solve those problems." And that resonated with me, that I think that pretty much drives me to do what I'm doing now insofar as getting the people to understand the power is with the people, and if you have a problem in your neighborhood, then you need to go through an examination process, look in the mirror, if you will, and to recognize what it is and then be open and honest and deal with it.

02-00:16:40

Wilmot:

Can you tell me what has a typical day been like for you in these Tent Cities?

02-00:16:48

Shumake:

It's been exciting, somewhat frustrating.

02-00:16:52

Wilmot:

Can you walk me through it?

02-00:16:53

Shumake:

Well, typical day: get up in the morning, someone calling out, "Reverend Shumake, someone's here to talk with you!" Someone in the community is having some issues, and right now it seems like all this week I've been getting calls from folk who are having problems in the school system, not necessarily directly related to the homicides, but in a way it is. And that, if our kids continue to be kicked out of the school system onto the streets of the city, well, they're going to turn to a life of crime. Issues within the camp, how do you bring the faith community together in partnership with the community, recognizing that not everyone in the community is saved, not everyone acknowledges Christ, and yet they all bring something to the table to help solve this problem of homicides within with the city? So, it's been a daily challenge of trying to get members of the faith community to recognize that in order for us to solve this problem in Richmond, that we have to bring everyone to the table who have a desire to do so. And that may mean individuals who are selling drugs, someone who's consuming mass quantities of alcohol and/or drugs. However, they have a voice on the street, and they have a desire to end the killing. So, to bring them together—because as I always say, you have to catch a fish before you scale it, you see, and if you don't create an environment for the people to come in and be part of the process, then you can never help them transition out of that into something better, into a better life. So, that's been a typical day of just having to work through those aspects, and then just try to coordinate the dialogue that's now taking place with individuals from North Richmond, Central Richmond, and the south side to end the killings. And it's a very sensitive area recognizing there's not a lot of trust between the young people in those neighborhoods. And yet, we're trying, as a result of Tent City and all of the attention that has come as a result of it, to bring these youngsters together, and what a tremendous blessing that has been, because what we're hearing from all of them is that they're tired. They've had many of their relatives who have been murdered. They've had friends that have been murdered. They're tired of living a life of fear where all the time they're having to look over their shoulders.

02-00:19:32

Wilmot:

Who are the young people? Like, who are you reaching out to? What do they look like? Who are they?

02-00:19:37  
Shumake:

They look like babies, you see? If you look at 16, 17, 18 year old kids who are carrying assault weapons because they don't feel safe, they feel that that's what they had to do—I had a 14 year old kid last year who's now 15 who shared with me the reason that he was carrying a nine mm weapon was not because he was part of any gang or any set, but because he felt that everywhere he went, there were others carrying guns. So in his mind, he was carrying a weapon for his safety. He would indicate that he didn't want to be caught without it if he went somewhere and someone drew down on him. 14 years of age, you see?

02-00:20:46  
Wilmot:

And you also had meetings going into the night as a part of your day. Like today, you have at least two more meetings happening.

02-00:20:58  
Shumake:

Yes, yes. Yeah, that has typically been the case, and in the midst of dealing with Tent City, we still have strategies that we are launching coming out of the Richmond Black On Black Crime Summit that was held on June 4 last year. We have a program, we're working with inmates out of San Quentin that's from the city of Richmond, and the idea being is if we can get them to go through some life changing experiences and self improvement courses while they're incarcerated—the idea being once they're released then they won't come out with the same mindset that they had while they're going in. So, every third Thursday, in some cases the fourth Thursday, of the month, myself and a group of individuals from Richmond, we go over and meet with the men from San Quentin that are from Richmond.

