

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

EVELYN RODES

The Bay Bridge Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman with Martin Meeker
in 2012

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Oakland Museum of California, the California Department of Transportation,
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The Bridges and the San Francisco Bay Oral History Project: Series History

The Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, launched a new oral history series on the history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in May 2012. At that time, ROHO entered into an agreement with the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) to conduct approximately 15 oral histories, totaling about 30 hours of interviews, on the history of the Bay Bridge, the San Francisco Bay, and bridges in the surrounding region.

This project was a collaboration between ROHO, OMCA, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). This project was designed to fulfill the historical mitigation requirements associated with the dismantling of the eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. The series coincided with, and contributed to, the research phase and design phase of an exhibit at OMCA on the social and environmental history of the San Francisco Bay.

This project provides a new set of resources widely accessible to students, scholars, and the public interested in the San Francisco Bay. Interviews focused on the men and women who spent a good portion of their careers working on the bridge, whether as painters or engineers, toll-takers or architects, labor or management. Beyond the human dimension of the bridges, these structures also connect geographic spaces, providing conceptual linkages between cultures, environments, and political discourses. This oral history project, then, explored the role of the iconic bridges in shaping the identity of the region, as well as their place in architectural, environmental, labor, and political history. This project enhances the historical understanding of the San Francisco Bay and the natural and built environment that helps define the region.

The Bay Bridge Oral History Project launched with an investigation of the history of the bay and the architectural, social, and political history of the bridges that span the waters of the region. Planning meetings attended by representatives of ROHO, OMCA, Caltrans, BATA, and MTC began in mid-2011. In these meetings, representatives of the various groups discussed the topics that should be covered in the interviews as well as the kind of people who should be interviewed. Although there were no known individuals who worked on the construction of the Bay Bridge (1934-36) still living, a foremost goal of the project was document the construction of the bridge and its early years, especially before the bridge was altered in 1959 with the removal of rail tracks on the lower deck. Beyond that initial goal, interviews were sought with individuals who would be able to share unique experiences related to the bridges from a variety of personal and professional vantage points: from laborers involved in maintenance of the bridge through bridge engineers who worked on the design on the new eastern span. The primary focus of this project was to dig deeper into the complex history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and its changing relationship to human communities and the environment.

The project interview staff at ROHO consisted of Sam Redman, PhD, and Martin Meeker, PhD. The project interviewers were assisted by David Dunham, technical specialist, and Julie Allen, editor.

Interview #1 August 7, 2012

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01-00:00:41

Redman: Today is August 7, 2012. My name is Sam Redman, and I'm sitting down today with Evelyn Rodes. This is our first session together today. First tape. Evelyn, to begin, very simply, would you mind telling me your name and then spelling it out for me?

01-00:01:03

Rodes: Evelyn, E-V-E-L-Y-N. "A" is Adeline. Rodes, R-O-D-E-S.

01-00:01:10

Redman: Great, thank you. When were you born?

01-00:01:12

Rodes: October 1, 1915.

01-00:01:14

Redman: And whereabouts were you born?

01-00:01:17

Rodes: I was born in Gonzales, California.

01-00:01:22

Redman: Gonzales, California. Where is that?

01-00:01:24

Rodes: That's just below Salinas.

01-00:01:26

Redman: Just below Salinas.

01-00:01:27

Rodes: Yes.

01-00:01:28

Redman: Okay. And tell me, were your parents from there? Or how did they get to Gonzales?

01-00:01:32

Rodes: My father was there. They owned a lot of land down there. In fact, some of it is still in the family. He was born down there. They were born there, then they moved up to La Gloria, next to the [Pinnacles National Park] in homesteaded land. [They] used to come through and make him save animals, because he had a dairy farm. My father-in-law was from Switzerland. My mother originally was from Switzerland, and my great grandmother was from Germany. She came across the plains in a covered wagon from Fort Wayne, Indiana to—oh, Washington. I never forget what state. Spokane, I guess it was. It's a long story there, too. It's very interesting how it ended up. They get married. They meet and get married down in Santa Cruz. I don't know how

