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Thomas J. Griffith, Jr. and D. Wayne White

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

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

Interviews conducted by
David Dunham
in 2003

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Interview with Thomas J. Griffith, Jr. and D. Wayne White
Interviewed by: David Dunham
Transcriber: Eric Evangelista
[Interview # 01:February, 04, 2003]
[Begin Audio File White and Griffith1 02-04-03]

1-00:00:05

Dunham:

Okay, so it's Tuesday, February 4 and here with Tom Griffith and D. Wayne White. I've just said your names, but I'll let you both say your full names and where and when you were born.

1-00:00:19

White:

You go ahead, Tom, you're older.

1-00:00:21

Griffith:

Yeah, okay. That's true, I am. I'm Thomas J. Griffith, Jr. I was born in Richmond, California on March 6, 1929 at 770 32nd Street. I walked by and looked at the house just about a year ago, and much to my surprise—we only lived there six months—but the house from early pictures is identical, I recognize it immediately from the pictures that I had seen. The house seems to be just as it was when we lived there that long time ago seventy-three years ago. It was kind of interesting—I want to go back and get pictures of it.

1-00:01:00

Dunham:

Yeah. So you were born in the house?

1-00:01:02

Griffith:

I was born in that house, and in the house actually, as a lot of times you were born at home in those days. My brother and sister would always comment that they really hated it because they had to sit out on the front porch while I was being born, if that's the right word. They'd sit out there for about three or four hours and got very disgusted, and so I got off on a bad start with my older half-brother and half-sister.

1-00:01:31

Dunham:

Okay, and how about you?

1-00:01:34

White:

My full name is D. Wayne White, and I was born in Chester, Idaho, September 19, 1929. We lived on another farm, my father's farm, but I was born in my mother's mother's farmhouse because she was the midwife. A small farming community in Idaho. Then, my mother and father divorced when I was seven or eight, and my mother brought me to California in 1937. She had a sister who lived here. So, she worked as a waitress at the Eagle Creamery on Macdonald Avenue.

1-00:02:24

Griffith:

A famous place in those days.

1-00:02:26

White:

Yeah, famous place in those days. [Interruption to attend to the telephone and the kitchen stove.]

1-00:02:45

Dunham:

Okay, so go right ahead.

1-00:02:48

White:

Okay, alright. We lived in a little house on Nevin Avenue, a little two-room {coldwater} house, cottage. I went to Lincoln Elementary School. It was about halfway my third year, I believe, when I started Lincoln School. This is where I met Tom, in the third grade, and Jim {McLaughlin} and Bob Marshall, old friends, and Eugene White. So, I still have the same friends. Never could get anymore friends. [laughs]

1-00:03:21

Griffith:

Mainly because of us.

1-00:03:22

White:

[laughs]

1-00:03:24

Dunham:

I lucked onto you two. You two are the rascals. What work, maybe you already referred to, your mom worked at the Eagle Creamery? Well, tell me about the Eagle Creamery a bit.

1-00:03:38

White:

Oh yeah, the Eagle Creamery. That was owned by a Greek family and most of the restaurants in Richmond were owned by Greeks, right, Tom? Wouldn't you say?

1-00:03:48

Griffith:

Yeah, and I would say probably true.

1-00:03:50

White:

So, my mother worked there, which was kind of a good thing for us because we never had any money. She didn't make hardly any money, but we always had enough food. She brought food home, and I'd go there and eat a lot. It was pretty good, in our circumstances. I think she worked there for a number of years, probably until the war started. She also did a few waitressing jobs for banquets out at the—what's the hotel out at—the Mac Hotel.

1-00:04:36

Griffith:

Yeah, Point Richmond.

1-00:04:37

White:

Point Richmond. Very famous hotel. She used to work banquets there on Saturday night, and she used to work banquets at the Elks Lodge, too. So, until the war started she was a waitress. Then, of course, when the war started, that changed everything. Everybody had a different perspective on things, and it changed the whole economy. People started getting regular jobs and defense jobs and earning money.

1-00:05:15

Griffith:

It was a traumatic thing for Richmond because we were a small town of twenty-thousand people. And one of the things that tripped me about D. when I first met him when he came into our class, he was from out of state. He was from Idaho, my God.

1-00:05:34

White:

[laughs]

1-00:05:35

Griffith:

I had a friend from a different state. There wasn't anybody from different states.

1-00:05:39

White:

And I wore a cowboy hat.

1-00:05:40

Griffith:

And he wore a cowboy outfit, and he looked like a cowboy.

1-00:05:43

White:

[laughs]

1-00:05:44

Griffith:

A little tiny cowboy.

1-00:05:46

White:

[laughs]

1-00:05:47

Dunham:

Wow. I haven't seen those photos yet.

1-00:05:49

Griffith:
[laughs]

1-00:05:50

White:
[laughs]

1-00:05:51

Griffith:

So, that was really, and I asked him, I can remember. I said, “Do you want to be friends?” And he said, “Yeah, I guess so.” So, we became friends, little realizing that we’ll be friends up until now, up until this minute. Maybe, who knows after this session.

1-00:06:07

Dunham:

So, that was right away? He wasn’t picked on at first as an out-of-stater, per se?

1-00:06:11

Griffith:

No, he was kind of looked on as kind of a, what would you say—

1-00:06:15

White:

A curiosity.

1-00:06:16

Griffith:

No, a sort of a celebrity.

1-00:06:18

Dunham:

Okay.

1-00:06:19

Griffith:

Yeah. He was kind of a celebrity in his own way.

1-00:06:21

White:

Well, that’s before the big influx of out-of-staters.

1-00:06:24

Griffith:

Oh yeah, this was before the war.

1-00:06:25

White:

Yeah, when the war started, of course, everybody from out-of-state started coming to California, from Oklahoma and Arkansas in particular.

1-00:06:33

Griffith:

And that's when there was a lot of hard feelings. Of course, we were young, maybe we didn't know as much about it as we thought we did. It seemed to be the local people who kind of, well, did resent the influx. And we had some other crude names, you know, Okies, Arkies.

1-00:06:51

White:

Yeah, that's true. That's right.

1-00:06:54

Griffith:

And then it wasn't popular to play cowboy music. I had a friend who said, "You know, I don't mind them coming here. But why do they have to bring their music?" Cowboy music was unheard of until then.

1-00:07:08

Dunham:

What kind of music did the locals listen to?

1-00:07:11

Griffith:

Oh, you know. Just plain—.

1-00:07:12

White:

Just popular music.

1-00:07:14

Griffith:

Just popular music, whatever it was on the hit parade and that kind of stuff.

1-00:07:18

Dunham:

So, you didn't experience that tension, though, within the schools?

1-00:07:24

Griffith:

I don't recall it within the schools. I remember one time we were in a restaurant with Bob Marshall. They were always kind of putting me on the spot. And I forget how it came up. We were laughing about the cowboy music. We really did make a lot of fun of it, at least we kids did, I don't know about in general, but they were kidding me about this, and a very nice man came up and he looked at me and he said, "Son, you're not ashamed of being from Oklahoma, are you?"

1-00:07:55

White:

[laughs]

1-00:07:57

Griffith:

“No, not at all.” They were implying that this was my music. That was these same guys, they were always trying to embarrass me in some way, which wasn’t hard to do.

1-00:08:14

White:

I remember it. We used to have some comments about people from Oklahoma and Arkansas. Remember Okie shoes?

1-00:08:20

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:08:21

White:

Anybody who wore boots or high-top shoes, those were Okie shoes.

1-00:08:25

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:08:28

White:

Of course, we wouldn’t say that today, would we?

1-00:08:32

Griffith:

Remember that song, “Hey Okie, if you’ve seen an Arkie, Texas got a job for him out in California, working in the shipyards?”

1-00:08:39

Dunham:

No, I haven’t heard that one.

1-00:08:40

Griffith:

You haven’t heard that? Oh, that was kind of a popular song.

1-00:08:42

White:

[laughs]

1-00:08:44

Griffith:

That was actually a song.

1-00:08:45

Dunham:

Yeah.

1-00:08:46

Griffith:

That wasn't criticism.

1-00:08:47

White:

He didn't make that up.

1-00:08:48

Griffith:

No, I didn't make that up.

1-00:08:49

Dunham:

No, I mean, I've heard of—so, who sang that song, though? That wasn't an Okie song, that was a pop song, probably.

1-00:08:55

Griffith:

Well, by then, music was in all the jukeboxes, and that's where I heard it. You'd go in a restaurant and every little booth had a little jukebox.

1-00:09:05

White:

Oh yeah. That's right, a nickel.

1-00:09:06

Griffith:

You'd put a nickel in there, and it would play the music. That's where the antagonism came from, I think. Every time you'd go in a restaurant, there'd be some kind of cowboy song. They were really cowboy songs, they weren't as classy as they are—there's no distinction now.

1-00:09:21

White:

You know, come to think of it, Tom, we were kind of cliquey, really.

1-00:09:24

Griffith:

We were.

1-00:09:25

White:

We were the older people in town. And when the new people came in, we kind of resented them. We stayed in our own group, and they stayed in their groups. It was probably true in all walks of life. And I remember we used to go, during the war, for entertainment, they had community centers in all of the war housing tracts. They'd have dances there every Saturday night, and all the kids would go there. We'd always segregate—our bunch and people from Oklahoma and Texas. They'd all stay to themselves.

1-00:10:01

Dunham:

So, each center kind of had a mix of those groups. But within each dance—

1-00:10:04

White:

Yeah, right.

1-00:10:06

Griffith:

Yeah. And those things, they were just kind of taken for granted. You didn't really feel you were being necessarily prejudiced. It was just the way things were.

1-00:10:14

Dunham:

Within those community centers, then, it was those mixes of people, but was it all white?

1-00:10:21

White:

Well, it was. Now, there were certain tracts were all black.

1-00:10:25

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:10:26

White:

There were, I think—.

1-00:10:27

Griffith:

Canal Project? I don't know which ones.

1-00:10:31

White:

There were three. I have it in my book there. I think there were three tracts that were segregated, and they were all black. They stayed in the community center. They were in their community center. We never went there, and they never came to ours. So, yeah, we were segregated.

1-00:10:47

Dunham:

But they did have their own community centers?

1-00:10:49

Griffith:

There were certain unwritten rules that you just wouldn't. We used to have places we'd go to when we were older, bars and things. You'd never see a black person. You just wouldn't see one there. There are a lot of places in North Richmond that we wouldn't dare go to, for the same reason.

1-00:11:05

Dunham:

Because there was quite a club and bar scene there, too. Some white folks did go to those, I think, though. Not to your knowledge.

1-00:11:13

Griffith:

Not to our knowledge.

1-00:11:14

White:

If they did, they went there looking for trouble.

1-00:11:16

Griffith:

Out to North Richmond?

1-00:11:18

Dunham:

Once the music scene got going, some of what I've read is that—and it was a type thing where it was almost a reverse—.

1-00:11:25

White:

Probably not when we were kids, maybe later on.

1-00:11:27

Dunham:

Yes, later. Yeah.

1-00:11:28

Griffith:

This wasn't a Harlem kind of thing where people would get dressed up and go down to Harlem, as I've read about. That didn't happen. There was tension.

1-00:11:38

Dunham:

Yeah.

1-00:11:39

Griffith:

There was tension, and you wouldn't—. If you were driving in North Richmond, police would stop you and ask you what you were doing there.

1-00:11:47

Dunham:

You mean if you were white and driving.

1-00:11:49

Griffith:

If you were white—.

1-00:11:50

White:

Yeah, in North Richmond.

1-00:11:51

Dunham:

And conversely, if you were black and in the whiter area of Richmond—.

1-00:11:56

Griffith:

I suspect so, but I just am not sure of that. But you definitely would be stopped, and you would be definitely asked what you were doing and advised to leave.

1-00:12:04

White:

Well, you really wouldn't want to go out to North Richmond, anyway. In fact, we didn't have cars, so we had no way to get out there. It's quite a ways from downtown.

1-00:12:13

Griffith:

Even later on when we didn't.

1-00:12:15

White:

But even later on, yeah. It's not a place you would want to go to. But I'm sure, maybe some people did; I don't know. I'm not quite sure when drugs came upon the scene, but I remember, probably when we were a little older, hearing that there were drugs available in North Richmond.

1-00:12:35

Griffith:

We grew up literally in a drug-free society. I didn't even know what drugs were. But there were—now that I've grown up, and I've talked to some people—there were a couple kids that were really, really dangerous kids. They, apparently, had gotten into the fringe of it, somehow. But it was unbeknownst to us that there was such a thing as drugs.

1-00:13:01

White:

Yeah, it wasn't a big thing as far as I know.

1-00:13:04

Griffith:

Remember zoot suits?

1-00:13:06

White:

Zoot suits! Yeah. Yeah, zoot suits was the big dress.

1-00:13:10

Griffith:

That was the thing that divided the community and people, dramatically. That was mostly the Hispanics.

1-00:13:18

White:

Hispanics, and Portuguese.

Griffith:

Blacks and Hispanics.

1-00:13:27

White:

Spanish and the Mexicans and Portuguese mostly wore zoot suits. You know what zoot suits—?

1-00:13:32

Dunham:

Yeah, sure. So, you guys remember. So, what was that like?

1-00:13:35

Griffith:

We hated that. We considered it an insult. We considered it an attack on the war effort in just every way. It was just looked down upon.

1-00:13:45

White:

Yeah, we didn't approve of that.

1-00:13:46

Dunham:

Did that kind of conflict lead to fights?

1-00:13:49

Griffith:

No, again it was—it could have.

1-00:13:51

White:

Well, it probably did at times. Not in our part—we were cowards. [laughs] We never went out looking for fights.

1-00:13:58

Griffith:

We were the sneaky type.

1-00:13:59

White:

[laughs]

1-00:14:00

Dunham:

What did that mean name-calling or just—?

1-00:14:03

Griffith:

Well, you know, there wasn't that much exposure to it. We mostly read about it, and then headlines, "Zoot Suit Riots in LA," and that kind of thing. Servicemen were always fighting down in southern California, always fighting the zoot suiters. I had a good friend that was in the

Marine Corps at the time, and he claimed to have been rolled at a bus stop by some zoot suiters. Either that or he got drunk and didn't want to admit it.

1-00:14:32

Dunham:

“Rolled” meaning? Oh, beat up.

1-00:14:34

Griffith:

Beat up, yeah, and his wallet taken.

1-00:14:36

White:

You know, before the war, North Richmond was inhabited by Italians and Portuguese immigrants. Then, when the war started, they moved out and the blacks moved in—.

1-00:14:48

Griffith:

Very rapidly.

1-00:14:49

White:

Yeah. Because my wife is of Italian descent, and she knew a lot of people, her family knew a lot of people who lived in north Richmond.

1-00:14:56

Dunham:

So, how were the Italian and Portuguese viewed in your community then?

1-00:15:01

Griffith:

They were really, the Portuguese especially, are a very—I highly regard them—but they were very close. And I remember when I first went to Roosevelt Junior High School, for some reason, it's hazy now, but we originally started together but somehow we weren't in the same classes. I don't know what happened, but I was in with mostly Portuguese. And I had a heck of a time getting accepted. I was literally frightened a lot of the time until I finally got accepted, and then they were great. I liked them. Really nice people.

1-00:15:39

Dunham:

Did they speak Portuguese mainly? Was that an issue?

1-00:15:41

Griffith:

No, they all spoke English. It was just that they were very closely knit, and they didn't particularly enjoy outsiders immediately. They didn't take on outsiders immediately. It took me about two semesters before I was finally accepted in the inside. Danny {Cuadros} and Bill Grace and those guys.

1-00:16:00

White:

It probably was a little less so with Italians; I don't know.

1-00:16:03

Griffith:

Yeah, it is less with Italians.

1-00:16:05

Dunham:

Less interaction?

1-00:16:07

Griffith:

No, less of that problem.

1-00:16:10

White:

Less segregation.

1-00:16:11

Dunham:

But were you aware of prejudice against either Portuguese or Italians?

1-00:16:16

Griffith:

It was the other way around for me.

1-00:16:17

White:

Yeah, I don't think so.

1-00:16:19

Griffith:

But it wasn't a big deal. It was more of my own inability.

1-00:16:24

Dunham:

But during the war, in terms of Italians then, it wasn't a big issue, a loyalty issue?

1-00:16:27

Griffith:

Remember we had one kid that was there, a really nice guy. He was Italian, but he had come over. And so they were passing him off as Portuguese, because we were at war with Italy.

1-00:16:41

Dunham:

Right, that's what I mean.

1-00:16:42

Griffith:

That was never a problem like it was with the Japanese. Italians were Italians, they were just as much Americans as anybody else.

1-00:16:50

Dunham:

So, you didn't know of any Italians who were—?

1-00:16:52

Griffith:

Oh, no.

1-00:16:53

White:

I don't think so because there were a lot of prominent Italian families in Richmond, the Travelinis and Banduccis.

1-00:17:02

Griffith:

Yeah, yeah. No, there was never any problem.

1-00:17:04

Dunham:

Did either of you know of any Japanese that were sent away?

1-00:17:09

Griffith:

You know, they got sent away so quick, and we were still pretty young, 1942. I remember one Japanese family that got sent away, but I didn't really know them. I knew their son a little bit because he used to pick on me. You're getting me to sound like a real coward.

1-00:17:26

White:

[laughs]

1-00:17:28

Griffith:

I didn't mean to imply that. He was always kind of a pushy guy, but that was just one individual.

1-00:17:35

Dunham:

Was he in your school?

1-00:17:36

Griffith:

No, actually he wasn't. He was living near where we lived. I used to try to avoid him because he always seemed a little threatening to me.