While that's taking place, we have a program called Project Clean Slate. The idea is where men and women who have felony conviction and some misdemeanor convictions, they can get their records expunged and go through a process of getting their driver's license back if they've been suspended or revoked so that they can get back into the work force. These are all ideas that came out of the summit, recognizing the need to create an opportunity for parolees to be gainfully employed and with stable housing. And we have a transitional house program that we're working on now as we speak. We should be signing a lease agreement on that sometime this week or early next week where we're going to house the inmates of youth offenders coming out of the youth authority. We are hearing that there are several hundreds of them that will be released over the next few months coming back into Richmond, and many of them have no place to stay. So we feel that if we can create the transitional housing for those offenders as well as for the adults coming out, then that will help us to address the issue of violence within the city.

02-00:23:10  
Wilmot:

One thing you mentioned, when I asked you about what the young people look like, I wanted to also ask, where are the effects on the young women who

are in that age group of 14-17? How are they wearing, if you will, these experiences?

02-00:23:28

Shumake:

It has to be real challenging, and I think we're finding out what many of the younger women, by getting caught up in the life if you will—many situations where they might just be involved with a young man who might be involved in their life, and they wind up getting dragged into that whole lifestyle because of their involvement with the young man. And so we're finding now where although we are reaching out to the young men that we're hearing and seeing more data, that there are a lot of women and younger girls being incarcerated at an alarming rate because they are now being sucked into that whole process as well. So also, while we are working on those men, at the same time trying to identify who their personal relationships are with, their mother, their fathers, if they have girlfriends; and the programs that we are putting in place for them will also be of benefit for their loved ones.

02-00:24:27

Wilmot:

So I also wanted to know, you mentioned in working with the faith based community, does that mean that many elders and members of your church really came out and sat in the Tent Cities? People that just came out?

02-00:24:48

Shumake:

Yes, and from different churches, and our group, the Richmond Improvement Association, is a coalition of churches across denominational lines, and that was real intentional because the problems that we have, they're not just Baptist problems or Church in God and Christ problems; they're problems that we all experience. So the idea being similar to what they did in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 when those men and women came together across denominational lines, and they formed the Montgomery Improvement Association. Hence, you have the Richmond Improvement Association which was formed out of that same spirit of bringing churches together across denominational lines around issues. So, when we come together, we're not discussing doctrine, what you believe or don't believe, it's about an issue. And it's an issue that crosses denominational lines. And so that's been our model, and we are patterned after what was done in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955.

02-00:25:51

Wilmot:

When did RIA start, Richmond Improvement Association? When did you start?

02-00:25:54

Shumake:

November of 1999 actually, and it came out as a result formally at my church, the North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church, I was entrusted to run a community career resource center, which was in partnership with the county, and the idea was we were working with those men and women who were on welfare transitioning out of work from welfare to work. And, we had a very successful program where we were getting men and women who were on

welfare out into high paying jobs, if you will, jobs with benefits. And what we did, we brought in employers like Chevron, Kaiser, United Airlines, many who would come out to the site at the church, do some of the testings for those departments that could, and many times do the interviewing and job offers right on the spot.

So, as a result of that work, I was invited to a job developer meeting at Martinez in November. And at that meeting, there was about 50-75 people there. I was one of maybe three or four African Americans, only African American male in the room, and the coordinator was talking about "them people". Now, these are job developers, mind you, from all around the county. And the coordinator was talking about "them people" and how we had to be careful in how we dealt with "them people", and that "them people" would only qualify for certain types of jobs. And for me, it was the most humiliating experience that I'd ever felt. Because I went to that meeting with the feeling that I'm going to meet other job developers from around the county, we all have the charge to bring to the table viable jobs to help the community rise up out of poverty, if you will, and yet it was so discriminatory in my opinion to where it became a self-fulfilling prophecy that if you expect very little of people, then that's what you will bring to them. Whatever it is, it will be on that level. You're never challenging them to rise above that because you don't have an expectation that they care or that they will.

