

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Lee Wilson

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

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

Interviews conducted by
Nadine Wilmot
in 2006

Copyright © 2007 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Lee Wilson, dated June 22, 2006. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

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

Discursive Table of Contents—Wilson Lee

Audiofile 1

Family life—born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and was the third child out of six children—remembers his grandmother Fanny who lost her son in World War 1—after her second marriage her and her husband took a train to Oakland, California in search for working opportunities—explains her living situations in Oakland as her husband left for training in Texas—worked as a welder in the shipyards—explains how different war times were then—remembers the attack on Pearl Harbor

Audiofile 2

Working life—explains how worrying doesn't solve any problems—her co-workers were racially integrated—her siblings were spread out through America—remembers naming her daughter LeDell after her close friend from Arkansas—brought her children from Arkansas on a train to her—describes harsh living situations and then finally settled into a home—worked as a trained nurse after the war—answers questions on racial separations and racial movements—involvement at church—worked at Deborah Circle—describes how items were rationed during the war.

Interview #1: June 22, 2006

Begin Audio File 1 Wilson 01 06-22-06.mp3

01-00:00:00

Wilmot: Today is June 22nd. Regional Oral History Office, interview with Mrs. A.[Arthur] Lee Wilson. So, good morning to you.

01-00:00:32

Wilson: Good morning.

01-00:00:34

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

01-00:00:37

Wilson: I was born September 1st, 1917 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

01-00:00:45

Wilmot: And can you tell me a little bit about your family?

01-00:00:48

Wilson: My mom and dad, there were six children, three girls and three boys. And I'm the third child. What else did you want to know?

01-00:01:01

Wilmot: I just wanted to know that. Can you tell me your parents' names?

01-00:01:09

Wilson: My father was Arthur Massey, A-R-T-H-U-R M-A-S-S-E-Y. My mother was Ora Phelps Massey. Her maiden name was Phelps. And her married name of course was my dad, Massey, so she was Ora Phelps Massey.

01-00:01:30

Wilmot: Were they from Arkansas?

01-00:01:32

Wilson: No. My father was born in Mississippi and my mom was born in Louisiana.

01-00:01:39

Wilmot: How did they come to be in Arkansas?

01-00:01:42

Wilson: Well, my mom, from Louisiana she came to Arkansas, went to school. In what they used to call then Branch Normal. They call it University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff now.

01-00:01:57

Wilmot: But it used to be called? What was it called before?

01-00:02:01

Wilson: Branch, B-R-A-N-C-H, Normal, N-O-R-M-A-L.

01-00:02:07
Wilmot: Oh, one of those Normals, yes. So she came to go to, she came for—

01-00:02:17
Wilson: Yeah and she met my dad. He was—while he was there. I don't know from Mississippi to Arkansas. All I know is that when I came along, when my mom and dad, they married, and I have a sister and brother older than I am, and I'm the third child, and I was born. You want to know when I was born? I was born September 1st, 1917 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

01-00:02:52
Wilmot: How far back do you know your family? Can you tell me about your family as far back as you know?

01-00:03:05
Wilson: Well, far back as I know is like when I was born to the same—my mother and father. And I was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

01-00:03:17
Wilmot: But did you know your grandparents? Did you grow up with your grandparents?

01-00:03:22
Wilson: Yes, I knew my grandparents. My grandmother on my mother's side was named Frances Phelps. Frances Dickerson. She was a Dickerson, born a Dickerson.

01-00:03:35
Wilmot: Your mom.

01-00:03:36
Wilson: My grandmother.

01-00:03:38
Wilmot: Your grandmother.

01-00:03:39
Wilson: Frances, but they called her Fanny. And I have one of the pictures of her I think is right over here on the passport, where she went to—you see the little black—

01-00:03:58
Wilmot: I'm looking. A little small picture like—I think I do see it here. Oh it's beautiful. I'll bring it to you. You can show it on the camera if you want to. It's gorgeous.

01-00:04:09
Wilson: Yeah, see this is my grandmother.

- 01-00:04:12
Wilmot: Here. I'm going to try and go in a little bit closer to her face while you hold it, okay? Oh, it's beautiful. So what is that book?
- 01-00:04:22
Wilson: This was her passport when she went to France. All the gold stars. See I had an uncle to die over in France. And—
- 01-00:04:32
Wilmot: In World War I?
- 01-00:04:33
Wilson: In World War I. And it was her youngest son, this lady. This was my grandmother, it was her youngest son.
- 01-00:04:41
Wilmot: This is Fanny?
- 01-00:04:42
Wilson: Yeah, this is Fanny. Her name was Frances but they called her Fanny. And her son was the one that was in service and he died in France.
- 01-00:05:02
Wilmot: So did your grandmother come to Arkansas as well or did she stay in Louisiana?
- 01-00:05:10
Wilson: My grandmother as far as I can remember they lived in Louisiana and then she came—they came to Pine Bluff.
- 01-00:05:19
Wilmot: To live or to visit?
- 01-00:05:20
Wilson: To live. They came to Arkansas to live.
- 01-00:05:26
Wilmot: May I look at that beautiful thing? Can I look at that? [reads] “War mothers and widows official certificate of identification.”
- 01-00:05:34
Wilson: That was because she had a son to get killed, to die over in France. And the year, I think it was 1932 or '31 or '32, that the government gave all the women who had sons—they called them gold star mothers and widows—all those who had sons that died in France and all of those whose husband died in France. They had the free trip to France to see. The government is the one that gave that trip to France.
- 01-00:06:11
Wilmot: It says here date of birth is August 17th, 1863.

01-00:06:16

Wilson: That's right.

01-00:06:17

Wilmot: And she was born in Bastrop, Louisiana and that she was five-foot-one so she was tiny. And her eyes were hazel. And that she had a mole near her right eye. So amazing. So I'm going to give this back to you. And then it says she passed away on November 2, 1948. So you got to spend some time with her.

01-00:06:40

Wilson: Oh yes. I grew up with her from a child, a little child, on up.

01-00:06:46

Wilmot: Did you live in Louisiana with her?

01-00:06:48

Wilson: No, she was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. And see, I was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

01-00:06:54

Wilmot: What was she like as a person, your grandmother?

01-00:06:57

Wilson: She was a very nice person. She was tiny, kind of petite, about five-one or two or three, something like that. And she did have a mole near her right—phrase was right in there, the mole, you might can see it on one of her pictures. But she was a very, very, very nice person. And they had built property out in the West End, they called it, out in the hills. There in Pine Bluff. And they had 40 acres of land in cultivation and 40 acres in timber. And we used to go out and play and we could roam all over.

01-00:07:48

Wilmot: And that area was called the westing?

01-00:07:50

Wilson: The West End.

01-00:07:52

Wilmot: The West End.

01-00:07:54

Wilson: That was the west end of Pine Bluff. [clears throat] Excuse me. That was the west end of Pine Bluff.

01-00:08:04

Wilmot: So you grew up knowing your mother's mother. And did you grow up with your father's parents as well?

01-00:08:09

Wilson: No, my father's parents lived in Missouri. And I knew my father's mother, my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, I knew her. And I knew my paternal

grandfather. And I knew my maternal grandparents also. I knew both of them, my mom's folks and my dad's folks.

01-00:08:32

Wilmot:

What kind of stories did your family tell about themselves? Did they tell any stories about themselves?

01-00:08:40

Wilson:

It was all real, I suppose, what all they told. About when they were growing up, and going to school, and the things that they liked to do, and the things that they did, and the churches that they attended, and the schools that they attended. They would say, “When we were going to school--” we didn't ask them in details about it, but they'd say, “When we were going to school we did such-and-such a thing. Our assignment was so-and-so.”

And we would have to do whatever in our schooling, going to school, if we ran across a section that we weren't familiar with, or what have you, then our parents would tell us. They would show us. They tried to lead us in the way that they knew was best for us. And we had limits. We had to do our homework first. This is like when we were in school. We had to do our homework first. Then we'd do our chores, all outside stuff that we had to do like bring wood in for the fireplace or what have you, we'd do that first. And then we're through outside, now we're inside, we do your homework.

After your homework, if you weren't up too late—like 9:00 or 9:30 that was bedtime. I mean, we didn't have pianos and television or no such thing. I'd never heard of a television. We had to do our homework. We'd play, make our little running place or wherever do outside and do whatever we're going to do, we finished there, we come inside. And we would come inside, we'd do our homework. We had to get our homework done to take back to school the next day or whenever we had to turn it in.

01-00:10:37

Wilmot:

Where'd you go to school?

01-00:10:38

Wilson:

We went to school several places because we lived in several places there in Arkansas. We lived in Pine Bluff. That's where I was born, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. And I married a Hot Springs boy so I married in Hot Springs. And I went to school at a little place they call Redell, Arkansas. I went to Jefferson County Training School. That was in Pine Bluff out in the West End. These were all like local schools and things.

01-00:11:09

Wilmot:

What kind of community did you grow up in? Was this a farming community or was it a town?

01-00:11:14

Wilson:

It was a little town. Like at that time—well, until about 1940, in the '40s, Pine Bluff had had a population I would think like 27,000. And that wasn't very big. But now it's much, much, much, much more than that.

01-00:11:40

Wilmot:

Did you feel like you knew everybody in the town?

01-00:11:42

Wilson:

No. No. We just knew the people in our area where we went to school and Jefferson County Training School. They used to call it the Hall School and then they built a nice new school on 13th Street and they called it Jefferson County Training School. And Mr. C. P. Coleman, he was the principal of that school. And we knew the children we went to school with, the ones who lived next door. Not everybody was close that had children, like some people who lived close to you, they did not have children. Those who lived three or four blocks from you or what have you, if the child come over to play at a certain time they had to be home before sundown, before it got dark. They didn't roam around like the kids do now. The parents don't know where they are. 6:00 or 8:00 at night. 10:00. At that time we had to be inside.