1-00:17:43

Dunham:

So you don't know if he went to school or not?

1-00:17:46

Griffith:

You know, I don't. I don't recall any Japanese in our school. We had one little Chinese fellow who got over here somehow from China. I used to play with him, used to wrestle with him a lot.

1-00:18:02

Dunham:

Did he stay in your school through the war years?

1-00:18:04

Griffith:

He stayed at Roosevelt Elementary School, and I lost track of him after that. But he didn't speak English very well. He was—I don't know how they got over here during the war, but they did.

1-00:18:18

White:

I have one story I could tell about a family in North Richmond who owned a florist, a rose-growing company. The daughter went to school with my wife. Her parents owned the Able Rose Growers, or I don't know the corporate name. Anyway, they had a competitor and a neighbor, a Japanese family right across the road who also had a florist business. And during the war, the whole family was sent out to Utah or someplace. So, Mr. Able took over the florist business, his neighbor's and competitor's florist business and ran it all through the war until he came back. It made a profit, and he saved all the money, kept all the money in an account. And when he came back, he turned his business back and gave him his bankbook, showing all the money that he had made. In fact, there is a story about that in *Reader's Digest* about ten years ago.

1-00:19:32

Griffith:

Oh was there?

1-00:19:33

White:

Yeah.

1-00:19:34

Griffith:

Oh. That was really—.

1-00:19:35

White:

Yeah that was quite a—. Mr. Able is still alive. He's in his nineties.

1-00:19:41

Dunham:

Oh really?

1-00:19:43

Griffith:

He'd be good to interview.

1-00:19:44

Dunham:

Do you know where he lives?

1-00:19:45

White:

Yeah. They live in this god-awful location in North Richmond. They own all this land; it's a lot like a compound there. Our friends, my wife's good friend—her husband {Lina and Wally Hale} they live there. And then the parents live there. They have several houses there. The parents are, like I say, both in their nineties. They've turned the business over; they've sold the business. I mean, they're not running the business anymore; somebody is buying them out and operating the business. But they're still there because, for one reason, they can't sell. Nobody's going to buy their house. They have a nice house, but who is going to buy a house out there.

1-00:20:43

Griffith:

That's gradually changing, I understand. But maybe not right in North Richmond.

1-00:20:46

White:

Yeah, it is. Yeah. A lot of new housing is going up in that vicinity.

1-00:20:51

Dunham:

And so the Aebi's are white, I take it? Right? Yeah. And did they live in North Richmond all through the war years?

1-00:20:57

White:

Yeah.

1-00:20:58

Griffith:

They'd be interesting people if you don't mind talking to them.

1-00:21:02

White:

Yeah, I don't know about that. They're pretty elderly, but the daughter would be really interesting. She knows an awful lot about—her name is Lina Hale.

1-00:21:11

Dunham:

Lina Hale. And then the parents' name is Aebi.

1-00:21:14

White:

Able.

1-00:21:16

Dunham:

Able. How do you spell that?

1-00:21:19

White:

A-B-L-E.

1-00:21:21

Dunham:

Do you have any idea about the Japanese family name, the ones who ran the flower shop?

1-00:21:25

White:

I've forgotten the name of the Japanese family.

1-00:21:27

Dunham:

Well, we can check that.

1-00:21:28

White:

But it's a heck of a story.

1-00:21:30

Dunham:

Yeah, that's certainly unique since usually it was the opposite that businesses were just seized, and they had no recourse.

1-00:21:35

White:

Yeah, if you ever want her phone number, or you want me to ask her or call her.

1-00:21:39

Dunham:

Yeah, sure. Lina Hale.

1-00:21:42

Griffith:

Yeah, I bet they'd be interested, glad to do that.

1-00:21:45

White:

Yeah, and she's lived there her whole life. In fact, she is third generation. Her father's parents started the business, her grandparents.

1-00:21:56

Dunham:

And so far as you know, the Japanese family came back and then did start running the business again?

1-00:22:00

White:

Yeah, right.

1-00:22:01

Griffith:

Are they still there?

1-00:22:03

White:

No, they sold their business, I don't know, ten or twenty years ago.

1-00:22:08

Dunham:

But that was quite a long time.

1-00:22:10

White:

Yeah.

1-00:22:11

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:22:12

Dunham:

So interesting, too, that they weren't discriminated against too much in terms of—I mean, their business did okay, it sounds like?

1-00:22:17

White:

Yeah.

1-00:22:19

Griffith:

Yeah, there wasn't much. I don't think there was much—well, of course the Japanese were all removed. But I don't remember, there was not really too much discrimination against individual Japanese. It was just more of a hatred of Japan. More so on this coast. We hated everything Japanese as little kids. I remember we lived in the Richmond Arms. We had a lot of little Japanese toys. Everything that came from Japan in those days, was real cheap stuff. We went up on the roof and threw them off the roof after December 7. Symbolic. We were little kids, what did we know.

1-00:22:59

White:

On December 7, Tom and I were going to the movies, to the Fox Theater on MacDonald Avenue. I guess the movie was at noon, and you picked me up from my house, I remember. We were walking up Seventh Street, I believe, and some fellow hollered that, "We're at war. We're at war with Japan." We didn't know what he was yelling about. We got in the theater, the manager came out and announced that we were at war and that all military personnel report to their base immediately.

1-00:23:33

Griffith:

This was exciting to us. I remember saying, "Oh boy, we could be bombed."

1-00:23:38

White:

Yeah. [laughs]

1-00:23:40

Griffith:

[laughs] We thought that was a big deal. We weren't concerned at all.

1-00:23:44

White:

No, it's kind of exciting as kids.

1-00:23:45

Griffith:

It was very exciting.

1-00:23:46

White:

It was a very exciting time. Then, of course immediately, we had to put up blackout curtains. No lights.

1-00:23:54

Griffith:

And everybody—this gets into my father—everybody went all out for the war effort. You just couldn't do enough. My dad immediately became the air raid warden for, I forget what the district, but he had to go out. Air raid wardens were allowed to be out during the blackouts. The first blackout we had, which was right after Pearl Harbor in early '42, we had a Russian immigrant living in the bottom of—this was Richmond Arms apartment at 426 Eighth Street, which was quite well known as a place for people working in the war effort to try to have a—it was quite a nice place, and everybody wanted to live there. My folks managed it. And they had a Russian immigrant that was living on the first floor. It was an old man, and he was deaf. And the air raid sirens went off, and of course he didn't hear them, and all the lights went out, or at least ninety-nine percent went off. But his lights stayed on, and before we knew it, we had a crowd amassed in front of the house. People threatening the house, they were going to throw rocks through the windows.

1-00:24:59

White:

[laughs]

1-00:25:00

Griffith:

Fortunately, my folks came out in time, and my dad being an air raid warden, he just burst through and tried to explain to them. The attitude was so strange in those days, sometimes people didn't know who their enemies were. People yelled, they said, "We know who he is, you know." Implying that he was Russian. Well, Russians were our allies.

1-00:25:18

Dunham:

Sure.

1-00:25:19

Griffith:

Or, maybe not in December. When did Russia—no, they weren't then. December 7, Hitler didn't attack Russia until later in the year.

1-00:25:26

White:

Well, yeah, Hitler attacked in '41.

1-00:25:31

Griffith:

Yeah, well this is December. Oh okay, you're right. Yeah. So, there was no reason for them to be concerned about the fact the guy was a Russian.

1-00:25:40

Dunham:

But that may have been a general—again, around immigrants, so it didn't mean that he wasn't fluent in English.

1-00:25:45

Griffith:

Yeah, maybe so. A little anti-foreigner attitude, perhaps, that comes out in times of real stress.

1-00:25:50

Dunham:

There at the Richmond Arms were there a lot of other immigrants, per se? Or what was the make-up—.

1-00:25:55

Griffith:

Richmond Arms?

1-00:25:56

Dunham:

Richmond Arms, sorry.

1-00:25:57

Griffith:

No, it was kind of hard to get in there. My mother was from the South, so she was not very liberal. She was pretty exclusive. We had waiting lists. People would call up to get on the waiting list. Housing was about as bad as it is nowadays, I guess, if not worse. There was all these people coming in, and they had not really started building the war housing, enough. So, there weren't places for people to live.

1-00:26:26

White:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Housing was a big problem. What's El Sobrante now, we called it "Shantytown" because people coming in to work in the defense industry were putting up shacks. I mean, really, shacks. It had been mostly farmland. Getting housing was a real problem.

1-00:26:51

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:26:52

Dunham:

And that was unincorporated land? So, they were able to just do that?

1-00:26:54

White:

Unincorporated, yeah. This might be a good time to talk about the bowling alley. I've always thought that was kind of interesting.

1-00:27:01

Dunham:

Sure.

1-00:27:04

White:

There was a bowling alley on Eleventh Street called the Uptown Bowl?

1-00:27:09

Griffith:

I think so, yeah.

1-00:27:10

White:

Yeah, it was owned by Que Prentis. Remember Que Prentis?

1-00:27:13

Griffith:

I don't remember him.

1-00:27:14

White:

I remember him because he always had black hair slicked down parted in the middle. He looked like a riverboat gambler.

1-00:27:20

Griffith:

Somebody from the Sopranos.

1-00:27:21

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:27:22

White:

Yeah. Anyway, he couldn't get pin-setters during the war because everybody was working in the shipyard or Ford Company—paid good money. They didn't want to set pins, but at the same time, they couldn't find a place to sleep. So, in Que's bowling alley, he had a spectator's gallery up there. So, he shut that down, and he put army cots all through the place. Anybody who would set pins for him, why, he'd let them sleep there. So, a defense worker would work the daytime and come and set pins for Que at night and have a place to sleep.

1-00:28:00

Dunham:

Did they have any place to bathe either there or at work, then? Or was that just catch as can?

1-00:28:04

White:

Good question.

1-00:28:06

Griffith:

Probably didn't.

1-00:28:07

White:

I don't know. I don't know of any—I don't remember any showers.

1-00:28:10

Griffith:

I worked there for a short time, too. That's why I remember it was eleven cents a line.

1-00:28:14

White:

Yeah. And I worked there with Jim. Jim and I.

1-00:28:17

Dunham:

So what was the scene there like? Was that a variety of folks? I mean, black, white, or Okie?

1-00:28:22

Griffith:

Yeah, it was very popular because there wasn't that much recreation in those days, too.

Everything was in short. There wasn't anything being built that wasn't for the war. So, there was a big demand for—bowling alleys were very popular.

1-00:28:34

White:

Oh, very popular, yeah.

1-00:28:36

Griffith:

And I hated it because when you'd get bored, they wouldn't let you go home.

1-00:28:40

White:

[laughs]

1-00:28:41

Dunham:

Wait, what do you mean?

1-00:28:41

White:

[laughs]

1-00:28:42

Griffith:

You're setting pins, you're a fifteen-year-old kid setting pins.

1-00:28:44

Dunham:

Oh, because they just keep playing all night.

1-00:28:46

Griffith:

Well, yeah. And then the guy would say, "I'm supposed to off." "No, stay there, don't go yet."

1-00:28:49

White:

Yeah. [laughs]

1-00:28:51

Griffith:

It was a heck of a time getting out of there once you got in those bowling pits.

1-00:28:54

White:

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They had so much business. People were waiting to get a line.

1-00:29:01

Griffith:

Lines were very common in almost anything.

1-00:29:03

White:

Like Tom said, eleven cents a line, or a game—eleven cents a game.

1-00:29:07

Griffith:

Yeah, we used to call it a line, but it was a game.

1-00:29:10

Dunham:

Yeah, looking through the *Richmond Independent* during the war years, I've seen the big ads that it's clear that the bowling alleys were always looking, as you've said, for the pin-setters. It wasn't the most lucrative job.

1-00:29:20

Griffith:

And they didn't care how old you were as long as you were—they might ask you, I don't know if they even asked you.

1-00:29:25

White:

Probably the most popular form of entertainment was the movies.

1-00:29:28

Griffith:

Oh yeah, by far.

1-00:29:30

White:

We had seven theaters in Richmond. We had theaters all over the place. They were very popular. Everybody went to the movies, and boy, you got your money's worth, too. They always had double features and a newsreel and comedies and comedy shorts and cartoons. You could spend about four hours in the theater for a quarter.

1-00:29:54

Griffith:

Yeah, and I suppose a lot of people stayed in there to rest.

1-00:29:58

Dunham:

That's what I was going to ask. Was that—

1-00:30:00

Griffith:

Before the war, there were two theaters, the Fox Theater and the State Theater. We always referred to them as 'the little show' and 'the big show.' That's all we called them. Fox Theater was 'the big show' and the State Theater down Macdonald Avenue and about Fourth was 'the little show.'

1-00:30:16

White:

Was that where it was?

1-00:30:17

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:30:18

White:

I can't remember.

1-00:30:20

Griffith:

We used to go down there, and we'd sit right up on the stage and watch the movies.

1-00:30:23

White:

[laughs]

1-00:30:25

Griffith:

We were not all blind.

1-00:30:27

Dunham:

Not because all the seats were filled, but that's just because where you liked to sit.

1-00:30:29

Griffith:

No, that was the place to sit. Yeah.

1-00:30:31

Dunham:

It was more exciting.

1-00:30:32

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:30:36

Dunham:

Was it one called 'the big theater' just because it was bigger, or because it had—?

1-00:30:39

Griffith:

Yeah, it was bigger.

1-00:30:41

Dunham:

Okay. Did they show the same kind of movies? Or did one have more first run.

1-00:30:45

Griffith:

'The little theater,' the State Theater, had more of the, which were real popular, the serial type things—the Westerns, the B pictures where you had to go every week to keep in touch with what was going on with your favorite hero. Flash Gordon, mostly cowboys though. Mostly Western. Bob Steel.

1-00:31:05

Dunham:

So, which were your favorites to see?

1-00:31:08

Griffith:

The State Theater. We used to go down to the State Theater. That's where we favored going. Then, in those days, you could go anyplace. There was never any—. In the early period, there was not any really crime to be concerned about. I remember the first time my folks let me go uptown by myself. There used to be a newsstand on Tenth and Macdonald. Tenth and Macdonald was the hub of Richmond in those days. And that was the first place they ever let me go by myself. They gave me a couple of dimes because you could get magazines for a dime. They let me walk uptown by myself, and I was so thrilled. I was about nine years old. There was never any thought about anything happening to me.

1-00:31:53

Dunham:

And when did that change, then?

1-00:31:55

Griffith:

As the war, in the forties, '41, '42, '43, there were more strangers, if you will, and a lot of people just hanging around. There was more concern about crime. A lot of drunkenness, a lot of drunkenness. Again, the war workers didn't have that much to do. And they had money. They had money but nothing to spend it on. So, they ended up, a lot of the guys—and a lot of the guys were out here single because they didn't bring their families. So, they had a lot of time, a lot of money, but nothing to do. And they drank a lot, and there were fights and all kinds of troubles. Not racial, just a typical situation where you got too many people and not enough to do.

1-00:32:43

White:

I think the roughest place, by reputation anyway, were, they called them the southern bars or the honky-tonks, where they had the Western music. They'd have the dances and the Western music and a lot of drinking and a lot of fights. By reputation, those were the roughest places.

1-00:33:04

Griffith:

They were usually on the Southside, down by where the shipyards were.

1-00:33:09

Dunham:

Now where those—if they are called honky-tonks, is that an association with Okies and Arkies?

1-00:33:14

Griffith:

The music—if they had a Western band it was a Western place.

1-00:33:17

White:

Yeah, also on San Pablo, Tom.

1-00:33:19

Griffith:

Oh yeah, you're right. San Pablo. I remember going in one of those places one time, and I actually saw—never saw that before—a guy actually broke a chair over a guy's head.

1-00:33:28

White:

[laughs]

1-00:33:29

Dunham:

You saw that?

1-00:33:30

Griffith:

He really did that. "Let's get out of here."

1-00:33:33

White:

[laughs]

1-00:33:34

Dunham:

How old were you then?

1-00:33:35

Griffith:

I was probably about sixteen.

1-00:33:36

Dunham:

That was another big difference of the time, right? That minors could be in bars.

1-00:33:40

Griffith:

They weren't allowed.

1-00:33:41

Dunham:

Oh, they weren't.

1-00:33:42

Griffith:

No, but we went. D. and I and some of our friends, we were kind of daring in a sense. We would do things that a lot of the kids didn't do. We got, at least I did and to some extent D. and my other friends, got totally caught up in the war. It just became a fixation with us. Anything to do with the war that—not to go into bars—I knew where all the military installations were around Richmond. We'd go out to them.

1-00:34:14

White:

You'd have been a great Japanese spy.

1-00:34:16

Griffith:

I would have, and I knew everything. My teacher, one time, my social studies teacher—every time he asked a question, I'd answer it. He said, "You know more about World War II," they didn't call it World War II, he says, "the war than I do."

1-00:34:31

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:34:32

Griffith:

I said, "You're probably right." We, of course, rode our bikes everywhere. There's a lot of things that D. and I did on our bikes and some of the other kids too.

1-00:34:43

White:

I guess it was 1943 when we joined the Army Air Force Observers. Was it '43?

1-00:34:51

Griffith:

'43, I think so. Because I think I was fourteen.

1-00:34:55

White:

Anyway, somehow we had read about it or heard about it.

1-00:34:58

Griffith:

So we volunteered.

1-00:35:00

White:

We found out who the director was, Margaret Madison, and went to her house and said we wanted to join the US Army Air Force Observer Corps. This is it, right here.

1-00:35:16

Griffith:

There was our book that we were—this was a very secretive.

1-00:35:19

Dunham:

Oh, you got that, oh. Let's take a look at that.