So, after experiencing that humiliating experience, I came back to Richmond, talked to my pastor who's now deceased, the Reverend C. W. Newsome, and said to him, "Pastor, we need to get other churches in Richmond to do what we're doing because if we don't, our community's going to be in trouble." And I asked him if he would allow me to look at forming a group of bringing the churches together. And I started going online, looking for the best practices, best models of faith-based organizing, and in my opinion the best model that I came across is Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 when they came together around the issue of bussing. And again, when I read where they formed the Richmond Improvement Association and the whole idea around why they did that—hence, you have the Richmond Improvement Association, a take off from the Montgomery Improvement Association.

02-00:29:24

Wilmot:

Which other churches do you work most closely with at this time?

02-00:29:30

Shumake:

It's a number of churches. We have several of the Baptist churches, the Church of God in Christ churches, Methodist churches that's in the area; there's a couple of Catholic churches that we're working with also. They just really started getting involved in much of the work that we're doing around the violence piece.

02-00:29:58

Wilmot:

And I also wanted to ask you, you know, you're someone who's been part of the North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church. You were a young person in the church. Now you are a Reverend in the church, and what is that experience like, having that kind of engagement with an institution over, I would say, 30 years?

02-00:30:19

Shumake:

Well, it's been an interesting experience to say the least, and I often say—well my pastor, who's now deceased, Reverend Newsome—that he baptized me as a child, ordained me as a deacon in the church, and he also ordained me to preach the Word of God. And so, at three of the most critical points in my life, he was there. And it took place at that church. Actually, I'm leaving out one, and that's my marriage certainly to my wife which was done by that pastor at that church, Reverend Newsome. So most of what I've learned as a child growing up, I got out of the church, because of my experience in the church. There was always academic enrichment programs taking place, there was always oratory programs taking place within the church, and that's where I got my training, in the church. And it was interesting going from running the halls of the church as a child to sitting in the deacon's seat, looking out over the congregation, and then ultimately sitting up in the pulpit looking out. But that's home. It's been a wonderful journey, a very challenging journey, but I wouldn't trade it in for anything in the world.

02-00:31:53

Wilmot:

“Challenging,” do you want to say more?

02-00:31:55

Shumake:

Challenging in that here I am now, as they would call me Reverend Shumake, but just yesterday I was little Andre running around, you know? And now, being in the position that God has placed me now, it takes some folks a little time to make the adjustment, you know, from one position in the church to another authoritative role in the church, if you will. So that's been interesting because I'm still the little baby boy who they used to chase around the halls of the church. However, many of them have gone on to glory. Our congregation is an older congregation. We're starting now to do the evangelistic work that's required to really bring in more of the younger people. Many of us who may be in our mid 40s, late 40s, early 50s, our kids are grown and they've either gone onto college and got jobs and moved out of the area. So they're not really active in the church as we were active in the church. And so it's that whole, I don't want to say recruitment, but evangelistic work that's taken place now to bring more families back into the fold.

02-00:33:15

Wilmot:

Can you tell me a little bit—I'm going to move back and forth now, but I'm moving back into the Tent Cities—can you tell me about how additional Tent Cities came, and when, what junctures, what provoked their springing into existence?

02-00:33:31  
Shumake:

Well, the primary purpose—

02-00:33:32  
Wilmot:

The first one started off at 4th and Macdonald?

02-00:33:35  
Shumake:

Yes.

02-00:33:35  
Wilmot:

Yes.

02-00:33:36  
Shumake:

The primary purpose of the Tent Cities was we wanted to start off in Central Richmond at 4th and Macdonald, where two individuals were murdered. Donald [Bonner?], who was a cousin of Reverend Charles Newsome, president of the Richmond branch of the NAACP, and Sheila Gibbons, who was a good friend of his, and the idea being is that we wanted to have the Tent Cities spring up in all of the neighborhoods where violence and homicide was occurring, that being North Richmond and on the south side. And so we set up on September the 25th at 4:30 PM on 4th and Macdonald. What was in my mind historic was that night we had already put the call out to everyone in the other neighborhoods that we were going to do this, and it was going to start on 4th Street, and we wanted everyone to come and be part of that initial opening if they wanted to.