01-00:12:57

Wilmot:

What kind of work did your parents do?

01-00:12:59

Wilson:

My mom was a housewife. My dad, he did a lot of working at a mill as they call it. The lumber mill there in Pine Bluff. He worked there at a lumber mill. Then he had worked on the government boats. He was a cook on one of the boats that he—that was in Warren, in Warren—oh, Warren, Ohio I believe it was. Where he would leave and go there. Warren I think. Warren, Ohio.

01-00:13:39

Wilmot:

So he would go away and go work on the boats or he—

01-00:13:43

Wilson:

He'd go and work and then he'd come back. And be gone ever so long. He was working on the boat and he said it was a government boat. That was way, way back. I was trying to think. Warren, Ohio. This is I think where he went and then from there that's where he got on the boat at.

And my dad, he was a minister. He didn't pastor five or six churches or nothing like that but we grew up with his supervision. And my grandfather, he was a deacon; my grandmother was a deaconess; my mom was a deaconess. And we were brought up religiously. And—

01-00:14:45

Wilmot:

What faith, what—

01-00:14:47

Wilson:

Baptist. We were Baptist.

01-00:14:52

Wilmot: Do you remember any close friends you had from that time in your life when you were a young person growing up?

01-00:14:58

Wilson: Do I remember the friends?

01-00:15:00

Wilmot: Any close friends.

01-00:15:02

Wilson: Oh, yes. I had one real close friend. She's in Fort Smith, Arkansas now. She and I, we grew up together and we played together. We were more like sisters. We were real, real close together. She was a year—about two years and a month older than I was. But we were still friends. That was my best friend.

01-00:15:30

Wilmot: What was her name again?

01-00:15:33

Wilson: Myrtle. And she was a Myrtle Johnson and she married a Wilkins. She's a Myrtle Wilkins now.

01-00:15:46

Wilmot: When you say your neighborhood, was it an integrated community, was it mixed or was it mostly black?

01-00:15:55

Wilson: We were always more or less—we lived in a mixed neighborhood. It may not be as many whites as there were blacks. They called—years ago, they said either Negroes or colored people. Just in recent years, since we came to California, did they start using the term black. They was using—they said Negro or colored. The colored people.

01-00:16:29

Wilmot: And when you went to school in like elementary and high school did you go to—

01-00:16:36

Wilson: They were all—white and black did not go to school together. You lived together, because we always lived close—we had white kids who were our playmates. We always lived—where the black children and the white children, we all played together. And one of the—Mr. Hogan, one of the men, white men, he had his store and we would always—we'd play together and everything but we just didn't shall I say—go over and sit down, we always had white and black living in the same community. And if you needed something, if you needed help with something in any way they would always help you. And we've always lived neighborly. But we just didn't do a lot of visiting.

Because I don't do a lot of visiting now. It's just that I guess people have telephones now. If they want to talk about something, they get on the phone and talk. Years ago, they didn't.

01-00:18:03

Wilmot: And they also have the Internet.

01-00:18:05

Wilson: Yes, yes.

01-00:18:09

Wilmot: So you said you got married in Hot Springs. Actually let me ask this question. You said your mother went to that—she went to college at Normal?

01-00:18:21

Wilson: Branch Normal, they called it then.

01-00:18:22

Wilmot: Branch Normal. And your father, did he go to college as well?

01-00:18:29

Wilson: No my father, he did not that I know of. My father was a minister, he was a preacher, and he used to preach at different churches and what have you, and we had a lot of preacher friends. They had children and we were all friends with their children. And like, this Sunday the preacher, he would come here, his family would come to our house and they'd have dinner. And my mom would fix dinner and they'd have dinner and the kids would play out in the yard and swing and play together, like that. For a time. And we did what most kids do. We played with our neighbors. And it wasn't that we had a lot of white but we've always lived, like within two blocks or a block, of the whites. If anything was—if we had anything was wrong, or my mom needed anything, different things, they'd always come over to help them. We did the same. We lived neighborly with everybody. And even when I married my neighbor—we lived like in the middle of the block, and just across the street there was this white family. We always lived near—you know, integrated.

01-00:20:01

Wilmot: When you got married—could you tell me a little bit about your husband?

01-00:20:08

Wilson: My husband.

01-00:20:09

Wilmot: His name and—?

01-00:20:11

Wilson: He's Oscar Wilson, I was looking to see one of his pictures is in the other room back there.

We were married little bit under 40 years when he passed. When he passed away. He passed in 1980.

01-00:20:36

Wilmot: So you got married in 1940.

01-00:20:41

Wilson: Yeah, I was married in 1940.

01-00:20:45

Wilmot: How old—so you were about—

01-00:20:47

Wilson: I was 23 years old. But I was married—years ago girls married—if you weren't married by the time you were say 17 or 18 then you were considered—you were like an old maid, they called it. [laughs]

01-00:21:09

Wilmot: So when you got married you were older to be getting married?

01-00:21:14

Wilson: No, I married first. First I was married because that marriage didn't last. And then the second time I married, we married, and we stayed together until he passed. It was over 40 years. We stayed together until he passed. And he passed right—we were living right here in this house when he passed.

01-00:21:40

Wilmot: So the Hot Springs marriage, was that your first or your second husband?

01-00:21:45

Wilson: Hot Springs was my second husband.

01-00:21:52

Wilmot: You want to tell me about meeting him or--?

01-00:21:56

Wilson: Well my first husband or second husband or both of them or either one?
[laughs]

01-00:22:03

Wilmot: Both of them if you like.

01-00:22:05

Wilson: Years ago girls married real young. If they weren't married by the time they were 18 or 19 years old, they were considered an old maid and they sat around the house. Usually the people that had children, they grew up and the girls when they were old enough to get married, years and years ago, people used to—if they wanted a son to marry a certain girl they sort of like—a planned wedding—

01-00:22:47

Wilmot: So your first marriage was like that?

01-00:22:50

Wilson: My first marriage.

01-00:22:50

Wilmot: Yeah, it was kind of a planned wedding.

01-00:22:54

Wilson: It was like, he was my—we were kids, we played together. You're supposed to be married to each other. It was something on that order. All the girls married. You were married by the time you—if you're 17 or 18 years old and you weren't married by the time you were 18, by the time you 18 you were an old maid. It used to—the mom and dad had to sign for you to get married. At that young age.

01-00:23:25

Wilmot: Did they sign for you?

01-00:23:27

Wilson: My mom did, sure.

01-00:23:28

Wilmot: Did you set up your own house?

01-00:23:32

Wilson: [laughs] Well we stayed with my folks, and stayed with his folks, my folks and his folks. We had our room and what have you. But we was just like supervision. People who want this girl to marry their son or they want this boy to marry their daughter and it was sort of like that. My mom, she really did love my first husband. He was just like her son. He'd come up and she just would—just him she loved. She really did. Just sort of grasp and welcome him into the family. It was some of the boys that she didn't—that they didn't want to—

01-00:24:33

Wilmot: They didn't want around.

01-00:24:35

Wilson: Yeah, they don't want them around. They don't want them socializing, hanging around the house. And he better not go get in jail. Because they didn't kids to go to jail like they do now. They had what they called a reform school. And if the boys were out of control, they would be put in this place called the reform school. And they stayed there until I guess they felt that they were ready to be discharged and come home. And of course if a boy had been in the reform school he didn't associate or socialize with the other kids. Because he was considered not a very good person.

01-00:25:32

Wilmot: So what was this first husband's name? What was your first husband's name?

01-00:25:37

Wilson: Sidney.

01-00:25:37

Wilmot:

Sidney. Okay, so you got out of that marriage and went on and lived your life. Were there any—can you tell me about meeting your second husband and tell me his first name?

01-00:25:54

Wilson:

His name was Oscar, Oscar Wilson.

01-00:25:56

Wilmot:

Oh, beautiful. And how did you meet him?

01-00:26:00

Wilson:

I met him when I was working at one of the hotels there in Hot Springs, Arkansas. I met him there. He was working at a ladies ready-to-wear store. They called it Hubert Mendel's, this store. And we met and we married and then we came out here. We married in 1940, the 12th of November in 1940. Anyway, he came out here in 1943. He came out in April, 1943. And I came out in June, 1943. And he was working at—he came out—the reason he left Arkansas was to come out because everybody was coming out to California. They wasn't going in the service. They were coming out to California to work because there's a lot of work that could be done. A friend of ours came out first. And he came out and he wrote back to tell my husband how work was and everything and so that he should come out, there was plenty of work. And so he came, he left his job and he came out here, my husband did, he came.

01-00:27:56

Wilmot:

He left his job at the ladies garments store?

01-00:28:00

Wilson:

Ready-to-wear store.

01-00:28:01

Wilmot:

Okay, so how did he come out? On train?

01-00:28:04

Wilson:

On the train.

01-00:28:06

Wilmot:

From Arkansas?

01-00:28:06

Wilson:

From Hot Springs, Arkansas.

01-00:28:09

Wilmot:

And did he write you when he was out here? What did he say about this place?

01-00:28:14

Wilson:

Well, when he arrived here, this friend of ours who lived a couple blocks from us there in Hot Springs, he came out first, and then he wrote back and his wife, told his wife. And his wife came out and then they wrote back to us and

then she was telling me, “You should come out and work, there's plenty of work out to do.” This was in 1943. And so my husband, he decided, well, he'd come out and try it. And if he didn't like it he could always go back home. So he came out. And I think he went out in April. And he started working. Then he sent back for me. And I came out, I arrived here on the—I think it was the—was it the 24th of June I believe, the 24th of June in 1943. I arrived here.

01-00:29:17

Wilmot: Where did you arrive to?

01-00:29:20

Wilson: Oakland.

01-00:29:20

Wilmot: Oakland? On a train.

01-00:29:22

Wilson: On the Santa Fe. We got off the train on 40th and San Pablo in Oakland, on the Santa Fe, we rode the Santa Fe train out here.