1-00:35:23

White:

Mrs. Madison, at first, wouldn't even consider us. We were only thirteen years old. But, we knew so much about airplanes and the military, I guess we impressed her with our knowledge.

1-00:35:38

Griffith:

We knew much more than most adults because the adults were doing their thing. And we didn't have anything to do but think about the war.

1-00:35:44

Dunham:

So otherwise, it was all adults who were doing it?

1-00:35:47

Griffith:

Oh yeah. Mostly senior citizens.

1-00:35:50

White:

We were the youngest in the whole corps. So, she took us on because, like I said, we knew so much about airplanes. We served, I think, every Wednesday morning, Tom, from 4:00 to 8:00?

1-00:36:03

Griffith:

Yeah, I think so. I think every Wednesday morning, on our bikes.

1-00:36:06

White:

Or did we do two mornings?

1-00:36:09

Griffith:

I can't remember the exact things.

1-00:36:11

White:

I thought it was Wednesday and another day. But anyway, we'd go on our bikes to the top of city hall.

1-00:36:16

Griffith:

That was a long ride.

1-00:36:17

White:

Which was five stories. The tallest building in Richmond. There was a little shack, I guess they built it on top of the building. And of course blackout curtains.

1-00:36:29

Griffith:

No, not blackout curtains.

1-00:36:32

White:

No, we had windows, but it was dark. Of course, no lights. And they had posters up of the silhouettes of all the Japanese and American planes—

1-00:36:40

Griffith:

And this book that we were supposed to study. And then they had the forms that we filled out when we saw an airplane. This is what we had to fill out. And then we'd phone it in to the Air Force. We had this kind of a—

1-00:36:58

Dunham:

And did you ever see any?

1-00:37:00

Griffith:

Oh yeah, we reported airplanes, but they were all ours. We saw a lot of them. This was a very active area for military.

1-00:37:10

White:

Yeah, we had several Air Force bases.

1-00:37:12

Griffith:

Oh yeah, Moffitt Field was a big one.

1-00:37:14

White:

Hamilton.

1-00:37:15

Dunham:

So, on a given morning you would see several?

1-00:37:18

Griffith:

Oh yeah, we'd see quite a few. Bombers and a lot of fighters from around here.

1-00:37:24

Dunham:

But never anything other than a—did you ever think you saw anything other than a US?

1-00:37:27

Griffith:

No.

1-00:37:29

White:

I don't know if we were hoping to see a Japanese plane.

1-00:37:32

Griffith:

We probably were.

1-00:37:33

White:

[laughs]

1-00:37:35

Griffith:

But one of the things we used to do as kids, and I don't suppose a lot of kids did this. Moffitt Field was the final staging area for fighter planes going over the Pacific. There were frequently crashes. We used to have them listed. The P-39 crash, the P-40 crash, the P-38 crash, the Wildcat crash, around the Bay Area here. The P-40 crashed up in Alvarado Park. That was the first one. The Army would come in and clean the place up, but not very well. And then, they'd leave. If there were fatalities, and there was, they'd take that, and they'd take a lot of the big parts. The kids would go up there and dig for airplane parts. And this was a weekend thing. And for years at Alvarado Park, after that, kids would be going up there digging for airplane parts. Some of the guys that got up there early, the first ones that got up there really got some pretty big stuff. But then, that's what we'd do. Out in Pinole Valley, a Navy Wildcat fighter crashed. Crashed, came down for a forced landing, came down on the road. It was kind of sad. You could see his tire marks for a long time where he was skidding. But the road turned at a ninety-degree angle, and he went off and couldn't make the turn, of course, and went into the embankment. We used to go

out there, that was the Wildcat crash. We used to go out there every weekend after weekend and dig for parts. We'd find bullets, and we'd find pieces of metal. Then, there was a P-39 crash, which was out in Pinole Valley also on a ranch, a farm there. We used to go out there and look. They left quite a few parts there, so—I used to have bags of World War II airplane parts we collected.

1-00:39:24

White:

Whatever happened to all that?

1-00:39:26

Griffith:

I sold the whole—one time I just got everything all together, all of my World War II stuff at that time, I was about seventeen or eighteen, and I started having more interest in girls.

1-00:39:34

White:

[laughs]

1-00:39:35

Griffith:

And I just sold the whole nest for \$100 dollars to some guy. I had a couple guns. You could have guns in those days. It was not a taboo.

1-00:39:46

White:

Anyway, that was quite exciting. Like Tom said, we were sworn to secrecy. We couldn't tell any of our friends what we were doing. Now, this was big stuff to us.

1-00:39:55

Griffith:

Yeah, being airplane spotters.

1-00:39:56

White:

Yeah, so we couldn't tell anybody what we were doing. We were top secret.

1-00:40:01

Griffith:

We were very official. We actually got this, and there's an identification on the back and a fingerprint on the back.

1-00:40:09

Dunham:

So, how long did you do this for?

1-00:40:15

Griffith:

A year?

1-00:40:15

White:

Gosh, I don't know. Had at least 200 hours, something over 200 hours.

1-00:40:22

Griffith:

It must have been over a year.

1-00:40:23

White:

Yeah.

1-00:40:26

Dunham:

Did you remember how long, then, sort of the application process was, and talking them into it, or did they have to do sort of a background check?

1-00:40:34

White and Griffith:

No, no, no.

1-00:40:37

Dunham:

They tested you and liked you?

1-00:40:40

White:

They could tell that Tom wasn't Japanese.

1-00:40:42

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:40:43

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:40:44

White:

They had their doubts about me.

1-00:40:46

Griffith:

But also, I did a dumb thing. When the National Guard was federalized, we got the California State Guard. A lot of people know about it, but a lot of people I don't think remember that. When I was about fourteen or fifteen, you're supposed to be eighteen, I went and joined the California State Guard.

1-00:41:08

Dunham:

So, that was also a volunteer position?

1-00:41:10

Griffith:

Yeah, that was a military group. We actually wore uniforms and carried rifles and did guard duty at various places. We were paramilitary, well not para-, we were actually in the military, the state military. We had in-field rifles and bayonets and the whole—we went on maneuvers.

1-00:41:32

Dunham:

So how often did you do that?

1-00:41:34

Griffith:

That was a weekly thing, once a week. We'd go through the drills. I didn't stay in it very long. It was a little bit too challenging for me at my age.

1-00:41:42

Dunham:

Yeah, I was wondering. Were you a lot smaller than the other—?

1-00:41:45

Griffith:

No, I reached my full—which helped me a lot in those days. I reached my full height, the same height as I am now, when I was about fourteen. So, I was always being mistaken for being older than I was. I was always forging my IDs, and it got to be a problem because I couldn't prove how old I was. Sometimes we went to the Fox Theater, and I asked for a juniors ticket. And the girl said, "How old are you?" I said, "Fourteen," and she said, "Are you kidding?" And I reached for my wallet, and I thought, "Wait a minute, everything I've got in my wallet says I'm sixteen."

1-00:42:23

White:

[laughs]

1-00:42:24

Griffith:

So, I had to buy an adults ticket.

1-00:42:26

Dunham:

Right.

1-00:42:27

Griffith:

It really bugged me.

1-00:42:28

White:

[laughs] That served you right for being a forger and a liar.

1-00:42:34

Griffith:

One of the things we used to do, D. and I, especially, and D.'s younger brother Kal—D. got stuck baby-sitting Kal. We didn't want that to hold us back, so we'd take turns. Kal was about

three or four, I guess. We'd carry him on our shoulders. We'd go down to the Fox Theater, and we knew how to sneak in. We'd go around to the side door of the Fox Theater, and there would be an emergency exit, that'd either be a little ajar, or actually if we waited along, somebody would come out. So, we would sneak in. I don't think we ever really got caught. One time we took my nephew in there, and he was about Kal's age. We sat down and my nephew kept saying, "Tom, well Tom, when are we gonna pay?"

1-00:43:18

White:

[laughs]

1-00:43:19

Griffith:

I said, "Shut up."

1-00:43:21

White:

[laughs]

1-00:43:25

Dunham:

[laughs] What else did you have the fake IDs for? Was there anything else?

1-00:43:32

Griffith:

Mainly for getting jobs. Mainly for getting jobs.

1-00:43:35

Dunham:

What was the legal requirement?

1-00:43:38

Griffith:

Well, you had to have a work permit.

1-00:43:40

White:

I think thirteen, because I remember at the bowling alley you had to be thirteen. I worked as a dishwasher too, a long time. Probably thirteen.

1-00:43:49

Griffith:

I think to get an official work permit, you had to be really old. I think you might have even had to be sixteen. We would do all kinds of things to become part of the activity. I took my birth certificate, and I changed the date from March 6, 1929, to March 6, 1928. I went down to where you had to get the work permits at the school place, there, and the lady looked at me and she said, "Why did you change it?" And she wouldn't give it back to me.

1-00:44:26

White:

[laughs]

1-00:44:27

Griffith:

I went back home, and I told my dad. He mentioned my dad, he's kind of a gruff old railroad man. He said, "Wouldn't give it back to ya?" And he stormed off. "Look, you've got my son's birth certificate; I want it. Where is it?"

1-00:44:41

White:

[laughs] I've got to tell you a funny story about his dad. One time, I was trying to sell calendars to businesses, and I couldn't sell anything. I told his dad, he had asked me how I was doing, and I said I hadn't been able to make any sales. He said, "I'll make a sale for you. Come on." So, I followed him along, and we went to a dry cleaning shop just a block away. He knew the owner there, and he goes and sells the poor guy some calendars for the next year. He didn't want to buy calendars, he didn't need calendars, but he wouldn't say no to Tom's dad. That was my first and only sale.

1-00:45:24

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:45:26

Griffith:

I know when I was delivering the *Richmond Independent*, he used to go out and collect for me because I was in the bad part of town, and people wouldn't pay. One time I threw a paper through a window. But, he'd go out and collect for me. He didn't have much problems. One time the funny thing he did, I don't know if D. remembers this. We were going to Roosevelt Junior High. Well, D. used to draw some funny pictures of Roosevelt Junior High. One of them was—well, I'm diverging now—he drew a picture of our school gym. Do you remember that? And you showed the coach, I forget his name, the coach had a whip and had all us kids lined up with chains around our neck. We said, "That's our school gym," and then we put that up on the bulletin board.

1-00:46:13

Dunham:

Oh yeah?

1-00:46:14

Griffith:

But worse than that, what I was starting to allude to, was when Eugene, this other friend of ours who has passed away now, who grew up with us. He sent pictures when he was in the Army overseas with D. But, we decided, we got mad at the school for something, we were always ditching classes. So, we said, "Our school flag," and we put a skull and crossbones. I still got it. It's about this big. We had it so we could run it up on the school flagpole. We were so proud of it, Eugene actually drew it—He was a pretty good drawer—That we said, "Geez, they're not gonna know who did this." And I said, "I know, let's put our initials on it." So, T. G. and E. White. Of course, the dean of boys knew us, Mister—I forget his name now, but he knew us so well because we were always in his office. So, we went down there in the middle of the night chuckling, and Eugene climbed up the flagpole and he hooked it up. Then, he climbed up and he got the rope up real high, so you couldn't bring it down. And we were so happy, we had to tell

somebody. So, we went home to my house and told my folks what we did. And my dad is kind of a portly guy. He was so upset, he went down there and climbed up somehow, I don't know how, he managed to shimmy up the flagpole and take that flag down in the middle of the night.

1-00:47:36

White:

[laughs]

1-00:47:38

Dunham:

I see.

1-00:47:39

Griffith:

So, we never got the recognition we'd hoped for.

1-00:47:43

White:

I think the dean of boys was Reder Claey.

1-00:47:46

Griffith:

Yeah, Claey. Mr. Claey.

1-00:47:48

White:

Yeah.

1-00:47:49

Griffith:

Yeah, that's who it was.

1-00:47:50

Dunham:

So, he was a close contact of the both of you, I take it.

1-00:47:54

Griffith:

We had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun. It was an exciting time to be growing up, and we overdid it, no question. A lot of the kids didn't. As I say, I was kind of the ringleader, in a sense, but these guys gladly came along.

1-00:48:10

Dunham:

Did the schools get really crowded?

1-00:48:12

Griffith:

Very. Yeah, as a matter of fact, because of the—you know when the Roosevelt Junior High burned down, it was a day D. and I were going to our airplane spotters. It was about 4:00 a.m., I guess, and we saw the fire engine and everything. So we followed them on our bikes and went

down to Roosevelt and, “God, our school’s on fire! Great!” Yeah, we were so happy, we were watching that place burn. “Oh boy!” What kid wouldn’t want to have their school burn down.

1-00:48:39

White:

[laughs]

1-00:48:42

Griffith:

So, we were excited about that. But then they had to replace it right away with a temporary. And I guess that temporary stayed there for years.

1-00:48:48

White:

Yeah, well before that, they sent us to the high school. Remember, we had to go to the high school?

1-00:48:52

Griffith:

Because they didn’t have the temporary.

1-00:48:54

White:

We’d have sessions until we got the temporary.

1-00:48:57

Dunham:

Did you go later in the day? How did that work?

1-00:49:00

Griffith:

We all had split shifts.

1-00:49:01

White:

Split shifts, yeah.

1-00:49:02

Griffith:

That might be how we got mixed up because we all went to split shifts. Some shifts were in the morning, some in the afternoon. Maybe, we got different shifts. Our names being far apart, our last names, always was a problem. His, White, and mine, Griffith. I remember when we went in the Army together, and we went to Fort Knox. They would haul us out of trucks, and they were saying, “Okay, everybody from A to so-and-so go with this group, and of course I was G, so I just stayed until they called the Ws, and I went with these guys.

1-00:49:38

White:

[laughs] Tom talking about how different it was during the war and the work situation. When we worked at the post office, I think I was fourteen. I must have been fifteen, I guess, and you worked there before me.

1-00:49:51

Griffith:

Yeah, I worked there for a long time.

1-00:49:53

White:

But anyway, a fifteen-year-old kid, I was required to carry a .45 Colt automatic.

1-00:50:06

Griffith:

A revolver, D.

1-00:50:07

White:

A revolver?

1-00:50:09

Griffith:

Yeah.

1-00:50:10

White:

I'd go out with the mail carrier when he went to pick up mail in the boxes. What was I, a guard?

1-00:50:18

Griffith:

Yeah, you just went along with the .45 on your hip in the holster, so people wouldn't—.

1-00:50:22

White:

Yeah, fifteen years old, and I was guarding the mail carrier.

1-00:50:27

Griffith:

You see, nobody thought anything of guns.

1-00:50:30

White:

And today, can you imagine that being done today?

1-00:50:33

Griffith:

The post office had Army 1917 model .45 Colts. I used to work night shifts, which was—I could write a book about what went on at the post office at night. But, I used to walk the girls home because a lot of them lived near the post office. So, I always put the .45 on, and I was maybe fourteen or fifteen, and I'd walk them home wearing the .45. Nobody ever thought there was anything strange about that.

1-00:50:58

Dunham:

But neither of you ever had to use them?

1-00:50:59

Griffith:

Oh no.

1-00:51:00

White:

We wouldn't know how to.

1-00:51:01

Dunham:

So you'd never practiced with them either?

1-00:51:04

Griffith:

Oh no. You'd just put the .45 on, "It's loaded. Don't worry."

1-00:51:09

Dunham:

So, if one of the girls you'd been escorting—if something had happened, what do you think?

1-00:51:15

Griffith:

She'd have had to shoot the gun.

1-00:51:16

White:

[laughs]

1-00:51:17

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:51:23

White:

After that job, my mother, at that time, was working for the Ford Motor Company. [brief interruption] Of course, Ford, during the war, was building tanks. She did something in the assembly line, or whatever. But, she told me she used to put notes in the tanks when they were finished—good luck, to whoever, and her phone number. One time she actually got a phone call from some Army guy saying that he got her note and thanked her for her message.

1-00:52:06

Griffith:

That's post office. D and I didn't work together at the post office. I worked the night shifts, because I was still making the pretense of going to school a little bit. They even let us work graveyard shifts, if you can imagine fourteen, fifteen years old. But they used to have the postmaster, maybe I won't mention his name, but his daughter was there. We had a mail chute, and one of the things we used to do on the night shift was we'd have sacking contests. We would sack a guy up and throw him down the mail chute in a mail sack. She thought that was really funny, and she was in high heels and silk stockings. She jumped down and went down the mail chute. Everybody talked about that {_____}. It wasn't a big chute, it was just kind of from the main floor down to the basement. All the things that went on in that post office—and then in the

Christmas time, that's when the Army came in, and they used Army trucks to deliver the mail because they didn't have enough post office trucks. Then, they had high school girls and soldiers, so you can imagine what that brought on. I don't know of anything, but I can assume.

1-00:53:17

Dunham:

Yeah. What was dating like for you guys in those days? Or was it all just obsessed with the war?

1-00:53:27

Griffith:

We had girlfriends, or girls we liked a lot of times, but sometimes, the girls didn't know we liked them.

1-00:53:34

White:

[laughs]

1-00:53:36

Griffith:

D was a little more aggressive with the women. I was a little bit of a slow bloomer.

1-00:53:41

White:

I was very fast with the women. I had a girlfriend first year of high school. Her name was Bertha. She was a cute girl. I used to carry her books. She lived in Atchison Village, one of the war housing tracts, one of the nicer ones. I used to carry her books. And anyway, she played in the Salvation Army band on Macdonald Avenue. So, I used to go down there. That was the extent of our dating. I'd go down and listen to her play in the Salvation Army band. And when I went into the Army, while I was overseas in Germany, she sent me a letter. She was getting married to some guy. It wasn't—our relationship wasn't going anywhere anyway. But it was funny—at a high school reunion in '97, I guess, she came down. She lives in Paradise now. She came down to the reunion and sat at our table. So, I got a good visit with her. It was kinda fun.

