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Mary Lou Cordova

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

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

Interviews conducted by
David Washburn
in 2002

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00:46:00

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End Tape 2

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00:00:15

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00:15:45

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00:30:15

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00:46:45

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00:00:30

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TRANSCRIPT

[Interview #1: November, 1st, 2002]

[Begin Audio File Cordova1]

1-00:00:00

Washburn:

Again, it's the first of November, we're in the house of Mary Lou Cordova in San Pablo, California, and this is David Washburn interviewing Mary Lou about Richmond. So, I've already spoken to your sister, interviewed her before, so I know some about your past already. I don't want to spend as much time covering the things I already kind of learned from Polly, but I do want to learn some things about Las Cruces and everything like that.

1-00:00:43

Cordova:

Can I begin?

1-00:00:47

Washburn:

Yes, just a little bit, just to start us off. Not too much.

1-00:00:50

Cordova:

Background? Oh, sure, okay.

1-00:00:51

Washburn:

You were raised and born in Las Cruces with your sister?

1-00:00:55

Cordova:

I was raised and born in Las Cruces. I went to a Catholic school, we all did. I was reminiscing about that, because my mother was very strict, pretty strict with us. I can remember that when we were growing up, she would take in washing to subsidize our daily living. I remember that she would tell us—now, Las Cruces was a small town at the time, and she would say, “Go gather some kindling, because I've got to boil.” She did nothing but white clothes; sheets, linens, and all those things. So she would have to boil this, and she would have this big tub, and we would have get the kindling from out there in the--what would you call it--the outskirts of town, and we'd bring it, and she'd start the fire. And you know what? It would actually boil, and the clothes were white, white, white. She would wash the clothes where they were snow white.

And I remember that if we didn't obey her, maybe she said to do something, she'd say, “All right, you're gonna pay for it.” And I said, “No, Mom, no!” And we'd run around the yard, around and around the yard, and then we'd run into the bathroom, because it was kind of a community bathroom, you know, it's flushing toilet like we have today. But I'd run into the bathroom, so she wouldn't catch me. Of course, my mother was young at the time. But I remember that I used to do that. We all did, we all did; my brother and my other younger sister, not Polly and not Josie, but my other.

1-00:03:17

Washburn:

Actually, I don't remember from my interview with Polly Russell about how big your family is. Can you describe a little bit who was in your family?

1-00:03:25

Cordova:

Yes. I had two older sisters, Polly and Josie. Let's see, let's go back: Josie, Polly, and Ralph. Now, Ralph went into the service when he was fifteen. He faked his birth certificate so he could go into the service. So he was in the service at the age of fifteen. He made it his career. Once he got in there, we never saw him again, because he was going into World War II, he went to that, he went to Germany, to France, to all those places. Then after that war was over, then he went to Korea, to Vietnam. I can remember when he went to Vietnam, he was very close to death. He says he could hear the bullets going right by him. And he made a promise that he would be true to the Blessed Mother if he would come out of this alive, because he would tell my mom, "You believe me praying? You think it's gonna help you?" My mother would just listen to him, right?

Well, when he got back, he was a changed, changed person. He was so devoted to the Blessed Mother, because he came back alive. He says, "You don't know what I went through." Because when he came from back from Europe, he was kind of like shell-shocked—well, I call it that. But he says he was on the bus coming home and he was coming to see us, and he heard a backfire, and he fell on the floor, and the people started laughing, and he was so embarrassed. He said, "They don't know what was going through my--I thought somebody was shooting at us." That was just one incident.

1-00:05:54

Washburn:

So he had a military life. So did you come after Ralph?

1-00:05:57

Cordova:

Yes.

1-00:06:00

Washburn:

So you are the youngest of the four?

1-00:06:02

Cordova:

Well, I have another, a younger sister.

1-00:06:05

Washburn:

Who's that?

1-00:06:08

Cordova:

Frankie.

1-00:06:10

Washburn:

The sister?

1-00:06:12

Cordova:

Yes, Frances. Frances is her name, but we call her Frankie. And then after that, I've got two more brothers after Frankie.

1-00:06:17

Washburn:

What are some of your other childhood memories of growing up in Las Cruces?

1-00:06:22

Cordova:

Well, in Las Cruces, that a hamburger cost five cents and a Coke cost five cents. So my girlfriend and I, on Saturdays, her dad had a grocery store, and she would invite me to come, so we could go to the park and buy--they had hamburgers, huge hamburgers. She'd buy hamburgers for her and hamburgers for me, and we'd buy Cokes. I can remember they were five cents apiece, so that at the time, you know, they were expensive, we thought they were expensive. But her dad would give her money to buy the stuff, but we didn't have that kind of money to spend.

But I'm going to tell you a little incident. When we were there in Las Cruces--this is fun--we didn't have any money, us kids didn't have any money, right? We thought that in the mortuary, they had the dead people there, you know? We used to scare each other and say, "You are going to go by that door." We'd run, you know, because we had to go home at this place for--it was an office, but we'd say that the dead were in there. But anyway, to make money to buy Cokes or whatever, we would sell "gunny sacks" that would get the "potato sacks," okay? Being that they were in abundance, they would fill them up with potatoes or whatever. Of course, people would discard them. Well, we'd pick them up, and we'd sell them at this lumberyard, because they collected them, and they gave us two pennies per bag.

So we'd take them over there, and my brother was the one started us doing this, see. So okay, so we were going over there, and one day he found out where they were throwing them, so he would go around and get them again and then we'd sell them again. Yes. So, that's the way we were making--I mean, I didn't go around and do it, but he knew where to get them, right, so he'd go ahead and do that. So anyway, we made two pennies per "gunny sack," so boy, if we made a dime, that was a lot of money.

1-00:08:48

Washburn:

That was good money?

1-00:08:50

Cordova:

At the time, yes. Then we could buy probably candy and all this. That was just a little incident that I can remember, that he found out where they were throwing them so he'd go and pull them out.

1-00:09:11

Washburn:

But it raises a good point, that did you and your siblings, and especially yourself, did you guys work during your childhood and elementary school years, or did you go to school?

1-00:09:24

Cordova:

No, my two sisters were working, Polly and Josie were working. They were the older of us. Ralph would try to find part-time jobs, I mean little jobs, there was no such things as a job, you know. He tried to make errands, I tried to make errands for my neighbor, and she'd pay me two cents to go down to the store and buy meat or eggs or potatoes, whatever she needed. She was my neighbor, so she would send me to the store to get the stuff. Because her son-in-law had a market, so she'd send me over there to get the stuff. So that's the way we'd make money, and you know where I would put it? I'd put it in this little can, and I found a place in the yard, and I dug a hole and I'd save it there. Because in the house, there's no place that you could save money, I mean put your money away, because the kids would get it, right? So I had my little safe in the yard--I guess I knew where I put it, right? But I remember that I used to do that, because I used to do a lot of errands for this lady. Anyway, oh, there's so many things I could tell you about Las Cruces.

1-00:10:45

Washburn:

But the thing I'd like to learn, to compare to other people is, it seems like some of the older siblings in some of these families I've been talking to had a harder time. Did you feel like being younger, in a way, you were let off maybe, you were treated differently than Polly or Josie?

1-00:11:08

Cordova:

No. Everybody had a job to do, like see, we had chores to do at home. I had to make lunch, I had to cook. I was maybe eight or nine years old. Mom expected me to have lunch ready, and lunch--by that I mean I had to heat up the beans, and maybe she had tortillas made, you know, so that I would have that, so that when they'd come from work, they would have something to eat. I really didn't know how to cook, because I was too young, but I could at least heat up the stuff, right? But our main function was to go to school; that was my mom's--the only thing she could say is that we were going to go to school. So we'd go to school, and of course, the school was about three blocks away from the house. And we'd move to different places, you know, always trying to look for something a little bit better. Then we'd have to walk a longer distance, but it was still the same school that we'd go to. As I understand going back, I always wondered how my mom would pay for the school. Well, Josie, my older sister, would help clean the rooms; that's the way they would pay for the school.

1-00:12:37

Washburn:

Rooms of the school?

1-00:12:38

Cordova:

Yes. She would help clean the rooms, just Josie, not Polly, because we were all in the same boat, she was also going to school. But that's the way Mom would pay for the school, and then of course she took in washing. Then I graduated from Holy Cross School.

1-00:12:58

Washburn:

Hold on. I'm going to adjust this camera really quickly, but I have a question. [tape interruption] The glare is much better now, sorry about that. But why did you have to pay for school?

1-00:13:10

Cordova:

It was a private school.

1-00:13:18

Washburn:

It was a private school, okay.

1-00:13:22

Cordova:

Yes. Catholic schools are private schools. You have to pay. Anyway, we had to wear uniforms, and that saved a lot of money, because it was the same uniform that we'd wash and use over and over again, with that little white dickey. I remember that.

And then when I was around in the fifth grade, I was going to school, and my sister Frankie was with me, and she was trying to pull me back from hurrying. I was trying hurry to school, and so anyway at the crossing, I ran across and a car hit me. And it threw me forty feet up in the air, and of course, people rushed to where I was. And I got up and I cleaned myself up, and I ran to school, and I didn't want to talk to anybody. It was a hit and run, the car got away. But see, a lot of people knew me and my family, my mom and dad. What happened was that when I got to school, I was called into the principal's office, and he says, "Mary Lou, did you get hit by a car?" I says, "No, not me." But when I got to school, I was bleeding from this side, but I didn't want to get in trouble with my mom, because we always feared that we would get into trouble because we did it, we were the ones that instigated. And so I figured that I would get in trouble if she would find out, so anyway, of course I denied that I was in--.

But I went to the bathroom, and I showed one of my girlfriends, I said, "Look what happened." "Mary Lou, what happened?" I said, "A car hit me out there, you know." She said, "Oh, my God." But I was walking. Okay, so nobody knew, I went home, and I was cleaning myself, I was trying to take care of myself, but I wouldn't tell my mom. But we would hang clothes out on the line, and about, I don't know, three days later, she saw me

limping. She says, “Mary Lou, what’s wrong?” “Nothing.” [gasps] “I know what’s wrong!” And I started crying, I started crying, I started screaming, because somehow or other, she had found out what happened, because this friend of ours came to the house and says, “How’s the little chubby daughter of yours doing?” I was a little chubby. They said, “A car hit her,” and they said, “No, not my—no, she’s fine.” She says, “Yeah, one of your daughters was hit by a car.” And I denied it.

Anyway, Mom says, “Come here,” and I thought she was going to--because this is the way it was over there. If you get in trouble, it’s because you are the instigator, right? So then not only would you get hurt, but then they would also get after you, spank you for doing that, whatever got you into trouble. I was always afraid I was in a big trouble. Well then after that, then I showed her. She says [gasps], “Oh my God!” you know, because I had taken all the skin off my leg, and it was fresh, it was still fresh. I didn’t know how to take care of it. So, of course immediately, she started, you know, taking care of me.

1-00:17:34

Washburn:

You said there before that everybody knew your folks and knew your mom. And that’s maybe how the person came and told your mom about the accident. How did everybody know your family?

1-00:17:51

Cordova:

My mom and dad? Well, because it wasn’t such a big town. It was a small town, and everybody knew my mom, my dad, you know. My dad used to work at a lumberyard, and so he knew a lot of people. They were just friends, you know, and they would get together and probably go out having drinks or whatever. But it was a real good friend of the family that came and told them--tattled on me. I never forget it because I was very embarrassed, because my mom said, “Let’s see, pick up your dress so they can see.” You know, people would come, because they had seen what had happened, and of course we were very, very modest. You want to go back in Las Cruces? You know where we would take a bath?

1-00:18:38

Washburn:

Where?

1-00:18:42

Cordova:

We would take a bath behind the stove, you know, she would make a fire. They were the potbelly stoves, and behind the stove, she would fill it up with warm water and everything so that we would be warm while she was giving us a bath, it would be behind the stove. You know, the stove would sit away from the wall, and of course, we were very, very modest. So that whenever she would take us out, she’d have a towel, and she’d wrap us up. Of course, I can remember that I didn’t want them to see my back. She says, “No, no, no, turn around the other way.” Because you know, we have family, we had only two rooms--no, we had three rooms--the kitchen, the living room, and a bedroom.

1-00:19:39

Washburn:

So, the stove radiated the heat to the bathtub?

1-00:19:44

Cordova:

Right, to the tub. It was a tin tub, and she was always taking care of us.

1-00:19:56

Washburn:

When you say modest, do you mean modest as in you didn't want to show your flesh—

Cordova:

The body.

Washburn:

--or do you mean modest as in you guys were of modest means, you guys were poor?

1-00:20:09

Cordova:

No. No. We were of modest means. We didn't have any money.

1-00:20:11

Washburn:

From what you are saying, you would assume that you didn't have hot water in your house--running hot water.

1-00:20:17

Cordova:

That is right. You know, we'd have get the water from the faucet outside, but it was running water. It was a faucet, we'd bring it in, she'd fill up the tub, but she heated up the water, then she filled the tub, but we would be right there. Then after she gave us a bath, then she would give us cool water with a little bit of sugar for us to drink every time that she'd give us a bath, she'd give us this to drink. And this was very refreshing, very refreshing.

And another time, I can remember that my brother bought a whole bunch of boxes from the stores, and we were having a lot of fun playing in them. Anyway, I decided I was going to jump on them, and the fence, we had a wire fence with the loops. So anyway, I got up there, and I wanted to do everything my brother would do. So what happened was when I jumped down, my feet didn't come out of the wire, right, and I went plop and hit the wire, the fence. So anyway, I got a big gash, and I still have the scar. Then when I was bleeding, I went and hid under the bed, because I was in trouble. Because there I am again in trouble, so I would tell my little sister, "Go get me a mirror, go get me a mirror." You know, we weren't trying to get in trouble, but it just seemed like I was always getting me in trouble. So she went in and got me a mirror, you know, and I said, "Oh, my God! Did it stop bleeding? Did it stop bleeding?" Because I knew I was going get in trouble with my mom again, because she was always reprimanding us, you know, to do right. Because they were always working, see? We are always supposed to take care of ourselves, you know--do the right thing and all this.

1-00:22:14

Washburn:

So, they were working so much, they didn't have a lot of time to watch over the kids?

1-00:22:20

Cordova:

Somebody was always there. I mean, they'd be there for lunch, they'd be there for dinner, they'd be there—you know, they were always around some place. They weren't that far off; my dad was, but not my mom. My mom was always just around.

1-00:22:38

Washburn:

What were some of the other families like in the neighborhood, were they like yours? Were they the same size and the means and everything like that? Can you describe it to me?

1-00:22:47

Cordova:

Yes. Yes. Some of them, okay, some of them were even better than we were, because they were--it seemed like as if all my friends had stores; they had grocery stores. They would come from one end of town and they'd come. Then Bernice, my friend Bernice, was around the corner from me. They were of better means. Some of the other girls, you know, they always had these beautiful clothes, but they were handmade, or they were seamstresses. I mean, they were good seamstresses, so the parents would make all this clothes. Even my mom would make me some of my clothes, she would make some of my clothes. And I loved it, I loved to wear something new.

1-00:23:42

Washburn:

Did your folks speak Spanish in the home to you guys?

1-00:23:56

Cordova:

Yes, they spoke Spanish, but my mom, because she would send us to the store, she'd say, "Get me a dozen eggs, a pound of sugar," in English. Okay? A dozen eggs, a pound of sugar, and something else. I'd go to the store and I'd say, "I want a dozen sugar and a pound of eggs," and so the grocer, my girlfriend's dad—I'd get all mixed up. He'd say, "Okay, I know what you mean." But my mother would tell us in English, because she spoke both English and Spanish, you know. But most of the time, they spoke Spanish, but whenever we'd go to the store—and it seemed like as if I was always around, I'm the one that was always around to do things. I was very, very close to my mom and dad. Because I was the one that they came down here with, with me, because my dad was drafted into the service, because he didn't vote Republican. Right, they told him to vote Republican, and he said, "No." Because it was such a small town, they drafted him even though he had all these children. And so he taught me how to write in Spanish, the accents and everything, and he would teach me how to write real--because he used to like to embellish on the letters.

1-00:25:38

Washburn:

Kind of cursive style?

1-00:25:40

Cordova:

Cursive, yes. He'd write to me, because he wanted for me to answer Mom, because she didn't know how to write fast, but I could write fast. My mother would write very slow, so I would write the letters for my dad, or answer the letters, or I'd write to him all the time.

1-00:26:07

Washburn:

When he was in the service.

Cordova:

Yes.

Washburn:

Were all the families in your neighborhood, was it a mixed neighborhood, or were they all Mexican families in the neighborhoods?

1-00:26:21

Cordova:

All of them, all of them were Hispanic. No, no, no. I take it back, no, I had Anglo friends. They would tell me, "I wish I was your color, I wish I was your color!" I thought it was weird, you know, but they were my neighbors. Oh, we had Mrs. Jentry, I remember. I remember this other girl that was my neighbor, she didn't go to the same school I did. But we had Anglo neighbors and everything.