01-00:29:36

Wilmot: 40th and San Pablo. And your husband was there to meet you?

01-00:29:41

Wilson: Yeah.

01-00:29:41

Wilmot: And where did you first live?

01-00:29:44

Wilson: Well, he was there to meet me. He had a room on Tenth Street there in Oakland. 1678 West Tenth Street, that's the house where he was staying. And of course at that time people had homes, they had—the people who had lived here for, I guess, I don't know how many years, but they had rooms that they rent out to the people who had come from other places here to live and to work. Because the war was going on, the United States was involved in the war. And the men were being sent to the service. And all of those and even those who were doing wartime jobs, what they called wartime jobs, they were sent to the service, they had to leave their job that they were on here and go in the service, that's if they were called to go to service, to go to the army or service. And so that was in 1943, and I know my husband, he went and I think it was July in '43 that he was called to go in the service. And so he went in service.

01-00:31:15

Wilmot: So just after you moved out to Oakland, just after you got to Oakland, he went to the service.

01-00:31:23
Wilson: I arrived here on the 24th of June. And he knew he was in 1A, that he would be called to go in the service.

01-00:31:31
Wilmot: Oh, that must have been so hard.

01-00:31:35
Wilson: Well that's something you know it's going to happen and you just prepare for it, do the best you can.

01-00:31:41
Wilmot: So he went into the service. Where did he go?

01-00:31:46
Wilson: Left here and went to, I think, Monterey for two or three days but then he went down to Camp Wallis, Texas. He was sent from California to Texas in the service. And he wasn't in there that long but he still had to go in the service. I think it was 110 days.

01-00:32:07
Wilmot: So was he sent to another country? Was he sent—?

01-00:32:10
Wilson: No, he was never sent out of the United States.

01-00:32:13
Wilmot: So they just trained him? And was he in the army or the navy or marines?

01-00:32:18
Wilson: Army. He was in the army. He was in the army.

01-00:32:20
Wilmot: He was in the army. What did he tell you about that experience?

01-00:32:23
Wilson: Well, it wasn't that much experience that he got because he didn't go in the— wasn't with the fighting. He was just there at Camp Wallis, Texas.

01-00:32:37
Wilmot: So at that time you were on your own. So you get there and then two weeks later you're on your own in Oakland making a home for you two. So, you were staying in a room at Tenth?

01-00:32:50
Wilson: We were staying in his room at 1678 West Tenth Street.

01-00:32:55
Wilmot: West Tenth Street. What's the cross street there?

01-00:33:00
Wilson: What is the cross street? I think Willow.

01-00:33:04

Wilmot: You were right there in West Oakland.

01-00:33:05

Wilson: Yeah, near west Oakland. It was not far from Seventh Street. We were on Tenth. And then I know Willow, there was a little store there on Willow and we used to go in there and we were on Tenth Street and 1678 West Tenth Street. We used to go from there, a couple blocks to a little store there to get food or whatever we were going to fix for dinner. And it was like six or seven families in that one house. They had people upstairs and they had people downstairs. And we were downstairs. And the room was probably their living room, the people who owned the place, their living room. Because we had what would have been the—the fireplace was in our room, so I know that was the living room. And the next room behind that room was like the dining. There was somebody—the person who owned the place had moved out and I guess bought some other place and rented all that out. And right across the hall it was another family, the Robinsons, Annabelle Robinson.

01-00:34:22

Wilmot: Where were they from?

01-00:34:24

Wilson: I really don't know where they were from. But she and I talked. She was the first person I met when I came here. And she was the one that helped me a lot, showed me where the store, where to go to the store. Because she had been here long enough. And she lived right across the hall from me. But I don't know if she's still living now or not. Her husband, he was the one that was working. He was a minister. But he was working at one of the places there in Oakland. Had a place they called Moore's Dry Dock and some other—several other places there in Oakland where the people worked during the war years. And because it was jobs. You could find a job anywhere. You didn't have to worry about a job.

01-00:35:24

Wilmot: Did you leave a job to come here?

01-00:35:28

Wilson: Yes I left. I worked at the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs.

01-00:35:32

Wilmot: So you left that job and—

01-00:35:33

Wilson: Yes, I quit there when I came out here.

01-00:35:35

Wilmot: What was the train ride like out?

01-00:35:37

Wilson:

Crowded. Crowded. People stacked up like cordwood almost. From Little Rock to out from Hot Springs here and from Hot Springs we had to change and it was Little Rock. And from Little Rock then we came out and changed in Kansas City. Make little change in Kansas City. And again I think we had to wait a while in Barstow. And that's when it was so hot. And we had to get off the train and wait there until whatever reason. You get arrived in Barstow that morning; we had to stay there till way late that evening, *way* late. And it was hot as it could be. I'd never been in a place that hot in my life. But that's where we were. And we stayed there until our next train came.

And then we come into Oakland. We were riding the Santa Fe. Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe. We were riding the Santa Fe from Barstow into Oakland. And my husband met me there. My husband met me, that was 40th and San Pablo.

01-00:37:06

Wilmot:

Do you remember what he was wearing?

01-00:37:09

Wilson:

Well he was wearing a suit. He had more than one suit but he was wearing a suit when he came to meet me at 40th and San Pablo. And he got a cab because I had—he got the taxi to take us down to the place on Tenth Street, 1678 West Tenth Street. And we stayed there until he was called to go in the service and he left Oakland and went to San Francisco and check, whatever they did, had to do. And he had 14 days to get things straightened out before he left to go in the service.

01-00:38:06

Wilmot:

Did he have to leave a job?

01-00:38:09

Wilson:

Did he have to leave a job?

01-00:38:11

Wilmot:

Was he working when—

01-00:38:12

Wilson:

Yes, he was working.

01-00:38:14

Wilmot:

So he had to leave that job to go—

01-00:38:15

Wilson:

Yes, oh yes.

01-00:38:16

Wilmot:

Where was he working at?

01-00:38:17

Wilson:

Yeah he was working at Moore's.

01-00:38:22

Wilmot: What was he doing there?

01-00:38:24

Wilson: Tell you the truth, during the war years, I don't know what his particular job was there because after that when he was called to go in the service he had to report for duty. Then he had to quit that job and so he went to Monterey and from Monterey he went to Texas. They sent him to Texas. And that's where he was.

01-00:38:44

Wilmot: Did you work as well?

01-00:38:45

Wilson: Yes, I worked in the shipyard.

01-00:38:47

Wilmot: Did you get a job right away or did you wait a while?

01-00:38:49

Wilson: Right away. When he had to go in the service, received his papers to go in the service. Some friends of ours who lived over here in Richmond asked instead of me going back home, because I was going to go back home—

01-00:39:09

Wilmot: When he went into the service.

01-00:39:10

Wilson: When he went into the service, I was just going to go back home. Back to Hot Springs. And she just kept on saying, "No, just stay on out and work. So you can stay out and work and at least it would help you a lot and it would help the country." So she encouraged me to stay. And so when they moved over here in Richmond, they got one war housing, one of the war projects, the housing. They got an apartment in there. And they moved over there and I came over and stayed with them.

01-00:39:53

Wilmot: Where was this located exactly?

01-00:39:54

Wilson: They were in the Canal—here in Richmond, in the Canal. Building 144 Apartment 11. That's where they were.

01-00:40:05

Wilmot: Was it a two-bedroom apartment?

01-00:40:07

Wilson: It was two-bedroom, well, it was one real bedroom because there was a door, you had the privacy. You come in this door and it was a little cot on this side the door and one on the other side. That was if you had any children. You had housing, it was different then than what it is now. So, anyway instead of me

going back home I came over and stayed with them so they let me stay in the front room, the front.

01-00:40:47

Wilmot: The living room.

01-00:40:48

Wilson: Yeah, and then back where the private bedroom was, that was their room. So I stayed there with them. And apartments and places were hard to find then. And everybody that had relatives, they'd put in for housing and if they had one child or two kids, they had two, a boy and a girl, they would get more room than if they had two girls or two boys because if they had two girls they could sleep in the same room or if they had two boys, the two boys could sleep in the same room. But if they had a boy and a girl they could get a room for the girl and a room for the boy. Because girls and boys, you don't want to sleep in the same room. But a lot of people, they had their relatives coming from wherever they came from. They would bunk up and sleep in order to—they had a job but they just didn't have nowhere to stay. It was housing was very, very hard to find then because there was so many people and not enough houses.

01-00:42:04

Wilmot: Did you just stay with this family? Tell me their name again.

01-00:42:07

Wilson: I stayed with them and my husband was in service, he was in 110 days.

01-00:42:16

Wilmot: So when he came out did you guys find another place to live?

01-00:42:19

Wilson: We got an—well, I had put in for one because he was in service. I had put in for one while he was in service. And I was still working in the shipyard but I was staying with some friends. And after he came out of the service—as I say he was only in there 110 days I believe it was. And he came out of the service and we got this apartment, what they call a no-bedroom unit. It was—

01-00:42:57

Wilmot: Studio. A studio apartment.

01-00:42:59

Wilson: Right, right.

01-00:43:02

Wilmot: So you got to decorate it and make it nice?

01-00:43:04

Wilson: Right, we stayed there, that was on Huber, H-U-B-E-R. 49th and Huber. It was like 49th and Cutting, you turn off of Cutting, 49th Street and Huber was the next street. And that's where we were. In the no-bedroom unit.

And then I went home, I got laid off out of the shipyard. This is after the war. And I was laid off from the shipyard and I went home and got—I had two children. I went home and got the two children and came up here. Brought them out here.

01-00:43:46

Wilmot:

So wait, you went home to have your kids?

01-00:43:49

Wilson:

No, I had—

01-00:43:51

Wilmot:

Oh, you had two children at home that you brought.

01-00:43:54

Wilson:

I had two children home and when we came to California and my husband went in service, before I came out here, I took my children to my mom. I had a girl and a boy. And she took care of the children while I came up to work. I came out because she was talking about there was so much work, plenty of work to do and what have you.