1-00:54:43

Griffith:

Had she changed much?

1-00:54:44

White:

She's older.

1-00:54:45

Dunham:

[laughs]

1-00:54:52

White:

My first date I ever had was a girl, her name was Pony Smith. Remember her?

1-00:54:56

Griffith:

I remember Pony.

1-00:54:57

White:

I think I was in the fifth or sixth grade. She asked me for a date. So, “Yeah, sure!” She wanted to go to the movies, so we went to the movies. I think we paid our own way. It was a cowboy movie, and she wanted to sit in the front row. So, “Alright, we’ll sit in the front row.” When the action starts, Pony stands up on the chair and starts shooting back at the cowboys. I remember I was so embarrassed. I said, “Who is this girl? She’s crazy.” So, that was it.

1-00:55:34

Griffith:

I had an older brother and sister—half-brother and half-sister—but we were a family. They lived with us and everything. But they used to tease me terribly, especially about girls. I think it really retarded my ability—they had a girlfriend I used to play with. We were little kids, her name was Gretta. Her folks were from Sweden. But she was just a friend I played with, and they used to drive me nuts about Tom you’ve got a girlfriend. I liked the girl, but I thought she was ugly.

1-00:56:04

White:

[laughs]

1-00:56:05

Griffith:

And it used to really embarrass me that they thought she was my girlfriend. Whenever I liked a girl, the girl never usually knew it.

1-00:56:14

White:

You know the girl I really liked in high school was Mavis. I met her through Jim McLaughlin because he knew her. She used to come into Lucky Stores where I was working. Jim introduced me to her, and she lived on Tenth Street.

1-00:56:30

Griffith:

I remember that.

1-00:56:31

White:

She lived in a flat.

1-00:56:32

Griffith:

I remember that place now.

1-00:56:33

White:

Her mother and dad both worked. So, on my way to Lucky's to work, I'd stop by, and we would neck. So, this went on for quite a while, several weeks anyway. One day, I got up enough courage to kiss her. I was like, oh man, that was a big step. That was really exciting.

1-00:56:52

Griffith:

Even in high school, huh.

1-00:56:58

White:

I must have been about fourteen.

1-00:57:00

Griffith:

Because in high school I had gotten over being afraid.

1-00:57:02

White:

I must have been about fourteen, I think. But anyway, I went to school, and I couldn't wait to tell somebody that I kissed a girl. I told this kid, some guy that I had kissed a girl. And he said, "Oh, that's nothing. I've kissed a lot of girls." [laughs]

1-00:57:27

Griffith:

I dated a girl one time, and I was so proud of myself. I think I kissed her too, and I told D about it. So, D went out and dated her, too, just to show he could do it.

1-00:57:36

White:

Oh yeah. [laughs]

1-00:57:38

Dunham:

Was that before high school?

1-00:57:40

Griffith:

Yeah, it was just around that time.

1-00:57:42

Dunham:

Okay. Because you say one you got to high school, you overcame your lack of confidence.

1-00:57:46

Griffith:

Yeah, the short time we spent in high school.

1-00:57:49

Dunham:

Right. So how much time did you spend? You were mostly missing school more than making it anyway?

1-00:57:54

Griffith:

Yeah actually, I just completed the tenth grade. By that time I was fifteen or so, I had my own car, I had a '39—this era you couldn't cars. I had a '39 Chevy which was about—you could get a '41—but a '39 was a very good, because I had worked at the post office. My folks helped me a lot. Since I was the only child because my sister and brother were twelve and thirteen years older than me. By my mother's first marriage. So I had my own car, and I was interested in everything but school. I was interested in going to work at the post office at that time. I was making good money, and I was living at home. So what did I need education? You don't need it all to have an education as far as I was concerned. I made up later by going back to college. There was a real period there when we were—.

1-00:58:50

White:

Looking back, I wonder how our parents ever allowed this. I wouldn't allow my kids to drop out of school and run around.

1-00:58:57

Griffith:

No, again it was hard.

1-00:59:00

White:

That's ridiculous.

1-00:59:01

Dunham:

What do you think, it was more the era? Or do you think it had to do with the war and the boom and everything?

1-00:59:06

White:

I think the war had a lot to do with it.

1-00:59:08

Griffith:

Yeah, education wasn't—well, don't misunderstand. Again, we were unusual in that respect. Most even some of our friends like Bob Marshall, he would have never thought of quitting school.

1-00:59:19

Dunham:

So there weren't a lot of others that dropped out, even—?

1-00:59:21

Griffith:

There were but not the way we're kind of implying. There were quite a few.

1-00:59:27

Dunham:

Did most everyone of the children that came—did they all go to school to begin with or were there some kids who didn't necessarily even go to school?

1-00:59:35

Griffith:

I was not aware that there were kids that didn't go to school or may well have been.

1-00:59:39

Dunham:

And were the schools totally integrated in that you had blacks and all the different ethnicities there? How was that?

1-00:59:46

Griffith:

I don't remember being—we have all of our class pictures. I should have brought them from the start to the beginning. Except by the time you got to high school, they were practically, I don't recall any black kids in any of my classes.

1-01:00:02

White:

I don't remember any black kids through junior high, not until high school.

1-01:00:07

Dunham:

So what year did you guys enter high school? Do you recall?

1-01:00:14

Griffith:

1946?

1-01:00:15

White:

'45?

1-01:00:16

Griffith:

'45 or '46.

1-01:00:18

Dunham:

So there should have already been a number of—?

1-01:00:20

Griffith:

Or '44. Excuse me, we joined the Army in '46, March of '46.

1-01:00:28

White:

Well, in high school, a lot of kids had left school and joined the merchant marine. They were coming back, and this was really exciting. These young kids were—well, they weren't young kids to us, they were experienced servicemen—they were coming back and showing us, talking about their adventures and showing us their seamen's papers and everything. That got us excited. And Eugene and I got the idea that that's what we should do. We ought to join the merchant marine and get into the war while it was still going on.

1-01:01:04

Griffith:

There was so many things going on—

1-01:01:07

Dunham:

I'm gonna have to cut you off. I'm just about to run out of tapes here. I'm gonna need to shift it. Let me just get a shot of this here at the end of the tape

1-01:01:16

White:

Do you want any coffee, Tom?

1-01:01:18

Griffith:

Yeah, half a cup.

1-01:01:21

Dunham:

This is Tom's identification card.

1-01:01:23

Griffith:

Post office.

1-01:01:24

Dunham:

Post office. No finger print on this one.

1-01:01:27

Griffith:

No finger print on that one.

1-01:01:28

Dunham:

And this is a picture of the Richmond post office. Now, is this post office still standing?

1-01:01:32

Griffith:

Oh yeah. It's still, it's not—at that time, it was the main post office. Now, I'm sure it's just a branch.

1-01:01:37

Dunham:

Where is it?

1-01:01:39

Griffith:

It's on Nevin Street right off—between Tenth and Eleventh, I think. Right downtown.

1-01:01:54

Dunham:

Let me get a shot of this here. Air raid warden, a band that Tom's father had, his position.

1-01:02:01

Griffith:

Here's my California State Guard.

1-01:02:07

Dunham:

Did I get another one of this? Did you? Is there more than one of this?

1-01:02:09

Griffith:

Oh you did. I think you may have. It could have had a fingerprint.

1-01:02:14

Dunham:

Alright, end of tape 1 here.

1-01:02:25

Griffith:

I haven't covered hardly anything.

1-01:02:27

All:

[laughs]

[End Audio File White and Griffith1 02-04-03]

[Begin Audio File White and Griffith2 02-04-03]

2-00:00:05

Dunham:

So, we'll pick up back with your joining the merchant marines.

2-00:00:11

White:

All right, well Eugene and I decided we'd join the merchant marine because it sounded very adventurous and would get us into the war. We were only fifteen, but Eugene came up with something that would dissolve ink. And since I had the artistic talent, I was the one that did the forgery. So I forged our birth certificate and made us a year older. Somehow, at that time, with parents' consent you could join the merchant marine at sixteen because there was really a dire need for merchant seamen. Shipping was very critical as the war went on. I don't know how we

got our parents' consent, particularly Eugene, because he had both his mother and father, and his mother was Italian.

2-00:01:11

Griffith:

Forgery maybe.

2-00:01:15

White:

[laughs] Yeah, well, no. Eugene got his parents' consent; I got my mother's consent, somehow. So we joined the merchant marine. The Coast Guard was the authority. They did the training, and they were the ones who accepted you or not. So we joined, and they put us through training school in San Francisco. I remember we were still in training when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Then, shortly after that, the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. That ended the war, and here we were just finishing our merchant marine training. You know, and the war is over. [laughs]

2-00:02:08

Griffith:

What a bummer. [laughs]

2-00:02:10

White:

[laughs] Yeah, this is terrible.

2-00:02:12

Dunham:

Everyone else was celebrating.

2-00:02:16

White:

Anyway, Eugene shipped out on one trip, and I was signed on another ship as a merchant seaman and ended up in China, which was still kind of adventurous and dangerous as well because all the loose Japanese mines in the China Sea. But that was quite a thrilling thing and then come back. The big thing to do was you had a kind of a big wallet that you carried your seaman's papers in on a chain, and then you put the chain on a loop on your pants. This was in your pocket. So everybody knew you were a merchant seaman. So you'd go around to the high school and tell all the guys about your adventures.

2-00:03:06

Dunham:

Were any of the other merchant marines in your outfit injured or killed during the war?

2-00:03:12

White:

No.

2-00:03:13

Dunham:

Tom?

2-00:03:14

Griffith:

I would have liked to join too, but I couldn't get my parents consent, then.

2-00:03:17

White:

No, but anyway, when I came back, I signed on another ship that was going to the Persian Gulf, the victory ship in the San Francisco harbor. A couple days before it was to sail, I got bumped off because I was an able-bodied seaman without papers. I was on waivers. And this was a union job, so if somebody with seniority and Coast Guard papers bumped me. So I was off the ship and out of a job. Tom was about to join the Army because he had turned seventeen. You could join the Army at seventeen.

2-00:03:55

Griffith:

At seventeen at that time.

2-00:03:56

White:

And so Eugene, he was home, and he was without a ship. So somehow, we all decided to join the Army together.

2-00:04:06

Griffith:

Which we did.

2-00:04:06

Dunham:

Did you have to have parental consent?

2-00:04:08

Griffith:

Yeah.

2-00:04:09

Dunham:

So your parents did sign off on the Army.

2-00:04:11

Griffith:

They did very reluctantly.

2-00:04:12

Dunham:

You had to talk them into it?

2-00:04:14

Griffith:

Yeah, oh god, did I. I thought my mother was gonna have a heart attack.

2-00:04:18

Dunham:

So basically, she just didn't want you to go off , didn't want you to go off and maybe die.

2-00:04:23

Griffith:

Right, didn't want me to go in the Army.

2-00:04:25

Dunham:

But your father was resistant too?

2-00:04:26

Griffith:

Oh yeah, he threw more than one little temper tantrum. He could be very vocal. [laughs]

2-00:04:33

Dunham:

Yeah. Well, I wanted to ask you, D. I know you'd written a couple stories about the merchant marines. I was curious about—I thought the first was, I think, kind of was with alcohol? An operation you thought, maybe, you were gonna have a money maker?

2-00:04:52

White:

Oh yeah right. In Honolulu, some of the fellows in the deck gang got the bright idea that we could buy whiskey in Honolulu and sell it to the marines in China. So, we pooled our money; I know four or five of us were in on this enterprise. And the older guys, of course, bought the whiskey. And then we'd smuggle it aboard the ship and hid it, usually under our bunker, wherever. And we had quite a few cases of whiskey. And when we got to China, we discovered that the marines already had ample supplies of whiskey. They could get all they want from the Army, from the PX. So we couldn't sell it, at least not as a profit. We sold some at a loss. But that was a losing proposition.

2-00:05:46

Dunham:

Did you drink a lot of it yourselves or something?

2-00:05:48

White:

On the way home, of course, we picked up a lot of soldiers on Okinawa to bring home. We brought out the whiskey, and so we had a lot of happy soldiers. We had a lot of parties coming home.

2-00:06:05

Griffith:

You know the rationing was quite a problem, really. There were things that we really didn't even think about. Dentyne Gum used to be popular. It came in a red pack. You couldn't buy it anyplace. When D. and I went in the Army, this was in 1946, at the PX we could get all the Dentyne Gum we'd wanted. We loaded our families up with Dentyne Gum because they never had been able to get it for years.

2-00:06:29

White:

Yeah, that's another thing during the war is rationing. We forget all of the items that were rationed. Even shoes weren't they? Even shoes were rationed.

2-00:06:37

Griffith:

Well, I think they were , although I don't remember that.

2-00:06:40

White:

Well, sugar of course.

2-00:06:42

Griffith:

Tires, obviously.

2-00:06:43

White:

Sugar, of course cigarettes. Women couldn't get silk stockings. They would buy a liquid, a tan liquid they'd paint of their legs to give the illusion of silk stockings. Butter—of course that's when margarine first became popular. You'd buy a package of margarine, you'd get little package of yellow coloring. That used to be my job at home to mix up this margarine with yellow powder to make it look like butter. And meat was—.

2-00:07:26

Griffith:

Oh, meat was a big item.

2-00:07:27

White:

Meat was a big item that was rationed. I remember one time, my mother sent me to the meat market to get hamburger. And as a joke, I bought horsemeat. They actually sold horsemeat, and I bought horsemeat. I don't think I told anybody what it was. What else was rationed, Tom?

2-00:07:49

Griffith:

Oh, sugar. Sugar was a big item. Coffee.

2-00:07:52

White:

Oh, gas.

2-00:07:54

Griffith:

We were fortunate in our family, my dad was a conductor in the Santa Fe streamliner between Richmond and Bakersfield, and they almost always carried troop trains. There was just one troop train after another, and there wasn't any rationing on the troop trains. So, he would go in the dining car when the train got back to Richmond, and he would load up with ham sandwiches. Ham was impossible to get. He'd bring these big ham sandwich home, and boy, we'd make a dinner of it. It was such a treat to be able to have a ham sandwich. I remember that.

2-00:08:26

Dunham:

Was there much of a black market for these goods, given that that there were certain ways to access—?

2-00:08:29

White:

There may have been.

2-00:08:31

Griffith:

There may have been more knowledgeable at our age.

2-00:08:34

White:

I don't think our folks were either. I don't remember them ever buying anything on the black market.

2-00:08:38

Dunham:

So your father had access, but he just got enough for your family.

2-00:08:41

Griffith:

Yeah, he was the conductor, the head of the train. So he could go back to the dining car and told one of the cooks, "Hey fix me a couple ham sandwiches," and they would do it. But the trains were all troop trains, and they always carried military police on the trains. They did this for a long time, even after the war. And they used to have some real problems on the train, and my dad used to have to go through the train and find out if there was an officer on the train. He'd find the highest ranking officer he could, and so he asked the officer if we have any trouble, could you come through. We used to have to have them do that once in a while because the guys would get—usually, they were going overseas, so they'd get pretty riotous about it sometime. Good-naturedly, but it could be a problem.

2-00:09:28

Dunham:

They'd be drinking and such, I assume.

2-00:09:29

Griffith:

Drinking, yeah. They weren't supposed to drink on the train, but they'd smuggle liquor on.

2-00:09:35

Dunham:

What about you guys and drinking, while you were school-aged? Did you get involved?

2-00:09:41

Griffith:

We were fairly early starters. Me being, looking two or three years older than I was, I could go into a bar, and I'd hardly ever be asked. Funny that we used to go out and get a bottle, we'd buy

a bottle of bourbon or something. We used to like to go over to San Francisco. We'd go over to the—what was the name of the international settlement over there? We'd go to the bars and—.

2-00:10:10

White:

We were older then, weren't we?

2-00:10:12

Griffith:

Well, that was when you got out of the Army, yeah.

2-00:10:19

Dunham:

What was that like, anyway, at the international settlement?

2-00:10:22

Griffith:

It was a pretty wild place.

2-00:10:24

Dunham:

Where was that?

2-00:10:25

Griffith:

In San Francisco.

2-00:10:27

Dunham:

Where in San Francisco?

00:10:28

Griffith:

They had a big sign. It was in North Beach. It had a big sign "International Settlement," I think.

00:10:33

White:

Isn't that where Broadway is now?

00:10:35

Griffith:

Yeah, Broadway is now.

2-00:10:36

Dunham:

And was it literally that? Was it for immigrant residents?

2-00:10:41

Griffith:

Just bars on both sides of the street.

2-00:10:42

Dunham:

Okay.

2-00:10:44

Griffith:

Well, I guess they still have that. People outside trying to get to the building. We used to like to go over there and see the floor shows.

2-00:10:54

White:

Yeah, we were older.

2-00:10:55

Griffith:

We were older, yeah, that's true.

2-00:10:58

Dunham:

Were the floor shows, is that like strip clubs? Did they have those then?

2-00:11:01

Griffith:

Yeah, more or less.

2-00:11:03

Dunham:

What were those like, then?

2-00:11:05

Griffith:

They're about like they are now.

2-00:11:06

Dunham:

Okay.

2-00:11:07

Griffith:

They haven't been able to improve on those too much.

2-00:11:09

Dunham:

[laughs]

2-00:11:11

Griffith:

I don't remember.

2-00:11:12

Dunham:

But before hand, when you were still in school or not in school?

2-00:11:16

White:

We used to experiment a little bit with drinking.