1-00:26:47

Washburn:

At first you said there were all Hispanic families, and then you said--was it majority Hispanic families and a few Anglo families?

1-00:26:57

Cordova:

Yes, I think the majority of them were Hispanic, but a lot of the stores were run mostly by Anglos. Okay? Most of the stores were Anglo, run by Anglos or businessmen, maybe not from there that I can remember. I would just go shopping, and a lot of our Hispanic friends worked there in the stores as clerks. Because I remember that the dads and the moms of some of kids that were going to school, they were working in the stores.

1-00:27:36

Washburn:

And so this is the reason why you couldn't go speak Spanish at the store. Did the store owner not speak Spanish, and that's why your mom told you to go say, you know, "One pound sugar"--

1-00:27:47

Cordova:

Oh, no. We picked up English like that. No, this is when I was younger--maybe about five or six, I mean younger, so that they would understand what she needed. I mean, I was really young; I think even before I started going to school. Because once we started going to school, English was--it came to us just like that. I mean, we had to learn it, and once we started learning English, and this was in kindergarten, first grade, the Spanish was gone, the Spanish was gone. There was just--nobody spoke Spanish.

1-00:28:28

Washburn:

Did the school allow you to speak Spanish on the grounds or in the classroom?

1-00:28:32

Cordova:

Nobody spoke Spanish, no one, not a single kid spoke Spanish. We were all English-speaking. They were mostly Hispanic, but there was a lot of Anglo kids, lot of Anglo kids, because now I remember Harry Bradley and other kids that--we were a mix, you know, going to school.

1-00:28:54

Washburn:

What was the name of the school?

1-00:28:56

Cordova:

Holy Cross.

1-00:28:58

Washburn:

Holy Cross. Sure.

So can we talk about the decision you guys made to come out to Richmond? What do you remember about the decision your family made to come out to Richmond?

1-00:29:05

Cordova:

Sure. My dad lost his job at the lumberyard. We moved to El Paso, because they had offered him another job in El Paso. At that time, I was in the fourth grade. I can remember that I went to school, and in the school, they were so shocked that I could read and write. They were shocked in the fourth grade that I could read and write. So I can remember that they were bringing classes into the room so they could hear me read, and I would write on the blackboard. So they were trying to show them that they could learn. Right now, I'm thinking about that, why were they doing this? But they would bring other classes so they could see what I was doing.

1-00:30:12

Washburn:

Why were they shocked that you can read and write?

1-00:30:17

Cordova:

Evidently, the kids there were not--why couldn't they do that? Why? I don't know. I don't know whether it was the teachers, or what? But see, I was going to a Catholic school, and we moved over there because of the job. Then, because I can remember when I went--and then I loved art. I used to love to draw insects, and I used to draw in them in those great big boards. You know, the charts that stand up. And they taught me how to play glasses of water, you know, music. And they thought I had so much talent. They asked me if I would run on a relay. You know how you pass the--. And of course, I said, "Of course!" So, guess what? I couldn't run. I had the shortest legs. I was so short; everybody left me behind.

1-00:31:24

Washburn:

Wait, I'm interested. Were they shocked that you could read and write? Does this have to do with the fact that you were Hispanic, or that the schools in El Paso were just no good?

1-00:31:43

Cordova:

Yes. Right, the schools were very bad, and also the fact that, you know, El Paso is right next to the border, right? So, I would assume that there was a lot of people coming in from Mexico, and they didn't know how to read or write. So maybe the teachers were having a problem, because in El Paso, there's a lot of Anglo people. But anyway--

1-00:32:09

Washburn:

Do you think that applied for the Anglo and Hispanic kids, that they were shocked that at your age you could--I mean, are you saying that the Hispanic kids couldn't read and write as well as the Anglo kids?

1-00:32:24

Cordova:

No. I'm saying that none of kids could read or write. None of them. None of them. At the time, I didn't think anything about it, you know. It was easy for us to do that, because we learned this as soon as we got into school. I mean, right away, you know, the ABCs, the writing, cursive, and you know how they make you practice in school. Evidently, they didn't have that much time over there for it as us. We were obligated; we had to learn. We had homework; we had all this we had to turn in. Well, anyway, the job didn't last very long.

1-00:33:06

Washburn:

Whose job?

1-00:33:07

Cordova:

My dad. So that we had to move back to Las Cruces. Go back. Well, anyway, when he went back, we didn't stay there too long. Let's see, I was in the fourth grade, and then when I was in the eighth grade, then we came to California, once I graduated.

1-00:33:43

Washburn:

Eighth grade.

1-00:33:45

Cordova:

I graduated from the eighth grade.

1-00:33:47

Washburn:

Let me ask you, as best as you can remember, why do you think your father didn't look for some job outside of New Mexico-El Paso area before he went--?

1-00:33:58

Cordova:

Oh, he did. That why we went, we went to El Paso. But there were not very many jobs during that time. There were not very many jobs, but they had offered him--

1-00:34:08

Washburn:

Can you place the time period?

1-00:34:10

Cordova:

Well, let's see. It must have been during the war. When was the war? In '39, '40, '41?

1-00:34:25

Washburn:

'40. '41, '42 to '45?

1-00:34:27

Cordova:

Yes. '41, '40. Maybe it was '39, '40, '41. And the jobs were hard to get, because everybody was going into the service. All the men were being called into the service, and even my dad went into the service. Then, that came as a blessing that he served for, I think, two years. Then he was discharged, okay? But later on in years, now after he, you know, retired and career and all this stuff, he had a lot of benefits from the service. See? So they did him a favor.

1-00:35:10

Washburn:

So you went back to Las Cruces from El Paso?

1-00:35:15

Cordova:

We went back to Las Cruces, and I finished my schooling there. We had beautiful friends, beautiful people. Everybody seemed to know one another. We were very patriotic. My friends from across from where we lived, if I go see my girlfriend, and they'd start playing the national anthem, the father would stand up, and we'd all have to stand up and listen to the national anthem. I mean, this is way the people were, very patriotic. And we had to be very respectful. Now, I remember that, Corinne and her dad.

1-00:35:59

Washburn:

Do you remember how long you guys stayed in El Paso?

1-00:36:03

Cordova:

I think it was less than a year.

1-00:36:08

Washburn:

Less than a year?

1-00:36:12

Cordova:

Yes. It was a very short period. Because my dad couldn't find a job, and it was creating a hardship on us. It's so interesting. We didn't have anything to eat. I mean, that's how bad it was: we didn't have anything to eat. My sisters were working, but the wages weren't very much. But I can remember that my brother would go to the train yards and they'd throw all these ripe bananas away, the bananas that were going to be ripe, and he'd bring them home. So we'd have bananas. So that was real good. But my mom and dad knew that they had to do something, because this wasn't going to go on forever. And I remember that there were streets—an avenue that did a lot of tortillas, corn tortillas. While we were going to school, we could smell this beautiful smell of corn tortillas being made by hand. There were different homes that would make these tortillas. Because I remember that when we were really hungry, they smelled so good, you know.

But my mom started making donuts. She started making donuts at home, and then she would sell them to the neighbors and they'd buy donuts, and that's where she started making a little bit of money to pay the rent, right? I think to myself, How come I don't know how to make donuts? I'm thinking about it myself now. But she would make donuts, and they were so good. Anyway, she made donuts while we were in El Paso, trying to raise money for our daily needs. So then we went back to Las Cruces when my dad, the job didn't last.

1-00:38:14

Washburn:

Let me ask just so I can follow. Am I right to say that he lost his job at the lumberyard in Las Cruces?

1-00:38:23

Cordova:

In Las Cruces.

1-00:38:26

Washburn:

But the same employer found him a job?

1-00:38:28

Cordova:

Another lumberyard, because he was real good at the lumberyard, so they told him, “You know, there’s a place in El Paso, you know, that you might be able to find a job.” Well, he went, but it didn’t last very long. They could see the hardship of the family, and my sisters, they found a job right away. I don’t know what they did. My older sister was working and so was Polly, and she was with a different group. She’d go to our neighbors, you know, and socialize with them and all that, so this is why we never saw her.

Anyway, we went back to Las Cruces, and of course, we moved to a different location and all that. That’s where my older sister found this boyfriend that was in the service--and that was in the forties. She got married, and once she got married, she left home. We were still there, going to school and all that. But as soon as I graduated from grammar school, Las Cruces, then we came to California. My dad just decided that he was coming to California, you know. Because my dad was born in Colorado, but he was very adventuresome. So he decided; we didn’t even know how we were going to make it. But he did have relatives in Brentwood, so we came directly to Brentwood, my mom and I and my dad, just the three of us were there. During that time, I didn’t know that my mom was pregnant, but she had a baby and I knew that--because where we went in Brentwood, it was a fruit--they had orchards and orchards of fruit, peaches and all that.

1-00:40:53

Washburn:

Oh, yes. Still do.

1-00:40:55

Cordova:

Our relatives worked in the cutting fruit and all that, what do they call them? The sheds, the fruit sheds, where they would dry fruit, they would have to cut them up and take out the seeds.

1-00:41:12

Washburn:

The cannery?

1-00:41:13

Cordova:

It was like a cannery, but it was in the open.

1-00:41:16

Washburn:

A little less formal—okay, I don’t know. That’s a good description, though, what you just gave us. Yes.

1-00:41:19

Cordova:

Okay. Because I remember that I used to see these huge, like four by eight trays, and they would have placed them there to dry them in the sun, right? But you would have to cut these by hand, everything by hand. Anyway, I thought that was a lot of fun, because when I got there, then I would see my cousins; that’s where they went to work, so I

wanted to go. I wanted to go over there and experience this, so of course I tell my mom, you know, "I want to go work, too." Well, there was no problem, it was close to the house, so we'd walk. We walked to work. So I experienced that, cutting peaches and all that stuff. Of course, they had been doing that for a long time.

Anyway, I went to Liberty High in Brentwood. We didn't last there very long either, but my mom--let me tell you what happened. I heard my mother moaning, and I knew that something was happening, see? Because everything's on the Q.T., right? Then I heard a baby crying, and I said, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!" I know my dad had something to do with that. I know that she's in pain because of him. I didn't know what or how or why, but I knew that because she was moaning and she was hurting, I felt the pain and I knew it was my dad's fault. But I didn't know exactly what part he played in this, but I heard this baby. Anyway, so they bring the baby, and I could hear that my aunt, you know, because my dad went to get my aunt, and they went to get the doctor, and she had the baby at home. Anyway, the doctor says, "Do you have some hot water?" I could hear all this going--I'm in the other room, and the walls are just paper thin, you know they are just boards. So then they brought the baby out into the kitchen. I guess it was in the morning when I finally got to see the baby, and I says, "Eyew, it looks like a witch!" It was my brother, right? The baby. You know, I was kind of jealous of the baby, and I was calling that a witch.

1-00:43:56

Washburn:

The baby was Frances?

1-00:43:59

Cordova:

No, no, no.

1-00:44:03

Washburn:

So, this is one other.

1-00:44:04

Cordova:

My brother. This is my brother.

1-00:44:07

Washburn:

Which one? Who was the baby?

1-00:44:09

Cordova:

My brother John.

1-00:44:11

Washburn:

The baby was John?

1-00:44:13

Cordova:

Oh, you know what? I forgot to tell you that I had a brother in 1937 in Las Cruces also; that was my brother Junior. And that one, I just knew that my mom had had a baby, I didn't hear any commotion over there. But over here, I did, because I was, you know, we were in this small--it was like a camp for the fruit workers. That's where we had ended up, but anyway, so we had my brother, and he was cute, cute, turned out to be a cute kid, you know. [laughter]

1-00:44:53

Washburn:

Not a witch.

1-00:44:55

Cordova:

No, not a witch. But then my sisters came, Polly and Frances came; they came from Las Cruces, they came to join us. I can remember that because my parents were always working, this is, "Okay, we're gonna leave you at home, and we expect dinner to be ready. You know, there's some chickens out there." So I could remember that I used to see my mom kill like—she'd twist the neck off the chickens and they would die, right? Anyway, Polly and I were in charge, and so Polly says, "We've got it taken care of." Okay, so she goes and gets the chicken, because we're supposed to have chicken soup. So anyway, she gets the chicken and she twists the thing, because there was no such thing as to know how to kill a chicken right. She twists the chicken like that, and then she let it go and it was still jumping around, you know. So there I was after it with a bucket trying to stop it. Anyway, she had to do it until it was done right. [laughter]

1-00:46:08

Washburn:

Let me ask you a few questions about--how did your dad decide to come out to California? You said there was no work, but why this area?

1-00:46:26

Cordova:

Because of his relatives, yes. He knew that his relatives lived in this area. He knew that they were here someplace. And he knew that some of them were in Brentwood; others were up here in Richmond.

1-00:46:43

Washburn:

Had he been in contact with them?

1-00:46:51

Cordova:

Oh, yes. They would write.

1-00:46:54

Washburn:

They'd write.

1-00:46:55

Cordova:

Yes. They would write, and that's the way they were in touch. They knew, because he would drive to Colorado, Colorado right over here. Everybody knew exactly where everybody was. I didn't even know that I was going to meet any cousins of mine.

But anyway, I was going to tell you about what happened with the chicken. We knew how to clean it, you know, how to; we had seen Mother do this a lot of times, so we knew exactly what to do. We thought, right? Soon, we were pulling the feathers off of him and everything. Then, dinnertime comes, we're very proud, we've made chicken soup and all this. My dad's cutting the chicken, and he goes, "What's this?" And he says, "You didn't clean out the gizzard from the chicken?!" We said, "Well, we cleaned everything out!" He says, "Well, the gizzard," the gizzard with the dirt and all the gravel and all, was still in there. [laughter]

1-00:48:01

Washburn:

So, it was pretty gross. Oh, that's a funny story.

1-00:48:06

Cordova:

But anyway, that's one little incident that happened.

1-00:48:12

Washburn:

Did his relatives who lived there, were they from Mexico or were they--?

1-00:48:15

Cordova:

No, they were from Colorado, from Greeley, Colorado.

1-00:48:19

Washburn:

Had they worked in agriculture their whole life?

1-00:48:23

Cordova:

Yes. I think they were in agriculture all their life. My dad was Indian, you know, so he was--

1-00:48:37

Washburn:

Your dad wasn't Mexican?

1-00:48:41

Cordova:

No.

1-00:48:43

Washburn:

Oh, yes! I didn't even know that. Your dad was what kind of Indian?

1-00:48:46

Cordova:
{Piwa?} Indian.

1-00:48:48

Washburn:
One hundred percent Piwa?

1-00:48:54

Cordova:
Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, we didn't even discuss, you know, that. He was just--he was.

1-00:48:56

Washburn:
And your mom was Mexican?

1-00:49:03

Cordova:
Yes.

1-00:49:05

Washburn:
Was she born in Mexico?

1-00:49:07

Cordova:
Yes. She was born, but she came down here when she was very young. She just crossed the border and--

1-00:49:16

Washburn:
Polly never mentioned any of this stuff. Did you feel [when you were] younger more culturally Mexican or more culturally Piwa Indian?

1-00:49:39

Cordova:
Oh, no. More Mexican than Indian, because--not even Mexican. I mean, we were Hispanic. There was no such thing as Mexican, because whenever we'd get a child or student from Mexico, or they would come from California to Las Cruces, they didn't know how to read or write. Those we considered Mexican, see? They were from Mexico, I mean they were Mexican, because see, they didn't--. So, we didn't consider ourselves any kind of a race, really. You know what I'm saying? You didn't discuss it. I mean, everybody was the same, except when the students would come from California or from Mexico. Then you'd know, because they had an accent, they didn't know how to read and write, especially from California, too.

1-00:50:41

Washburn:
So, did your dad speak two languages? Which languages?

1-00:50:45

Cordova:

English and Spanish.

1-00:50:48

Washburn:

English and Spanish? But if he was Piwa Indian, why didn't he speak his own language and--but he spoke Spanish?

1-00:50:58

Cordova:

Because they don't speak Indian, they don't speak Indian. They've mixed throughout the hundreds of years, you know. They learned Spanish or they learned English, depending on what area they lived. And they picked it up. They knew both languages, both languages. They picked it up.

1-00:51:22

Washburn:

Yet he was still 100 percent Piwa? Neither of his parents were--?

1-00:51:24

Cordova:

And my grandfather, they were pure Indian. You could tell by the pictures they were Indian, you know, the grandmother had the long skirt and—good-looking people.

1-00:51:42

Washburn:

So, these folks in Colorado, they were also Indian then, too? I mean the people in Brentwood?

1-00:51:47

Cordova:

Right. Yes, yes. Right. As a matter fact—oh, wait a minute, yes. Aunt Rose and Uncle Mariano, that was his brother, so they were Indian, but they didn't speak Indian. You know, they spoke English and Spanish.

1-00:52:21

Washburn:

Other than knowing that they had Indian ancestry, did they make any kind of Indian foods or anything like that?