That night, there stood at that site, around a little hibachi that we used to burn wood and to keep us warm initially because that's all that we had—I mean, this wasn't anything planned. It was the Spirit of God moving, and just brought us together to make that happen. And that very first night, you had men and women standing and sitting around a little hibachi trying to keep warm, from North Richmond, Central Richmond, and the south side: unprecedented because those individuals normally wouldn't come out of their neighborhoods into Central Richmond, okay, and so that night—and it's historic for me, we were all there together. These are the older guys who came together and said that they too wanted this madness to end, our babies killing one another, and the older folk, you know, getting wounded and murdered just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And so the idea was that they would go back into their respective neighborhoods and put the call out to the older men and women who would come out and participate and then create an environment where the younger men and women could participate: just absolutely phenomenal, and it's been such a wonderful experience. And the dialogue that's taking place, the very fact that we have these young perpetrators of the violence, if you will, from the North, Central, and south side talking to each other, which is why, this being day 36, we've only had two homicides in the city of Richmond as a result of the neighborhoods fighting with one another, when we know the

numbers certainly would have been larger than that. But because of the dialogue that's taken place, we've been able to impact that. So that's significant. So if nothing else comes out of Tent City, we can look back and say that it did have a significant impact on the level of violence that's been taking place within the city of Richmond.

02-00:36:48

Wilmot:

That first night around the fire were primarily church goers or church members, congregation members, or no?

02-00:36:55

Shumake:

A combination, a combination, and that was the beauty of it because I often say and believe that we figured it out in Richmond. We understood in Richmond that if the church have not been able to do it by itself, the community has not been able to do it by itself, nor has any municipality been able to do it by itself, and so it's bringing the two together that we felt would enable us to reach the ultimate goal of zero homicides in the city of Richmond.

02-00:37:31

Wilmot:

Did you know the young man who was killed on October 20?

02-00:37:35

Shumake:

Did not know him personally. I think that shooting occurred across the street from the site over on 41st and Cutting, however one of the site participants, site coordinators, heard the car when it pulled up that night. It was late at night, and around 4-4:30 in the morning, music was loud, so he just sort of looked out at the camper blind and saw a car parked there and he closed his blind and laid down. Then he heard the gunfire go off, and when he came back out, there was a car speeding off, and so he got out and walked over and saw the young man slumped over the steering wheel. And you figure at 4:30 in the morning there had to have been some kind of transaction taking place. No one is going to be out, you know, that time of morning just randomly trying to shoot somebody. And so that is part of what we are having to address is getting our young people to understand that taking someone's life is not the solution. That is not the answer to whatever it is that may be troubling them, and finding ultimate ways of dealing with that anger and that rage and hostility that they may have within them.

02-00:36:08

Wilmot:

Was the site on Cutting and 41st, was that the second site that came up?

02-00:36:13

Shumake:

That was actually the third site. The first site was 4th and Macdonald. The second site, which opened up the very next day on the 26th of September was in North Richmond at Shields-Reid Park, and approximately two weeks later, the site opened up on 41st and Cutting. And I don't have that specific date right in front of me, but the following day we opened up the site down on

Marina Way at Virginia Avenue. So during week three is when the other two sites on the south side opened up.

02-00:39:50

Wilmot:

And how have the camps been sustaining themselves in terms of food and water? How has that been happening? Have you been receiving donations?

02-00:39:59

Shumake:

Yes. The community has just been incredible, and one of the things that I really learned in this process is that this violence is not a race issue. It's a human issue. We've had people from all race, creeds, and colors coming out donating food and other types of supplies, tents, and what have you, in order to sustain the people who are staying out at those sites. We've had them come from Marin County, south San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley—it's just been incredible: Fairfield, Sacramento, folks have been coming out and leaving small donations for us, little lady seniors going back and baking beans and pasta and bringing it out—just been incredible. On a corporate level, Kaiser Permanente have just been incredible. It's a fantastic organization, and every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday they provide us with lunch that we divide evenly among all of the sites. They've been doing that all of the month of October. Wal-Mart Corporation, huge donations of tents and sleeping bags and blankets and other supplies, right here in Richmond, CJ's Barbecue, small family-owned operation went out and brought tents and other supplies in order to sustain us. So it's just been a blessing, and the support has just been phenomenal.