01-00:44:21

Wilmot:

Wow. Was that hard for you to be far away from them?

01-00:44:25

Wilson:

Well, I knew it was—this was something that had to be done, and I knew they were with my mom, and I knew they would be taken care of. I didn't have to worry about them being taken care of.

01-00:44:40

Wilmot:

How old were they?

01-00:44:42

Wilson:

They were—well probably was about eight and nine and a half, something like that. Because when I went home, I went home to bring them after I was laid off from the shipyard in '46. I went home to bring them out here. And they were—I think Doris was ten years old I think. She was ten years old, or she was going to be ten years old in October. They came out in August. She and her brother. I went home and got them and brought them out. That was after I was laid off from the shipyard.

01-00:45:25

Wilmot:

Can you tell me a little—and your son's name?

01-00:45:29

Wilson:

JD.

01-00:45:29

Wilmot:

JD.

01-00:45:30

Wilson:

James David. And her name was Doris. The girl is Doris, D-O-R-I-S. There's one of her pictures is over behind there. And of course there's him and her, him and his wife, the man and the woman there.

01-00:45:45

Wilmot:

I saw that beautiful picture. I have a question for you. When you were working in the shipyards, well, what kind of work did you do there?

01-00:45:56

Wilson:

Welder.

01-00:45:57

Wilmot:

You were a welder. My goodness.

01-00:45:59

Wilson:

I went to school there in the shipyard. I think we had Yard 4. I went to welding school and I passed the test. They had 96 hours, you train in 96 hours; then they put you out in the yard to do the welding and tacking and whatever that leader man had you to do. And I was over there in the school, I was only in school like three days and they felt that I understood enough to be out in the yard and so they pulled me and put me out in the yard. And that was with a leader man, these are men that have a group, so many welders, so many chippers, so many burners, it's all within this group. And I was the tacker or the welder.

01-00:47:07

Wilmot:

A tacker?

01-00:47:09

Wilson:

Well that is when—the welding is—the tacker—tacking is shorter welder. When you're tacking you weld the place about so long. And from that long on to how ever long that they want you to weld it. And anyway I was a welder and I was out in the yard 30 days and I got a raise and the next 30 days I got a raise. You in school to get 95¢ an hour. That's what we were getting then, 95¢ an hour. The time that we're in school. And when they take you out of school and put you in the yard then you'd be getting \$1.05. That was on the dayshift. And \$1.05 and then 30 day you get \$1.10, another 30 days, \$1.15 and on dayshift \$1.20, that was as high as they went. And you'd get \$1.20. But I was on the dayshift and I had got like \$1.15 and I took the welding test and passed the test for to become a journeyman welder. And that was \$1.15 on my card that morning and when I brought my card back that evening it was \$1.20 because it was \$1.10, I skipped \$1.15 because I passed the test. And that's right, I skipped \$1.15.

01-00:48:50

Wilmot:

So it was \$1.20 per--?

01-00:48:54

Wilson:

\$1.20 per hour.

- 01-00:48:56
Wilmot: Per hour and so you were making—was that a lot more money than you had made in Arkansas?
- 01-00:49:00
Wilson: That was a lot of money. That was more than we would make because they were paying like \$3 or \$4 a week and of course where I worked at when I came here I was making \$18.75 a month. And I got paid on the 5th and 20th. And I quit that job when I came out here. And of course out here when I started in the shipyard making—started with \$1.05—
- 01-00:49:34
Wilmot: \$1.20 then you ended up making.
- 01-00:49:37
Wilson: You started off, in the shipyard you were—
- 01-00:49:40
Wilmot: You were making \$64 a week, which is really different than—that's a big difference. Wow.
- 01-00:49:49
Wilson: In the shipyard if you were a welder, which I was a welder, when I started on the dayshift, started out in the yard, that was \$1.05 an hour and for 30 days then you'd get \$1.10 but I didn't do that, I took the ABS test and passed it so I skipped all of that to the highest amount.
- 01-00:50:13
Wilmot: Well let me ask you something—hm, of course my mind goes blank. So what did you do with all that money? You suddenly were making more money than you'd ever made in your life. Did you save it? Did you spend—?
- 01-00:50:29
Wilson: Well I had two children to take care of.
- 01-00:50:32
Wilmot: So you sent it back home?
- 01-00:50:33
Wilson: I sent the money back home to my mom to take care of my two children. And see my husband at that time, he was in service but he had just gone in service.
- 01-00:50:47
Wilmot: So when he came back 110 days later you continued that job, welding.
- 01-00:50:52
Wilson: When he came back from the service, I kept—I continued that job and I worked there until I was laid off in 1946.

01-00:51:02

Wilmot:

And I wanted to ask before you came out to California how far had you gotten in school?

01-00:51:10

Wilson:

I had gotten to the tenth grade, 12th grade, what some school. But mainly, it was the tenth grade and then I went to night school. I just kept on going and going and adding more units and more units to my education, stacked up. Some of it was repetitious, some of it was new, but *all* of it was good. Because the more you learn, that's something nobody can take away from you. You can learn and a person doesn't have to know or never know *how much* you know because there's no way that somebody can tell how much you know. There are certain tests and thing or certain work that you do and if you complete this you will accomplish whatever. But I've always liked to learn. I try to learn because when you stop learning you start forgetting that which you had learned. Because you're supposed to learn something new every day. And whether you do or not you should—that's what I was told.

01-00:52:57

Wilmot:

What do you pursue now as far as learning?

01-00:53:00

Wilson:

What do I do now?

01-00:53:01

Wilmot:

Yeah, what do you do now to learn something new every day?

01-00:53:02

Wilson:

Well, right now, yeah, you learn something new. Usually I read. I read a lot or I'll get on the phone and call different people to find out as much as I can about what's going on in the outside world. I just start running references, look through some of my books and things, and then I can pick up on there and--. But I always try to learn a little more because when you stop learning you learn, you learn, maybe a little bit, just a little tiny bit, but you still are learning.

[Wilmot moves rug] That's all right, you don't need to worry about that. Because I just keep that other one up and put it—wherever I put it at? Anyway it's all right. I don't know, it's just down here, I guess it keeps somebody from tripping or getting his foot hung up over whatever.

No, I try to learn something new and if you listen to the news and the television or you listen to the news you'll hear some something that you didn't know. And you'll learn a lot. I think but once you don't learn nothing, once you stop, once you don't learn anything at all, then you start forgetting that which you had learned, because you never stay even, you never just on an even keel. Either you're learn a little something, it may not be significant, but you learn a little something, and then you add a little more to that and you keep going and keep going. But when—when you get when you're not

interested in learning nothing, you stop going forward, then you're going backwards. You start going backwards. At least that's how I see it.

01-00:54:53

Wilmot:

I understand. I have something to ask you. Which is how is the war era, how is the war we're in now in Iraq different from the war we were in in World War II.

01-00:55:05

Wilson:

Well, I think in most cases the war that we're in now is more or less overseas and it's not as much talked about or commercialized. You don't see it in the street or anything. You don't see the boys going with army suits on and the way they're fighting. And all of that, that's like it's kept like miles and miles away. When the men were fighting in 1942 and 3, early there, that was like close to home. It was so obvious. Street corners, it was a difference, to me it was a difference in the streets and food was rationed. And you can just tell the difference when you go in the store. Food was rationed. And you had to have stamps, your food stamps and tokens to buy certain—well mostly everything was rationed then. And of course gasoline, it was rationed also. They was charging so much and so much for it now, but years ago it used to be you could only get so many gallons. If you had a car. And you were going to work, like we work in the shipyard. You got so many stamps that we could use. For gasoline.

01-00:56:42

Wilmot:

Did you drive to work?

01-00:56:44

Wilson:

Well once we got the car we drove to work but we usually ride the bus, catch the bus, the 72, they called it, I'm trying to—

01-00:56:59

Wilmot:

It goes up and down San Pablo?

01-00:57:00

Wilson:

Yeah, it would go up and down San Pablo, up and down Cutting, up and down Oakland from Oakland, Ashby Avenue, change buses there. Had streetcar, you'd change streetcar to the bus and come to Richmond from Ashby. Back here to Richmond.

01-00:57:22

Wilmot:

I'm sorry I interrupted you though. You were telling me about how the two wars were different or how the wartime was different.

01-00:57:31

Wilson:

How the wartime was different?

01-00:57:32

Wilmot:

From between Iraq and World War II. You were telling me all about that, I interrupted you, I'm sorry.

01-00:57:37

Wilson: Oh well—

01-00:57:38

Wilmot: Was there a sense that people should go out and fight this war? That it was a just war or a righteous war?

01-00:57:43

Wilson: Yeah, well we knew then to me it seemed like the war, the boys, our men were going away fighting and you knew they were going away fighting when you saw a soldier. But you see the soldiers now, they're dressed in uniform but they don't portray the same—well, to look at them is not the same. And you don't see them as often as we used to see the other. During World War II.

01-00:58:20

Wilmot: Did you remember when Pearl Harbor happened?

01-00:58:28

Wilson: Mm-hmm. I was working, and was in Hot Springs, Arkansas. And that was on a Sunday morning, and they was talking about they had bombed Pearl Harbor. And that's when everything really got all turmoil in Hot Springs. Everybody was talking about it. And that's when they really started—you started knowing that the war was, that there really was a war that they were fighting, they were serious about fighting.

01-00:59:10

Wilmot: And then did you have a sense like, 'Oh no this is going to come closer to home? This is going to involve me and my family?'

01-00:59:17

Wilson: I was concerned. I was concerned because we didn't know how far they would go. More or less, everybody was jittery because they knew the war—they didn't know how bad it was going to be. Didn't know how long it was going to be. We just didn't know. Of course it was up to everybody's imagination to imagine.