1-00:52:29

Cordova:

Well, we were in Las Cruces, there was a town by the name of Tortugas, and on the twelfth of December, all the Indians would get together and they would have a ritual of climbing this mountain, a mountain. They would start early in the morning, and then at night, they started coming down, you could see the lights. As they were going up, they were picking up kindling and would put it on the side of the road. And I guess way up there--I never went because I was too young--but there was like a little chapel, and they would do whatever they did, but then coming back, they would light up these mounds of woods that they had put together. You would wait for them, and the people would wait

for them with food down here. And they ended up at the church. Now, this was in Tortugas, this was about three miles from Las Cruces, from where I lived. But all the Indians would get together and they had their costumes and they had fiestas. But we didn't--the older ones did, his sisters and his brothers, you know, they would make like a promise or something.

1-00:53:54

Washburn:

Who's that? Your father's sisters?

1-00:53:58

Cordova:

Yes, yes. My father's older sisters, they would make a promise or something, and they would have the actual costumes and they would dance. You know, we'd see this, and we were small at the time.

1-00:54:10

Washburn:

But your father, did he participate in this also?

1-00:54:12

Cordova:

Yes, yes he did.

1-00:54:15

Washburn:

So he did retain some of the culture, a bit.

1-00:54:17

Cordova:

Oh, yes! As a matter of fact, he made this drum out of deer skin, and that's been in the family, you know. He used it to play wherever they would have the fiestas. Anyway, he passed it on to my brother and my brother passed it on to my other brother, so he had this drum with a maracas that they would dance with, you know, the ladies would have their little dance, and all that. And you could see the old men would crack the whip to the people, you know, in the fiestas. They would take us to see all this, and that was interesting, that was interesting.

1-00:55:07

Washburn:

Do you remember the people in Brentwood? Do you remember them inviting your father to come, or did he make a proposition to them?

1-00:55:23

Cordova:

Oh, no. They belonged to a tribe, like, okay? Everybody belonged to this. All of them were Indian there. I mean, they were all over Las Cruces, you know, they lived in different areas, right? Then they would get together during this time.

1-00:55:40

Washburn:

Oh, I'm referring to the people in Brentwood. When your father and family came to Brentwood, you said they were relatives, but do you remember that the relatives invited him to come or that he proposed to them? Do you remember which way it happened?

1-00:55:59

Cordova:

Oh, I think that he just made up his mind that he was coming down here to see if he could get a better life, you know. And he just made up his mind that he was coming, and we had car, and we came in the car with the little things that we had. But we had beautiful stuff in Las Cruces, you know, like a huge stove that was blue, the really old--.

1-00:56:33

Washburn:

But you couldn't take it with you?

1-00:56:34

Cordova:

No. We had to leave all the stuff that is now worth hundreds, thousands of dollars. She had to leave all that back there.

1-00:56:41

Washburn:

That's too bad.

1-00:56:43

Cordova:

Anyway, we came here to Brentwood. Well, then everything was more modern once we got into California. There was no such things as Indian, you know, you are not going to-- his brother was there. But now we are in a different era, more or less.

1-00:57:08

Washburn:

Why do you say things got more modern? Can you describe what you mean by that?

1-00:57:10

Cordova:

More modern--by that, because I think that you are thinking that because of the fiestas and all this, that maybe some kind of a tradition was brought over. No, it was left over there.

1-00:57:25

Washburn:

Oh, no. Don't worry about what I'm thinking. Don't worry about that.

1-00:57:30

Cordova:

No. Because see, I started going to high school, and my cousins were going to Liberty High, so it was just like going to another school, but it was a public school this time. So, I went there, and it didn't last very long, because then my dad came over here to look for

work, because there was no work for him over there. You know, he wasn't gonna stay there in the fruit. That wasn't his thing. So he came over here to Richmond and he got a job right away at Standard Oil. Immediately, he got a job as a pipe fitter.

1-00:58:06

Washburn:

Do you remember what year that was?

1-00:58:10

Cordova:

Let's see, that was most likely in '43. He got a job right away, and then it wasn't long before he--in the meantime, my mom had this baby in Brentwood. So John was born in Brentwood. He [father] went to pick us up, he found us a place right away, because there were a lot of warehousing projects. And the apartments were beautiful, they were nice, nice apartments. We moved to Cutting Boulevard. There was nothing that you needed, they were furnished, so you didn't have to worry about furniture, you didn't have to worry about where are we going to get furniture. Everything was furnished. So we had it made. We enrolled in school right away. I went to Longfellow High School, which used to be on 23rd and Macdonald, and that's where I got a cultural shock. I came home.

1-00:59:36

Washburn:

Hold that thought. I have to change this tape here.

[End Minidisc one]

[Begin Minidisc two]

2-00:00:00

Washburn:

Hold on to that thought about Las Cruces, because we ran out of tape just then and I wanted to ask you--you were talking about when you first moved down Cutting Boulevard, and I wanted to ask you about the home you moved into. Can you describe what the home--you said it was furnished and everything, but can you describe more a little bit more about the home?

2-00:00:33

Cordova:

Sure. They were eight-unit apartments. They were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. They were eight-unit apartments and they were kind of L-shaped. It was eight units, then eight units on each side. They were housing projects. They had tile floors; they had table, chairs--wooden chairs, nice, probably maple, it was maple, because it was light wood that I can remember. Our neighbor upstairs was Anglo, he was Anglo. The neighbors in the other unit, the other side, they were Anglo. That's where my sister met her husband, Mr. Russell. But--okay, I'm not going to be able tell you about Las Cruces, I mean, we'll forget about Las Cruces.

2-00:01:48

Washburn:

That's okay.

2-00:01:50

Cordova:

So now we are coming over here. Anyway, I was going to Longfellow, then from Longfellow, that's when the war ended in Europe, when I was in Longfellow. Because I remember that Roosevelt had died, and I said, "Oh, that's too bad that he didn't get to see what happened with the war's over." That must've been '45. Then I went to--oh, but this cultural shock.

2-00:02:25

Washburn:

Yes, the cultural shock, yes, you left off there. What was the cultural shock you experienced when you came in to Richmond schools?

2-00:02:38

Cordova:

No, that I experienced?

2-00:02:41

Washburn:

Right, that's right. What did you experience?

2-00:02:43

Cordova:

Because I don't know about my brothers and sisters, but I went into the classroom, brand-new student, and we had double desks, and I sat next to a black person, a black boy. And I was so impressed, because I had never seen a black person. Never. I came home and I said, "Mom, you are not going to believe this, but there was a black person in my room and I sat next to him." And my mother ignored me just like as if I hadn't said anything. But for me, it was a shock, and then in the gym, they'd have dancing, and he came and asked me to dance. And of course, I didn't know how to dance. But I would get up. I was embarrassed to get up, because I didn't know how to dance, and it was just waltzing, it wasn't rock 'n roll and all this kind of stuff. It was waltzing with slow music at that time, it was slow music. There was none of this real fast dancing, especially in the gym. Everybody was asking everybody to dance, so there was no prejudice, no prejudice. This guy was the nicest person, the nicest person I can remember. As a matter of fact, all the black people that I can remember at that time were nice people, very nice. So, we just all blended in. We just all blended in. We were all together going to school, sharing desks or whatever. But nobody ever--no fights, no nothing.

2-00:04:49

Washburn:

So your classroom seemed to be very mixed in race. Can you describe who else was in the classroom?

2-00:05:03

Cordova:

Yes. Well, there weren't very many blacks. He was the only black in the class, so there weren't very many black. Because I was shocked to see one black person, see? You can see that I never saw any other except him. Then after that, I never really paid attention, because I was too busy with my own friends, and then we had to catch a bus from where we used to live to Richmond. Richmond High is just down here, right here. Where I used to live was in Cutting Boulevard, which is about, what, two or three miles.

2-00:05:47

Washburn:

So, did that take place at Longfellow Junior High, or is this story coming from Longfellow Junior High or Richmond High?

2-00:05:49

Cordova:

You know what? This is coming from Richmond High, Richmond High, because in Longfellow, no, it didn't happen in Longfellow. It happened in Richmond High.

2-00:06:01

Washburn:

Were there other Hispanic kids also that you remember?

2-00:06:09

Cordova:

They were all Hispanic. Well, they were all mixed; they were all mixed. There were Anglos and Spanish-speaking, and all that, but you could never tell, because they all spoke English. There was no Spanish, none, not even my neighbors. No one spoke Spanish. Maybe we'd speak it at home to my mom and dad, you know, once a while something would come up, you know, and they would be talking, or maybe they'd even talk in Spanish so that we wouldn't understand what they were saying. But I understood, because my dad taught me really well, because none of other ones wanted to learn.

2-00:06:58

Washburn:

Was it surprising that when you came to Richmond to be in such a mixed classroom or one that didn't have as many Hispanic kids as other classrooms you'd been in?

2-00:07:15

Cordova:

No. It was so mixed that you couldn't tell one from the other, you know. You couldn't tell; you wouldn't even think about it, because you were just going to school. You'd see all kinds of kids, but you didn't classify them. Is he Hispanic, is he--you know, we just went to school, and we all spoke English.

2-00:07:41

Washburn:

But do you think you are saying that because you grew up in a more diverse atmosphere, or diverse community, and so it just seemed normal to you? But maybe some other Anglo kids did notice.

2-00:07:51

Cordova:

No, I don't think they even noticed. I don't think they even had the thought, because we were neighbors. Our neighbors went to the same high school, and they were Anglo, you know, there was no separation. We were friends, and I can remember this one time, my younger sister met my sister's husband first. And she's the one that told my sister, "You've got to meet this guy." Well, one day when I was coming from school, he stopped, and he says, "Come on, why you don't jump into the car." I said, "I don't know you." He says, "You were with me last night." I says, "No, I wasn't." I was offended. It was Polly that had been with him. He thought I was Polly.

2-00:08:46

Washburn:

[laughter] He mistook you for Polly.

2-00:08:50

Cordova:

He mistook me for Polly, but they were doing that all the time. When we were going to the stores or something, and that was during the time when you are young and flirtatious and all that, and my younger sister was very flirtatious. When I'd go into a store, maybe some manager or someone would talk to me like as if he knew me. And I said, "Oh, my sister's been here." Then I would tell her. I says, "Hey, did you go into this store and blah blah blah, say this and that?" "Yeah, I did, I did." I says, "Well, they thought I was you." You know, we were always doing this, or else they would meet us and they would talk to us, and they would be talking to somebody else instead of--maybe they were talking to me, but they thought they were talking to Polly and vice versa. Polly would say, "You know who I met? I met this person, he looks like this and all that. And this is what this person said to you." "Oh, yeah. Yeah." So anyway, she said, "Well, I pretended that I was you." I said, "Oh, okay."

2-00:10:10

Washburn:

Can I go back a little bit and ask you how your father found the house you lived in?

2-00:10:14

Cordova:

Well, see, being that this was an area of--I'm going back and I'm thinking, as you're asking, how did he find this out? Okay, so when he found the job at Standard Oil, he told them, "I don't have a place." They said, "Okay, we have a list of all these housing projects, and this is where you go." They had a main office, the housing administration, so you go there and you apply for a home. If it's available for an apartment, they would assign you to that home. Of course, you pay rent, you have to pay something.

2-00:10:50

Washburn:

Do you remember how much he paid?

2-00:10:53

Cordova:

I don't think it was very much; I don't think it was very much. But he did have to pay something, because they were war housing projects, because by the time that we got a place, the war was over.

2-00:11:08

Washburn:

In this war housing project or another place? I'm not following.

2-00:11:19

Cordova:

Well, the war was on--granted--

2-00:11:27

Washburn:

I thought you said your father started working in '43 as a pipe fitter.

2-00:11:30

Cordova:

In about 1944, I think. I mean, we came over here, it must've been about '44, because in '43 is when we came here, and it probably took him a few months, you know, to look for another--because he was looking for a job all the time.

2-00:11:48

Washburn:

So, you guys stayed in Brentwood while he was in Richmond doing his thing?

2-00:11:52

Cordova:

Looking for a job, that's correct.

2-00:11:56

Washburn:

Looking for a job, and so where did he stay during that time?

2-00:12:00

Cordova:

Well, he had a car. He had a car, and he probably, maybe he stayed in the car, I really don't know. But I know that he was determined that he was going to find a job. And he did find that job right away; that's the whole thing, that he came over here, he looked for a job, he found it. He found it almost immediately, because I remember that Brentwood was just a temporary place, and he didn't go over there until he found a place for us to move into.

2-00:12:36

Washburn:

So this war housing, that was the first place, that was the first day you came to Richmond, you moved into this place?

2-00:12:45

Cordova:

That is correct, yes.

2-00:12:48

Washburn:

Okay, now I follow.

2-00:12:49

Cordova:

Yes, that's the first place we moved into, and we were very, very excited, because it was full, it was full of people, you know, all the apartments were full. So we made friends right away, right away we made friends.

2-00:13:04

Washburn:

Why do you think?

2-00:13:06

Cordova:

Because we were kids, we were kids, kids talk to one another, and, Oh, you know, we've got new neighbors and all that. And then we started visiting one another. The neighbor upstairs would cook stuff, she sent us stuff down, and she was Anglo. You know, Polly got real friendly with her, I remember, and she was teaching her how to do a lot of stuff. My older sister stayed in Las Cruces, because she was traveling with her husband while he was in the service. She was going to Virginia and she was traveling--she came home to have a baby. As soon as she had the baby, she went back to Maryland, Virginia--wherever he would go, she would go with him.

2-00:14:10

Washburn:

Let me ask you, what do you remember about the people who lived around you? By that I mean, where they worked, and where they were from?

2-00:14:16

Cordova:

The majority of those people were from Las Cruces, or they--yes, they were from there, from Las Cruces, or they were like us, you know that--. I don't remember meeting anyone that came from Mexico. The only ones that we met were the new kids that would come into class, and this is when I was in the sixth, seventh grade, that they couldn't read or write.

2-00:15:01

Washburn:

This is back in Las Cruces. I mean, your neighbors in the war housing--

2-00:15:04

Cordova:

All the neighbors, they were--. Oh, no no no. There was no war housing in Las Cruces.

2-00:15:08

Washburn:

No, I'm talking about the war housing. I'm sorry, I didn't clarify. I mean, we were talking about the war housing, and you said everybody made friends, and I was curious to know what you remember about where the people were from originally, and where they were working in Richmond.

2-00:15:25

Cordova:

Oh, I see. Oh, right. They were from all over the country, because my sister's husband was from Arkansas, you know. So all these people came to work here in Richmond at the shipyards, because it was so active. The shipyards, the cannery, there was a lot of industry, a lot of industry here. And I can remember that, well, my dad working at Standard Oil. I didn't know about my sister going to the shipyards, because I was busy going to school, I never did care whether she worked or not, because I was going to school. You know I wasn't involved with her at all.

2-00:16:15

Washburn:

Why did your dad get to--I mean, if he worked for Standard Oil, did the people who lived in the war housing where you lived, did they work in a bunch of different industries, not just the shipyards?

2-00:16:29

Cordova:

Yes, yes, that's right. Different industries, different—let's see, my brother-in-law, where did he work? He had been working as a mover--

2-00:16:52

Washburn:

How do you know where people were from? Was it a common thing to introduce yourself and ask where you were from and all this stuff?

2-00:17:02

Cordova:

No, I just know because my sister's husband was from Arkansas, and this is why--I know that they came from all over the country, because people were looking for jobs. During that time, jobs were not easy to find. And some of the shipyards here were very active, because they were making ships for the war. I mean, they had three yards, and they were sending out ships every day. Every day, brand-new ships. And I swear it was mostly women that were doing this. But I was going to school; I was going to school.

2-00:17:46

Washburn:

Right. And I want to learn about you going to school, too.

2-00:17:51

Cordova:

I didn't know about the shipyards when I was going to school, I mean, I never paid attention. I knew my dad had a good job. I knew that I had to catch a bus to go to school.

I made a lot of friends, but my mother would never allow me to visit friends that I had met in school.

2-00:18:23

Washburn:
Why not?

2-00:18:25

Cordova:
Because it was something that she didn't approve of. Because she always figured that they would be instigators out there trying to get you into trouble. Go here and go there, you know. So, I would just have fun with them at school, you know, I'd meet them at school, talk to them, but I could never go to their homes, even though they lived in my area. I could never--I made a lot of good friends, close friends, but I wasn't allowed to go to their home, because my parents didn't allow that.

2-00:18:58

Washburn:
Well, I think I remember you telling me when we first met something about recreation centers. What do you remember, and what can you tell me about socializing at the recreation center? And for people who don't know, like myself, what were recreation centers?

2-00:19:12

Cordova:
Oh, yes. Okay, they were centers where they had rooms where the kids could go and play pool, the boys could play pool. There was another room where they would have dances, I mean, big halls where they could have dances. They had a kitchen, and a regular area where if they wanted to do anything, or they could study there. But I couldn't go there too often either. If I wanted to go there, my mother would take me and she'd wait for me. And the kids from the rec, both girls and boys, this is, "Your mom's waiting for you." "Okay." Because she would come and pick me up, and she wouldn't come in front of the hall. She would wait for me about a block away. She didn't embarrass me. But they knew, and they'd say, "There's your mom."