they met. That story I never got. It was funny, because I happened to go by one—I was doing a convention thing in Santa Cruz several years ago, and I happened to see the way my grandmother spelled her name on a street down there. My aunt was still alive. I said, “Aunt Lena,” I says, “Do you know that grandma’s maiden name is written down there?” She said, “Oh, yeah.” She said, “Yes, that’s what she told me about them getting married there.” The only thing I knew, her first husband up there had come through with the circus, and they got married and she had one child, and he never came back. She didn’t have much to do. The family had passed away. So she came down. Her brother comes to Santa Cruz. I don’t know how he got there. He built the first bathhouse in Santa Cruz. That’s why the name was there. It was funny, because, as it turned out, my grandmother told me that she had come down. She was about nineteen or twenty. She had a baby. She decided to come down here. She got a covered wagon, her horse team, and a shotgun, and took off all by herself through the Indian territory, coming down to go to Santa Cruz.

01-00:03:41
Redman:

Can you tell me about your parents’ personalities? What were they like as people?

01-00:03:45
Rodes:

My dad was a very hard worker. He was sort of the middle. He was a dairyman. That’s how we all got started. He hated Hoover, because he went over Chowchilla to some land to clean all the jackrabbits, they got a dollar a day for jackrabbits, to kill them, and then world war come along and Hoover says, “Don’t get any animals.” He said, “We’re going to have to feed Europe.” So they planted—everybody went over and did this—planted these beans. Then when they were ready, they didn’t want them. They wanted money, and they couldn’t even give it to the government. Oh, he hated [Hoover until] the day he died. He said, “That man should have been shot,” he said.

01-00:04:30
Redman:

Oh, that’s interesting, because Hoover, of course, later when he becomes president, he becomes a very controversial figure.

01-00:04:38
Rodes:

At the time, I think he was already president.

01-00:04:41
Redman:

Let’s talk, then, a little bit about your mother. What was your mother like?

01-00:04:47
Rodes:

Well, that’s a story that I never got the whole—my mother had a bunch of newspaper clippings. A friend of hers in San Francisco—she had a sister at that time, going back to the late 1800s or something. How they got part of this story, because one day my brother, who passed away years ago—I raised him. He was nineteen years old—

01-00:05:10

Redman: How many siblings did you have, by the way?

01-00:05:12

Rodes: I didn't have any. I raised three generations of children.

01-00:05:15

Redman: But you yourself didn't have any siblings?

01-00:05:17

Rodes: No, I couldn't [have children]. I didn't want any at first, because hemophilia run in the family, my brother—

01-00:05:23

Redman: I'm sorry, rather than children, how many *brothers and sisters* did you have?

01-00:05:26

Rodes: I had a brother and a sister. I was the oldest.

01-00:05:29

Redman: Okay, so you were the oldest of three. Carry on about your mom.

01-00:05:34

Rodes: My mom [and] her friend in San Francisco went overseas. They were poor. They were in Switzerland. They lived in Switzerland. They were very poor. His friend came over, and he was over there visiting, and for some reason, my mother had a sister here, and I don't know how she ever got here. She was older. Anyway, her sister says, "Send him over here. I'll take care of her." Because they had trouble eating and what have you. So anyway, this friend of my mother from her father was over there, and they said, "Well, why don't you go and"—they said, "Her sister wants her, but we can't afford to send her. He was coming back to San Francisco, so they taught her how to get through the inspection at New York and come out here. He lived in Redwood City. Well, she got deathly ill after they got off the ship. The porters took care of her on the train, and he got off at Redwood City, figured her sister is going to meet her there, but she got off, she fainted, and nobody was there. Her sister had to go take the same boat back that she had come on. So she became a ward of the court, and they thought she was brought over here for white slavery. The trial went on for months in San Francisco. When I was a little girl, my mother had all these papers, and I don't know what happened to them. My brother and I got talking one day. I said, "She didn't talk about the earthquake in"—what was it? Nineteen oh six?

01-00:07:04

Redman: 1906.

01-00:07:05

Rodes: I said, "But I think she must have come over 1908." I said, "That seems [wrong] in my mind." We got looking and looking. We finally found an

article. That was before our brother died. He knew he was dying. He was the first one that got AIDS.

01-00:07:19

Redman: Your brother?