01-00:59:47

Wilmot: Okay. And as far as this war in Iraq do you think that we have an equally good reason to be over there now?

01-01:00:00

Wilson: Well, to tell you the truth I don't put too much thought in how I feel or what I think about things because I just wish it didn't have to be this way. It shouldn't have to be this way. We shouldn't have to—but the Bible tells us there'll be wars and rumors and wars. And earthquakes in diverse places. Well we know there are wars and if not a war you can hear somebody talking about a war and rumors of war, always a rumor. And earthquakes you know, they're in different places. Every time—just about every week, it's an earthquake somewhere. So I just look at that as part of the Bible's being fulfilled.

01-01:00:43

Wilmot:

Okay. And even when you think of like Bush's search for weapons of mass destruction? Do you think of that as--?

01-01:01:02

Wilson:

Well, I just think of it as somebody's going to fool around and we going to really get messed up and we going to really get hurt. Because these things, you don't know, everybody who's grinning in your face is not your friend. And to have—well, I just think I would *hope* that people one day could communicate and get along better without having to fight, be at war. But we know there will be wars, it's going to always be war. Somebody's going to always find something to fight about. When we get out of this one it's going to be the start of something else.

01-01:01:45

Wilmot:

Well, let me ask you a question also. I wanted to return to your work as—no, no, actually I wanted to—okay, I need to change all the recorded media so I'm going to stop now.

End of Audio File 1 wilson 01 06-22-006.wav

Begin Audio File 2 wilson 02 06-22-006.wav

02-00:00:00

Wilmot:

It's recording. Okay, can you look up one more time? Thank you. Okay now I am recording. There.

02-00:00:54

Wilson:

Where were we?

02-00:00:57

Wilmot:

I had asked you about Pearl Harbor and I wanted to ask you also about the internment of the Japanese after that, when they came and took all the Japanese away.

02-00:01:21

Wilson:

They were taking them away, the Japanese away, when I came out here.

02-00:01:26

Wilmot:

How do you remember that?

02-00:01:28

Wilson:

There used to be the Santa Fe I think it was. Anyway, the railroad used to pass there on Cutting, where Cutting run into San Pablo. Anyway, it was a hothouse, you know, where they have plants?

02-00:02:00

Wilmot:

A greenhouse?

02-00:02:02

Wilson:

Greenhouse, hothouse or whatever they call it. They used to have them up there. That's where the Japanese, they had a lot of Japanese operating those. And I know once we just happened to be coming through that way, on Cutting. It was close to Cutting and San Pablo was where the—and the train passed with—the Santa Fe train passed with a long, long trainload, cars, boxcar, not boxcars but passenger cars. And they had a lot of Japanese on the train.

02-00:02:56

Wilmot:

You remember seeing this?

02-00:02:58

Wilson:

Do I remember seeing it? Yeah. The Japanese used to own—I don't know it they owned—but they used to operate, it was a florist there. Close to San Pablo and Cutting. It was a florist there. And the Japanese owned that, they ran that. I don't know about owned it, but they ran that. And you could see the Japanese would be just stacked like cordwood, stacked on those, just a lot of people on those trains. And they were taking them to the intern—the camp where they were going to put them. And some of them, I don't know if any of them ever come back or got their property back. I don't know because I never tried to keep up with things like that.

02-00:03:54

Wilmot:

Did you know anyone who was taken away?

02-00:03:58

Wilson:

No, not by name. No.

02-00:04:04

Wilmot:

Were you concerned about what was happening?

02-00:04:07

Wilson:

Yeah, I was concerned every day but I never really worried about it because worry doesn't solve any problems. If anything is happening or going on and I'm concerned about it I try and see what I can do about it to make it better, if that is the case, to make it better, or what can I do. I don't just sit and worry about something. If I can do something about it, then I do it. If I can't do anything about it, then I don't.

02-00:04:40

Wilmot:

Did you feel like this was something you could not do anything about?

02-00:04:43

Wilson:

I knew I could not do that, I could not do anything about that. So there's no point in worrying about something that you know you can't do anything about.

02-00:04:57

Wilmot:

What did you know about what was going on in terms of the Holocaust in Germany?

02-00:05:02

Wilson: I didn't know anything about that.

02-00:05:10

Wilmot: Did you have a sense that our troops were going over there to liberate those—

02-00:05:15

Wilson: I knew they were going to be fighting over there, but like I said, I never worry about something. If I can do something about whatever it is, I do. And if I don't, I don't clutter up my mind just worrying about what is and what should be. I don't—if anything happened and I can do something about it, I do it, and if I can't do anything about it, I don't worry about it.

02-00:05:49

Wilmot: I wanted to return to your wartime work. Oh, actually, no, let me ask this last question. When the war ended there was the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima with those nuclear bombs. Did you know about that?

02-00:06:07

Wilson: Yes, I knew they said they dropped the atom bomb, is that the one? You're talking about the atom bomb? Yeah. Nothing I could do about it but I knew about it when they dropped the bomb. And that was a sad thing to do but I guess, you know, they did what they had to do.

02-00:06:27

Wilmot: At that time, did you know how serious that bomb was? Or did you just think it was—at the time was it just like, well—

02-00:06:29

Wilson: No, I don't think nobody knew how serious it was. I don't think. It was very, very serious.

02-00:06:44

Wilmot: Do you remember learning? How did you learn about how serious it was? How did you—did you watch a TV program later?

02-00:06:52

Wilson: It wasn't that many TVs. In fact I don't remember any TVs at that time, but they had radios. We could listen to the radio. Listen to what's happening, the radio, what's happening, and what they'd have a debate on what they should do or what have you. Sometimes they did. If a person was talking too much in what should or should not do, they would often close off that subject. You didn't hear it. They'd just scratch it out or whatever. But there's just so much that you could hear of what was really going on.

02-00:07:37

Wilmot: Okay, do you mean when people were talking about what people should or shouldn't do, that wasn't a conversation that people pursued, really?

02-00:07:44

Wilson:

No. What people should or shouldn't do, that was just a matter of this person's opinion. If somebody was talking about something, if they said, "Well, what they ought to do is such-and-such a thing," well, this is just a person—the higher-up hasn't said that this is what you do.

02-00:08:13

Wilmot:

Okay. So you heard about that and then the war ended and then you were laid off your job. Tell me a little bit about the work you were doing. As a welder were you—you were in Shipyard 4. Were you in Shipyard 4 the whole time?

02-00:08:28

Wilson:

Yeah. I worked in the shipyard I think it was like 22 months. I was a welder. I was ABS journeyman welder. that is. The first 30 days after I was out of the school, 95¢ an hour when I was in school. And when they took me out of school and put me out in the yard you were supposed—I could have stayed in so many hours, I think it was like 96 hours and if you don't learn enough in that time, they feel that you aren't qualified to continue on. Well, anyway, they pulled me. I was in there like a day and a half and they pulled me and put me to practice and then—

02-00:09:20

Wilmot:

Right away. They brought you right in.

02-00:09:22

Wilson:

Uh-huh. Right. And then they took me down to the test place and I had to do the test. I had to weld so much horizontal, so much vertical. So much overhead. We had to weld so many pieces together overhead and they have to stay there. Anyway, I went that morning and the next morning I went and when my leader man came by, he brought me the thing that I had passed the test, and so that's when I skipped \$1.15, I went right to \$1.20. I was getting \$1.05, \$1.10, then I went—I didn't get \$1.15 because—

02-00:10:14

Wilmot:

You told me that.

02-00:10:16

Wilson:

And I was up to \$1.20. And so I started work in the pm. When I started working the pm, I was making \$1.40.

02-00:10:25

Wilmot:

Wow. So they bumped you up if you worked at night.

02-00:10:28

Wilson:

Yeah, everybody. If you worked in the daytime you got \$1.20 for the—

02-00:10:35

Wilmot:

But if you worked at night you got more money.

02-00:10:36
Wilson: If you get work in the pm from 3:00 to 11:00 you got more money. You work graveyard shift from 11:00 to 7:00 in the morning, you got some more money.

02-00:10:45
Wilmot: So let me ask you a question then. Did you like the work?

02-00:10:50
Wilson: Mm hmm. Yes.

02-00:10:51
Wilmot: Who did you work with?

02-00:10:53
Wilson: Who did I work with?

02-00:10:54
Wilmot: Were you part of a crew of other women?

02-00:10:57
Wilson: Yes I was a part of a woman and man crew.

02-00:11:00
Wilmot: Did you have a female supervisor?

02-00:11:02
Wilson: No, I had a male.

02-00:11:04
Wilmot: Okay, and how many women? Was it more women or more men in your crew?

02-00:11:09
Wilson: It was about the same. Maybe one or two more men than there were women.

02-00:11:15
Wilmot: Was it mostly black people or was it also integrated with white people?

02-00:11:19
Wilson: It was integrated.

02-00:11:21
Wilmot: So it was a mixed group.

02-00:11:23
Wilson: It was mixed. Sometime you was working with some, is all black. And sometime you're working with some, you the only black. And so I would say it depend on what type work you were doing. And—

02-00:11:38
Wilmot: Did you experience discrimination in the shipyard? Racial discrimination?

02-00:11:41

Wilson: Here and there. Well, you know, you don't pay stuff like that no attention.

02-00:11:46

Wilmot: When you say here and there, what do you mean?

02-00:11:49

Wilson: Well maybe with this group, you're working with this group, they'll say—you'll hear them talking about the other group, somebody'll get in trouble. If you just keep your mouth closed and be quiet long enough, you hear all what's going on, you don't have to ask nobody. And those who were kind of shy, they were not openly, shall we say, prejudiced, they were not openly prejudiced, they were just like, say it under their breath. They try to pretend, they'd say something but you didn't know what they were talking about or whatever.