2-00:20:27

Washburn:
How long would she wait for? How long did you play at this rec center for?

2-00:20:30

Cordova:
Well, see, I can only go once a week, approximately once a week, on Friday nights, because that's when they had dancing.

2-00:20:37

Washburn:
Tell me about these dances and stuff, because I don't know.

2-00:20:42

Cordova:

Oh, let me tell you. It was so wonderful. I loved dancing. I met this guy; he was Polish, his name was Bob, and he taught me how to dance, how to swing, how to do the Sugarfoot. Let me tell you, I was so light on my feet that he just wouldn't let me go-- right, so we'd dance and dance and dance all night. Then I met this couple, this girl and boy, and they were a good-looking couple, and he would never dance. They would see the way I danced, so I made friends very easy. I made friends real easy. Well, anyway, they'd drop me off around seven, seven-thirty, and my mom would be there at ten to pick me up. Then I would go home, but I would look forward to Friday nights, because that's when the dancing--. You know, they had bands, they had music, they had top forty music, and that was during the Dick Clark--

2-00:22:02

Washburn:

Was this right after the war that this happened?

2-00:22:06

Cordova:

Yes. Also, they had a lot of Western music.

2-00:22:13

Washburn:

Let me ask you just so I can place things. When did you graduate from Richmond High?

2-00:22:17

Cordova:

'48.

2-00:22:19

Washburn:

'48, okay. So this was during high school too?

2-00:22:20

Cordova:

Yes, during high school, that's correct. During high school, too. All these recreational halls were active, very active. There was other recreation halls in Virginia, Virginia and Cutting, that's another recreational hall. I'm sure they have one in Atchison Village, you know, Atchison Village is still in existence.

2-00:22:35

Washburn:

Yes. But describe what the recreational halls were. Today, we have like Boys and Girls Clubs, but what were they? Were they private, were they public? Who ran them, and who worked there?

2-00:22:54

Cordova:

They were public; they were provided by the housing projects, because they kind of ran everything: the apartments, the recreation halls, because there must have been maintenance men working there, cleaning them up. But they did this for the children of

the parents who were working, right? And they would go there and the guys would play pool. The girls never were in there, but the guys were always playing pool. I can remember that the hall was large and we would dance, there was a stage. This was at Huber and Cutting.

2-00:23:36

Washburn:

This is where the recreation hall was?

2-00:23:43

Cordova:

Huber, it wasn't on Cutting, it was further in, but it was on Huber.

2-00:23:49

Washburn:

What was it? Do you remember the name of the hall?

2-00:23:54

Cordova:

We just called it recreation hall, Cutting Recreation Hall. But anyway, it just seemed like as if the young kids, the ones that could go out, you know, would go from recreation hall to recreation hall, because to meet other people, meet other girls or boys or whatever, but I could never do that, you know, because my mother was waiting for me all the time. But I enjoyed dancing, that was my life. I either wanted to dance, become a secretary, or become a nun. Those three things that I wanted to become as I was growing up. Well, the first one was to become a nun. If I couldn't become a nun, then I was going to be a secretary. And then my passion was dancing.

Okay, the recreation halls, they were in existence for the kids. After school, the kids would go there. I couldn't go, but the other kids would go. A lot of the parents were strict, a lot of the parents were strict, because my girlfriend couldn't go, she couldn't go. My parents were more strict with me than with her, but she couldn't just go over there. Because I can remember that I never saw her there.

2-00:25:14

Washburn:

Was it a mixed crowd that went there?

2-00:25:24

Cordova:

It was the whole neighborhood.

2-00:25:32

Washburn:

It was the whole neighborhood?

2-00:25:35

Cordova:

All the neighbors, everybody--

2-00:25:42

Washburn:

But I don't know who lived in your neighborhood.

2-00:25:44

Cordova:

Well, like I said, there was a lot of people that liked Western music, and during that time, who was playing—God, I remember the names of the--the popular, popular artists would come here to The Barn. It was called The Barn. It was on Potrero, Potrero, there was a place with a huge, huge--it looked like a barn and they called it The Barn. But the Western music was fantastic. And I used to sneak over there, because I loved the Western music, used to love to dance. Well, I used to love to dance to anything. Because they would mix the swing with Western music, and like they do now, Tex-Mex music, this is the way they would mix it, and it was packed, packed with people, a lot of Anglos, a lot of Anglos.

2-00:26:45

Washburn:

And a lot of Hispanics also?

2-00:26:47

Cordova:

Yes, both. Right.

2-00:26:51

Washburn:

How do you know that there were a lot of Hispanics that went there also?

2-00:26:53

Cordova:

There was, well, I don't think there was that many Hispanics in the Western. No, I don't think. There was mostly Anglo, but then like I said, there was no division. Anybody could go if they wanted to go, they could go. We went all the time, because we loved dancing.

2-00:27:13

Washburn:

At The Barn?

2-00:27:15

Cordova:

At The Barn, right.

2-00:27:18

Washburn:

But you had pay to get into The Barn? It was a privately-owned place?

2-00:27:20

Cordova:

Yes. Exactly.

2-00:27:22

Washburn:

Was there a bar and everything--people were drinking?

2-00:27:24

Cordova:

Yes, I'm sure there was, or they would take the bottles. We never drank, you know, but I'm sure there was, because the people were having a wonderful time, wonderful, and it was called The Barn. I'm sure they had a bar.

2-00:27:42

Washburn:

It was on Potrero, so did people talk about, if I lived then and was in that neighborhood, would I know about a big act coming through The Barn, was it that well-known of a place?

2-00:28:02

Cordova:

Yes. Yes.

2-00:28:04

Washburn:

Because I haven't heard other people talking about it.

2-00:28:07

Cordova:

See, this is what I'm saying, like Polly, see? She doesn't know a lot of things that I used to go to, because she was not around. But this place would be something like her husband would go to, see? Western. And then, of course, she did--we finally did go as we were getting older, you know, we went together. But most of the time, I would go with a friend of mine, because that's when the service was still on, there was a lot of servicemen, young servicemen. Because they tried to pick you up and all this stuff, you know, and you were a little leery. Because, see, all this area here up in El Cerrito and all that? No homes; it was all hills. All this here, all rock and everything--there was nothing here. So, it wasn't that developed. It was a small town. The people would just come to work. They had the housing projects, a lot of housing projects. They all had a job.

2-00:29:32

Washburn:

Let me interrupt you and ask you, how do you remember your family getting along in terms of your father came to work here, and you said came to find a good-paying job. You described earlier in the interview your family in El Paso, for instance, not getting along okay. How do you remember the changes that took place in terms of your family life once your father had a job at Standard Oil?

2-00:30:02

Cordova:

Well, you know what, we were taught to live with what we had. If we didn't have anything to eat, we would share the little bit that we had, and we thought it was normal. We thought it was normal, and we knew that they were having a little struggle, but we

were young, you know, you take all this in stride. But you know, I know that they were stressed. I know that they were stressed, because they wanted us to have food. But I remember what it was not to have food. I remember that. And I'm glad I experienced that. Maybe they don't even know that, maybe my mom and dad never knew that, but I remember that we didn't have anything. I remember that we had one egg and we split it between my brother and my younger sister. We scrambled it, and we split the one egg, we had one egg in the house. My parents were looking for a job. This was in Las Cruces.

2-00:31:25

Washburn:

Right, and so how did it change when you--how can you compare that to Richmond, your life in Richmond?

2-00:31:34

Cordova:

Oh, no. Well, it was completely--I mean, there was no comparison. My dad didn't have a job over there. If you don't have job, you can't buy food. The neighbors found out that my dad was out of a job. They started bringing food to us at the house. They were bringing us boxes of canned goods, because we told them, you know, we're leaving because he doesn't have a job. The neighbors found out, and they brought us boxes, but then by that time, my parents already had decided they were coming back to Las Cruces to see if he could land something over there.

2-00:32:17

Washburn:

I understand that. My question is, I guess, once he got a job, you kind of are describing how things changed, and you've already described how it was when you had less. What was it like when you had more, if indeed you did have more?

2-00:32:36

Cordova:

Well, we didn't want for anything. They provided us with food and clothing. Once he got a job, it was paying the rent, we could buy the minimum. We had furniture--we didn't need furniture.

2-00:33:00

Washburn:

In Richmond?

2-00:33:05

Cordova:

In Richmond, so we didn't have to buy furniture. We just had the minimum clothes. I wanted to wear the latest. I can remember that they had miniskirts at the time, miniskirts! Because I remember I couldn't get on the bus, because my skirt was so tight that they would have to come and pick me up and push me up on the bus. And of course, I was very, very small. I was very short. I can remember that they'd come and they'd pick me up and put me on, and I weighed only ninety-eight pounds.

2-00:33:39

Washburn:

I can only presume things, and I kind of want you to try and describe to me, you know. So I'm understanding that you guys had furniture already, and your dad got the job at Standard Oil.

2-00:33:47

Cordova:

And remember that my sister was working.

2-00:33:50

Washburn:

Your sister was working.

2-00:33:53

Cordova:

And she would buy stuff for us. She would buy clothing for us.

2-00:34:00

Washburn:

Your mom wasn't working, though?

2-00:34:02

Cordova:

No, my mother wasn't working when we moved to Richmond. She wasn't working, but my dad was bringing in the money.

2-00:33:40

Washburn:

So, what did you do with the money, then?

2-00:33:40

Cordova:

What did we do with the money? I guess he put it in savings, or they saved it. They didn't have a savings account. They must have saved it, because we bought a home. We bought a home.

2-00:33:40

Washburn:

Tell me about that.

2-00:33:40

Cordova:

Okay, we were in the housing, and we were at the recreation. We had wonderful years there. Then not very far from where we had the war house, there was a private home for sale, and my dad bought this home on Waller Avenue, and that's off of Cutting. Yes, off Cutting, right. Then we made real good friends with the people from the store, they were Italian and they had a market there, right close to where we moved. So of course, we made friends right away, and there was a lot of--it's residential, it was residential--it was all mixed. It was a lot of Anglo people all over. Now that you are talking about that, a lot of Anglo people. But we bought a home; it was a very modest home, and that's when

Polly had met her husband. And I can remember that—okay, so I'm going to school, had made a lot of friends, I graduated, and I started looking for a job.

2-00:35:58

Washburn:

Hold on, I want to find out about what you did after you graduated, but where did the home fall into the timeline of your schooling? You said you graduated in '48. Did you move into the home before you graduated?

2-00:36:06

Cordova:

Right.

2-00:36:09

Washburn:

You did? So, you are still living at home. Do you remember this being a joyous occasion that you were moving out of the housing, the war housing and into the home?

2-00:36:17

Cordova:

Oh, yes. It was very exciting, because now we were going to have our own home, and it was private. We were going to have a yard, and my dad had a car. I can remember--we didn't know how to--my dad would leave, and Polly and I would get in the car, and we didn't know anything about brakes, we didn't know anything about shifting or anything like. The car was smoking, and then it would stop on us, and it was because the brake was still on when we were driving the car, you know. Finally somebody stopped her and told her, says, "You know what? You are driving with the brakes on--you are burning the brakes."

2-00:37:07

Washburn:

Let me ask you about moving into the home, because it seems like a really important, a kind of important event for you guys in Richmond. You said there were a lot of Anglo folks in that neighborhood. You know, you read about there being restrictive covenants. A restrictive covenant was something that was signed into the home saying, "You can buy this home but you are not allowed to sell it to a black family or a Mexican family," or it was the same for Jewish families in many places. So, do you remember there being any complications with your father buying the home?

2-00:38:03

Cordova:

No, no problem. As long as you had your money, because I can remember that when we moved there, I would still go to the recreation hall, because by that time, I finally graduated, and then my mom wouldn't let me go out. Because I had to look for a job right away; I had to look for a job right away soon as I graduated. That was part of our education, was that okay, you've graduated, so I went to look for a job.

2-00:38:37

Washburn:

But about the home, before moving on to what you did for a job, do you remember anybody saying to you in the neighborhood—I mean, what do you remember about your neighbors, with them being very receptive to you, being nice or--?

2-00:38:54

Cordova:

You know what, everybody was busy, everybody was working, you know, there was no time to be visiting your neighbors. My mother never visited neighbors--she made friends with the neighbor next door, and they were Anglo, but they were friendly. Everybody was friendly. Everybody was friendly here as far back as I can remember. Everybody was friendly, and once I graduated from Richmond, I got a job in San Francisco. I went and I looked in the ads, you know, I went and applied for a job, and I got the job. And I worked at Royal Insurance Company in San Francisco on Sansome Street. I worked there for three years right after high school, I went to work right away. [phone rings]

2-00:40:06

Washburn:

You can go ahead, you can get it, go ahead.

2-00:40:10

Cordova:

Hello, yes. [tape interruption]

2-00:40:14

Washburn:

So you were talking about the job you got on Sansome. We paused for a little bit there. And we started a new cassette.

2-00:40:21

Cordova:

Yes. And now let me tell you during all these time, I'm still going to the recreation halls during all this time.

2-00:40:30

Washburn:

During all this time? See? I was talking while you said that, sorry. Just repeat, you can repeat yourself.

2-00:40:37

Cordova:

While I was working, the recreation halls were still there, okay, I kept going to the recreation halls, and I met a lot of people there, a lot of people from school were at the recreation halls. This fellow, Avalos—the one that I told you about--they were going to the other recreation halls. So, I never saw them at our recreation hall over here, they had their own recreation halls. Because they were all traveling from one recreation hall to the other, because I can remember that they'd say, "So-and-so was over there at the recreation hall." And I always wondered, "I wonder where that's located." You know, I'd always wondered, because I wanted to dance, that was my life. Anyway, this one person

that I met, Bob, he taught me how to dance, and I used to win trophies, dancing trophies. Macdonald used to be closed, you know, like they have Solano fair, you know they close it? Well, they did that in Richmond. We had Breuners, we had Travelini's, we had the Fox Theater, United Artists, we had theaters, we had Woolworths, we had Penny's, we had Smith's, we had men's clothing stores, exclusive stores for men, a lot of beauty shops, women's shops, Marlene's. And we also had a shelter, a war shelter, and they made it into a dance hall, {McCrackin's?}, the name of the place was McCrackin's, and we used to go dancing.

2-00:42:25

Washburn:

Tell me about this place.

2-00:42:27

Cordova:

Yes, it's so interesting.

2-00:42:29

Washburn:

Yes, it sounds great.

2-00:42:31

Cordova:

Right outside it said, "Shelter, Bomb Shelter." So you'd walk downstairs, but they made it because of the war, but it wasn't used for that. I guess they made it just in case, right? Anyway, you could see this bomb shelter. So, you'd go downstairs, it was a dance hall. So they converted into a dance hall. So, I can remember--you know how the people are very entrepreneurs, that they decide that, you know, we can make some moneys here, you know. So kids would go there; they would go dancing there. Anyway, there was a--and I bet you it's still there, is it there? Oh, no, they've torn the whole place down. I mean, it was--

2-00:43:20

Washburn:

[laughter] Of course, it's not there, right. It was called McCrackin's, and can you describe where it was?

2-00:43:24

Cordova:

I'd say it was between Ninth Street and Eighth, I think. Yes, because it wasn't on Tenth Street, it was further down. Because you couldn't even tell anything from the outside, you'd have to actually go down.

2-00:43:47

Washburn:

Along Macdonald?

2-00:43:50

Cordova:

It was on Macdonald, and the name of it was McCrackin's.

2-00:43:52

Washburn:

You said you wouldn't see it from the outside, how did you know that these dances were going on?

2-00:44:00

Cordova:

Well, because we had newspapers, *The Richmond Independent*, you know, they had all this news and what's going on: Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, they would come to Oakland. We used to go the dances over there, to Sweets Ballroom. It was wonderful; it was beautiful. All the big name bands would go there. Thousands of people would fit in this area, and the place was beautiful, you know, how they have the lights that glows, and all the lights were thrown all over the place, and it was packed with people--packed. I'm talking about all kinds of servicemen: army, navy, marines, because this was a port in Oakland, you know, where all these people would come. So you met all kinds of people from all over the world, from all over the country, not the world, but the country--from the country. They were coming from all over. You know the sailors, soldiers, where are they from? They are from all over. I met a lot of people.

2-00:45:06

Washburn:

You said that *The Richmond Independent* had the concerts listed, how did you find out? Where would you read about all the concert listings?

2-00:45:23

Cordova:

By word of mouth, by word of mouth. Well, no, they were advertised. They'd have them in--you know how they have them behind glass, you know, "Tommy Dorsey, Oakland, Sweets Ballroom," and then there were other ballrooms. But Sweets was the most popular one, and of course, you had to be over eighteen to go there--or twenty-one--no, eighteen. But I can remember, we had—do you know what a {tambia?} is? It's a rail car, you know, like the cable car. We used to have this in Richmond, from Richmond to Oakland to San Francisco. We had that, that's the way I used to go to work, on this rail car.

2-00:46:16

Washburn:

Describe how you would get on it and how it would take you. Describe a day or night's journey on the railroad car.