2-00:11:20

Griffith:

Well, what we'd do is—we had cars fairly early. We'd usually get a bottle, and we'd frequently go out in the car and sit and have some drinks. We'd cruise the drag which was a big thing in Richmond. We weren't drunk doing that, but we had our cars and were able to do that.

2-00:11:39

White:

Go hang out at the drive-in, Gordon's Drive-In.

2-00:11:41

Griffith:

Gordon's Drive-In, yeah.

2-00:11:44

Dunham:

And did you have—did girls go with you, too?

2-00:11:46

Griffith:

Usually, the guys were in the one car, and the girls were in the other car. Although, sometimes they'd get together, and sometimes they wouldn't. [laughs] We were always down Macdonald Avenue, left on 23rd Street down to Gordon's Drive-In. Go in the drive-in, have coffee, finish your coffee, get back in the car, go down 23rd Street to McDonald Avenue, right turn all the way down into McDonald, turn around back and forth all night long like this.

2-00:12:16

Dunham:

Yeah, well how many nights could you do that with the gas rationing? Did you have any other way of—?

2-00:12:21

Griffith:

Well, you know, that's really in—this was in '46, '47.

2-00:12:24

Dunham:

Okay so this was after the rationing.

2-00:12:28

White:

An interesting sideline on gas rationing, a trick was, for some people to get more gas for their car, was to buy a lawnmower and get registration for the lawnmower. And with that, they can get a ration book for the lawn mower, so they'd get a few extra gallons. Or not only a lawn mower, anything else that would need gas.

2-00:12:53

Dunham:

I see. So a lot of people did that?

2-00:12:54

White:

Yeah, they could go and buy a lawn mower at the junkyard. It didn't have to work; they just wanted the registration number.

2-00:13:02

Dunham:

Were there any ways around other kinds of rationing that you knew of?

2-00:13:06

Griffith:

No. Steal ration stamps. [laughs]

2-00:13:10

Dunham:

How would that happen?

2-00:13:12

Griffith:

Maybe from your parents or something.

2-00:13:15

Dunham:

Did you guys ever do that?

2-00:13:16

Griffith:

They had gas ration stamps the A stamps, the B stamps, and the C stamps.

2-00:13:19

White:

You know, during the war, not a lot of people had cars, owned cars.

2-00:13:26

Griffith:

Of course, if they had cars, they didn't have tires for them.

2-00:13:29

White:

Yeah, and if they had tires, they didn't have gas. So, there was a lot of carpooling. All the defense industries, people would carpool to get to work. I know about public transportation, they must have had some buses going around.

2-00:13:42

Dunham:

You know the Key System? How was that? What do you remember about the key?

2-00:13:45

Griffith:

Yeah, that was the tracks. They had those down Macdonald Avenue. Those got torn out, I think, before the war.

2-00:13:52

Dunham:

Oh yeah?

2-00:13:53

Griffith:

I think so.

2-00:13:56

Dunham:

I thought that sometimes people used them to get down to the shipyards. I've heard they were exceptionally slow, but—.

2-00:14:00

White:

I don't remember them going out to the shipyards.

2-00:14:01

Griffith:

I don't remember. I vaguely remember. We had buses, of course.

2-00:14:07

White:

I'm sure they must have had some kind of shuttle buses going down to the shipyard.

2-00:14:11

Griffith:

Yeah, Macdonald Avenue, there's no tracks there on Macdonald Avenue.

2-00:14:15

Dunham:

And that's just, so it ran right down here before Macdonald.

2-00:14:18

Griffith:

Yeah, I called them, even before D. came to Richmond, they had them, but I think they tore them out.

2-00:14:26

White:

I don't remember them being there when I moved to Richmond.

2-00:14:33

Griffith:

One thing we used to do is every time there was anything, again, related to the war, I was always on top of it. One time there was an article in the *Richmond Independent* about how car terminal number five in Richmond, they had brought back a bunch of wrecked airplanes from the Pacific

for the scrap drive. We were always having scrap drives, paper drives, and things. So this friend of mine, I don't think it was D., I think it was Bob, went on our bicycles. We had to go see that. We went out on a Sunday, and of course, you couldn't get in there. We were looking, they had parts of Japanese Zeros and P-17s and just really fascinating, things that we'd been reading about that I'd never really seen. We were just, literally, fascinated. So I said, why don't we go around to the gate where the guard is and where the train goes through? So, we went down to the guard gate, and there was a real old fellow. I'll never forget that. We asked if we could just go in and look around for a little while. He said, "Well, alright. You kids go ahead; go and look around." We got a little carried away and started coming in, looking at parts of Japanese Zeros and everything, and I had to get a piece of metal. So about that time, here comes a couple of the officials of the { } terminal who were apparently showing their friends through. They caught us, and they said, "How did you kids get in there?" I said, "Well, the guard let us in." They said, "You get out of here, and put those parts down." I'll never forget that. They walked us back, and the guard looked at us. He said, "You young scamps." And they kicked us out of course. Later, I felt bad about that guard.

2-00:16:10

White:

I ought to show that copy of that letter we got from *Life* magazine.

2-00:16:12

Griffith:

Oh yeah.

2-00:16:14

Dunham:

What's that?

2-00:16:15

White:

I have a copy. Tom has the original.

2-00:16:21

Griffith:

I was an avid *Life* magazine collector, and I still am. I have every *Life* magazine from the first one through 1945, stacks of *Life* magazines. But there was an article about 1942 about Guadalcanal, and they showed a horrible picture of a tank with a Japanese skull on it. They got a lot of negative, people writing in about it. We thought there was nothing wrong with it. So, we wrote this letter to *Life* magazine—is it the letter we wrote, or is this the letter coming back?

2-00:16:57

White:

This is the letter coming back. I don't know. Do you have a copy of the letter we wrote?

2-00:17:00

Griffith:

I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think we kept a copy.

2-00:17:07

White:

Of course they didn't know that we were still punk kids. [laughs]

2-00:17:11

Griffith:

[laughs]

2-00:17:14

Dunham:

So it was controversial, though, the {_____}.

2-00:17:16

Griffith:

Very, oh, negative reporting. That was terrible Americans that do this kind of thing. This was something, we shouldn't become like the Japs.

2-00:17:25

Dunham:

How exactly did you feel about it?

2-00:17:28

Griffith:

Oh, we were twelve or thirteen. We thought that was great. That was a neat picture, and again, people looked at things differently.

2-00:17:40

Dunham:

Do you still—how do you feel about war, in general, now?

2-00:17:43

Griffith:

Well, we wish there were no such thing as war.

2-00:17:46

Dunham:

Yeah.

2-00:17:48

Griffith:

You know, this was in the mind's eye of a fourteen—.

2-00:17:51

Dunham:

Oh sure, yeah, I'm just curious.

2-00:17:53

Griffith:

And a time when it was, there hadn't been any wars since World War I. So we had nothing, no reference. Another thing was interesting is during the war, the Navy took over the race track. Where is it, El Cerrito?

2-00:18:12

White:

Albany.

2-00:18:12

Griffith:

Albany race track. They took it over for storage for landing barges. They also brought back a lot of landing barges, and another guy, this contractor, he contracted to bring back wrecks for salvage. We used to go out there, and we'd go out and dig through the wrecks. Water would still be in the bottom, and we could dig through the bottom of some and find bullets and pieces of shrapnel. We used to go out there and do that. And then right across the street from that was the Army's salvage depot. They brought in, again, stuff from World War II, I remember stacks of helmets and airplane—. We used to go over there, and I found a long pole and was able to get over the fence, and I picked up one of the helmets, and got that over the fence. But the worst thing and what put an end to it, they had a German Focke-Wulf 190 fighter plane on tour for people to go look at. And after the tour was over, they put it out there in the salvage yard to be scrapped. Even at that age, I just thought that was terrible. That thing is—that ought to be saved. We were down at one side of the fence so we tried to dig under it. I said I wanted to go get a part of it, a piece off of it. So they had a high barbed wire fence, and I don't know, I think I dug under it, finally. D doesn't remember it too well, there were about three of us. I got under the fence, and I just got up to the Focke-Wulf 190 and they had a tarp pulled on it. I was under the tarp looking for something that I could take off it, and it was a beautiful airplane, a German fighter. And all of a sudden, an Army command guard comes screaming out from the headquarters, but they didn't see me. They headed for the fence with D. and the other guys, and they took off running. I'll never forget that MP jumped out with a big long club, and he was running around the fence. I was on the wrong side of the fence, and I don't know how I ever did it. But it took me about fifteen minutes to get under that fence. But I was out and over that fence in about two seconds. Then, but they caught us. They cut these guys off, and that's when I went and hid behind a boxcar. D. comes walking back with the MP, and he said, "Tom, you know you was hiding; they know who you are." [laughs]

2-00:20:30

White:

[laughs]

2-00:20:35

Griffith:

So they took us in, and they gave us a very stern—asked us how old we were. We were fourteen and fifteen. They said, "You know, you guys are almost old enough to be in the Army. You shouldn't be doing this kind of stuff. Don't ever come back here." So we were really happy to get away.

2-00:20:47

Dunham:

And did that discourage your further explorations?

2-00:20:49

Griffith:

Very much at that place.

2-00:20:52

Dunham:

At that place, but elsewhere? Did you have any other times when you got caught or other brushes with the law, per se?

2-00:20:58

Griffith:

Another thing about the Bay Area there during World War II was all the military activity. The Army took over the high school out at Point Richmond. I guess it was a high school; it might have been a junior high school. It was right there before you go through the tunnel. The Army was there, and they used to go out to the rifle range, which was on the other side of the tunnel, and practice shooting machine guns. We used to go out and watch them. And one of the machine guns they shot, where the biggest one was the fifty-caliber. And what we would do and watch them, they wouldn't give us any shells as souvenirs, but they couldn't recover the bullets. So after they left, we would go up along where they were shooting and dig up fifty caliber bullets. We had tons of those for a little while. So that was another thing we did.

2-00:21:48

White:

[laughs] We entertained ourselves.

2-00:21:50

Griffith:

Yeah, we did.

2-00:21:51

Dunham:

Were you guys very interested in the shipyard activity? Were you able to go down there much?

2-00:21:56

Griffith:

The shipyard, no. It wasn't as easy to get into the shipyard work. Mostly, it was older people, relatively older.

2-00:22:08

White:

Well like I said though, I got a job with Ford Motor Company. In fact, my mother worked there, and they were hiring high school kids there towards the end of the war. And so I got a job there. I was making ninety-some-odd cents an hour, which was pretty good money in those days. They put me with a group of two other teenage kids, and our job was to uncrate and inspect World War I machine guns. They were all in grease. Imagine this. This is 1945, World War I machine guns, which were completely useless. And so our job was, we'd uncrate them, clean all the grease off, make sure they worked, worked the mechanism, and if they worked alright, we'd grease them again and repack them. [laughs] It was the most boring job you can imagine. So I did that; I guess I did that until I went to the merchant marine.

2-00:23:04

Griffith:

A lot of people, housewives, of course, went to work. A lot of them to the shipyards. My mother worked out where D. was at Ford Motors; she worked at the cafeteria. So everybody that could work did work for the war effort, and also the pay was good.

2-00:23:23

Dunham:

Did that affect much girls you were in school with at all? Was that kind of notion of more women working and all, was that—?

2-00:23:31

Griffith:

It was acceptable. We always assumed they would go back to their housewife jobs. As a matter of fact, that was the knowledge in the mailrooms and places like that. They would have women and girls working, and they always assumed that they would only be there until the war was over. They'd go back, and they would hire men for those jobs.

2-00:23:53

White:

You know an interesting fact, when we were at the Rosie the Riveter Museum on that tour out there, one of the posters out there said that a majority of the defense workers were women. I think sixty-some-odd percent were women. I thought that was a startling fact.

2-00:24:16

Dunham:

I don't recall that figure, so I'm surprised at that. I'd be curious to check on that.

2-00:24:24

White:

So a majority of the defense workers were women. I didn't know that.

2-00:24:31

Dunham:

And did your mom continue at the Ford plant after the war ended, D.? Do you recall?

2-00:24:38

White:

I think she continued until they—.

2-00:24:45

Griffith:

They turned back the civilian production. They were making tanks.

2-00:24:49

White:

I don't know how long she worked there after the war.

2-00:24:53

Dunham:

Do you remember what work she did, what she did after that? She was a single mother?

2-00:25:04

White:

Yeah. I think at one point she went back to waitressing at one point. I don't remember just when.

2-00:25:14

Dunham:

Do you remember if that was a specific issue? You don't remember if it was hard, like if she was forced out of her job or anything?

2-00:25:22

Griffith:

I don't think that came up that way. It was just naturally assumed that when they converted back to civilian production that the ladies would go back to doing what they were doing.

2-00:25:32

White:

Well, I think there was a long period of time there—.

2-00:25:35

Griffith:

Or they went back to more women-oriented jobs like waitresses or secretaries.

2-00:25:39

Dunham:

Right, that's what I mean. I am particularly, maybe I guess I'm raising because as a single mother if in D.'s case, maybe, sort of that if it was more of an issue then because if people had to go to lesser paying jobs or different types of jobs.

2-00:25:53

White:

I don't remember it being an issue. It seems like when the war ended, people just left the defense industries. The shipyards closed down.

2-00:26:01

Griffith:

Shipyards just closed. There was no work, so they left.

2-00:26:05

White:

And Ford, I imagine, there must have been a period of time that they didn't need all the workers until they had to retool or whatever they had to do. They probably laid almost everybody off at that time.

2-00:26:15

Griffith:

You know there's a lot of talk now about, especially about women and how they were given a chance, and then they lost it. But that certainly wasn't, if they were thinking that, that certainly wasn't the topic of the time. It was just assumed that that's what they would do, and everybody assumed it and so did they. Now, you hear of, I think, after-thought kind of discussions about oh yeah, well we had these rights, and we proved we could do the same work men could do and

they took it away from us. I don't think there was that strong feeling. Never {inaudible} in our families.

2-00:26:53

White:

You're saying there is no women's liberal organization at that time?

2-00:26:57

Griffith:

Exactly. [laughs]

2-00:26:58

White:

Yeah. That's true, there wasn't.

2-00:27:00

Dunham:

And so, as I kind of said before, girls your age, it wasn't symbolic of anything to them, then?

2-00:27:07

Griffith:

No. Girls our age weren't working.

2-00:27:10

Dunham:

Right, and you don't think then that it changed their ambitions or their ideas about what they could or couldn't do?

2-00:27:16

Griffith:

No, not at that time. That came later, I think. Much later.

2-00:27:22

White:

But I do remember, though, that girls our age, after the war, there were not a lot of opportunities for girls in the workforce. They could be—and my wife reminds me of this all the time—you could be a secretary, a nurse, or a schoolteacher. Those were the three avenues open to women. There was not much opportunity to be a leader in business or a professional person.

2-00:27:54

Dunham:

So it sounds like she has some resentment around that. Was she aware of that? Did she say that at the time? Or is this more looking back?

2-00:28:01

White:

Well, at the time, it was taken for granted. They didn't think much about it. She says that when we talk about it now. She'll bring that up. We didn't have opportunities, we weren't encouraged—they weren't encouraged by their parents. Parents at that time who had girls, they weren't encouraged to seek a professional career for the most part or to get into business. Times

change. Like, our parents, I don't know about your parents, I know my family, my mother, they never encouraged me to go to college or to get an education.

2-00:28:46

Griffith:

No, no, no.

2-00:28:47

White:

I wasn't pushed into anything.

2-00:28:49

Griffith:

Because we came from a blue collar background in Richmond. My dad was a railroad man. My mother got into real estate; she was quite active in real estate in Richmond for quite a while.

2-00:28:59

Dunham:

So she's the one who more managed that part of the business of managing the Richmond Arms and such?

2-00:29:04

Griffith:

Yeah, well, she kind of ran the family. Dad came home and gave her his paycheck.

2-00:29:10

Dunham:

And he'd travel. He would be—?

2-00:29:13

Griffith:

Yeah, so she really ran the family.

2-00:29:16

Dunham:

And did they own the property, or they managed the property?

2-00:29:19

Griffith:

No, they managed. A lot of people thought they did own it, and my dad didn't discourage people from thinking that. But they actually belonged to a Russian man Mr. {Guberoff}, a giant old fellow about six-foot eight. He lived over in Berkeley.

2-00:29:33

White:

I remember you telling me about him.

2-00:29:34

Griffith:

Yeah, he was a captain in the Czar's Army. So they pretty much—he never came over. He was never there. So people just assumed that they, I think a lot of people assumed. But that was quite

a place. It really was a mecca for people could get in there. They hired a lot of railroad people, too. And we met a lot of friends, people there that we still know today from those days.

2-00:30:06

White:

It used to have quite a waiting list.

2-00:30:07

Griffith:

Oh yeah.

2-00:30:09

Dunham:

How many units were there?

2-00:30:10

Griffith:

Eighteen. It was three-story. It was kind of Spanish style. They tore it down and made a parking lot there.

2-00:30:23

Dunham:

And how long did you live there?

2-00:30:24

Griffith:

Oh gosh. At least from 1942 through 1945. And then after the war when I came back home, on occasion, and they lived there until just prior to being torn down, which I don't remember when, I think that was in the fifties.

2-00:30:42

Dunham:

Do you guys recall, with all the growth and everything, were there any particular health issues that came up?

2-00:30:48

Griffith:

No. Not that I'm aware of.

2-00:30:51

Dunham:

What kind of doctor—did you guys see doctors regularly?

2-00:30:55

White:

That's interesting. That's an interesting point because my wife and I have talked about this. No. We never had a doctor.

2-00:31:03

Griffith:

We did.