I never listened to—I'd go to work and do a job. I didn't go to work to socialize. And I go to work and I do what I'm supposed to do. And when time for me to go on my break, I go on my break. When time for me to come back from my break, I come back from my break. I don't wait ten or 15 minutes after my break and here I come back. I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. And I treat you right inasmuch as within me, I'll treat you right. If I can't treat you right, I'd rather not be around you. Stay away from me. I don't get that lonesome that I have to get involved with something that I don't feel comfortable with.

02-00:13:20

Wilmot: I see what you mean. Was discrimination here out in the West Coast—?

02-00:13:27

Wilson: Yeah, it's discrimination everywhere you go. If you look for it. If you look for it, you'll find it.

02-00:13:38

Wilmot: I guess I was going to ask though, was it different or more or less than what you knew back in Arkansas, the experience of racial discrimination?

02-00:13:46

Wilson: No, the one thing I liked about Arkansas, if people like you they like you. And if they didn't like you, they'll let you know they didn't like you and they don't have nothing to do with you. And I appreciate that.

02-00:13:57

Wilmot: It was straightforward.

02-00:14:00

Wilson: Yeah, you don't cover up or pretend that you're something when you're not. Some people are like, “Oh, I just love you, I just love you!” and “I don't know what—don't get nothing near me.” I don't like that. Whoever you are, you be whoever you are. You find you live much longer. And you won't have high blood pressure.

02-00:14:24

Wilmot: If you're straightforward.

02-00:14:27

Wilson: Right, if you're straightforward. Just be what you are, don't try to be nothing different. You don't like a person, you don't like them. So. There's some more people you can like, more people you can—that would be glad to have you like them or love them. So I always found that worked. I've never been in the habit of just smiling and patting you on the back when I know I could cut your throat. I've never been that kind of person. So I just—inasmuch as I can, if the person let me. And I'll even go the extra mile to be nice, not because I have to or not because it's some kind of record of what I got, it's just that I believe in giving everybody a chance.

02-00:15:21

Wilmot: Did your brothers and sisters join you out here?

02-00:15:28

Wilson: No.

02-00:15:30

Wilmot: They stayed mostly in Pine Bluff?

02-00:15:32

Wilson: My brother, one of my brothers, he went to Kansas, he never came out here to the shipyard stuff. He went to Kansas. My other brother, he stayed, he went to Michigan and he worked in the slaughterhouse or wherever they do the beef and stuff, the animals. In fact, that's where he died at, in Flint, Michigan. And my youngest—my brother that was next to me, he was the one that—he lived here in California. He worked different odd kinds of work and he died in—I'm trying to think, it was 1984—1982, 1984, he passed. I had a brother that passed in '84, one that passed in '82, one that passed in '56. I had three brothers.

02-00:16:41

Wilmot: And your sisters?

02-00:16:42

Wilson: I had two sisters. My oldest sister, she living in Detroit now. My younger sister, she passed away a couple years ago.

02-00:16:55

Wilmot: I'm sorry to hear that. Your brother who came out here, did he come out during the wartime era?

02-00:17:03

Wilson: He came out right after the war. He was in Kansas, in, oh, some parts of Kansas. And he came out here in California. He was sort of like a—he'd work here, he's here this month and maybe next month he's somewhere else and then next month he's somewhere else.

- 02-00:17:27
Wilmot: Odd jobs, different. So was it good then to have family close to you? Like when you were out here?
- 02-00:17:34
Wilson: It was good then to have a family close to you because they could always pick up a little slack, any slack that you had. And I was always the one that they always called on. Whatever went on, I was the one that had to handle it. Which made me kind of tired.
- 02-00:17:57
Wilmot: I can imagine. And you weren't even the oldest. You were the middle.
- 02-00:18:01
Wilson: No, no, I'm the middle.
- 02-00:18:02
Wilmot: You weren't the oldest girl either so.
- 02-00:18:06
Wilson: No, I'm the middle girl.
- 02-00:18:07
Wilmot: So you just got it for some reason I don't know. [pause] Well, when was your last daughter born?
- 02-00:18:24
Wilson: She was born the 5th of September, 1954.
- 02-00:18:29
Wilmot: 1954. So this was—
- 02-00:18:32
Wilson: She was born here.
- 02-00:18:34
Wilmot: So you were in your mid 30s.
- 02-00:18:35
Wilson: I was 37 years old, 37, I was 37 years old and, what, like, five days old when she was born.
- 02-00:18:52
Wilmot: And who did you name her for? Who did you name Phyllis for?
- 02-00:18:57
Wilson: I just named her, I don't know. [laughs] I had been wondering what I was going to name her if she had been a boy. What we were going to name her, we had decided we'd name her Gerald, G-E-R-A-L-D.
- 02-00:19:14
Wilmot: But it was a girl, so she was Phyllis.

02-00:19:16

Wilson:

But it was a girl and then if it was a girl I would name her Phyllis LeDell. And so when she was born, naturally it was a girl so that was her name, Phyllis LeDell. LeDell is one of my schoolmates. I went to school with her. She and I were real close when we went to school together back in Arkansas. And so I didn't tell her that I was going to name her. Because she lived over here in Berkeley, this friend of mine. And I didn't tell her I was going to name the baby after her until way, way, way when—about three or four days, and she was getting ready to go on vacation. And I was going to have the baby, I'd known, before she'd get back. And I told her, said “Well, I'm going to name her LeDell. Name her after you.” And she said, “No, no, don't tie nobody down with that name!” So, anyway she was gone on vacation and of course, I knew that before she came back that I would have had the baby. And so anyway she was born on the 5th of September in 1954 and I named her Phyllis LeDell Wilson. So that's the end of that. She doesn't use Phyllis though, she call herself Peaches and she calls herself something else. Other names. I forgot all the different ones. Anyway, she has some other name that she named herself that to her, that's what she likes. So, anyway.

02-00:20:56

Wilmot:

Can I ask you also—sorry, were you going to say something? I had one last question about the shipyards, which is, were you in a union?

02-00:21:04

Wilson:

Yeah, we were in the boilermakers union. And of course you had to be in the union, but the union wasn't doing nothing for you. You had to be in the union. And the unions were segregated, they had the black union and the white union, and the white union, I don't know where the white union met at but the black union met up here on—during that time, on 16th and Barrett, right where you go under the underpass, a little building there, years ago, and that was the union hall. That was where we had to go to pay your union dues. But it didn't do anything for you, it was just something that they had to—they had a white union and they had to have a black union. Because before then, they just had a white union.

02-00:22:05

Wilmot:

Did you have a union official or somebody you interacted with, someone who collected your dues? Or was there somebody—?

02-00:22:12

Wilson:

No, you paid your dues on 16th and Barrett at that office. And then from then on, whatever it was, they took it out of your check. You didn't see it, they just took it out of your—so much for union dues. So much for health plan. So much whatever. They had it down there.

02-00:22:33

Wilmot:

And there used to be a woman there, her name was Betty Reid, did you know her?

02-00:22:38
Wilson: Betty Reid? No.

02-00:22:39
Wilmot: She worked in that hall.

02-00:22:42
Wilson: Worked in the union hall?

02-00:22:43
Wilmot: I think so. I'm not sure. I might be wrong about that.

02-00:22:48
Wilson: I didn't know her.

02-00:22:53
Wilmot: And at this time were you still—all through the war did you stay in that little no-bedroom apartment?

02-00:23:04
Wilson: [laughs]

02-00:23:05
Wilmot: Isn't it funny?

02-00:23:05
Wilson: I stayed in there till—we stayed in there until I went home and—when I got laid off in 1946. When I got laid off at the shipyard, then I went home in August in 1946 and brought my children, because I'd left them there with my mother while I come out here to work.

02-00:23:25
Wilmot: You told me that, yeah. You told me that.

02-00:23:27
Wilson: And I went home and got the children, the two children, and brought them out here. And the boy, he's the one and then the girl, Doris, the one I showed you a picture up there. And they were the two, that was in 1946.

02-00:23:46
Wilmot: Did you bring them straight out or did you stay home for a while?

02-00:23:48
Wilson: Probably there like on a vacation, maybe a week or so. And then I brought them out.

02-00:23:53
Wilmot: On the train.

02-00:23:55
Wilson: Yeah, on the train.

02-00:23:57

Wilmot: How was that for them?

02-00:23:57

Wilson: It was rough, it was rough. She was telling me about it the other night. She was saying that she had rode so long on the train coming from California here—I mean, coming from Arkansas here it's a long, long way and of course, back then the train would stop at certain depots. Certain places the train would stop, and she was telling me how upset it—upsetting her and how she felt like she was rolling because of being on the train so long.

02-00:24:31

Wilmot: She was trainsick.

02-00:24:34

Wilson: Yes. And she said she never wanted to go back. And she went back when my grandmother passed. I took both the kids back home with me to the funeral and brought them back. So they haven't been back since. Because I've been back, back to Arkansas, but they haven't.

02-00:24:51

Wilmot: Do you still have family there?

02-00:24:53

Wilson: No, I don't have anyone there—cousins, distant cousins in Arkansas. All of my people that's still living, they are in other places. Like, I have a cousin in Wichita, Kansas and here and there, back in Saint Louis, a cousin in Saint Louis. And around. But I don't have any close relatives out here no more than my sister and then my family, my children and my grandchildren.

02-00:25:41

Wilmot: So when you came back after the war with your children, did you and your family buy a new house? Or what did you do? Did you rent still or did you move into a home?

02-00:25:51

Wilson: No, during the war—when the war was over, we were living down in the Canal. In the projects.

02-00:26:00

Wilmot: In that one not having a bedroom apartment?

02-00:26:04

Wilson: No, that wasn't—we wasn't in that one. See, I stayed in that one until I brought the kids out. When I brought the kids out, when I brought the two children out, then they gave us—supposed to have been a larger apartment. Room for the boy and a room for the girl. And well, that was back down in the Canal. And I did not like the Canal. Because it was—

02-00:26:26

Wilmot: Why?