2-00:46:27

Cordova:

Okay, they were like railroad tracks, and it goes right in the middle of Richmond. The railroad tracks would go all the way into Richmond, and you'd put a--what do you call it, a slug? What do you call it, the little coins? They weren't coins--

2-00:46:42

Washburn:

Token.

2-00:46:48

Cordova:

Token. Token. You'd buy tokens, put it in, you'd go all the way into Oakland, then into San Francisco.

2-00:46:56

Washburn:

So where was it in Richmond, on what streets?

2-00:47:01

Cordova:

Macdonald, all down San Pablo Avenue, all the way into Oakland. I used to work in San Francisco. I used to go to Heald's Business College in Oakland, and I used to get on that rail car and go to school twice a week. I did that for about two years, because I wanted to further my career. And I can remember that I was on that train at ten o'clock at night coming home. Then I would walk home, where they'd drop me off. And I would walk home, and I wasn't afraid. It was very safe during that time, it was very safe.

2-00:47:49

Washburn:

How did that trolley get over to the city? Did it go along the bridge? Did it go on the bridge? I understand how it got to Oakland, but how did it go from there to San Francisco?

2-00:48:06

Cordova:

How did it go into San Francisco? [pause] Did it get over there? No, I think it was just into Oakland, then I would catch the bus, I must have caught the bus. Then I used to get into the trolley, because that's the one that would take me to Heald's. Yes, so it must have been the bus that I would catch. But I would have to transfer, I would have to transfer—they had transfers to the trolley.

2-00:48:38

Washburn:

So, can you describe like a night that you went to Sweets, and I mean, would you--how would you get to Sweets and how would the night unfold?

2-00:48:52

Cordova:

We'd get over there on the—let's see, how did we get to Sweets? We would get there--sometimes we'd catch the bus, sometimes we catch the trolley, and it was close. Nothing was far; it was close. We just walked; we were used to walking. We were used to walking miles to go to church, so that was nothing to go. Sweets Ballroom was a beautiful place. The beautiful part about it was the people. It was packed with people, just a lot of buzzing, a lot of buzzing, a lot of music in the background. And you just enjoyed, I enjoyed just going in there and just walking around, and sometimes, you know, you get a tap, you know, "Would you dance?" We'd go dance, they take you back, and you know.

2-00:49:49

Washburn:

Was it expensive to go there?

2-00:49:52

Cordova:

No, wasn't expensive.

2-00:49:54

Washburn:

What about going to McCrackin's?

2-00:49:57

Cordova:

Oh, no. That was even less, I mean, you know, probably maybe a buck and a half or something.

2-00:50:02

Washburn:

What was the scene? Was McCrackin's less formal?

2-00:50:05

Cordova:

Yes, less formal, oh yes. McCrackin's was less formal. It's local, more or less for the people in the area, you know, that were going downtown. But it's mostly younger people that would congregate there, mostly young people. By young people, I'm talking about in their twenties.

2-00:50:28

Washburn:

What was the drinking like at McCrackin's, describe--?

2-00:50:35

Cordova:

You know what, being that I never drank when I was going there, I never paid attention. I don't think they drank that much, even though they were going there for the dancing, whoever drank, drank, but the people that you associated with weren't drinking. So I never paid attention whether they had drinking or what they would do. All I knew was the dancing. A lot of smoke, I remember that, a lot of smoke. But at Sweets Ballroom was just like going to a ballroom. It was a beautiful place, and I never wanted it to end. Never wanted it to end, because dancing was my life, and I would get trophies for dancing.

2-00:51:22

Washburn:

Wow.

2-00:51:26

Cordova:

Well, like I told you, this guy that I met, he taught me so much. You know how, you throw me down like this, pick me up, twirl me around. It was fun, it was a lot of fun.

2-00:51:37

Washburn:

How late--did the concerts go very late into the night?

2-00:51:43

Cordova:

Yes. Till two o'clock in the morning, right? Then we'd have to come home. So, I remember that Polly would sneak me in, because she knew I loved dancing. But like Polly says, you know, I enjoyed those ham and eggs at two o'clock in the morning. You know, they'd go out eating.

2-00:52:08

Washburn:

Yes, tell me about that. What would you guys do after the concert?

2-00:52:12

Cordova:

Well, I couldn't stay, but Polly could stay. I would have to come home, but she would be able to stay and go out with her friends. She had a lot of good dancing friends, and they would go out and go out to have breakfast late at night. Of course, she was a lot--not so much older, but she was older than I was. They used to have a wonderful time, because I used to look forward to, "What did you do last night?" I used to look forward to for her to tell me what happened. What did you--? And she had a lot of friends, and they all loved dancing.

2-00:52:57

Washburn:

So were your friends and her friends, were any of them Hispanic?

2-00:53:00

Cordova:

No.

2-00:53:01

Washburn:

What were the backgrounds?

2-00:53:04

Cordova:

All the people that we met while I was dancing, they were all Anglo. All of them were Anglo, because they were not from here. They were from outside the country, they weren't from California.

2-00:53:17

Washburn:

Outside the state.

2-00:53:25

Cordova:

They were all either in the service, and none of friends that I knew from here were going over there to Sweets. We'd look for places where we could go dancing, see, where the

big name bands were playing. And being that they never allowed me to go out, I never really made a lot of friends, so just a little bit that Polly would sneak me to Sweets, I could go. Then my friend would meet me there, because I wouldn't go out with no guys. So he would meet me there, and that's when we would go dancing. And I'd tell him, I says, "You go and have a good time." Because I couldn't go, because they wouldn't let me go. See, I wasn't allow to date.

2-00:54:12

Washburn:

Was this your friend Bob, who met you there?

2-00:54:14

Cordova:

Yes. Yes. So then he would tell me, and I would live that evening, just for him telling me who was there, the music, the dancing, and he'd tell me who he danced with and all this and that. And I looked forward to someday that I would be able to go.

2-00:54:36

Washburn:

Did you ever dance--you danced with him, though?

2-00:54:39

Cordova:

Oh, yes, yes. I used to sneak away and go. But when I couldn't go, then I would ask him. Because I would tell him, "Go!" you know, "Hey, I want you to have a good time," and he would go.

2-00:54:54

Washburn:

But can I ask you, did you and Bob become girlfriend and boyfriend or were you just--?

2-00:54:57

Cordova:

He was my boyfriend.

2-00:55:00

Washburn:

He was?

2-00:55:02

Cordova:

Yes. The guys, I can remember we'd get together and they'd say, "Hey, you know, have you made out?" and he says, "No. She's too young and tender; she's not ready to surrender." [laughter]

2-00:55:11

Washburn:

That's the saying they had?

2-00:55:14

Cordova:

That's what he would say to them, you know, because he respected me a lot, because he knew what I wanted. I told him, I says, "Some day," and I thought that I was going to marry him. I'd say, "I want a big wedding," and he'd say, "Oh, okay. Fine." But it didn't end up like that. But we had wonderful times together, beautiful times together.

2-00:55:47

Washburn:

That's great. Would you and Bob ever talk about how you are from different backgrounds, would you ever talk about how he was Polish and how you were Hispanic and how that could be a problem?

2-00:55:58

Cordova:

No, but he told me that he would rather not have me go with a Spanish-speaking person. He says, "Because they are mean." He says, "They are mean." I said, "Oh." He says, "Yeah." He says, "I used to live close to them." He says, "And they are mean." You know what, that stayed with me. He told me, he says, "Mexican people are really mean, you know--men." And I said--because he respected me so much, he wanted me to have my wish. And we'd go out and everything, and he never tried any funny thing. As a matter of fact, he was more like a mentor for me.

2-00:56:53

Washburn:

So why was he saying that Mexican men were mean, yet he was still your boyfriend and really liked you?

2-00:57:01

Cordova:

Because he wasn't Mexican; he was Polish.

2-00:57:03

Washburn:

But yet he knew you were Hispanic, and that you were--

2-00:57:09

Cordova:

Well, because see, I had never dated before, he was my first date. See? Being that he had lived, he was more or less--I never knew his parents, I think he was living with friends. But he had lived in Fresno or someplace where he knew Mexican people. He knew a lot of Mexican people, and I didn't. I didn't know a lot of men friends. He had a lot of men friends. I had a lot of girlfriends, but not a lot of men friends. As a matter of fact, yes, Bob was my first boyfriend.

2-00:57:59

Washburn:

That's sweet.

2-00:58:01

Cordova:

He was a beautiful person. He'd write me love letters. Every day, he'd write me a love letter. They were so beautiful; a lot of prose. Anyway--

2-00:58:13

Washburn:

So did his family ever find out about you?

2-00:58:18

Cordova:

He never talked about his family, never talked about his family. I never asked him about his mother or father. I don't even know where he came from. All I knew was that he was Polish, and that my mom and dad didn't like him.

2-00:58:39

Washburn:

But they knew about him?

2-00:58:41

Cordova:

They knew about him, because they caught me with him one day. My dad did. Oh, let me tell you! And this was on Cutting when we were at the war housing projects. When we were going to the recreation hall, he came, he was walking me from school, walking me home. Oh! And we were just talking. Oh, let me tell you. My dad let me have it, because I was with this guy. And then he was Anglo, right?

2-00:59:08

Washburn:

That was a big deal for your dad?

2-00:59:10

Cordova:

For my dad, but not for my mom. My mom was not the way my dad was. [phone rings]

2-00:59:22

Washburn:

I've got to change this, go ahead and do that.

[End Minidisc Two]

[Begin Minidisc Three]

3-00:00:10

Cordova:

You've got me wounded up.

3-00:00:14

Washburn:

No, you were telling me about your dad catching you with Bob.

3-00:00:17

Cordova:

Oh, yes!

3-00:00:20

Washburn:

It's really interesting to me, because it's neat to learn about the different ways of relations back then.

3-00:00:24

Cordova:

Yes. I didn't know that my dad had any feelings one way or the other, you see? Because his girls were never confronted with boyfriends, right? Because my sister back home, she married a Hispanic person, but then he was from there, you know. But anyway, so he caught me with Bob, and so I told my mom, I says, "Mom, I don't want to lie to you. He is my boyfriend, and I want you to know that I want to see him." She says, "I know. I know, m'hija, but your dad, you know how he is." You know, he wanted me to meet a Hispanic person, not an Anglo. [sneezes] Excuse me.

Well, anyway, as the story goes, I told him, I says, "I'm not going to lie to you, but I'm going to see him." Because by this time, I was already out of high school, and you know, they are still holding the reins. And I wanted to be obedient, you know, I was always very obedient to them. I had told my mother privately, I says, "Mom, he's my boyfriend and I'm going to see him." [sigh] And of course, she understood, she understood. Anyway, finally, my boyfriend says, "I'm going to meet your dad." I said, "Okay." So he came to the house and he introduced himself. He says, "I'm Bob," and that got my dad infuriated, because he had the guts to come to the house. Of course, he accepted him in the house, but not graciously. But he told him, he says, "I want to see your daughter."

So anyway, that's where it ended. I didn't go out with him or anything, we just sat there talking, you know. But he told my dad, he wanted to let him know that he wanted to see me. So, okay, so just not to make waves, I just never made it visible that I was seeing him. I never made it a point that he should come down all the time and all that stuff, because I wanted my dad to be calm, you know how that goes. Have peace in the family. But anyway, when I was going to work, when I was working, I met my husband at the recreation hall. That's where I met my husband, the man that I married.

3-00:03:18

Washburn:

So let me backtrack just a second. What did your father say about Bob being Anglo, and what did he say about your sister marrying an Anglo man, too?

3-00:03:33

Cordova:

Well, once Polly married Ray--well, he knew that we had our own minds, that we were going to pick the person that we loved, not the person that he cared about. And as it turned out, she went ahead and married Ray, because he didn't like him either. But of course, they turned out to be the best of friends. But you know, that's the way fathers are. I mean, you know, they think that you should stay within in the same race or whatever.

3-00:04:25

Washburn:

So did your sister meet Ray Russell after he found out about you and Bob?

3-00:04:38

Cordova:

No. They got married, I mean, Polly and Ray had been seeing each other for--

3-00:04:45

Washburn:

By the time you and Bob were seeing each other?

3-00:04:48

Cordova:

Oh, yes.

3-00:04:51

Washburn:

So tell me what he said about Bob being Anglo. Do you remember some of his words?

3-00:04:52

Cordova:

Oh, okay. What did he say? He says, "No me gusta ese lagartijo." [laughter] He called him a lizard.

3-00:05:11

Washburn:

Okay. "I don't like this lizard." [laughter]

3-00:05:14

Cordova:

Yes. That's what he said, exactly. And it was just because he was Anglo, and he had have to something negative to say about him. But he was a very, very nice person, and I was very much in love with him. But it didn't end up like that, because then he got to a point where he had gone to Los Angeles and he wanted me to come down there, and I said, "I can't." I says, "You know how I feel." And he says, "But I've got a beautiful ring for you over here." I says, "No. That's not the idea."

3-00:05:52

Washburn:

Why--you say, it seems like you describe your neighborhood as being everybody getting along, I'm sure the kids--

3-00:06:04

Cordova:

Even my dad would get along with everybody!

3-00:06:09

Washburn:

But then why did he take offense to you going with an Anglo boy?

3-00:06:11

Cordova:

Well, because I was his daughter, he wanted someone that he approved of. He wanted somebody that he approved of.

3-00:06:18

Washburn:

And who would've that been?

3-00:06:20

Cordova:

A Hispanic person. He wouldn't have cared what he looked like, but as it turned out, I did marry a Hispanic.

3-00:06:27

Washburn:

Let me ask you, though, why then--I mean, you described there weren't so many Hispanic folks in your neighborhood. If he wanted you to meet a Hispanic folk, why didn't you move into the section of Richmond where there were more Hispanic folks?

3-00:06:43

Cordova:

Because he didn't know anybody here. How would he distinguish where people lived? I mean, everybody was intermingled. There were Hispanics, there were Anglos, there were, oh, everybody in the neighborhood. There's people that spoke--that were Hispanic, they didn't know how to speak Spanish. I had a girlfriend, she didn't know how to speak a word of Spanish. And her parents were Hispanic.

3-00:07:11

Washburn:

Where did she come from?

3-00:07:14

Cordova:

She lived here in Richmond. I think her parents weren't local, they were from Colorado, I think.

3-00:07:30

Washburn:

In the people that I've interviewed down by Barrett and {Garrard?} down there--

3-00:07:32

Cordova:

Right. Because when we came, we were looking for Hispanic people. We couldn't find them. I says, "Where are they?" Because we were looking for somebody from Las Cruces. We'd say, "Gosh! I wonder if anybody lives here that--?" We wanted to find somebody from Las Cruces here. Because we figured that there must be somebody, and we'd look and we'd look, and we couldn't find any except in church. But we'd go to church and we'd come home.

3-00:08:04

Washburn:

Tell me about church. Talk about this.

3-00:08:07

Cordova:

Well, we started finding out that there were some people that lived at the end of Richmond, at Macdonald, Second, First, a lot of Hispanic people over there, a lot of them. But we didn't know that, because we were over here. A lot of Anglo people owned these houses. And they would all congregate at St. Mark's. They'd all go to St. Mark's. And we'd look to see if there was anybody that we knew, because we weren't out looking to make friends or anything like that. You know, we'd go to church, and we'd leave. We didn't know anybody, we didn't know anybody there, because we didn't live in that area. We'd come home. So I never met these people until we started going out dancing in different areas. Then my husband would meet them, he'd introduce me to them. Then we'd find out they were living over, then they would have house parties. We get invited over there, too. That's when we started finding out that there are all these Hispanic people over there. But these were our age, young, young people, but they didn't speak Spanish. They were all English-speaking people.

3-00:08:19

Washburn:

How do you remember--how can you link your husband to that? You just said your husband would introduce you to these people. How did your husband know these people? You described your husband as Hispanic, but how did he know them?

3-00:08:19

Cordova:

Because he was working at International Harvester. After he graduated, he went to work at International Harvester.

3-00:08:19

Washburn:

What's that?

3-00:08:19

Cordova:

That's where they built big equipment, and there were a lot of young kids working there-- International Harvester. His mother was working at where they make the tubs and all these--

3-00:08:19

Washburn:

American Standard?

3-00:08:19

Cordova:

American Standard. His mother, a lot of the friends of the mother were working there, they had children just like he had brothers and sisters, and they were going to school, the local schools here. I met him at the recreation hall, though, because he used to take his

girlfriend to the recreation hall over there. That's where I met him. He broke up with her, then he would come and pick me up and take me to the recreation hall. Well, he was Hispanic, right? So my dad didn't mind at all, right? But I didn't have any interest in him. My mind was with this other guy, right? And he had a beautiful, beautiful girlfriend, and we were very close. Anyway, they had broken up, and then he'd come pick me up. And I'd say, "You've got to learn how to dance." I says, "Look at all these beautiful girls out there." He says, "I can't." He says, "A dog bit me when I was young and I can't move my leg." So I says, "Well, come on. We are going to learn how to dance." So I would take him out there, you know. I went, "Okay, you go try this out with--go get the prettiest girl you can find." Then I'd direct him to a person that I thought would be nice for him, because I wasn't interested in him. He was very kind of bashful, and so he'd go and he'd try to dance and all this stuff.