2-00:31:04

White:

We never had a dentist. I never. I never went to a dentist until I went to the Army. I never went to a doctor.

2-00:31:10

Griffith:

I'm surprised Rosie's family didn't. We always got a doctor.

2-00:31:14

White:

Oh, her family did.

2-00:31:19

Griffith:

I can almost remember their names, but when I was growing up, I think we maybe had two different. But we always had a family doctor. It wasn't impossible for the doctor to come to your house.

2-00:31:29

White:

But there's no health insurance in those days. We didn't have—

2-00:31:32

Griffith:

But I was born in a house. I don't know the circumstances, rather than in a hospital. Maybe we couldn't get to the hospital.

2-00:31:41

Dunham:

Do you remember when the Kaiser hospital and all were created?

2-00:31:46

Griffith:

Oh yeah, during the war. I can envision; I can see it now down in the south part of town.

2-00:31:55

White:

Yeah, I guess that was the first health insurance system.

2-00:31:58

Griffith:

It probably was, yeah.

2-00:32:05

Dunham:

But there weren't any particular concerns in the schools that you recall with?

2-00:32:07

Griffith:

We used to get shots once in a while, but—

2-00:32:09

White:

Yeah, I kind of remember that, vaguely remember getting shots. Yeah, vaccinations.

2-00:32:13

Griffith:

We used to get milk; I always liked that.

2-00:32:19

White:

For free?

2-00:32:20

Griffith:

Yeah.

2-00:32:21

White:

Did we?

2-00:32:22

Griffith:

Yeah. I think it was once a week or something, get carton of milk.

2-00:32:26

Dunham:

You mentioned something about, in addition, you each managed to get cars both before you had licenses.

2-00:32:32

White:

I did. [laughs]

2-00:32:34

Griffith:

I got my first car when I was fifteen, as I said.

2-00:32:37

Dunham:

Did you have a license or was it sixteen, then, still?

2-00:32:40

Griffith:

I'm not sure; I don't remember.

2-00:32:43

White:

I know I did. I didn't even know how to drive when I got my first car.

2-00:32:46

Dunham:

So how did that happen?

2-00:32:49

White:

Jim McLaughlin, our friend, was selling—he had a '31 Model A Coupe. He sold it to me for \$150. He gave me about five minutes of instructions. He said the gears you do this, you do that. This is the clutch and the gas, and I drove it home, somehow.

2-00:33:09

Griffith:

Our friend Eugene had a Model A with no top, convertible. He used to ride around in that thing.

2-00:33:16

White:

Yeah, he had a lawnmower where he got extra gas for that.

2-00:33:22

Griffith:

Oh that's where the lawnmower—okay.

2-00:33:24

White:

Well, yeah, but a lot of people did that.

2-00:33:27

Griffith:

But I know he didn't have a license. I don't remember when I got my license. I still got it; I think I was fifteen.

2-00:33:34

Dunham:

So did you ever get pulled over or anything?

2-00:33:39

Griffith:

We had some excursions there.

2-00:33:41

White:

I don't remember ever getting stopped.

2-00:33:42

Griffith:

D. had a few bad accidents. Not life threatening, but so did I. I was a terrible driver.

2-00:33:49

Dunham:

I've read, just again looking through the papers, it seems like, maybe because I don't read the daily papers so much, but it seems like there were an awful lot of automobile accidents.

2-00:33:58

Griffith:

There were.

2-00:33:59

Dunham:

Do you guys remember much of that, then?

2-00:34:00

Griffith:

I remember our own.

2-00:34:02

Dunham:

Were there any injuries in those?

2-00:34:04

Griffith:

No, there should have been—well, Eugene, our good friend who is one of the three of us, actually; they were out driving, and he and Whitey drove out through the tunnel and lost control of the car. It was in Richmond, a big picture in the *Richmond Independent*, went off the embankment, down by the side of a railroad boxcar. It looked like nobody could survive that car, but they all did.

2-00:34:33

White:

Whitey ended up nine months in the hospital.

2-00:34:38

Griffith:

Was he?

2-00:34:38

White:

Yeah, at Oak Knoll Hospital.

2-00:34:40

Dunham:

From that accident?

2-00:34:41

White:

Yeah, I think he had a broken back or something.

2-00:34:43

Griffith:

Oh really? I didn't know what—.

2-00:34:44

White:

He had several injuries. Eugene was not seriously injured.

2-00:34:48

Griffith:

When I was fifteen, I had my car. I was driving for the post office, officially for the post office, delivering special delivery letters at fifteen. My brother worked for the post office, too, doing

that as a part-time job. He worked for Standard Oil. He went up on the canal project, when they were building the Alcan Highway. He worked up there for a year.

2-00:35:16

White:

You know I had forgotten all about that, and Catherine told me about their year in Alaska. She said she hated it.

2-00:35:21

Griffith:

Yeah. But the post office had an old Model A. And I used to drive that thing up Barrett Avenue, and the breaks were bad. You wouldn't think of the post office doing things like that. I remember coming down Barrett Avenue one time, and the breaks weren't working worth a darn. I never thought I'd get that thing stopped. I finally did before I got to the main street. But that's all they could get. They had to use what they could get.

2-00:35:51

Dunham:

So what was—you were talking about a jeep or something?

2-00:35:54

Griffith:

Oh yeah. I got, not the first by any means, but right after World War II when they started releasing the jeeps, I got it not from the Army but from a guy who got it from the Army. I think it was 1944, '45, something like that. I was sixteen, I guess, sixteen maybe by then. But we used to take trips in that. We used to drive it out. It didn't have a top. But it was a nice jeep, and they were very rare then. We attracted a lot of attention. Most people hadn't had a chance to ride in them, so we used to take girls for a ride once in a while. We got in the jeep one time on Halloween, I think you were there, I had a top on by that time. We were throwing tomatoes at cars, and they were throwing tomatoes at us. We got caught, and we had to stop the jeep. The girls were sticking their heads out of the back of the jeep, and the car pulled behind them and let them have it with tomatoes. I'll never forget that; tomatoes all over the jeep.

2-00:36:54

White:

[laughs]

2-00:36:56

Griffith:

[laughs]

2-00:36:57

Dunham:

So when you say you were caught, you were caught by police?

2-00:37:00

Griffith:

No, by other tomato throwers.

2-00:37:01

Dunham:

Oh okay, I see.

2-00:37:03

Griffith:

What we did, though, we took up one time to the—I guess they still have that motorcycle race out there in Point Richmond right next to the rifle range. And it was really steep; it was for motorcyclists. Of course, we'd been told jeeps could do anything. So we stuck it in four-wheel drive and went up that motorcycle climb. I thought we'd never get down. Some of things were so steep that the front wheels and the back wheels didn't have enough {clinger}. So once I had to stop. We finally got it over that. We used to drive that thing everywhere. We always caused attention when we did. We drove clear to Lake Tahoe one time.

2-00:37:45

Dunham:

Oh yeah?

2-00:37:46

White:

Big adventure in those days as a kid was to go over to San Francisco. We'd take the street car over there and go all the way out to the beach, go out to Sutro Baths and go swimming. I can still remember it. In fact, my daughter and I had lunch at the Cliffhouse about three weeks ago, I guess. There's a big picture at the Cliffhouse of the Sutro Baths. It's like showing your—I used to go swimming here when I was a kid. You see them just fascinated with that big sea, that big swimming pool. It was an all-day excursion to go into San Francisco.

2-00:38:31

Dunham:

And that was driving then?

2-00:38:33

White:

No, we'd take street car.

2-00:38:36

Griffith:

Yeah, the train just went across the bridge.

2-00:38:40

White:

We'd take a bus. We'd take a bus, I think, to Oakland or someplace or Berkeley where we picked up the streetcar. Was it Berkeley? It seems to me it is Berkeley, around University someplace. They had a big yard there, and we'd take the bus there. Then, we'd get on a streetcar. That would take us over the bridge to San Francisco.

2-00:39:06

Griffith:

Oh, the other thing that I remember vividly were the World Fairs, 1939 and 1940. Again, a first, that was the first time my mother or Bob Marshall and I went to the World Fair by ourselves in 1940. We went all by ourselves, and the way they dressed kids in those days, we both had

businessmen's hats on and little sweaters. Really dapper looking. We got our picture taken over there walking on the fairgrounds. We used to go to the World's Fair quite a bit. We rode across the bridge, the Bay Bridge, the first day it opened. My folks always told me I christened the bridge because it was the traffic, and I had to go to the bathroom. The cars were stopped, and dad said, "Okay, open the door."

2-00:39:51

White:

[laughs] I never heard that.

2-00:39:59

Dunham:

You mentioned in your writings about carnivals as being something else.

2-00:40:03

White:

Oh the carnivals. Oh yeah.

2-00:40:05

Dunham:

What were those like?

2-00:40:06

White:

You know I made a mistake, and Jim brought this to my attention that I wrote that the carnivals were at Nichol Park. I was wrong; they weren't at Nichol Park. They were at another area about—.

2-00:40:19

Griffith:

Near there.

2-00:40:20

White:

Near there, but just west of Nichol Park. They had a big open field where the carnivals, so my memory was faulty there. But yeah, this was really something. I mean when the carnival came, everybody went to the carnival. They did a land office business.

2-00:40:39

Dunham:

Did they start before the war or were they—?

2-00:40:42

Griffith:

During the war.

2-00:40:44

White:

During the war, mostly. I don't remember any before the war. But during the war, it seemed like the carnival came to town several times a year. It was very popular.

2-00:40:57

Dunham:

Yeah. And that was, again, everyone came? Did it include blacks from North Richmond and all the different ethnicities, or was it more prominently white?

2-00:41:06

Griffith:

More prominently whites, yeah, I think so.

2-00:41:12

White:

But that's pretty exciting stuff, though, the carnival.

2-00:41:14

Griffith:

Yeah we used to love to go after the carnival left because they had all this sawdust, and we'd go looking for coins and find quarters and nickels and dimes.

2-00:41:22

White:

[laughs] Isn't that funny? I can't stand those carnivals now.

2-00:41:30

Griffith:

We were always looking for ways to make money. One time, D. decided he would shine shoes on Macdonald Avenue.

2-00:41:40

White:

Oh yeah. [laughs]

2-00:41:41

Griffith:

He developed a shoeshine kit.

2-00:41:44

White:

Yeah, I think I made it. And I bought some polish and everything. Somebody we knew was making money from servicemen. He was charging ten cents. So I outfitted myself with a shoeshine kit and tried to shine shoes. That wasn't very successful. I never had a successful business.

2-00:42:06

Griffith:

You were always under-qualified as I said.

2-00:42:08

White:

Remember, I tried to sell *Liberty* magazines.

2-00:42:11

Griffith:

Yeah, we all tried that. *Collier* magazine—go around these little bags over your shoulders. Nickel—.

2-00:42:16

White:

I set up a stand on Nevin Avenue and displayed *Liberty* magazines for five cents. I'd sit there for hours. I don't think I ever sold one.

2-00:42:26

Griffith:

[laughs]

2-00:42:28

Dunham:

So you guys tried a lot of stuff. Was there informal gambling, or did you know of other kinds of gambling that went on, too?

2-00:42:34

White:

Matching pennies was the big thing.

2-00:42:36

Griffith:

That was for the other school kids, matching pennies.

2-00:42:38

White:

Matching pennies.

2-00:42:39

Griffith:

D. was good at that. I never got into that too much.

2-00:42:41

Dunham:

How did that work?

2-00:42:44

White:

Well, a bunch of us, a group, would get together at lunchtime or recess, and we'd just match pennies. Match pennies—if I have a head, you have a head, I win.

2-00:42:55

Griffith:

Then, you tossed the pennies, too.

2-00:42:57

White:

That was another game. If you toss them towards a wall, the closest to the wall would get the pennies.

2-00:43:04

Griffith:

They had a lot of those penny games going on during school.

2-00:43:09

Dunham:

Yeah.

2-00:43:10

Griffith:

You'd get on another subject, but when my dad was a conductor on the Santa Fe, as I've mentioned several times, he was also on the freight trains. We used to live at 523 Chancellor Avenue, which was right next to where the Santa Fe tracks went. And we knew when his train would be coming; he would tell us. There was no communication; of course, we had no phones. I'd go out there and wait for the train, and he always managed to find something to throw—he'd be in the caboose. And he always managed to find something to throw off to me. Either it'd be magazines or something he thought I might like. That was a big deal; I used to wait for that train. I can still see him back there waving as the old caboose went by. Now, that's an interesting thing, too. There's so many places in Richmond that I feel kind of bad about it in that we can't go anymore because it's not safe. We lived at 223 Chancellor, and then we lived at 523 Chancellor. 223 Chancellor is still there. I made the mistake of, oh about twenty years ago or thirty years ago, maybe driving down there, and I was very uncomfortable. I was being stared at. I like to go back to places, but we're deprived of that chance to do that now because of the situation as they now exist.

2-00:44:29

White:

As you know of probably the old library; I saw the picture of the old library. That's now the Richmond Museum.

2-00:44:36

Griffith:

Yeah, I knew that. Yeah. This is a picture of when it was first built.

2-00:44:41

Dunham:

When was that?

2-00:44:45

Griffith:

Right there on the back, it's a postcard.

2-00:44:46

White:

That's 1911.

2-00:44:48

Griffith:

When I say first built, I'm assuming, but the postcard was dated 1911. Looking at the building, it doesn't even look like it had been landscaped yet.

2-00:44:58

White:

I lived just two blocks from that library. I spent a lot of time in that library. I want to get back to, get over there sometime and go to that museum again. It was very interesting.

2-00:45:08

Griffith:

Yeah, I've never been there.

2-00:45:11

White:

Haven't you? You should do that.

2-00:45:22

Dunham:

We were talking before, kind of with both the influx of all the folks and a lot of single men, in particular, coming, I guess. Were you aware—I know you were younger—of the dating practice or sexual moray of the time?

2-00:45:39

Griffith:

Well I know that—D. can vouch for this more than I can—is the drill of the younger girls were very interested in going out. We had a lot of sailors.

2-00:45:46

White:

With serviceman, yeah.

2-00:45:47

Griffith:

Yeah, girls, that was the big deal. You may have seen these pictures; these aren't especially good. There's some of the housing projects.

2-00:45:56

White:

Yeah, if you were a serviceman at that time, you attracted the ladies.

2-00:46:03

Griffith:

And they were pretty much one shot deals. The girls would go out and meet servicemen at bars and have a good time with them, and usually it wasn't a continuing relationship.

2-00:46:14

Dunham:

Do you know if there was much, kind of, abuse in that way? And/or do you know if there was much prostitution? Any of that kind of thing?

2-00:46:26

Griffith:

I was not aware, but I was probably too young, to be aware of prostitution in Richmond, like houses of prostitution. There probably were, especially in North Richmond. But we wouldn't have known about it.

2-00:46:43

Dunham:

Were there any other issues relative to just kind of the servicemen or all the influx of the defense workers? You mentioned it becoming sort of less safe in general. But were there specific kinds of things that came up?

2-00:47:01

Griffith:

There were a lot of muggings and things like that on the streets once in a while. There was a lot of crudeness.

2-00:47:06

White:

There wasn't a lot of crime. I would say, like Tom said, more drunkenness, more fighting, that sort of thing.

2-00:47:11

Griffith:

Yeah, it just wasn't the place, whereas, my folks would let me go up to Tenth Street to go up when I was about nine years old. By the time 1942, '43 came around, had I been still nine years, they wouldn't let me do that. And parts of Richmond, you used to be able to walk from all—we walked down to the States Theatre in Fourth Street, and we used to even walk down to the ballpark because we used to like to go down to the ballpark where Standard Oil plays. They had a real good baseball team. You couldn't—you used to be able to do that up until the late-forties. You couldn't do that anymore; it wasn't safe.

2-00:47:52

White:

Well in those days, during the war, I don't recall—maybe I was too young to know—but I don't recall much crime, as such, like robberies or holdups, that sort of thing.

2-00:48:08

Griffith:

I think it was just that the element had changed from a small town to an overcrowded place with a lot of—the police were kept pretty busy.

2-00:48:19

White:

Well the population went from a little over 20,00 to over 100,000 in no time.

2-00:48:26

Griffith:

Remember the old police station out in Point Richmond, which was the main police station. I remember going out there—took out there one time. Again, it was for shooting. Again, in those days, there was no—I was always interested in collecting guns, and for my age, I had about ten or twelve guns, usually 22s and stuff like that. We decided one day we'd take them all to the rifle range and shoot them. We were about three of us in the car, and we had about ten or twelve guns. And that did cause a little stir. They took us to the police station, and they looked at the guns and asked us what we were doing out there. But we hadn't done anything wrong, so, they just let us go.

2-00:49:11

Dunham:

And you never had any mishaps with the guns?

2-00:49:13

Griffith:

No.

2-00:49:16

Dunham:

So you did know how to shoot a lot of different guns at a pretty early age?

2-00:49:19

Griffith:

Yeah, my dad bought me my first rifle from Montgomery Wards in Richmond. I still got it. It was a 22. But in those days, typically, a father would always buy his son a gun as soon as he thought he was old enough. It was standard. It was an honor to belong to the National Rifle Association. Every kid should have a gun as soon as he was old enough, starting with a bee-bee gun and then his way up to a shotgun or a 22. Hunting was a big thing.

2-00:49:54

Dunham:

Did you hunt?

2-00:49:56

Griffith:

I did with—D. and I didn't, but my other friend Bob Marshall, his dad, and his brother were avid hunters. I used to go duck hunting and geese hunting with them frequently.

2-00:50:07

Dunham:

Where did you do that?