02-00:26:27

Wilson:

Oh, it was noisy and everything went wrong. There was something that had—a hot plate that didn't have a regular gas stove like we had in the other projects where we had lived. Up on Huber. They had—we had gas stoves, four burners. Down in the Canal we had a hotplate. We had a hotplate. It had a dome fitting thing that if you're going to make—cook rolls or bread, you could only do that one thing. You couldn't have the hotplate here cooking something and the burner here cooking something.

02-00:27:14

Wilmot:

You had to choose.

02-00:27:15

Wilson:

You had either or. And you couldn't even use the oven. And every day I'd cry. [laughs] Every day, when it was time for me to cook dinner, I'd cry. Because I hated it so bad because we had moved from where we had our gas at. I'd been used to gas and everything. So, anyway that made us move quicker probably than we would have if we had been in a better, nicer place. It had to have gas. Where we could have used the gas and the oven. This was a dome, a hotplate, a thing made round like you've seen—anyway, it's round. About yea long, and it's round like that, and it has the thing where you put your bread on when you're cooking your bread or your cake or your pie or what have you. It had little thing that you put it on. But you couldn't use it and use the hotplate, too.

Every day I'd cry when I had to cook dinner. So that made us move out of the—when my husband had gone to work and everything, another friend of mine and I, she, they were looking for apartment, so she and I, we went together and we saw this place down on First Street here between McDonald and Nevin, that was for sale. And so we took that. That's how we got up there because if we had had a nice oven, nice stove to cook on, and a nice oven--

02-00:29:03

Wilmot:

You might have stayed there.

02-00:29:05

Wilson:

We would have stayed there longer, because we liked that. But I didn't want to stay there because we didn't—for the inconvenience it was.

02-00:29:15

Wilmot:

Did you end up buying this house at First and Nevin?

02-00:29:17

Wilson:

Yes. It was 326 between MacDonald and Nevin.

02-00:29:23

Wilmot:

And how much did you pay for it then?

02-00:29:25

Wilson:

\$39,000.

02-00:29:26
Wilmot: And did it have enough bedrooms for everybody? Was it two families or one family?

02-00:29:33
Wilson: Just us.

02-00:29:36
Wilmot: And that was right after the war?

02-00:29:39
Wilson: Yeah. That was after the war.

02-00:29:40
Wilmot: So that was your first home?

02-00:29:41
Wilson: That was our first home here. We had our home back in Arkansas. We had our own nice home back in Arkansas, it was all paid for and I had just bought new furniture and everything before I came out here. And so we put that in storage and rented the house out when we came out here.

02-00:30:00
Wilmot: How long did you keep that Arkansas house before you decided you weren't going to go back there and live?

02-00:30:05
Wilson: We had bought this house down on First Street then. It was probably about six or seven years, eight years.

02-00:30:13
Wilmot: So this house, was it a three-bedroom house or--?

02-00:30:18
Wilson: It was a two-bedroom, the one down on First, two-bedroom.

02-00:30:21
Wilmot: How long did you and your family live there?

02-00:30:25
Wilson: Probably a little better than 20 years, about 20 years.

02-00:30:31
Wilmot: Well, you stayed there until like—into the '60s.

02-00:30:35
Wilson: I moved here in 1966. And I moved from down there on First Street to here.

02-00:30:42
Wilmot: How much were you able to sell that old house for? Did it appreciate?

02-00:30:45
Wilson: \$13,000 and something.

- 02-00:30:48
Wilmot: Whoa so it went from \$39,000 to \$13,000?
- 02-00:30:52
Wilson: It was \$3,900, \$3,900.
- 02-00:30:55
Wilmot: \$3,900. Okay, sorry.
- 02-00:30:59
Wilson: And when we moved from there up here we got \$13,000 for the house down there.
- 02-00:31:11
Wilmot: Got you, wow. So did you—
- 02-00:31:15
Wilson: That was the difference in how property had gone up since we moved there. It was \$3,900 when we bought it and then we sold it, it was \$13,000. That was making a lot, getting a lot more than—it was a lot more than what we paid for it.
- 02-00:31:50
Wilmot: It was. It appreciated a great deal. After the war did you continue to work? I know you were laid off out of welding but what kind of work did you pursue after the war?
- 02-00:32:02
Wilson: Well, it was not very much work to be done then. Because everybody, the women who worked in the war, those were teachers, they had substitute teachers and they had different things. Anyway, it was not much work to do. I worked at Berkeley Home Furnitures that was there on San Pablo. I worked there a couple weeks just in somebody's place while they were on vacation and everything. So I didn't go back to work until I went to school down here, Contra Costa College. I took nursing. And when I finished there, I started to work at the county hospital in Martinez. That's where I did my training at. We did our training there. And I started work there and I worked there until I retired.
- 02-00:32:56
Wilmot: What kind of nurse were you?
- 02-00:32:59
Wilson: LVN.
- 02-00:33:00
Wilmot: So did you work mostly with—
- 02-00:33:02
Wilson: I was a licensed vocational nurse. I was a licensed psychiatric technician. I had both of my licenses.

02-00:33:09
Wilmot: Did you work mostly with young people or—

02-00:33:13
Wilson: No at one point—

02-00:33:14
Wilmot: Adults or seniors?

02-00:33:16
Wilson: I worked with adults. I had worked with all people, but not permanently. See that's where you get on a position—of course, the last time I was in charge of a crisis unit where a person would come to be there 24 hours or less. And I worked there. That's where I worked until I retired. I retired when my husband became ill and I came home to take care of him, to be here with him. I was home with him about 18, 19 months before he passed.

02-00:34:01
Wilmot: What kind of work did he do after the war?

02-00:34:03
Wilson: After the war, he worked at Naval Supply Center. The exact title of his job I don't—I don't think he had a title. I know he drove a jeep and he'd go in offices for certain things and what have you. But as far as the title, I don't know what he did. I know he worked at Naval Supply Center.

02-00:34:34
Wilmot: Was your husband's family also from Arkansas or did they come from other places?

02-00:34:40
Wilson: My husband's family?

02-00:34:43
Wilmot: Mr. Wilson.

02-00:34:44
Wilson: My husband, let's see, his mom was born, I think she was born in some part of Missouri and his dad was born in Tennessee.

02-00:34:51
Wilmot: And they migrated to Arkansas.

02-00:34:54
Wilson: Right, right.

02-00:35:01
Wilmot: And did he feel like you should be staying at home? Or working? Did he have any feelings about you working?

02-00:35:05
Wilson: No.

02-00:35:07

Wilmot: He was just good either way.

02-00:35:09

Wilson: Whatever. We got along good in that way. He never encouraged me or said get out and go to work and he never encouraged me and said no you stay here, you don't work. Whatever I did, we never argued about that. We got along good together. We didn't have arguments about that.

02-00:35:33

Wilmot: I wanted to ask you also: you were here in Richmond when the Civil Rights Movement started happening in the South. Did you watch that unfold on TV and see what was happening back in your home state in Arkansas?

02-00:35:49

Wilson: Talking about the separation or the coming together of blacks and whites? Well, frankly none of that never bothered me. I've always, as near as I can remember, I do what I'm supposed to do, work with whoever I'm supposed to work with, I treat whoever nice, I treat them as I wish to be treated. And I go from day to day, and what another person does, that's them.

02-00:36:20

Wilmot: I understand. I was just wondering if you watched all that unfold on TV and—

02-00:36:26

Wilson: Oh, I've seen it, yes. I've seen it. And I wonder how come, as big as this world is, I just wonder how come we all can't get along. You know, everybody mind his own business and if you can help me do something, do it, and if I can help you do something, do it. But it doesn't mean that we got to—if you need me, I'm there and if I need you, you're there. But it doesn't mean that we got to sit up under somebody day in and day out or know every move they make or what have you. I don't—

02-00:36:58

Wilmot: And when the Black Power Movement came to Richmond for example, did you know were there young people in your neighborhood who became Black Panthers or did you watch that unfold?

02-00:37:09

Wilson: Well, down the hill, they tell me, I don't know, I didn't see it, I was going to school at that time, but they said down—in Rolling Wood, that's a little area down the street, on down on the other side of—down on this side of San Pablo. Anyway they said it was—when they first built that place, build those homes down there, the whites thought that—they knew that they didn't want any blacks to move in. And of course somebody called the Black Panthers. And they rode down through there and that solved all that problem. All they did was ride down there. They didn't bother nobody. But when those people—the people that was down there was throwing eggs on the people who would come in there. And Wilbur Garry was one black family that had moved in and

somebody had to go out there and sit in front of his house while they slept because the people down there, they thought the area should be their area.

02-00:38:21

Wilmot: What year was this? Around what year?

02-00:38:24

Wilson: What year was that? It was in the late '50s or early '60s. But they used to be real prejudiced.

Well, in fact there was a lot of prejudice. But to me it never bothered me because I always mind my own business and I expect the other person to mind his. Theirs. I never had any problem with it and I never was so hungry that I had to go to try to get something—be under somebody who did not want me around. I've never been that hungry for friendship or—

02-00:39:02

Wilmot: Or money or anything.

02-00:39:04

Wilson: Right, right.

02-00:39:06

Wilmot: I want to ask you a question. I want to turn now to ask you about your church. When did you first become a member of the Richmond—

02-00:39:16

Wilson: North Richmond Missionary.

02-00:39:18

Wilmot: North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church?

02-00:39:20

Wilson: I became a member of North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church. It was in March, 1944. I came out here in '43 but I worked in the shipyard. And working there, of course my days, we worked on Sunday, my day off was—the week, was like on Wednesday. And so, anyway, I united with the church. And I could go to Sunday school when I was laid off, then I could go to Sunday school. But I united with North Richmond in March, February or March, 1944.

02-00:39:55

Wilmot: How many people were in the congregation then?

02-00:40:00

Wilson: It was a lot of them because during that time the war was going. Everybody was going to church. And the members were just like that. It was a lot of people.