Anyway, as it went on, he got so used to coming to pick me up, and used to me dancing with him, trying to show him. But see, I was really just trying to teach him so that I could be dancing with my friends and my friend, because they were good dancers. That's all I could think about. So, he's just barely starting to learn how to dance, and I was trying to encourage him to go and dance with some girl. But he'd pick me up, because he'd bring home. See?

3-00:12:20

Washburn:

Where did he live in town?

3-00:12:23

Cordova:

He lived just down the street here. He'd come from San Pablo to Richmond.

3-00:12:28

Washburn:

Oh, he lived in San Pablo?

3-00:12:33

Cordova:

He lived in San Pablo.

3-00:12:35

Washburn:

So you met him at one of the recreation halls? So you went to the recreation halls from when you were an early teenager up until your twenties, huh?

3-00:12:40

Cordova:

Yes, yes.

3-00:12:43

Washburn:

So it wasn't just a kid thing, huh?

3-00:12:45

Cordova:

No. No, it wasn't just a kid thing.

3-00:12:50

Washburn:

Tell me why not.

3-00:12:53

Cordova:

Because of the music. The music, the dancing. Everybody was into dancing. Everybody was into dancing. That's about the best entertainment that we had, was dancing. The big name bands would come into town--everybody was looking forward to seeing Tommy Dorsey, Harry James, Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, all the big, big good players. And you know, their music was fantastic, so that you could do wonders out there on the floor.

3-00:13:23

Washburn:

So was the rec hall kind of like, would you say was kind of like your practice?

3-00:13:32

Cordova:

Yes. It was just my stepping stone up. Yes.

3-00:13:34

Washburn:

So, you described to me that you found out about the Hispanic community down in lower Richmond there by Macdonald and Garrard because your husband started introducing you to people.

3-00:13:46

Cordova:

Yes, because he would stop at the bar at the end of the work day or whatever. He'd meet these people and he'd find out that they were working someplace or something, but they became very good friends. And then when we got married, then he started introducing me to some of his {_____} [tape glitch] that were going to {_____} the bar {___?}. They were still single, these guys were still single and everything. Maybe they had girlfriends, like I was his girlfriend, you know, have girlfriends, and that's the way we started meeting these friends. But we had a lot of Anglo friends too. Like we used to go to the Hungry I, to Bimbo's 365 in San Francisco--that was our entertainment--all dancing. We would go to all these places where they had dancing. That was the main thing--beautiful singing on the stage, and then he wanted me to learn how to smoke. I didn't know how to smoke. But my girlfriends smoked a lot--Pat and Bill Winters. So anyway, so they gave me a cigarette, and we were out in this club. So they gave me the cigarette and it gave me the giggles, the smoke made me laugh. Then they came in and they says, "I'm sorry but you going to have to stop laughing or you're going to have to leave." And I couldn't stop giggling, because the smoke was making me giggle. They had to give me water so that I could get rid of the smoke, but anyway he wanted me--. Oh, and then I would go like this--

3-00:15:30

Washburn:

Be more elegant?

3-00:15:34

Cordova:

Very elegant, right, like _____. Or gee, even let me have a holder, you know. And we were having a good time. We used to have a good time; used to go out dancing every weekend, Fridays and Saturdays.

3-00:15:50

Washburn:

Well, you've told me a lot of about dancing and going out, and that's something I haven't learned too much about at this point, but we haven't talked about going to St. Mark's.

3-00:16:01

Cordova:

Okay, that was our church. We didn't know any other church. We'd go to St. Mark's only on Sundays. We'd walk from Cutting Boulevard all the way to Bissell in Richmond to go to church. We'd walk every Sunday.

3-00:16:20

Washburn:

The church was on Bissell and what?

3-00:16:23

Cordova:

And Macdonald. And Tenth Street, Harbor Way. So we'd come from 40th and Cutting right now; we'd walk to St. Mark's. That's about two or three miles, that's about three miles. And then the town was right there, there's a lot of town, very active, very active. I mean, it was bustling, a lot of people.

3-00:16:46

Washburn:

If I wasn't there to see that, what can you describe to me what the scene was like walking from your house all the way over through town on Sunday morning?

3-00:16:57

Cordova:

We'd cross the railroad tracks, we'd try to find the shortest route. We knew where it was, Chancellor Avenue, and then finally we'd get to Bissell. And of course, we were so busy talking, we really didn't pay too much attention—let's see, where the Tradeway on Carlson--it used to be a furniture store--a new and used furniture store. I don't know if you are familiar with Richmond, but I remember we used to pass by there. They used to have a lot of carpeting and furniture and all this. But prior to that, it was like a yard for railroad cabooses, and then it changed into a warehouse for furniture and carpets and all. But I remember we used to pass by there, and we used to cross the railroad tracks and go all way down and go to church. And we'd just go to church and come home, because we didn't know anybody. But when I got married, I got married at St. Mark's. I got married in St. Mark's, and by that time, there used to be a memorial hall in Richmond, a huge

hall, and there was a lot of dances there. And I invited the whole town. I'd invite them, I had sent out invitations to the wedding. I'd meet them on the street—they'd say, "Mary Lou, you're getting married!" "Yes, come on down!" I had about four hundred people at my wedding. But I never thought whether we'd have food enough or--. But my mother and his mother prepared, and the neighbor, they prepared all these turkeys and all the goodies that went with it.

3-00:19:03

Washburn:

Was it just turkey or was it turkey mole? Was it a traditional food or was it just turkey?

3-00:19:09

Cordova:

Oh, no. It was turkeys and mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce, the whole bit, the whole thing.

3-00:19:19

Washburn:

Mmm, that sounds good.

3-00:19:25

Cordova:

And they had enough, but you know what? My husband and I paid for the hall, we saved, we saved our money, because we knew our parents could not afford it. So him and I saved our money to pay for everything. He did buy my wedding gown and everything, you know, in the Hispanic, they buy everything.

3-00:19:49

Washburn:

In the tradition?

3-00:19:56

Cordova:

The tradition. Right. So he bought everything that pertained to me, but him and I both paid for everything else. Everything. But my mom and dad and his mom and dad, they provided the food. But we had a band, we had the hall.

3-00:20:15

Washburn:

What kind of band was it? Describe it--was your wedding more a traditional Hispanic wedding, or was it a more American-style wedding? More Anglo American style?

3-00:20:27

Cordova:

Oh, no, no. It was definitely, it was like you would go to a wedding right now, just a traditional wedding.

3-00:20:36

Washburn:

What kind of music was it?

3-00:20:41

Cordova:

What kind of music at the church?

3-00:20:44

Washburn:

No, at the memorial hall.

3-00:20:46

Cordova:

Oh, it was the latest, the latest top forty music. Of course! Everybody was young, everybody. There was all kinds of people there, all kinds of people, because I invited them from the street. I would just tell them, "Come on down, it's at Memorial Hall." I can remember that they all crowded in. It was beautiful, it was wonderful. All my family was there, all my family was there. I was having such a good time, I didn't want to leave. It was wonderful. But anyway, yes, we've had a lot, a lot of friends. All these people you talk to, we became friends with them. I met them from work, and I had seen them at school. I had never met them at school, but I had seen them at school. But I went to work with her, with Esther, and they are the ones that had this, they were always having parties every weekend at their home.

3-00:21:50

Washburn:

Can I ask you, you said that you started going to house parties down in the Hispanic neighborhood. So what was it like going to those house parties? What were the house parties like?

3-00:22:11

Cordova:

There's a lot of booze, a lot of music, a lot of people sitting down, talking, dancing, it was like a family gathering. Even though their dad was, we knew that their dad was ill, but that didn't bother anybody, you know, everybody knew. We became very close friends. A lot of people there, I met a lot of beautiful people, beautiful people, and--

3-00:22:41

Washburn:

So there was a lot of booze, and did people serve food and stuff like this and--?

3-00:22:47

Cordova:

You know, I don't remember that there was food. I remember there was a lot of booze, I mean, that people would drink. I don't remember food, I remember there was a lot of drinking but no food. It's just the kids getting together, that's all.

3-00:23:06

Washburn:

And you played top forty music.

3-00:23:08

Cordova:

Yes. All top forty music, all top forty music.

3-00:23:14

Washburn:

Were these house parties—you described it was in the Hispanic neighborhood. Was it all Hispanic folks that went to the parties?

3-00:23:20

Cordova:

No. They invited everybody.

3-00:23:22

Washburn:

Oh, so it was mixed.

3-00:23:27

Cordova:

Mixed, they invited everybody. Just like we're used to inviting everybody. Like see, I went to a party from the recreation hall, I was invited. And I sneaked away, because it was not ten o'clock yet. It was at a private home. Of course, I was very shy at the time, but I went with this kid, good-looking kid. But I don't know what he was, whether he was Hispanic or, he was tall and had dark hair. Bob {Funston} was his name. I went with him, we walked in, everybody sitting around and everything. A lot of Italians, and then someone says, "You better be careful with him, because he's out." I got scared, you know, because they says, "You better be careful with him, because whatever girl he wants, he gets." So I told my friend, I says, "Hey, let's get out." I says, "I want to get out of here." Because they were drinking Cokes, they brought me a Coke. But you know what, that scared me. Because he was back from the war, he was back from the war. He was in the marines, and I said, "Forget it." You know, I was too chicken. So I says, "Come on, I got to go back."

3-00:25:02

Washburn:

Because he was a real swinger, huh?

3-00:25:07

Cordova:

I don't know whether he was or not, but I was scared because I didn't want to be around if that's the kind of person he was. You know, I wanted to meet nice people.

3-00:25:15

Washburn:

He was "out" meaning he wanted to date all the women he went out with?

3-00:25:18

Cordova:

Yes, you know, trying to make out with the women. And I wasn't about to be exposed to that. So I says, "Come on, let's go." I just went, just to see what the other kids did. See? Because I was so confined, and I wanted to see what the other kids were doing. Some of them would have house parties, just like right now, teenagers get together at their homes and all that stuff, and some of them would probably have a little bottle or something,

trying to mix a drink or something. But no, they brought me a Coke anyway. Yes, because the people were all mixed—Italians—

3-00:25:56

Washburn:

Would you hear Italian at these parties, people speaking Italian?

3-00:26:00

Cordova:

No, later on I found out. No. They were all American.

3-00:26:06

Washburn:

What about at the party in the Hispanic neighborhood of town, would you hear people speaking Spanish?

3-00:26:11

Cordova:

All English. No. You never. It was all English. They all spoke English, I never heard anybody speak Spanish.

3-00:26:20

Washburn:

Not even a few words or anything, or even a greeting--hola or adios?

3-00:26:23

Cordova:

I never heard them. Yes, because my husband, he spoke his Spanish so broken, I didn't even want him to open up his mouth in front of the kids. Because I was afraid that they would say something that was incorrect, and I wanted to teach them how to speak Spanish. And they said, "Mom, we don't want to learn that funny language." I said, "Okay, you know, I wanted to teach you Spanish." But they said they didn't want to learn the funny language. Why? Because there was no one that they could speak with, because none of the kids spoke Spanish, none of them when they were going to school.

So then, when they got to junior high, now that would be in the sixties, then a bunch of people were coming in, a bunch of people were coming in from Mexico. They were going into the schools, right? Then what happened? My girls came and they says, "Mom, how come you never taught us how to speak Spanish? This guy started talking to us, we don't even know what they are saying. All we can do is smile at them." I said, "Remember you told me you didn't want to learn that funny language?" They said, "Now we've got to hang around with kids that speak Spanish that you don't approve of." See, they were tough, tough kids. And I was very protective of my children, very protective. It was during the time when this other culture started coming in, other people coming in. As a matter of fact, we had such a beautiful town, and then the strikes started in the sixties.

3-00:28:42

Washburn:

Tell me about those.

3-00:28:44

Cordova:

They started talking about La Raza and all this stuff. And we'd say, "La Raza, what is that?" We didn't even know what La Raza was at the time. And then they'd say, "Se huelga," and all this stuff, and I said, "Huelga? What is that?" Well, it was during Cesar Chavez' time, and they were trying to get all the people to get involved. So then they says, "We are going to do something about it." So then they were starting to have strikes. Then the kids would try to be part of the thing, so they would skip school to be in the street to strike, to show that they were supporting the farmers.

3-00:29:40

Washburn:

The farm workers?

3-00:29:41

Cordova:

The farm workers. A lot of these kids were the sons and daughters of these farm workers. You know, they were kind of spreading out. So I told my children, "I'm sending you to school to learn, I'm not sending you to school to be out on the streets." He never went, he never went, so he never got involved. None of my kids. But my girls started meeting all these Hispanic-speaking--they were coming from Cuba, from all over, and so they met a lot of Hispanic kids. That was in the sixties.

3-00:30:17

Washburn:

In Richmond?

3-00:30:25

Cordova:

Yes. And then all these other people start to come in from the outside the area, people from the South. Then they started throwing Molotov cocktails at the stores to break in, and Richmond started to close down. Bars were put in the windows. The people were afraid to go downtown. Because these different kinds of people were coming to our town. Travelini's moved out, they closed down, Breuners moved out. You know, one by one. The theaters were demolished, the beautiful theater, beautiful theater. They had a Rio Theater, a Mexican theater in town.

3-00:31:14

Washburn:

What theater?

3-00:31:16

Cordova:

Mexican theater. Rio, the Rio.

3-00:31:18

Washburn:

Which one? The Rio. What would it play there?

3-00:31:20

Cordova:

Mexican movies.

3-00:31:22

Washburn:

In Spanish?

3-00:31:24

Cordova:

Yes, because my dad used to go there.

3-00:31:24

Washburn:

Tell me about this. I haven't heard about this place--the Rio.

3-00:31:28

Cordova:

Yes. It was the Rio, and they had Mexican movies, and my dad loved to go watch Mexican movies. He would take my mom to the Mexican movies. They were just like going to the theater, you know, but it was a movie house on about First Street or Second Street, one of those--you know, closer to the end of Macdonald, that was the Rio. We had the Fox and we had the United Artists. In El Cerrito, we had another theater. We had the Park Theater in El Sobrante. There were a lot of theaters, we had a lot of entertainment centers.

3-00:32:16

Washburn:

Let me ask you about the Rio Theater. I mean, we could talk about all the different theaters, but I kind of want to concentrate on that, because it showed Mexican movies. Did it only show Mexican movies? Describe to me what you knew about the Rio Theater and its place in the community.

3-00:32:41

Cordova:

Well, I guess my dad would go there to see the Mexican movies, and I think I went once with them. But they were regular movies. It was a small theater, it wasn't a big theater. It was for the benefit of the people that wanted to see Mexican movies. I guess a lot of people went, because it was flourishing.

3-00:33:08

Washburn:

How many seats do you think it had in there?

3-00:33:21

Cordova:

Oh, let's see. Maybe about a hundred and fifty, maybe? About a hundred and fifty.

3-00:33:28

Washburn:

So would you describe it as a pretty good-sized theater for those days, or a rather smaller theater?

3-00:33:37

Cordova:

It was a smaller theater, because the Fox was huge. The United Artists was huge. See? There was the difference: it was a small theater, you know, it wasn't a big theater.

3-00:33:49

Washburn:

I know those theaters back then were huge, and nowadays they are a little bit smaller. Was the Rio similar to the size of today's theaters, or even a little bit smaller?

3-00:34:00

Cordova:

Yes, that's right. You know what they're sectioned off, right? In the same theater. Yes, it would be probably even smaller than that.

3-00:34:09

Washburn:

Than today's. And when you would go, would it be crowded, as best as you can remember? I know you said you didn't go too often.

3-00:34:24

Cordova:

No, I just went--as I can remember, I think I went once with my dad and my mom. I guess I was small, because I don't remember too much about it.

3-00:34:34

Washburn:

When was this? What years?

3-00:34:37

Cordova:

Well, probably when I was still going to high school.

3-00:34:41

Washburn:

So in the late forties.

3-00:34:44

Cordova:

Yes.

3-00:34:45

Washburn:

What else would your folks or you go down to that neighborhood for?

3-00:34:58

Cordova:

Well, my dad worked down there.

3-00:35:00

Washburn:

In Standard Oil.

3-00:35:02

Cordova:

Yes, at the end of Macdonald. It's right there.

3-00:35:04

Washburn:

I thought the Santa Fe was right there at the end of Macdonald.

3-00:35:07

Cordova:

Well, it's just a little ways from there, just a skip and a jump from there.

3-00:35:08

Washburn:

It's just adjacent from Santa Fe, Standard Oil is?

3-00:35:10

Cordova:

Yes, right. It's at the point. Because we used to go to the picnics and everything at Standard Oil, because he was an employee. So they would take the family swimming and to all the activities that they had there, bowling and everything. They have everything there at Standard Oil for the employees. So we were able to, I invited my friends from work to come over and we'd have picnics and everything there.

3-00:35:40

Washburn:

On the grounds?