02-00:41:36

Wilmot:

What's been the most unique donation, or memorably or remarkable?

02-00:41:44

Shumake:

For me it was day three. A little Italian lady who lives over in the Civic Center area, she came forward and walked up to me down at the site on 4th and Macdonald and said, "Reverend Shumake, I grew up here in Richmond, and I am so moved by what you guys are doing to stop this violence. I want to know what can I do to help." And I said to her, I said, "Ma'am, just by you being here is enough." And she said, "No, no, you're not listening to me. I want to help. What can I do to help sustain you guys while you're here?" So I told her some of the things that we needed, and she went on to share with me that her husband and son thought she was crazy when she told them that she was going to drive from her community up in the Civic Center area down to 4th and Macdonald to help us, and she told them, "Look, I grew up in that neighborhood. I went to Lincoln Elementary School. This is my city, and if they have the courage to get out there and sleep in tents to stop this violence, I'm going to do something to help them." So, that to me was the most exciting moment of it all, just the fact to see that kind of courage, that kind of commitment, and that will to help out and to demonstrate that others do care. People really do care in this city, and again, it transcends race. It's not a race

issue. It's a human issue. People want the killing and the violence to stop, and Tent City has created an environment for that to take place.

02-00:43:28

Wilmot: What did she gives?

02-00:43:30

Shumake: She took the list, and she came back, and brought some food. She brought some blankets, as well as some flashlights, you know? Just met, and I felt her spirit, you see, and reflecting back on that enabled me to keep going out there night after night. Also, reflecting on the number of homicide scenes that I've been called out to over the past three years and seeing these youngsters brains blown out and blood pouring down the streets, seeing their mothers come out and recognizing that her baby boy is laying out there dead, and that whole reaction and being there to try to console those mothers—so those kinds of experiences is what drives me to do what I'm doing out there, and my commitment in this process, and to the commitment to the city to end this violence because families are just being devastated and it's a no-win situation. No one wins in this.

02-00:44:42

Wilmot: What are next steps? The tent cities are being dismantled tomorrow most likely. What are next steps?

02-00:44:51

Shumake: Well, the plan is on November the 5th we're having a city-wide rally at the Civic Center. The idea is that from each location, each of the four locations, we will be marching and converging at 23rd and Macdonald collectively, and then marching on in to the Civic Center and while there, there will be a number of activities taking place throughout the day, talking about ending the violence in the city and the role that the community can play, because it's not going to happen if the community does not get involved in a significant way to end this violence. And then we're going to talk about some of the dialogue that's been taking place at each site, because at each location the question was raised with the eldest as well as the young people, what is it that we need in this neighborhood to sustain this movement, to keep it a safe, peaceful or prosperous area, to get to that point where that's the case? And so we're going to share the findings that came out of each of those sites, and what it is that we've determined that we need to do collectively to keep this movement going.

02-00:46:08

Wilmot: Over the course of this time in these last 36 days, can you tell me a little bit about the allies and detractors? Where have you found people who are helpful to you, people who were surprisingly helpful, or people who were surprisingly hostile to the tent cities and to this movement?