02-00:40:15

Wilmot: You were not a founding member?

- 02-00:40:18
Wilson: Founding member? No. That church was already organized when I came here.
- 02-00:40:24
Wilmot: So how long has it been around?
- 02-00:40:27
Wilson: Probably that was—I came out here in 1943, I came in '43, I united with North Richmond in '44, March of '44, and I think probably maybe 1939 when somebody else had started the church. I'm not sure. Somebody else had started it. I know it was before—they were all organized but they were in a small church. I have some of the pictures. If I'd known that you were—had read that you would be interested in them, I would have got them and showed them to you.
- 02-00:41:09
Wilmot: I would love to see them if you want to get them. But I want to ask you who was the pastor there?
- 02-00:41:15
Wilson: The pastor was a minister that I don't know. I mean it was before my time. I think it was somebody named Reverend Holmes. Holmes. And I know Reverend Watkins was a minister there, he was there for a long time. I have the record of who all the ministers who were members of the—I'll just look right here. I have it right here. On this table and see if it's here. [gets up and retrieves North Richmond Missionary Baptist Church history book]
- Ooh. See, that's what—you don't want to get—that's what happens when you get old.
- I have lots and lots of pictures. I'll just bring these. This is just a scar here, like I said.
- 02-00:42:48
Wilmot: And you're in the church now? You're still with the same church? Are you the chairperson of the Deborah Circle?
- 02-00:42:57
Wilson: Yes. This is—I'm sorry, but this is—you can go from the front over to the back. This is when it was little but you can see a little more of an inside there.
- 02-00:43:26
Wilmot: Oh, it's been around since 1919. And the pastor is Reverend Newsom.
- 02-00:43:33
Wilson: Yeah, the last pastor that passed away.
- 02-00:43:36
Wilmot: He just passed away. [pause while flipping through pages]

02-00:43:38
Wilson: Reverend. That's part of this. It's a lot that's pertaining to—

02-00:44:22
Wilmot: You have two of these. May I take one?

02-00:44:25
Wilson: Two of what? Those are the same?

02-00:44:29
Wilmot: It appears so.

02-00:44:30
Wilson: Oh, let me see them.

02-00:44:32
Wilmot: I will give it to you. I just was looking at them.

02-00:44:41
Wilson: Because I'm wondering how did I get—oh, these two you're talking about. Oh yeah. Okay. I don't know if this one—I had got this one for somebody.

02-00:45:03
Wilmot: You probably did.

02-00:45:05
Wilson: I probably did too, yeah. Yeah. Yeah this is—you saw the little church here.

02-00:45:10
Wilmot: And now it's a big church. Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement over the years?

02-00:45:23
Wilson: My involvement at the church?

02-00:45:25
Wilmot: Over the years, yes.

02-00:45:26
Wilson: Over the years, I have worked with about every organization in the church. Oh, you wanted to—I don't know if I got this for somebody or not. But—

02-00:45:37
Wilmot: That's okay, I don't need to take it, I was just asking. I'm going to read this one, you're looking at that one, I'll read this one. Yeah this is a really—

02-00:45:52
Wilson: This is I what I was looking—this is my pastor that just passed. And this is—

02-00:46:17
Wilmot: Alice Newsom.

02-00:46:20

Wilson: That's his wife.

02-00:46:25

Wilmot: The only Newsoms I know of were involved in this thing in Oakland in the early '40s. [looking at book] Okay. Okay, beautiful. I'm going to give this back to you now. Oh you have a whole book.

02-00:47:04

Wilson: That's the last book.

02-00:47:07

Wilmot: And that was from 2004. [pause] Do you want to tell me what has been one of the most fulfilling—what has been some of the most fulfilling work that you've done at the church? What's been really fulfilling for you?

02-00:47:37

Wilson: On the whole, I enjoy—I've been a member since 1943—or '44, I've been going since 1943. I have worked in all areas of the church. I have worked in all parts of the church. I have worked with the choirs. I worked with the deaconesses. Everywhere they needed somebody to work, I have worked in that part of the church. I'm a follower and I'm a helper. But I don't just get out in front, jump out in front to try to lead. I work with anyone.

02-00:48:42

Wilmot: Can I ask you something? I'm wondering are you in any of these pictures here, these pictures?

02-00:48:52

Wilson: I don't know, I might be, I could be, I know they had our choir. [looking] I'm not in any of these. No. Let me see this. No. I thought they might have had a picture, they still might have a picture of the choir.

02-00:49:21

Wilmot: Why did you join this church?

02-00:49:27

Wilson: Well, back home I've always been active in church. I've always had to go to Sunday school, morning service. You always had meals--you said Deborah Circle, is part of the mission, we're a missionary society. I have always worked, since a child, I have always worked in the church. And it just seemed like that's something I'm supposed to do. I don't feel comfortable—if I'm not—I've never been out of church a long time. So I really wouldn't know, but I think it's something would keep nudging me to get affiliated with some church. So I could—we could participate in whatever program that they have.

02-00:50:21

Wilmot: Would you tell me a little bit about the work of the Deborah Circle?

02-00:50:27

Wilson:

Deborah Circle we have—it used to be like 30 some members, now it's only five. And one of them is in a nursing home. And we have like on our regular meeting we start with a song; then we read a scripture; then we have a song; then somebody prays; then we discuss the lesson. And it's always an interesting lesson. It's from the Bible and I can get you that and show you that book because we just had it last Monday. [gets up to retrieve lesson] Excuse me for keep moving around. [returns] And of course the Deborah Circle, this is our book. And we have Bible lessons and we read from the scripture, read from the Bible, and discuss. You see from that book there, the first week and then it have what you are to discuss. Just like a Sunday school book or another book you have your meetings at.

02-00:52:34

Wilmot:

Okay, well, thank you for sharing that with me.

02-00:52:40

Wilson:

And we go to visit the sick. You don't have to be a member to go visit the sick. But we do, we visit the sick, we keep in touch with the sick, and the widows and the orphans. And where there's problem and if anybody need help. This is the book we go by because it's four lessons in here per month. And we go by it.

02-00:53:09

Wilmot:

I'm looking at all the beautiful images of the congregation, it's just a beautiful book. It's beautiful. I'm looking for your picture.

02-00:53:18

Wilson:

Oh, my picture might not be in there for the—you might see it in the—

02-00:53:23

Wilmot:

There you are. A. Lee Wilson. A. Lee Wilson. Okay, well do you have anything else you want to say today?

02-00:53:39

Wilson:

I didn't know what else you want to talk about.

02-00:53:42

Wilmot:

Whatever you want to talk about. But I don't have any more questions.

02-00:53:45

Wilson:

Okay, well, whatever it is that I can do, help in any way, I would like to, and I would like to know about this meeting and what the final whatever it is.

02-00:54:05

Wilmot:

Outcome of it is?

02-00:54:07

Wilson:

Yeah. I would like to know.

- 02-00:54:10
Wilmot: I don't think it's going to be a meeting so much as a video for you.
- 02-00:54:15
Wilson: Yeah, I'd like to see that.
- 02-00:54:17
Wilmot: Yeah, it'll come to you. Okay, listen, thank you so much for your time.
- 02-00:54:22
Wilson: Oh, you're welcome.
- 02-00:54:23
Wilmot: All right.
- 02-00:54:24
Wilson: And I hope, I don't think I have contributed very much to this meeting.
- 02-00:54:30
Wilmot: I feel that you have. And I thank you for your time, yeah.
- 02-00:54:34
Wilson: Well thank you. If it's anything that you—
- [interview interruption]
- 02-00:54:43
Wilmot: We just reopened our interview for one second. Can you just tell me a little bit more about the rationing and where you went shopping and how you managed the whole rationing situation in World War II?
- 02-00:55:00
Wilson: Rationing, if you had—butter, sugar and meat were rationed. And they had—you got so many butter stamps and so many meat stamps. And you couldn't buy unless you had the stamps. If you had so many stamps for a pound of butter, so many stamps for five pounds of sugar, so many stamps for a pound of steak or two pounds of steak or whatever. All the meats, especially the good meats, the good meats you had to have stamps to buy the meat.
- And my sister, my older sister, they had their own cow, they had their own hog, their own chicken and their own food to eat and she used to send butter and stuff out here to me. She'd send, put butter in a quart fruit jar, and then she'd put the fruit jar into a Quaker oatmeal carton. And she'd ship that out here to me. She'd freeze the butter. Anyway she'd get it out here to me and the only thing they wanted was—because she lived in the country and she had plenty fruits and vegetables, and she'd give us the stamps until she got ready to make jelly and jam and stuff. And then she'd make her jellies and jam. But the stamp that she had for butter, she had her own cow, she didn't use the stamp for butter so she'd send me the butter. And she had her sugar and her children—the shoe stamp—for her children to go barefooted in the

summertime, go without shoes in the summertime. And they don't use their stamps. So she'd send the stamps to me. So I always had plenty shoes to wear and plenty goodies and like sugar and stuff. She'd send, she used her sugar stamps for canning but she'd send me the butter stamps because she had her own cow and she didn't use all of her—

02-00:57:38

Wilmot:

Did you send her anything?

02-00:57:42

Wilson:

No, I just sent her money. [laughs] I'd send her money and we'd buy things for her kids if she had—at that time she had eight kids. And I'd buy something for the kids to help her out because it wasn't very much that they could do down there. But they did have a nice family. She wound up with nine kids. Nine children, five girls and four—five boys and four girls.

02-00:58:14

Wilmot:

Thank you. Thanks.

02-00:58:16

Wilson:

Oh you're welcome. And that was the sharing part. It was like shoes. Her children would go without shoes in the summertime, all the kids were barefooted, be wading around in water and stuff. And she would send me her shoe stamps because she didn't need them. Her kids would go barefooted for the summer. And of course she sent them to me, then I could buy shoes with, we always had plenty. I always had plenty. We shared, we always shared what we had. Okay.

[End of interview]