3-00:35:35

Cordova:

On the ground of Standard Oil. They had a beautiful grounds.

3-00:35:37

Washburn:

Describe what it was like.

3-00:35:43

Cordova:

Oh, it was beautiful. It was wonderful. It was a huge, huge swimming pool. And they have a big bowling alley. They have beautiful grounds where you can have picnic, they have picnic tables all the way around. This is at Standard Oil, and it's there at present. It's still in existence, and people still go there, and my dad had a lifetime membership. Right? But we never went back. After my dad died, we never went back. That's where he retired from, he retired from Standard Oil when he did. We've had a wonderful life here. We

really have. The only sad part about it is that when these people started to show their feelings by destroying property, that's only the part. And I think that's when Richmond started to go down.

3-00:36:43

Washburn:

You mentioned that. Do you think Richmond started to go down because different people moved in, or because there was also massive unemployment--the layoffs at the Kaiser shipyards and--?

3-00:36:59

Cordova:

There was a lot of work. I found a job. I found a job in San Francisco. Then after I got married, then I moved to Berkeley. I found a job in Berkeley, and then I came to work here at Beckman Instruments. I've always worked as an administrative assistant. In all these places, I worked in the office. Always, I worked for the CEOs, for accountants, for directors.

3-00:37:34

Washburn:

You said you moved to Berkeley. Where did you and your husband move once you got married? You were still living with your folks in your home on--what was the street again?

3-00:37:47

Cordova:

It was in El Cerrito. On Waller. Then we got married, and then we found a little place in El Cerrito, a cute little place. Just darling. And you know what? When you get married, you want everything so perfect. I remember that I wanted my dinners to look perfect like from a book. And if didn't look like a book, like the book, I'd flush it down the toilet and I'd start all over again. So he would never know that I had tried it once. But no, we moved to El Cerrito. Then we moved to--

3-00:38:35

Washburn:

Where did you move in El Cerrito? Where did you move there?

3-00:38:37

Cordova:

Do you know that I can't remember exactly where in El Cerrito, but it was in El Cerrito, our first place.

3-00:38:42

Washburn:

Did you buy that home?

3-00:38:44

Cordova:

No, no, no. We were renting.

3-00:38:47

Washburn:

You rented?

3-00:38:48

Cordova:

Everything was rented. Then we moved on to another war housing project in Richmond, but we didn't stay there too long, because then his mom and dad had a home for us over here in San Pablo, and we bought that home from them. That's where my children were born, right there--right down the street from here. His folks owned a lot of property. They had their own home, they were building another one, they had another one. So we just kind of lived there. [tape interruption]

3-00:39:40

Washburn:

You know, I didn't ask you--you didn't tell me when you and your husband got married.

3-00:39:43

Cordova:

We got married in 1951.

3-00:39:45

Washburn:

In 1951. And what was his full name?

3-00:39:47

Cordova:

Henry.

3-00:39:49

Washburn:

Henry Cordova? So you changed from Mary Lou, what was your--?

3-00:39:53

Cordova:

Arambula.

3-00:40:01

Washburn:

Arambula. How do you spell that?

3-00:40:02

Cordova:

A-R-A-M-B-U-L-A.

3-00:40:04

Washburn:

Okay. That was your maiden name, your father's name? So we still didn't talk too much about St. Mark's. I interviewed somebody else, Sal Chavez, who lived in the Santa Fe housing, and you lived all the way over here on the other side of town, off Cutting. He said he went to St. Mark's, and you went to St. Mark's. So what can you tell me about what St. Mark's--what you did at St. Mark's and what it meant to your life?

3-00:40:43

Cordova:

Beautiful church. St. Mark's was a beautiful church; that's the only church we knew here. Like I said, that's where we got married. The priest we wanted for him to marry us had just been transferred, so we had another priest marry us. We weren't active in that church at all, because we lived way out there. So all we did was go to church there. That's all we did, go to church and come home, go to church and go some place. As a matter of fact, my husband would pick me up and take me church, then we'd go wherever we were going. But that's where we would go. That's the only church we knew.

3-00:41:34

Washburn:

What was the service like? Well, I guess maybe I'll ask a more pointed question: Did you and your parents go to service in Spanish, or did you go to service in English?

3-00:41:53

Cordova:

I think it was in Latin.

3-00:41:56

Washburn:

It was in Latin?

3-00:42:00

Cordova:

Yes.

3-00:42:05

Washburn:

It's all the same, right?

3-00:42:10

Cordova:

Yes. I don't think they had a Spanish mass and an English mass during that time. I think it was all Latin, and we would just go to mass. It wasn't until later on that they changed it, that they decided to translate the Latin into English so people would know what was happening. But it was Latin, so we never had a distinction between a Mexican or a Spanish or English, none. I think it was a community church; I think everybody went there. It was whoever lived that was Catholic, that's where they went. They went there from all over the area.

3-00:42:46

Washburn:

Do you remember any other—I've never been to St. Mark's. For someone who hasn't been to St. Mark's, can you describe it?

3-00:42:54

Cordova:

Well, I remember how the statues were, the Blessed Mother. It was a beautiful statue of the Blessed Mother on the left-hand side. I remember that she was like in a little concave thing, and it was blue in the background, and then St. Joseph was on the other side.

3-00:43:17

Washburn:

How many people would you estimate went to mass on a Sunday?

3-00:43:24

Cordova:

Let's see. It was full. It was always full. The churches were always full.

3-00:43:38

Washburn:

What is full? What does that mean?

3-00:43:39

Cordova:

Let's see, about two hundred? About two hundred people. No, more than that. Let see, because there's an aisle and it gets full on both sides, and so you'd think that--two hundred, three hundred. I don't know how many it accommodates, but it was always full, because it was the only church close by. St. Paul's is right here across the street. I didn't like St. Paul's, because it was dark and gloomy and eerie. I thought it was so dark. But I lived here, but I would go to St. Mark's, because I didn't like the--. But now, the church is beautiful, they painted it. They've got indirect lighting, they finally--people couldn't read, it was so dark. It was so dark, people couldn't read their missals, but now it is beautiful. It is gorgeous, and it's looking more beautiful every day, because it's been improved.

So, anyway, our hall got burned down. So ever since then they have been trying to improve the school--St. Paul's School is right there across the street from me. Then the church, they are building the new hall, and they've got a little chapel across the street, and that's very beautiful. We are very active in the church, very active. We do a lot of fundraisers, we belong to the parish council.

3-00:45:25

Washburn:

That's great. Who's we? You and your sister Polly?

3-00:45:29

Cordova:

Well, I belong to the parish council, but we both teach catechism and confirmation. Why is it blinking?

3-00:45:37

Washburn:

It's not blinking. Is it blinking right there? Oh, that's because it's recharging.

3-00:45:45

Cordova:

Oh, okay. Then we have a fundraiser that {Troy?} and I have taken care of since 1984.

3-00:45:56

Washburn:

You were too old to have your confirmation at St. Mark's, right?

3-00:46:03

Cordova:

No. We were confirmed when we were born.

3-00:46:08

Washburn:

See, I'm not Catholic, so I don't know the traditions too well.

3-00:46:10

Cordova:

Oh, okay. In the old days, when you were born, you were both baptized and confirmed at the same time.

3-00:46:16

Washburn:

So then communion is when you are like eight years old?

3-00:46:18

Cordova:

Yes, right. Seven.

3-00:46:20

Washburn:

When I was in Mexico last time, I remember this little gal, and she was like eleven years old and she had just had some ceremony done.

3-00:46:28

Cordova:

You know, a lot of these kids have never made their first holy communion.

3-00:46:36

Washburn:

I think maybe it was just something like that, maybe it was later on.

3-00:46:43

Cordova:

Yes. And now they don't allow them to be confirmed unless they are in high school.

3-00:46:46

Washburn:

Okay, so it was different during your time?

3-00:46:48

Cordova:

Yes. So during our time, we were both baptized and confirmed at the same time.

3-00:46:51

Washburn:

So what about—like, did you and your sister celebrate your quincenara?

3-00:47:00

Cordova:

Oh. We never, ever heard of quinceneara, ever. We heard about quinceneara when my daughter was going to school in junior high and she says, "Mom, there's going to be a quinceneara and I've invited to be in it." I said, "What's a quinceneara?" And she says, "Well, when you turn fifteen, they give you a celebration, a festivity." I said, "Oh, oh, okay." "So I've got to have a dress and all that." I said, "Oh, okay." I thought it was kind of fun, you know. And I asked my mom. I says, "Mom, have you ever heard about quinceneara?" She says, "Yeah." I said, "You never talked about it." She says, "No." She never talked about it; she had never had a quinceneara. She wouldn't know, or she never went or whatever. So, we never knew about knew about a quinceneara, not until my kids were in high school.

3-00:48:11

Washburn:

That's interesting. So what about like other more traditional, you know, holidays in the Mexican American and the Hispanic--

3-00:48:13

Cordova:

We never heard of Cinco de Mayo. We never heard of 16th of September. We never knew any of that. None of that. We didn't know what that was.

3-00:48:24

Washburn:

In your community in Las Cruces--?

3-00:48:29

Cordova:

No. They never--

3-00:48:30

Washburn:

There was never any public festivity or anything?

3-00:48:32

Cordova:

Never, there was never any of that stuff, because they were all born there. There were all from there. You see? It wasn't until the people from Mexico started coming over here that then they started talking about this. And we said, "What happened on Cinco de Mayo? And what happened on September 16th?" "Of course, we had nothing to celebrate, because we weren't familiar with that tradition since we had nothing to do with that, we weren't familiar with that. But of course, now it's fun to participate. Yes. They are going to have this music and all this stuff. They are going to sell goodies and food, and it's fun. But not because we are celebrating whatever happened. We are just celebrating because it's fun. It's going to be music.

3-00:49:29

Washburn:

It's a community event.

3-00:49:30

Cordova:

Community event.

3-00:49:32

Washburn:

What about your husband? I mean, he might have come from a different tradition than you. Did he bring different traditions into your marriage than you brought, introduce you to things?

3-00:49:40

Cordova:

No. He was like my kids, he didn't know how to speak Spanish. His parents knew how to speak Spanish, but we all seemed--everybody spoke English around here, you know. Then his Spanish was so bad, I'd rather that he not say anything, because it was completely chopped. And furthermore, he came from New Mexico, too.

3-00:50:15

Washburn:

Whereabouts?

3-00:50:17

Cordova:

EspaZola. EspaZola.

3-00:50:20

Washburn:

Where is that?

3-00:50:21

Cordova:

Close to Santa Fe.

3-00:50:22

Washburn:

Okay. Northern.

3-00:50:24

Cordova:

Yes. And they speak different than we do, you know. Of course, I kind of insulted them one day, because I didn't know this, but my dad says, "They are pochos." So anyway, so I went to their house and I says, "You are pochos." [laughter] I said that to the mom and dad. I didn't know what that meant, but I heard my dad say that. So anyway, I guess it didn't sit too well with them, but I didn't know any better. I didn't know what it meant, but they spoke different. They called different kitchen utensils different names and everything. Of course, I thought ours was proper and that theirs was not proper. But anyway, well, now I know better.

3-00:51:26

Washburn:

That's funny. Can you tell me quickly what's the story of your husband's family, how they made their way from New Mexico?

3-00:51:33

Cordova:

Well, you know, they never did talk. Yes, they also came for the same thing, for jobs, but they were here before we were, about maybe a year or two before. No, or maybe earlier, because they acquired a lot of property. When they first came here, they started buying a lot of property with the little jobs that they had, you know, at Standard, American Standard and all this and that, you know, and they started to acquire property. They were just people that knew the value of land, but they have a lot of relatives from New Mexico, but they are all spread, Fresno and all over. But they also married Anglos. You know, there was no prejudice during our time, no prejudice whatsoever. When we were going to school, when we were growing up, it wasn't until the sixties that prejudice started, in the sixties. It just, it was overwhelming, you could see the difference in people, the way people tried to separate people from one class to the other, and you could hear them, you know. We'd say, and I can remember this--when people started to shut down the stores, with throwing Molotov cocktails and all that. You know, they actually scared the merchants from out of here, and then Richmond has never been the same ever since. Oh, and they did take the rail car, railroad tracks all up and everything, they took that trolley car out and everything was made modern, you know. Then they started getting the buses. But it was interesting, I liked that part of my life growing up when they had the trolley, and when you'd use a--

3-00:53:46

Washburn:

A token.

3-00:53:47

Cordova:

A token.

3-00:53:49

Washburn:

Wait, you never told me, where were you buy the tokens, and where would put you them in? I can't envision--

3-00:53:58

Cordova:

The bus driver would have them, you know. You'd buy the tokens and you'd put them in this little slot, you put them in there, just like they do now putting in the money, but it was a little thing. They were tiny like a dime.

3-00:54:09

Washburn:

So describe how you'd get on the trolley, how that happened.

3-00:54:17

Cordova:

Well, it was just like getting on top of, getting on board a bus, but then they had this square little coin taker, and if you didn't have a token already, you'd buy some from the conductor, and then you'd put them into the slot, and then you could go. And they'd give you a transfer to transfer to a bus so you could make your connection.

3-00:54:50

Washburn:

How much was it?

3-00:54:51

Cordova:

Gosh, ten cents? Very little, very little. But I can remember that I was using that to go to school.

3-00:55:01

Washburn:

I know in Richmond, it's apparent now, a lot of black people moved into Richmond during the war and after the war. Did you notice--like riding on the trolley--did you notice seeing black people on the trolley?

3-00:55:20

Cordova:

No.

3-00:55:22

Washburn:

If you would, where would you see black people throughout Richmond?

3-00:55:31

Cordova:

I never paid attention. I never paid attention. I just remembered that one boy, just that one boy the very first time. I thought it was so interesting, because I didn't think there was—I had never even read about that.

3-00:55:49

Washburn:

It was new for you.

3-00:55:52

Cordova:

It was new for me, right. The people that were going to school with me were nice people--this boy was extremely nice. At the time, we were mixing with everybody. There was just absolutely no prejudice, none, zero--not until different people started to come into this area, and they just seemed to disrupt everything. And of course, I can remember I'd say, "Speak for yourself." So, "We don't like this, and we want to change this."

3-00:56:37

Washburn:

What about your father and his reaction to you dating Bob for the first place? That kind of seems like prejudice to me a little bit.

3-00:56:45

Cordova:

It is. Oh, he was very prejudiced, I found out. He was very prejudiced of Anglos and blacks--well, there was just two, Anglos and blacks. He was terrible, he was worse than anybody that I know of.

3-00:57:09

Washburn:

So, when you say that there was no prejudice, but yet your father was prejudiced, that seems--

3-00:57:18

Cordova:

Yes, he was. But see, we were young, we were going to school. He wasn't at school, but that's the older--his mentality. Well, when he started working at Standard Oil, that's when he started to change for some reason or other.

3-00:57:36

Washburn:

How did he change?

3-00:57:38

Cordova:

Well, because I never knew that he that was prejudiced. I never knew that he felt that way. He never showed it to us. Never, never. Because he got along with everybody, he had a lot of friends. They are the ones that met a lot of Hispanic people; they met a lot of Hispanic people. Because I remember that they used to say the rosary, and we used to go to people's houses, and that's where I met a lot of kids from school, too. They had parents that were very religious.

3-00:58:14

Washburn:

Where would you say rosary?

3-00:58:19

Cordova:

At their homes.

3-00:58:20

Washburn:

Down in the Hispanic section of—or just anybody's section?

3-00:58:21

Cordova:

No. As a matter of fact, it was here at 37th and Barrett, around that area. You know, Hispanic people, they were all over. They were sprinkled all over the place. No one was isolated. No one, you know. You could find them any place. They were all over.

3-00:58:41

Washburn:

So you seem to make it a kind of a theme to say that their generation was different than your generation. Amongst the kids, you kind of seem to say that there wasn't so much--well, how would you describe the difference in prejudice between you, the kids at the school, and your dad and all that, in his generation?

3-00:59:12

Cordova:

Well, you know what? I never heard him speak negatively about anyone until I met my friend Bob. And that he was working for Standard Oil, then I heard him talk like that, about Anglos and blacks and--but I had never heard him, because we weren't--he wasn't exposed either when he was in Las Cruces, because there was none. You see? But when he got here, there were more people, I guess they were working there. I don't know, maybe he experienced something, who knows. But being that we'd get along with everyone, it was a very, very friendly area. People were friendly. We trusted people that we didn't even know, and they could give us a ride home, they'd bring us home, and that's the last we saw of them. You know, they'd see us walking, and say, "You want a ride?" "Yeah," you know. So it was wonderful at the time.

3-01:00:35

Washburn:

Well, we've been talking for about three hours now, and this tape is about to run out. Do you have anything to say before we end the interview?

3-01:00:41

Cordova:

Well, all I can say is--

3-01:00:43

Washburn:

Uh-oh, this is gone; this one's done.

3-01:00:47

Cordova:

Oh, it's done.

[End Minidisc three]

[Begin Minidisc four]

4-00:00:02

Washburn:

So we are recording again and this is back on, and I stopped this just a minute ago--this is new videotape and we just started re-recording on the minidisk. You looked at your notes that you had there; and we can actually talk a little longer if you want to look at some of the notes you had there.