02-00:46:08  
Shumake:

I think the fact that all of the people showed up that did show up, even representatives from different organizations around the city was really meaningful in that organizations that we may not have partnered with in the past, not because there was any dissension or anything, but just there wasn't any path that we were on where those paths crossed. But yet, we saw them coming up, participate in different groups from the different racial backgrounds that's within the city was incredible. The challenge for me was, and is, with the faith community, you see, recognizing that we need everyone to be at the table to solve the problem, and we have to create the environment for that to happen. And you can't do that by being judgmental. You can't do that by driving people away who may not think or feel like we feel, and who may not believe in what we believe in, because again, you have to catch a fish before you can scale the fish. And if we continue to isolate and push our young people away because they may not be in their life where we feel they ought to be, then we will never ever solve the problem. And so, in terms of detractors, I would say for me, the most disappointing thing is that we didn't get more of the faith community involved in coming out and being a friend and establishing relationships with the young people that were coming in, you see, because that was a wonderful opportunity to reach a group of men and women who normally they would not have access to because those young men are not attending anyone's church in this city.

02-00:48:47  
Wilmot:

What role have the police played?

02-00:48:52  
Shumake:

Under the leadership of our new chief, Chris Magnus, it's been an incredible role. One of the things we asked of him initially when we started is that we wanted the police to patrol the streets every 20-30 minutes in the areas where the camps were setting up, because we recognized that we were putting our lives on the line daily. Every night that we were out there some knucklehead, if you will, could have come around and shot up the camp. So, we just wanted to make sure that we had that presence along with the word that we ourselves were putting out on the streets. And the purpose for which we were there, that we weren't there to try to drive away any business or enterprise that they may have had going on in that area. Our purpose in being there was to end the killings in Richmond, and that we wanted to reach out to them and make them part of something city-wide if not nationwide to help create a safe, peaceful and prosperous city.

02-00:49:56  
Wilmot:

In the city government, have they been supportive?

02-00:50:00  
Shumake:

The Richmond City Manager, Mr. Bill Lindsay, our Public Works Director Willie Haywood, has just been phenomenal in making sure parks were clean, we had electricity out there to do what we were doing. City Council member

Nathaniel Bates has just been phenomenal in making sure we had the space and get the permits that we had, and for the most part, the staff within the city managers, Sue and Rochelle [Monks?], I mean, they've just been phenomenal in working with us, making sure that we had everything that we needed when we needed it.

02-00:50:40

Wilmot:

I also wanted to ask you a question. This is going further back. It's going back to your childhood. I wanted to ask you a question about health, basically growing up in this largely industrial city. What have you seen around people's health issues unfolding over time?

02-00:50:58

Shumake:

With the current oil industries that we have here, the current companies that work in that area and produce products in this area, that has always been a problem here. And we are fortunate enough that we have some environmental groups in this city that are well educated and know what they're talking about, and have been the watchdogs to sort of make sure that the polluters didn't move forward with a lot of the plans that they may have had that would have created more pollution. I think they were very instrumental in making sure that certain safeguards were in place that could be in place in order to protect the community. And so we were very fortunate in that in that we had some strong environmental groups in the area here locally in Richmond and around the Bay Area that have been involved in that process.

02-00:52:16

Wilmot:

Growing up, did you remember any funny smells, or smoke, or...?

02-00:52:19

Shumake:

Oh absolutely. I mean, my little car, we had to get up and rinse the car off every morning because of the particulates that would come out of the air winding up on the cars. I remember that as a teenager in high school. I mean, it used to upset me because I had just got my—I think I was a junior in high school and I had just gotten me a new Toyota Corolla, a pretty little green car, and I'd come out in the morning thinking it was just dew from the mist, and it was stuff coming from these chemical plants in the area. So, I remember that because it was always something that we had to take care of and be mindful of periodically when they'd have some type of spill and you'd smell the foul odors, and on a few occasions many people had to rush to the emergency rooms as a result of those particular spills. So, it's something that comes with the area and living in the area but I'm grateful that we do have advocates who are watchdogs, if you will, or these organizations, and can those organizations do better? I'm sure that they can. And, I think with the amount of advocacy that's going forth now, we will see that eventually they will.

02-00:53:41

Wilmot:

And did Chevron have a presence at all with the tent cities? Did they make a donation?

02-00:53:47  
Shumake:

Not to the tent cities, no.