2-00:50:08

Griffith:

We used to go up around the northern part of the state, up where the geese would come in. I forget the names of the towns, even like Willits. We'd go up there, and you'd just go out in an open field. You didn't have to get permission. If there was no sign, like sometimes the farmers would post signs, "No hunting." If there wasn't a sign, and there was a field, go out and put out your geese decoys and dig a hole and wait for the geese.

2-00:50:38

White:

I never had a real gun. But I remember when I was about eleven or twelve, maybe, somewhere in there, I got a bee-bee gun for my birthday. I always wanted a bee-bee gun. And the first day I had it, I put some tin cans up on the fence, and I was shooting at the tin cans. My shots were going over the fence, over a yard, over the street, into a window of a dry cleaners.

2-00:51:07

Griffith:

[laughs]

2-00:51:08

White:

You know those—I put three holes. They weren't holes, but you know, they shattered. Until not too many years ago, that window was still there with the holes in it.

2-00:51:19

Griffith:

Yeah, really. [laughs]

2-00:51:21

White:

Yeah. In fact, I think the last time I saw it was maybe twenty years ago. It's probably gone now. But for all those years, those holes were there in the window.

2-00:51:31

Griffith:

I remember when the Marshalls bought there house out on 1918 Calinga Avenue, it was all open fields. We used to take our bee-bee guns and go out and hunt for squirrels and birds and stuff.

2-00:51:43

White:

Let me finish this story.

2-00:51:45

Griffith:

Oh sorry.

2-00:51:46

White:

A policeman came. [laughs] The owners of the store called the police, of course. They find out where the shots came from, they came over, and they took my bee-bee gun. I had only had it one day. [laughs]

2-00:51:58

Griffith:

Probably a good thing. [laughs]

2-00:52:00

White:

Yeah. [laughs]

2-00:52:05

Dunham:

So when you both joined the Army, it was in '46?

2-00:52:09

Griffith:

Yeah, March 13, 1946.

2-00:52:12

Dunham:

Okay.

2-00:52:13

White:

That was March 6.

2-00:52:14

Griffith:

That's my birthday.

2-00:52:16

White:

Oh.

2-00:52:17

Dunham:

Is that the day you turned seventeen?

2-00:52:19

Griffith:

Yeah.

2-00:52:22

Dunham:

And so you didn't have to forge your birth certificate for that. But yours was still forged to be able to get in because you were only sixteen, correct?

2-00:52:28

Griffith:

Yeah.

2-00:52:31

Dunham:

So what was that experience like?

2-00:52:35

Griffith:

Yeah, it was interesting. We e went over to San Francisco to be inducted. Then, we were sent to Camp Beale for two weeks for indoctrination. It's Beale Air Force base now. It was pretty primitive. I know when they shipped us through to Fort Knox, because we had applied for the armored services, they shipped us to Fort Knox. We, of course, went by train. And we didn't take you—fly you in those days, not us anyway—recruits. But we had to share—I remember Eugene and I had to share a Pullman sleeping car. I thought that was pretty cheap of them. And they gave us food stamps. The porters didn't like to wait on us because they knew what they were, and they knew they wouldn't get any tips.

2-00:53:28

Dunham:

And then how long were you in the Army?

White:

I was there three years.

2-00:53:35

Griffith:

This is a kind of a thing we kid each other about now. I'm not so sure. I got them to go into the army with me or they went in with me, and I got out in four months on a disability. But I was the one they went in the army with. They ended up going to Germany; I ended up coming home.

2-00:53:55

Dunham:

Were you disappointed?

2-00:53:56

Griffith:

Not at first. I didn't like the army. But after, by the time I was disabled out, I had scarlet fever—I got that actually in the barracks from another person. I was wishing I could stay in, but by then it was too late.

2-00:54:14

Dunham:

But it had been sort of your boyhood ambition to be in the Army. But once you got there, it was not the fun experience. What was it like?

2-00:54:23

Griffith:

It was pretty terrible for me. I don't think D and Eugene minded.

2-00:54:27

White:

Strangely enough, I liked it. I did. I liked the army. Looking back, I don't know why I liked it.

2-00:54:36

Griffith:

I don't like the way they kicked you around, especially in my experience because I was only in there four months.

2-00:54:42

White:

Well basic was pretty rough. But after basic, it was pretty good.

2-00:54:46

Griffith:

I remember at Camp Beale, they put us in a great big room with a whole bunch of beds, and I went in a top cot. I remember laying there, thinking oh my god, what have I done?

2-00:54:57

Dunham:

Yeah, well you'd been a pretty entrepreneurial, explorer individual.

2-00:55:01

Griffith:

[laughs] Yeah, I wasn't a joiner or a group member too much in any extent.

2-00:55:12

Dunham:

Right. It's interesting how that worked out. So what happened, did you come back to Richmond after that?

2-00:55:16

Griffith:

When I got out, I came back to Richmond and actually went over to—I think first, my brother got me a job with—my brother worked for Standard Oil by then. He had been transferred over to San Francisco. So he got me a job working in San Francisco for Standard Oil. I was still only seventeen, I think. But I was so embarrassed, he had kind of made demands on me. He said, "You've got to wear a suit. You've got to wear a hat." We always had to wear a hat and a tie, you know, these big brimmed hats. And I'd go over there, and low and behold, they put me in a mailroom. There I am looking like I'm probably thirty—I'm seventeen wearing this hat. I'm in the mailroom with these teenage girls, because they still hadn't gotten around to getting them out of the mailroom yet, working in the mailroom. And I had been in the army, low it be a short time, but I felt like I was a big adult. Here I was in this mailroom. I was so mad at my brother. I didn't stay too long. I ended up going to Armstrong College in Berkeley. I don't know if you know where that is or not. And then D. and Eugene got out of the service. They followed me and went to Armstrong, too. I graduated from there.

2-00:56:40

Dunham:

Now were either or both of you able to use the GI Bill over there?

2-00:56:43

Griffith:

Oh yeah. Matter of fact, I went under what they called a Public Law 16, which was for disabled. So I got actually a better deal than they did, and they spent all their time in the Army.

2-00:56:53

Dunham:

How was that? How did that work? What was your deal?

2-00:56:55

Griffith:

I really don't remember except they paid all my full tuition, and then I got an income, a salary. I don't remember what it was. I got out with, actually, a thirty-percent disability. So I was getting a disability payment. I was really making out.

2-00:57:12

Dunham:

But you were legitimately in school?

2-00:57:14

Griffith:

Yeah.

2-00:57:15

Dunham:

All through that time?

2-00:57:16

Griffith:
Yeah.

2-00:57:17

Dunham:
Because I heard there was a fair amount of—I know Armstrong is, obviously, a real school—but there were some other—have you heard about any kind of scams with the GI Bill and other kinds of schools in training that were used?

2-00:57:31

Griffith:
We didn't need to do any of that, so we probably didn't need to get involved in that.

2-00:57:34

Dunham:
Sure.

2-00:57:36

White:
I'll tell you a kind of interesting story. When I first got home from the army, Tom's brother offered to get me a job at Standard Oil.

2-00:57:44

Griffith:
My brother was always very helpful.

2-00:57:45

White:
In the stations, you know. So I said well yeah, sure, I needed a job. So he got me into the training station out in Hayward. So I went out there. The third day out there, the instructor took me aside and said, "I don't think this work is for you. I'm going to have to sign you off." So I never did tell his brother that I was fired. I wasn't really fired; I just washed out. But I told him I quit. He wouldn't speak to me for about year.

2-00:58:24

Griffith:
[laughs] But you know in those days, when you pull into a gas station, the attendant was required to go up to him and say, "Good afternoon." They automatically washed the windshields. But, "Can we check your tires? Can we check your oil?"

2-00:58:39

White:
Oh yeah. I wore a cap and a little tie. A bow tie.

2-00:58:42

Griffith:
D just coming out of the army. It was too much regimentation.

2-00:58:48

Dunham:
[laughs]

2-00:58:49

White:

Yeah, that didn't work out very well. I don't know if you've heard of Atlas Powder in Richmond. It was out where the golf course is. Well, Atlas Powder used to be out there. After Standard stations, Eugene, I think started there at first, and then I went out and got a job. They would hire anybody. And the reason why is because it was very dangerous. There had been several explosions out there. A lot of people died at that Powder company. So I lasted six weeks—worst job you could ever imagine. It was just a terrible job. Constant headaches from the paraffin. You'd dip the dynamite in the paraffin. Do that all morning, and then in the afternoon, while you're packing boxes and load it onto boxcars. You earned your money. I'll never forget. I was making \$2.60 something an hour, which was really good pay. I thought boy oh boy. I can understand why it was good pay, and I understand why they always needed workers. After that, I decided I'm going to school. [laughs]

2-01:00:09

Dunham:

How long did you do that for?

2-01:00:12

White:

Six weeks.

2-01:00:13

Dunham:

No injuries.

2-01:00:16

White:

No.

2-01:00:17

Dunham:

And so you went to Armstrong College as well.

2-01:00:20

Griffith:

He followed my footsteps.

2-01:00:21

Dunham:

What did you both study there?

2-01:00:23

Griffith:

Well, it's a business college. So I just took general business. Did you take art?

2-01:00:30

White:

I took advertising and journalism.

2-01:00:33

Griffith:

That's right.

2-01:00:35

White:

And then after I graduated, I went to art school—California College of Arts and Crafts.

2-01:00:41

Dunham:

And what did you do after art school?

2-01:00:45

White:

Well, I worked for Pennzoil Company for a while in advertising. Then, from there, I went over to San Francisco and started working for an advertising agency. I started as assistant art director and then eventually art director. I was an art director until I retired in 1988.

2-01:01:10

Dunham:

And you lived in Richmond for most of those intervening years?

2-01:01:14

White:

Yeah. Lived in Richmond until we built this house. We bought this property in 1970, built a house, moved in here in '72, been here ever since.

2-01:01:27

Dunham:

And so what was your experience? Did you live in the same place in Richmond after the war?

2-01:01:32

White:

Well, we rented an apartment. We were married in 1952, rented an apartment from my wife's uncle for two years, and then we bought our first little house on 38th Street. We lived there four years, and then we bought property up in Richmond Hills and built a house there in 1958. Then, we lived there until we decided to move out here.

2-01:01:59

Dunham:

What's been sort of your perception of Richmond through those years, at least while you were there? Was there much transition?

2-01:02:09

White:

Oh yeah. There was a major change. We really liked it. We liked Richmond. When we moved up on the hill, our kids went to some nice schools up there. We had a good neighborhood, and we liked it. Then, the school situation got pretty scary. We decided we didn't want our kids to go to school in Richmond anymore.

[End Audio File White and Griffith2 02-04-03]

[Begin Audio File White and Griffith3 02-04-03]

3-00:00:02

Dunham:

We hadn't talked about religion at all, and I was curious if you had any religious backgrounds and what they were?

3-00:00:12

Griffith:

You can start, D.

3-00:00:14

White:

I probably have more of a background than Tom, being the heathen he is. Now, I was raised a Mormon, and my wife's a Catholic. So I converted to Catholicism when I got married.

3-00:00:35

Dunham:

When you were growing up, were you a practicing, were you and your mom practicing Mormons then?

3-00:00:40

White:

Yeah.

3-00:00:41

Dunham:

And was there a church nearby that you'd frequent?

3-00:00:43

White:

The nearest church was on Twenty-ninth Street and Nevin in Richmond. It was quite a way. We didn't have a car, so we had to walk to church, which was—we lived on Sixth Street to Twenty-ninth Street, so twenty-three blocks. Quite a jog.

3-00:01:03

Dunham:

So did you go regularly or just special circumstances, services?

3-00:01:10

White:

Fairly regularly, yeah. I remember going to Sunday school at least until I was thirteen or fourteen. Then, it probably dropped off about that time, my church attendance.

3-00:01:29

Dunham:

Based on your numerous other interests?

3-00:01:32

White:

Yeah, I was getting more interested in the war.

3-00:01:35

Dunham:

Okay, and other slight moral declining.

3-00:01:39

White:

[laughs]

3-00:01:42

Dunham:

That reminded me too. What was the early places you lived in? What were they like? Could you describe, maybe? You lived in an apartment?

3-00:01:53

White:

You mean in Richmond?

3-00:01:54

Dunham:

In Richmond, yeah.

3-00:01:55

White:

Well, we only lived in one place, well two places. But one place for the most part. It was just a two room cottage, Coldwater Cottage. It was in back of another house. We lived there until 1943 when my mother saved enough money to buy a house. She paid \$3300 dollars for a house on North Eighth Street. That was quite a big event in our life, never having had a house before. That house only had one bedroom, but it had a little house in back, a little cabin or shed. Just a combination shed-cabin. It had two little rooms. One side I made that my room. That was pretty neat. Then, my mother had the garage converted into a bedroom. She didn't have a car, so she made it into another bedroom in the garage. So that was pretty upscale.

3-00:03:10

Dunham:

Did your mom date much, per se, when you were growing up?

3-00:03:14

White:

Oh yeah.

3-00:03:20

Griffith:

When did she marry Karl?

3-00:03:23

White:

'51

3-00:03:28

Dunham:

Okay, well how about you, then?

3-00:03:31

Griffith:

Well, when I was very young, I was born in that house, we lived in other houses. But after that we lived in apartments. We lived in about two other apartments before we kind of came to the Richmond Arms. The people that were managing it were leaving, so my folks got the opportunity to manage that. That's where we stayed pretty much. And when I was joining up.

3-00:03:59

Dunham:

Did your parents stay there after?

3-00:04:01

Griffith:

They did, and they stayed there until the 1950s when we decided to get out of Richmond, early fifties, mid-fifties maybe. My wife and I were living down in San Jose, so they decided to move down there. Again, but managed an apartment down in San Jose. They were retired by then. Our religion was really Protestant. My mother's side of the family was more religious than my father's. They were Southern Methodists, very strict Southern Methodist. I think it maybe discouraged her from pursuing that religion with her kids because she never encouraged us too much to go to church. The only really time that I, and I tend to go overboard on things. So one time when we were living in Richmond down by the SP tracks, there was a big apartment house there. A three-story place; it's gone now. But it was a nice one. One of my little friends was a kid by the name of Billy {_____}. His father was the Baptist minister of Richmond. And so I started going to Baptist Sunday school. I took it all very seriously. I didn't think we should have playing cards in the house. My folks loved to play cards, so they pretty much discouraged me from becoming—.

3-00:05:21

Dunham:

What age was that, then?

3-00:05:22

Griffith:

I was probably about nine or ten.

3-00:05:23

White:

[laughs]

3-00:05:25

Dunham:

Okay, and that was just a brief?

3-00:05:26

Griffith:

Yeah, they pretty much discouraged me from becoming a Baptist. I wanted to join the church.

3-00:05:30

Dunham:

That might have dramatically changed all the events we just talked about, perhaps.

3-00:05:34

Griffith:
[laughs]

3-00:05:37

Dunham:

Do you remember much about other church and religion scenes and if that was impacted much, again, with the boom and all the other folks coming in?

3-00:05:46

Griffith:

It was not—it was a negative factor for us, I mean it was a zero factor for us. Rosie's family, of course, was always strongly religious. But for us growing up, I don't think church was even a topic. Later on it became one. I remember my two other friends Dan and Bob were both Catholics. This was, again, after World War II. But I was single and young, I started going with them. And because they used to go to Catholic dances. We used to like to go out, so I liked to go to the Catholic dances to meet girls. It was kind of a problem. I had to do a little lying.

3-00:06:28

White:
[laughs]

3-00:06:30

Dunham:

Oh yeah.

3-00:06:30

Griffith:

Little lying. One time a girl asked me where I went, it was over in San Francisco, asked me where I graduated from. I said—what's the Catholic college in Santa Clara called?

3-00:06:43

Dunham:

I'm not sure, exactly.

3-00:06:45

White:

University of Santa Clara.

3-00:06:47

Dunham:

Oh it is.

3-00:06:51

Griffith:

Bob called and told me, he said don't tell girls that because they know all the guys from that university.

3-00:06:57

White:

[laughs]

3-00:06:58

Griffith:

They're going to know you're lying. It turned out I ended up going there for one semester for law school, and I decided I didn't want to become a lawyer either.

3-00:07:07

Dunham:

Oh you did that later? Why did you decide against law?

3-00:07:11

Griffith:

Well, first, it just wasn't my bag.

3-00:07:14

Dunham:

Okay.

3-00:07:16

White:

I was from a very strict Mormon family; at least my father's side was real strict. And when they learned that I was dating a Catholic girl, they were horrified. That was quite a thing. After we were married, and I took her to Utah to meet my family, I don't think they had ever met a Catholic before. This is like an alien from outer space that I was bringing up to meet them. But after a while, they accepted her.

3-00:07:58

Dunham:

They got over it.

3-00:08:00

White:

They got over that.

3-00:08:01

Griffith:

We used to hang out quite a bit at Eugene White. His mother was a strong Catholic, and all of her family were Catholics around here. One time I went over with him to meet the grandmother. I'll never forget. They introduced me, and she asked me, because I was with Gay, not dating her but I was just there with her, and the grandmother said, "Is he Catholic?" And they said, "No grandma, he's a little Protestant boy." I'll never forget that.

3-00:08:36

White:

[laughs]

3-00:08:39

Dunham:

Oh I know what I wanted to ask you. I know we talked a little about the movies and all, but did you guys also, I think, were quite into comic books and radio shows as well?

3-00:08:47

Griffith:

Yes, oh yes. Good point, we certainly were.

3-00:08:49

White:

Yeah, I wasn't much into comic books.

3-00:08:52

Griffith:

I was.

3-00:08:53

White:

I was more into radio.

3-00:08:56

Griffith:

I love a mystery.