4-00:00:28

Cordova:

I just wanted to let you that some of the entertainment here. Not only did they have the dance halls and the theaters, but they also had this nightclub. Oh, they also had The Village and {Moana's?} in Richmond. They were nice nightclubs that we used to go to, and we could have dinner there and listen to music. It was really nice--The Village, it was called The Village.

But anyway, this one club was in El Cerrito and it was at the end of, I think it was and the end of, either end of Cutting going into El Cerrito, and it was on the left-hand side of San Pablo Avenue. You know, you're going up San Pablo to Oakland, it's on the left-hand side. There, they had these female impersonators, and it was wonderful, because you couldn't tell that they were men. And they were all men. They were beautiful men; they were beautiful, blonde hair and good actors, and it was a nightclub. It was a nightclub, and they had the stage, and they would sing just like women. And people, the place was packed. People never thought anything about it, you know, it was just, "Let's go to the club." And we'd go there, we'd have a good time. We enjoyed it. We never thought any less of these people than anyone else.

So anyway, I wanted to bring that to your attention. I was trying to impress upon you that there was no prejudice at one time. Because everybody mixed, everybody was around here. Like Polly said, she was working at a wig shop, they came in to try wigs on, and she said she didn't think anything about it. Men would come in to try wigs--either they were in the business or maybe they wanted to be women. I don't know, but she says they would look good.

4-00:03:14

Washburn:

What was the club called? Do you remember what the club was called?

4-00:03:17

Cordova:

You know what? I can't remember. I thought it was {Moana's?}, but it wasn't Moana's. Moana's was in Richmond, it was a nightclub. Darn if I can remember the name of that place! It was one word, I remember, just one word. But I remember there was female impersonators.

4-00:03:40

Washburn:

How did you find out they were female impersonators there?

4-00:03:44

Cordova:

Hey, my friend. My friend would go all over the place, you know. And then later on as I grew older, then I could go into the clubs, right? So then, I went there, you know, and it was fun. It was interesting. You know, because you couldn't tell that they were men. They were women. Of course, when you don't know about the birds and the bees at that time, I didn't know the difference. But then I found out that they were men. I said, "What?" He says, "Yeah. Those beautiful women are men."

4-00:04:24

Washburn:

So when was this?

4-00:04:27

Cordova:

This was in the late forties, but evidently this was in existence, right? But I couldn't go. I mean, I never heard about it until I grew up, until I was able to go out to the clubs. That's when I found out. Because they had a card club in El Cerrito, they had the theater, card club, they would go there. My dad used to go there to the card club right there--

4-00:04:51

Washburn:

What happened at the card club?

4-00:04:56

Cordova:

Well, it was gambling. Gambling, there was a lot of gambling going on. Oh, we had the Lighthouse right here on. Do you know where Nation's hamburgers is? The Lighthouse was right there, and there was—it looked like a lighthouse, and it was a nightclub, and everybody went there to dance. Like I told you, we used to look for the places where you could dance. The Pablo Club was at the end of San Pablo, and that used to be a bar, and they had music, and oh, the dancing, it was just wonderful! There was more dancing there. I mean, that's all I can remember that I enjoyed as I was growing up, just to go any place where there was dancing. We used to go to Point Richmond with our friends, the ones that had cars, we used to go to Point Richmond. We'd turn on the radio on, and we were dancing out there at the point, you know, overlooking the water. We'd get out there, we danced with the music in the car, we were swinging and we were having a good time. We used to do that. We used to have a wonderful time. God! I can remember going back--that was in the late forties or fifties that that was going on.

4-00:06:26

Washburn:

Sounds like you had a lot of fun. Did the clientele who went to see the men dressed as women--were they all, was it a straight club? I mean, do you remember?

4-00:06:33

Cordova:

Yes. It was straight club.

4-00:06:39

Washburn:

Do you remember seeing men with other men?

4-00:06:43

Cordova:

No. No. It was just a straight club, and as matter of fact, they used to have the It Club right on San Pablo Avenue. This was in Albany, in Albany. That club, once this one closed down, then they kind of went to the It Club, that was another club that was open. They used to have a lot of entertainment there, a lot of strippers and all this stuff. As a matter of fact, we took my mother there one day. We took her there, and she didn't have any idea. And you know how they start, you know, little by little, you know. They are throwing things here, throwing things--and let me tell you, of course, you know it's a club and everything, we gave her a drink or two. Everybody enjoys going out and having a good time, but that was the It Club, the first time she had seen a stripper. But anyway, they don't strip completely, but you know, with little patches here and little patches there, you know. But these are beautiful ladies, beautiful ladies.

And this is like Carol Doda and all this stuff--you know Carol Doda? Okay, she's the one that had her breasts done to size forty, and she used to be very famous in San Francisco, Carol Doda! As a matter of fact, they've got the Carol Doda Club. And this was during the time when all this was in existence there, Carol Doda, Finnochio's. This club was like Finnochio's, you know what I'm talking about, female impersonators and all this stuff. Well, this is what this club was like. And I swear these people moved from here to San Francisco, because these are good, beautiful men that looked beautiful as women. You can't tell them apart. You can't tell that they are men. Anyway, that was the It Club, and they also had some of the female impersonators. They also had a lot of strippers, and that went on forever.

4-00:09:05

Washburn:

When did you go to the It Club?

4-00:09:06

Cordova:

When I was in my twenties. When I was in my twenties, went to the It Club.

4-00:09:14

Washburn:

So the early fifties, probably?

4-00:09:16

Cordova:

Yes. Yes. Early fifties.

4-00:09:19

Washburn:

So why did people decide to go to the It Club for entertainment? Why was that something that people found--to see strippers as something that was fun to do?

4-00:09:32

Cordova:

It was different club, it was a different club, something different. Because it was in existence--we used to go to different restaurants, we used to have Curly's Restaurant, famous restaurant here in Richmond where everybody went out for dinner. I used to take my kids there to teach them how to eat, because I used to take them to the city all the time. I used to take off to the city, to Fisherman's Wharf, I'd take them, show them the Fisherman's Wharf and everything there is to see when they were young. I used to have the nerve to cross the bridge all by myself, because I didn't learn how to drive until the late sixties. But once I got behind that wheel, let me tell you, I wanted my kids to be exposed to all this, because my husband used to go hunting all the time. So while he was gone, I managed to take my kids out, you know, for dinner and show them the nicer places in town and all this.

4-00:10:53

Washburn:

Well, it's interesting what you say about the bar where men dressed as women. Can you describe what the acts were like then?

4-00:11:06

Cordova:

Let me see. They were just mostly talk. Mostly talk and acting, you know, acting like women. It was more, what we were impressed about was that they looked like women and not like men, yet we were going to see female impersonators and they didn't look like men. Because they were just acting like women, and they sang very beautiful. They came in with different costumes, and that was another big thing, the different costumes that they would change into. This is what people would go to see, really: just the costumes, the singing, and the fact that they were men acting as women. We didn't see anything wrong with that.

4-00:12:00

Washburn:

Would people laugh at them?

4-00:12:01

Cordova:

No. No, we were being entertained. They would not laugh unless they did something funny, they would laugh--you know, the jokes or whatever. But no, people were very cool, very cool. And going to the It Club, it was here, so we'd go to see what this was all about. We wouldn't go all the time, but when we would go, you know, because we didn't know what to expect. We weren't really looking for that, but we would go to the club. Then they would have a show, and it so happened that maybe we hit it. Of course, you know when you are not used to it, you are kind of embarrassed. But then you go, Oh, God. [laughs] But I can remember that we took my mom, just like my daughter took me to one of these where the guys, what did they call them, where they start stripping, where they come in as cop or a farmer?

4-00:13:15

Washburn:

Like a Chippendale?

4-00:13:24

Cordova:

Yes. So, anyway, that was so embarrassing, and that was in Albany also.

4-00:13:26

Washburn:

So about the men: at this club, where the men dressed as women and sang, did people just think these were just normal men, straight men dressing as women, or did they consider them homosexuals?

4-00:13:46

Cordova:

No. They didn't consider them homosexuals. They just considered them as men acting like women, because see, that's the way we'd go and we'd see, we'd be entertained, it was fun, and they were men acting like women--just like Halloween, you dress up and you act the part. We were just being entertained. We didn't think bad about them. We didn't think that they were homosexual. It didn't come to our mind--my mind, maybe they did, the other people, I don't what they thought. But I know that when we'd go, we didn't think anything about it. We were just being entertained. And like I said, at the It Club, they had that kind of entertainment. There were card clubs going on. I'm telling you, this community was active, active. Oakland was the place to be in, because they had so many name bands come in.

4-00:14:51

Washburn:

Let me ask you just the last thing on that one. I mean in retrospect now, do you think that those men were homosexuals who were doing that?

4-00:14:56

Cordova:

No, I think they were just like the ones at Finnochio's. Some of those guys are just female impersonators and they have regular jobs and they are married. But they are acting the part, and I've taken a lot of people over there. I've taken my family over there, and they cannot believe that these are men. Because my sister-in-law, I told her, I says, "This is what we are going to see." So anyway, she asked my brother, "Which one do you like?" because they were dancing. He says, "That one, that one over there at the end," and she says, "Oh yeah?" She says, "He's a man." He says, "Oh, no, no, no." "They are all men." "No way!" He could not believe it. These were all beautiful female impersonators, and they would take off their wigs and show us that they were men. So we never thought anything bad about them.

4-00:16:08

Washburn:

And then about the card clubs, did the cops ever try and shut down the card clubs?

4-00:16:15

Cordova:

No.

4-00:16:17

Washburn:

Why not?

4-00:16:18

Cordova:

It was open. It was open.

4-00:16:20

Washburn:

Why did they allow it to go on if, if--?

4-00:16:25

Cordova:

Well, that was part of what was going on here during the war, you know, the card clubs. I mean, not only here, but they've got them in Concord. There's the Oaks in Oakland now, that's never closed. I'm not sure whether they closed down the one in El Cerrito, but there was--they must have, yes, they must go to the Oaks. They never closed down, they didn't bother anybody, because my brother-in-law used to go there all the time.

4-00:17:05

Washburn:

What about the one, you said your father went to the one in Richmond.

4-00:17:08

Cordova:

Not in Richmond, in El Cerrito. Yes, he used to go the card club there. You know, just like people going to the casino right here. It was very open, police never bothered them, they didn't bother the police.

4-00:17:24

Washburn:

Was that in the fifties?

4-00:17:26

Cordova:

Yes. Fifties, sixties, I think that it was—yes, it's still open. They had a theater right there. But it's not in existence now, you know, a lot of those places have closed down. The club in Oakland is still very active, a lot of people go there.

4-00:17:52

Washburn:

Do you want to consult your notes again and see--you were great to write down some stuff on your notes--and see if you have anything else that you didn't talk about that you wanted to talk about?

4-00:18:10

Cordova:

Oh, okay. [pause] Oh! [laughs] I put down, you know what I remembered? Most everything that I talked about: a lot of dancing, good schools, good friends. Oh, the {frisco?} jeans, we used to have frisco jeans.

4-00:18:44

Washburn:

What are frisco jeans?

4-00:18:47

Cordova:

They were like your pants, we used to roll them up like this, you know.

Oh, and my son had a band called the Illusions. My mom and dad had a restaurant here, right here on 23rd Street.

4-00:19:15

Washburn:

When was that?

4-00:19:17

Cordova:

In the late fifties, early sixties. It was right next right to this club--what was the club called? It was a Mexican club, and my mom and dad had their restaurant right next to it. When they would come out, they would sell a lot of stuff there.

4-00:19:59

Washburn:

Was it Mexican food? Did they sell Mexican food?

4-00:20:01

Cordova:

Yes, my mom and dad. Yes, they had Mexican food.

4-00:20:09

Washburn:

Yes, tell me about that. That's something--we never talked about that. We talked about the Rio Theater, but we never talked about Mexican restaurants and markets, and then you said there was a night club or a club there. What can you tell about the club and the restaurants for Hispanics?

4-00:20:23

Cordova:

Yes. They had a Mexican club right here on 23rd and Dover. As a matter of fact, I think the building burned. I think there is another building there. They used to have Mexican music and dancing there. Because my mom and dad had the restaurant, and I never went there, but Polly used to go and help them, after she got off work, she would go and help them there.

4-00:21:04

Washburn:

What was their restaurant called?

4-00:21:07

Cordova:

It was part of the club, and they would run the restaurant, from early in the morning till late at night. But my dad was working at the Standard Oil, but my mom was running while he was over there. Then he'd come from work, and he'd be with her. If I can remember the name; I can't remember the name right now, but it will come to me.

4-00:21:40

Washburn:

Yes, you can call me with the name. It wasn't Winter's Hall, was it?

4-00:21:40

Cordova:

No.

4-00:21:42

Washburn:

Yes, please tell me about that. That's neat.

4-00:21:55

Cordova:

Oh, yes, the strikes and Cesar Chavez. No, I covered--

4-00:22:09

Washburn:

You seemed to cover pretty much everything.

4-00:22:18

Cordova:

Yes, just where my sisters lived at the time, and all the stores, the culture shock. Mechanics Bank had been there for a long time, and that's going all over now.

Oh, Nickel's Park on Macdonald, everybody used to go to Nickel's Park. They used to a lot of festivities there, they used to have a little park where they have all these animals, peacocks and animals that we could go and see on Sundays. It was all green, and people would go for picnics. They would play out there. We would have bands coming in from San Francisco to play in the open. And right across the street was Moose Ice Cream--the best ice cream in the world. It was Moose Ice Cream, and it was right across the street. I'll never forget that, because I used to buy three gallons at a time in the tin--they used to sell them in the tin. And every time we'd go and replenish, we'd take the tin back and they'd give us another one. You know, that's how much ice cream we used to eat--three gallons at a time I used to buy, and we'd keep them in the freezer.

4-00:23:51

Washburn:

Where was Nickel's Park? It was on Macdonald and what?

4-00:23:53

Cordova:

Oh, Macdonald, you know where St.--not Calista's but St.--?

4-00:23:59

Washburn:

Cornelius?

4-00:24:03

Cordova:

Cornelius. Okay, just down the street from there, going towards San Pablo Avenue. It's right in the center, and Nickel's Park is still there.

4-00:24:10

Washburn:

Yes, I've seen it.

4-00:24:11

Cordova:

Okay? And across the street from Nickel's Park was Moose Ice Cream, but that's where Nickel's Park was, and it was a beautiful, beautiful park.

4-00:24:22

Washburn:

So what kind of festivities would people have there?

4-00:24:29

Cordova:

They would have all kinds of festivities. They'd have music that people would go and listen to, they'd go and have picnics, they had animals that the kids could see, they had different kinds of animals. It was very, very well kept and people felt relaxed and--

4-00:24:54

Washburn:

When would you go there?

4-00:24:56

Cordova:

On the weekends, you know, when you are not working. You know, we'd go there, we'd take the kids so they could go and see the animals. We'd go and get some ice cream and go across back there. And you'd see a lot of people having picnics, a lot of people having picnics.

4-00:25:18

Washburn:

When is this? When did people go to Nickel's Park, and when did you go to Nickel's Park?

4-00:25:21

Cordova:

Nickel's Park was always there, and I didn't start going to Nickel's Park until after I got married. Because that's when the family started to grow, and we wanted to take them to

the zoo or to Nickel's Park or some place where the kids could play out there in the open, in the open and on the grass. Because we used to take them to Oakland a lot, to the little horses. We used to have a little horse right here where the casino is. Every Sunday, there was a live horse, pony, where the kids could ride it around, and we'd take them there. That was like a ritual, I swear it was like a ritual. After mass, we'd go over there, and take the kids, they looked forward to that, to get on top of the little pony and ride it.

And across the street was where the Lighthouse was, and that was the best club. You know what? You meet a lot of people when you go dancing, a lot of people, a lot of friends, so that's one thing that I wanted to tell you. And Nation's has always been there. It was a tiny little place, they had the best hamburgers. Once the Lighthouse moved, then Nation's bought out, and then they expanded. And then they had right here at the end of 23rd Street, they had the Steakhouse, and the steaks were across the street, and chicken and fish were on the opposite, and the same owner had it. The {Acevedo's?} had it. People would come from all over to the restaurants, they were very, very nice restaurants right here at the end of here and San Pablo. Very, very active. People would come from all over. They were run by Italian people.

4-00:27:42

Washburn:

Well, thank you for telling me that story and writing down some notes so you could remember to tell me.

4-00:27:45

Cordova:

Yes, I told you everything.

4-00:27:50

Washburn:

That's great.

4-00:27:52

Cordova:

Old Milan's Jewelers was {Gallancamps?}, Thom McCann's, Hudson's, these were all men's stores.

4-00:28:07

Washburn:

Well, we could go on forever. Your memory is very great about Richmond, and I appreciate your time to interview with me.

4-00:28:23

Cordova:

Oh, well, listen, David, thank you so much for coming.

[End of Interview]