02-00:53:49  
Wilmot:

But in other places?

02-00:53:50  
Shumake:

Yeah.

02-00:53:50  
Wilmot:

OK. Let's see, what else do you want to—I think that was a question I threw in there which I could have put in a different part of the interview, but I just didn't get to it. Let's see, I think those are all my questions. Is there anything else you wanted to say? On Friday I had asked you to close with, if you had any scripture that was on your mind that was aiding you in your work, and you did. And I'm trying to think of anything else I want to ask you. I think that's about it in terms of my questions. Is there anything else you want to say?

02-00:54:26  
Shumake:

Well, I mean if I had to share a scripture it would simply be, "Faith without works is dead," and if we are going to solve the problems that we have in our communities, we within the faith community have to come outside of the four walls and minister to our community because we tend to come to church on Sunday. We bounce off the walls on Sunday. From Monday to Saturday the community is hemorrhaging with all kinds of problems, and they're not coming to the church. They see us drive in, do our thing, and then we leave. They see us drive in. We leave. We come back throughout the week for maybe prayer meetings, Bible study, an auxiliary meeting, and then we leave. And in the midst of all that coming and going, they're suffering in silence. The community needs the church. We need to be involved. We need to come outside the four walls, and not be afraid because again, for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, and we have to move in the power of the Holy Spirit in order to bring the transformation to our cities that is required. That has to come from the church, you see? No municipality is going to do that. It has to come from the church, and the church has got to learn how to partner with community and other groups in order to make that a reality. That's important, and we have to be at the head of the curve on this. We cannot be taking a back seat. We've abdicated our responsibility for too long. We understand that in order to have a strong community, you have to have strong families, and our families have been devastated. We've had babies who had babies who were not trained, and if they weren't trained, then how are they going to train their kids to teach them about respect and love and trust? They're not getting that. That's the role that we must play, and we can do it in a way where we're not forcing what we believe upon anyone. But we can demonstrate love, because where love is, fear cannot coexist. Where love is, fear cannot coexist with love. And I believe it's that fear that has been driving many of us to allow all of this

madness to continue that we see happening not only in Richmond, but throughout the Bay Area, throughout this region, this stage, and this nation.

02-00:56:58

Wilmot:

And when the tent cities close down, what neighborhood will you return to? Where do you live currently?

02-00:57:05

Shumake:

Right here in the Iron Triangle, which has often been dubbed one of the most dangerous and violent neighborhoods in the city. I beg to differ with that. I mean, we've had incidents of violence. It's only a handful of people that's doing it. We have a lot of hardworking, decent men and women living in this neighborhood. Kids have done well coming about in this neighborhood, but we've just ignored the problem for too long, and so now you have a sleeping giant that has awakened: that being the people through this whole Tent City movement recognizing that they don't have to live like this, you see, and I submit it's not the way it is. It's the way that we've allowed it to be, and that can change.

02-00:57:51

Wilmot:

And in this neighborhood, how have Asian and Latino communities or members of the neighborhood responded and become engaged?

02-00:58:01

Shumake:

Again, that's been one of the phenomenal things that's been taking place through the Tent City. They've been coming out, supporting the various sites. We're now seeing in the Catholic Church now where there's more rallies taking place—[interview interruption]—Is there anything you think that we've left out?

02-00:58:34

Wilmot:

We're recording now, and I don't think we have, but I think we can close if you'd like. So thank you so much for your time.

02-00:58:42

Shumake:

Well, thank you, and I think what we see happening here in Richmond is a wonderful coming together of the people, and as I've said in the past, when men and women of good will come together, the impossible becomes possible. And that's what we're seeing here in Richmond, a coming together of the people: men and women from all different races, creeds, and colors coming together around an issue, again, all of what was done in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. So I think that the same God that existed in Montgomery in 1955 is the same God that exists in Richmond in 2006, and we can make it happen here.

02-00:59:29

Wilmot:

Good, thank you. I'm going to—

[End of Interview]