3-00:08:57

Dunham:

It's interesting that you weren't into comic books since you already were drawing and everything, too. But that just didn't appeal to you?

3-00:09:03

Griffith:

Couldn't afford them.

3-00:09:05

White:

[laughs] It wasn't a big thing. I probably looked at them and everything, but it wasn't a big thing with me. I was much more fascinated with radio.

3-00:09:17

Griffith:

I used to have a little stool right in front of the radio that I'd always sit on to listen to all the programs when *Lone Ranger* came on. *I Love A Mystery*; that was my favorite. {_____}.

3-00:09:27

White:

Yeah, one of my favorites, too.

3-00:09:30

Griffith:

And a couple others I can't remember now. Oh, *The Shadow*

3-00:09:31

White:

Captain Midnight

3-00:09:32

Griffith:

Captain Midnight, yeah.

3-00:09:34

White:

Those were great shows.

3-00:09:37

Dunham:

Did they have news reports on the radio, too?

3-00:09:39

White:

Oh sure.

3-00:09:40

Dunham:

Did you get war updates?

3-00:09:41

White:

Yeah.

3-00:09:42

Griffith:

The other thing they had all the time, a term that was called, and almost two or three times a week, you'd hear somebody yelling, "War extra! War extra!" And there would be guys gawking down the street with a newspaper. Marines have landed in such-a-such place, and they'd be selling the newspaper, and people would rush out to buy those newspapers.

3-00:09:58

White:

Boy, they had the newsreels at the movies, too. I always enjoyed those.

3-00:10:01

Griffith:

Oh yeah.

3-00:10:03

White:

You know we got a lot of—it's like television now.

[doorbell rings]

3-00:10:07

Griffith:

Oh we have a visitor.

3-00:10:27

Dunham:

And the newsreels at the movies and all?

3-00:10:28

White:

Yeah.

3-00:10:29

Griffith:

Oh, you know again on the subject of the movies; that was a big deal with our family. We always went to the movies. I remember always, every week, my sister and my mother and I always went to the movies. My dad was gone a lot. We went to all the dish giveaways, you know when they had the dish deals and the drawings and stuff like that.

3-00:10:51

White:

Oh yeah, they'd have those drawings.

3-00:10:52

Dunham:

What are the dish?

3-00:10:54

Griffith:

Well, you could win a dish.

3-00:10:56

Dunham:

Oh okay, that was one of the prizes.

3-00:10:57

Griffith:

You could get a set. If you came long enough, you could get a different dish each time. You ended up, you could get a whole set. And they had, what was it bank night? I think it was bank night. You could win something like twenty dollars.

3-00:11:13

Dunham:

Now could you sneak into the night show? Did you ever do that?

3-00:11:17

Griffith:

No, I usually was with my folks.

3-00:11:18

Dunham:

Okay that was with your family. I just wondered if you snuck in like you guys occasionally did, if you were eligible for prizes or not.

3-00:11:24

Griffith:

No, they didn't have—.

3-00:11:27

Dunham:

That was different times; that was Friday night or something.

3-00:11:29

White:

I think Wednesday night was dish night.

3-00:11:31

Griffith:

I think it was, too.

3-00:11:34

Dunham:

Was that at all the theatres had something like that?

3-00:11:36

Griffith:

It was definitely at the Fox; I don't think it was at the State.

3-00:11:39

White:

I don't remember. I think each theatre had their own promotions.

3-00:11:44

Dunham:

Were there a lot of war-theme movies?

3-00:11:47

White:

Yeah, oh yeah. We always so those.

3-00:11:50

Dunham:

Those were favorites. Now what's your perspective? Are you still fans of those kinds of movies, either from that era or from now?

3-00:11:58

Griffith:

Not war movies at all, really. Just movies from the thirties—I liked the old movies.

3-00:12:08

Dunham:

Which kind, then, do you particularly?

3-00:12:10

Griffith:Mainly, whoever the actor is, or some of the famous ones of course: *Gone With the Wind*. But I like the old actors. I can usually sit there and name their names because I've always seen the

movies, how many times I don't know. But that's really, my wife {___} and I, even our daughter, she likes the old movies. She's kind of hooked on things from the thirties.

3-00:12:36

Dunham:

How about for you?

3-00:12:37

White:

Yeah, right, 1939 was a big year for movies. In fact, I have an uncle who was in *Northwest Passage* that came out 1939.

3-00:12:47

Griffith:

Oh, I remember that, yeah. With Spencer Tracy.

3-00:12:51

White:

This is in Idaho with Spencer Tracy, and oh, I can't remember the other actors. But they came in. They were recruiting extras to be in the movie to play frontiersman. So my uncle was hired to be in this group of men. I want to buy that movie. I'd like to have it.

3-00:13:19

Griffith:

Because you can see him on there.

3-00:13:20

White:

Yeah, you can see him. He's totally—he said he's the only one that is carrying the rifle backwards over his shoulder.

3-00:13:30

Dunham:

If you look back now at the movies, all the military-related movies and even, perhaps, the newsreels; do you think you'd see them in a different perspective? I mean, do you think any of them would feel propagandist to you?

3-00:13:42

Griffith:

Some of the movies were, the movie tone, no. They said things, references were different: the language they used, the sarcasm, and things that had been expected wouldn't be acceptable now. But some of the movies were pretty bad as far as, I'm trying to think of one that was really bad.

3-00:14:06

White:

Yeah, you're right. They were pretty bad. The Japanese were called "Japs," not Japanese. They were called "Japs." You couldn't get away with that today, but at that time, that's what they were called. I'm trying to think of the old war movies.

3-00:14:26

Griffith:

Awake Island, Back to Bataan.

3-00:14:28

White:

Yeah.

3-00:14:29

Griffith:

Those came out a little later, but some of them that came out right at the first part of the war were really propagandist.

3-00:14:36

White:

Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo

3-00:14:38

Griffith:

Yeah. *Thirty Seconds*— that's a good one.

3-00:14:43

White:

I don't think they were particularly well done. I think the movies from the thirties were much better done.

3-00:14:47

Griffith:

Yeah, the prewar movies were much better done.

3-00:14:53

Dunham:

Okay.

3-00:14:54

White:

And the postwar movies also were much better. I don't know the war movies—I think in those days I always liked musicals.

3-00:15:09

Griffith:

Yeah we did, too.

3-00:15:10

White:

I liked the musicals.

3-00:15:12

Griffith:

Yeah, Fred Astaire.

3-00:15:14

White:

The ones during the war—I always enjoyed those.

3-00:15:17

Griffith:

We're movie buffs, my wife and I. We like movies. We like new movies too, but.

3-00:15:22

Dunham:

Yeah, my wife and I are too. I don't know that many older movies that well, but some I particularly like. But I haven't seen enough to be a good judge.

3-00:15:33

White:

Have you seen *Chicago*?

3-00:15:36

Dunham:

The new *Chicago*? No.

3-00:15:37

Griffith:

That's great.

3-00:15:38

White:

Did you see it?

3-00:15:39

Griffith:

Yeah, we saw it.

3-00:15:41

White:

You did?

3-00:15:42

Griffith:

Yeah, it was really good.

3-00:15:43

White:

It is so well done.

3-00:15:44

Griffith:

Such a neat story plan.

3-00:15:46

White:

We saw the stage production in New York.

3-00:15:48

Griffith:

Yeah, we saw it too, and I can't hardly remember it. But the movie follows it perfectly.

3-00:15:54

White:

It is so—.

3-00:15:55

Dunham:

It's not too super-fast cutting, is it?

3-00:16:00

White:

Well, yeah. It is a little too fast-cutting for my taste. And I wish they wouldn't do that so much.

3-00:16:09

Dunham:

Yeah, I mean, even though I am the MTV generation, that even makes me crazy. I see a lot of documentary films, too, myself so.

3-00:16:15

White:

That's my one criticism; it's a little too fast-cut.

3-00:16:18

Griffith:

This suits this movie, though. If you keep it in mind when you go see it, this is a movie that's got to be that way, and it works for this movie.

3-00:16:26

White:

Well, to a certain degree. I think they go a little too far.

3-00:16:32

Dunham:

Let me pick this up, and we'll look at some of these more things we didn't quite capture yet. Here's some.

3-00:16:41

White:

I really enjoyed it though.

3-00:16:42

Griffith:

Oh we did too; we thought it was great.

3-00:16:44

Dunham:

Well before I do, is there anything else in particular on either of your lists that we didn't cover?

3-00:16:48

Griffith:

No, I think we pretty well covered things.

3-00:16:51

Dunham:

Okay.

3-00:16:53

White:

That's about it. I have this—you know I just noticed that this is Weed when my wife lived in Weed.

3-00:17:00

Dunham:

Oh from Weed, California.

3-00:17:02

White:

Yeah. This is Weed, not Richmond. This is my wife here; this is her book.

3-00:17:16

Dunham:

And that's where she grew up?

3-00:17:17

White:

Yeah, until 1943 when we moved here. Then, her dad—her dad worked for the Ford Company.

3-00:17:26

Griffith:

My brother-in-law worked for them.

3-00:17:28

White:

Who Mike?

3-00:17:29

Griffith:

Mike worked for the Ford Company. Oh yeah, he worked there until they closed it.

3-00:17:32

White:

Oh, that's right.

3-00:17:36

Dunham:

So which ones are these? Say spare?

3-00:17:38

White:

I don't know what that is. I don't know.

3-00:17:39

Dunham:

So these are all—they were coded for something. Okay, that says coffee, that's clear. Sugar. That's spare and these other symbols. Maybe it was even, those are just extra coupons that weren't even real coupons then, spares.

3-00:18:05

Griffith:

Well, like it even says here photo service. That's where that bookstore—I used to spend many hours in that little bookstore. They had a lot of books in there. It was a drugstore, actually, but they had a big book section there, magazine section. It had all the comic books.

3-00:18:25

Dunham:

And what were the themes of most of the comic books you liked?

3-00:18:28

Griffith:

Oh, Batman and those kind.

3-00:18:30

Dunham:

So did they have military themed comic books ever?

3-00:18:33

Griffith:

Yeah they did; well, most of them were the same people, but they were fighting the Japanese.

3-00:18:37

White:

Oh yeah [laughs].

3-00:18:38

Dunham:

Oh the superheroes were actually fighting in the war. Oh, I didn't know that.

3-00:18:41

Griffith:

Oh yeah, they were fighting. These are good pictures of the war project; especially, this is typical. They look like barracks, but I don't think I was ever in one.

3-00:18:54

White:

Yeah, I was.

3-00:18:55

Griffith:

But I used to deliver mail to them all the time, either on foot or in special liberty encampments.

3-00:19:01

Dunham:

Now were those in North Richmond?

3-00:19:02

Griffith:

This wasn't in Richmond, California, this was probably south. Most of them were on the south side, weren't they D?

3-00:19:08

White:

Yeah, near the shipyards. They had all that vacant land there.

3-00:19:12

Dunham:

And those were segregated, black from white?

3-00:19:16

Griffith:

Yeah, they were. They definitely were. That's a good picture; that's the Ford plant, {refinery coast}. We used to ride out there on our bicycles and catch the ferry and ride across and then take our bike rides to the other side of the bay.

3-00:19:35

Dunham:

And were you guys aware, either in Richmond or in general, kind of around the fifties and of course in the sixties, as there was some sort of desegregation laws and then, later, civil rights laws passed? Were you aware of any issues of that or any kind of civil rights movement, per se, in Richmond?

3-00:19:51

Griffith:

Well the main thing that affected that was in 1968 when Martin Luther King—.

3-00:19:54

Dunham:

That was kind of the culmination, but I think there were certain acts before in the fifties kind of dealing with race.

3-00:20:02

White:

Because of '65 the Civil Rights Act.

3-00:20:05

Griffith:

Yeah, I don't recall.

3-00:20:12

White:

I know the army was still segregated.

3-00:20:15

Griffith:

Yeah, the army in 1946 was still segregated. But I think it wasn't until the Korean War; I think Truman was the guy that desegregated.

3-00:20:24

White:

Yeah, right. It's funny, I don't think we ever thought anything about that.

3-00:20:37

Griffith:

No, we didn't. You don't see any pictures of Lincoln School.

3-00:20:46

Dunham:

And this is where you went for your whole grammar school?

3-00:20:49

Griffith:

Yeah, we did.

3-00:20:52

Dunham:

Was it torn down or something?

3-00:20:56

Griffith:

You know when we were first going there, there was a teacher called Mrs. {Taber} who still wore high top shoes and long black dresses. Amazing, she was really a carry-over.

3-00:21:08

White:

How old was she, then?

3-00:21:09

Griffith:

She was fairly old.

3-00:21:10

White:

I don't remember her.

3-00:21:12

Griffith:

It might have been you got there. She was in the kindergarten side, where that long road—to third grade.

3-00:21:23

Dunham:

What is this here? Air Force observance.

3-00:21:27

Griffith:

No, that's restricted, so you can't photograph that.

3-00:21:29

White:

[laughs]

3-00:21:30

Dunham:

Oh, is it?

3-00:21:34

White:

What is that there?

3-00:21:36

Griffith:

Oh, that's another one. That was one you could buy, but it also said restricted. It was just another aircraft identification book from World War II.

3-00:21:45

Dunham:

But they gave you this manual.

3-00:21:46

Griffith:

Yeah, they gave us that one. I think this one you could buy for twenty-five cents. That's just drawings by me; you can see my artistic ability there, notes I made.

3-00:22:01

Dunham:

I see your notes. So what would happen when you'd call on the phone to report?

3-00:22:07

Griffith:

We'd call; you see, we'd use this form like we showed you there. We called in, and we'd just call in. We had a number, I think, spotter post number so-and-so reporting, and then we'd give this report: single engine airplane flying northwest at approximately so many feet, and that was about it. Then, they'd just confirm that. They didn't have radar or anything like that. This was typical during World War II. I think it started with folks would buy identification bracelets for their kids just in case something happened.

3-00:22:54

Dunham:

So that, when was it?

3-00:22:56

Griffith:

It's got that date on it, 1944.

3-00:23:04

White:

Instead of wearing two watches, why don't you wear that?

3-00:23:06

Griffith:

[laughs]

3-00:23:08

Dunham:

What is the story on the two watches?

3-00:23:11

Griffith:

Well, they're automatic, but they require wrist action. What do they call it?

3-00:23:18

Dunham:

They stop functioning if you don't wear it?

3-00:23:20

Griffith:

Yeah, if you don't wear them after about twelve hours, they stop functioning. And they're calendar watches. If they stop functioning, first thing you know, you've got to wind them and wind them and wind them to get the calendar date back. I haven't been able to solve the problem, so I just wear them.

3-00:23:36

Dunham:

I can't even get myself to wear one watch these days. I'm pretty impressed that you can wear two.

3-00:23:41

White:

[laughs]

3-00:23:42

Griffith:

I bought this watch in 1952 in Lucerne, Switzerland. It still works.

3-00:23:50

Dunham:

It's all in the wrist, I guess, that it's still working.

3-00:23:51

Griffith:

Yeah, just the wrist action. There are no batteries; this was before batteries. I get a lot of questions about why are you wearing two watches?

3-00:24:03

White:

Especially when you're playing golf with two watches on.

3-00:24:05

Griffith:

Yeah, I take one off.

3-00:24:07

Dunham:

Oh you do take one off?

3-00:24:09

Griffith:

I guess that's about everything.

3-00:24:36

Dunham:

There's you and Tom. We should get that one there. So those are your army uniforms?

3-00:24:39

Griffith:

Yeah that was in Louisville, Kentucky.

3-00:24:47

Dunham:

And how about these two right here?

3-00:24:51

White:

Oh, this is Jim McLaughlin, our friend we talked about. This is Eugene. That's our friend we mention; he passed away. This is me and my mother and little brother. This is me in Germany.

3-00:25:10

Dunham:

And this is the gang?

3-00:25:14

White:

Yeah, there we are, twelve years old.

3-00:25:22

Dunham:

And is this your mom?

3-00:25:23

White:

That's my mother, yeah.

3-00:25:25

Dunham:

What's that outfit she's wearing? Is that just a standard work outfit?

3-00:25:29

White:

No, she's dressed up. It was my little brother's first birthday.

3-00:25:35

Dunham:

And this is?

3-00:25:36

White:

That's my grandmother and my mother with two of her sisters.

3-00:25:47

Dunham:

That's her whole family.

3-00:25:49

White:

The relatives she had. Yeah, these books I gave to each of my kids. I gave one with the pictures in.

3-00:25:58

Dunham:

That's great.

3-00:26:06

White:

This is interesting. That's Donnington Castle and this is it right here. And that's a rock from Donnington Castle. It's in Berkshire, England. I got them because my great grandfather, that's where he grew up. And so that castle is the dominating feature in that area. We've been there twice, and I've stolen a rock from the castle.

3-00:26:43

Dunham:

Still doing your same scavenging?

3-00:26:48

White:

Here's our wedding. There's Tom. This is Harbor Gate. This is where housing—we lived there. My mother sold her house, and we moved there in about 1950, I think. And that is my pride and joy, '48 Plymouth convertible.

3-00:27:14

Dunham:

So you went through a couple different cars, then.

3-00:27:18

White:

Yeah.

3-00:27:27

Dunham:

And where is that?

3-00:27:29

White:

This is at Fort Knox.

3-00:27:30

Dunham:

That is Fort Knox right there.

3-00:27:33

White:

This is in Germany, when I was a tank crewman.

3-00:27:39

Griffith:

That's a good book. D. you did a great job on that. I'm going to have you do one for me.

3-00:27:48

Dunham:

Alright gentleman. Shut these off, here. Thank you so much. That was really informative.

[End of interview]