01-00:07:20

Rodes: Yes, and they covered it up. Oh, yeah. Listen, we've done a lot of stuff around here. You don't have any idea what we did. That brother got a bill passed in this state before he died. He knew he was dying.

01-00:07:32

Redman: What were your siblings' names?

01-00:07:34

Rodes: [Cyril, but was called Cy] and my sister was Eleanor.

01-00:07:38

Redman: And then your parents? We should get their names on the record as well. What were their names?

01-00:07:43

Rodes: My mother's name was Pasquaine which is [also] Lena, and Ranzoni was the last name.

01-00:07:50

Redman: Can you spell the last name?

01-00:07:51

Rodes: R-A-N-Z-O-N-I.

01-00:07:55

Redman: And then your father's full name?

01-00:07:58

Rodes: My father was Albert Roy Pura. P-U-R-A.

01-00:08:04

Redman: Flash forward a few years. I've heard from a lot of people who lived through the Great Depression that times weren't so great even a few years before 1929, but others tell me that October 1929, that crash really made a big difference in their lives. What was it like for you?

01-00:08:24

Rodes: We lived in Oakland. Daddy had come up from the Valley, because he lost everything on account of what happened. So he came up here and decided that he liked the building. Built the house, the ranch and everything. As soon as we came to Oakland, I said—at the time, there was still money in the family. Everybody had Cadillacs in my dad's family, because they made all this money in dairy down in the Salinas Valley. Then it turned out that we come up here, and we come to Oakland with the clothes on our back, and this car,

and dad turned his Cadillac into a Riviera with this guy that rented the place. So much history in my family. We came to Oakland and we found a place, a little house. No bathroom, no tub in it. Here we lived in a place with a tub and all the good things.

01-00:09:23

Redman: So you felt like moving into Oakland—

01-00:09:26

Rodes: Well, it was a disaster for me, because I was just old enough to know and see what had happened. It's funny. People don't think kids—I was about three or four at the time—[people] don't think kids remember. There's certain things I remember so well. I never forgot. My sister got poisoned, and then, of course, for years, they favored her because she didn't have the beginning life like I had, with a private nurse and all this stuff. It turned out that, at the end, my dad thanked me for a lot of things. He realized he was wrong, and he wrote me a letter that I never did forget. I keep it.

01-00:10:07

Redman: Did what happened to your father's finances during the crash, did that affect him emotionally, do you think?

01-00:10:14

Rodes: I think it did. He was a very loving man, and then we come up here and have to fight to eat.

01-00:10:26

Redman: Talk about that. Tell me about how tough times got in that—

01-00:10:29

Rodes: Well, we come up here and have nothing but the clothes on our back, and I had a pet sheep that had been injured down there. I would not get in the car until we took it with us. My dad was ready to kill me. I'll never forget. We come through Pacheco Pass [on Highway 152 – connects Highway 5 to Hollister, CA]. To this day, I never will forget Pacheco Pass as long as I live as a little kid. He was mad at me and mad at the sheep, because we had to stop so many times to make sure the sheep wasn't going to dirty the car. Oh, god. I think back at these things. I think, people have no idea what it's like to have everything in the world, and end up with nothing. Then we come to Oakland. He was trying to figure out how he was going to get a job. He did a little bit of everything.

01-00:11:12

Redman: You mentioned that he got into building. That he was—

01-00:11:15

Rodes: He built a lot of the buildings on the ranch down there in Chowchilla. He built this beautiful home we had, and the barns and everything.

- 01-00:11:25
Redman: So he was good with his hands?
- 01-00:11:27
Rodes: Oh, fabulous [with] his hands. He had a good brain, but he never had the chance to be educated because of what happened in those days.
- 01-00:11:34
Redman: Talk about that. How far along was he able to make it in school?
- 01-00:11:37
Rodes: I think probably about the eighth or ninth grade, because they lived up at La Gloria, and the father's father homesteaded the property up there. The results of it, the teacher—there was a school there. They went to school there, I think, because they had cousins there, and the teacher lived with them. That's where he got his education. Then he was very sick. They thought he was going to live, and they went down and bought the property down in Gonzales and started a dairy down there. That's still in the family. It evolved after all these years.
- 01-00:12:08
Redman: That's amazing. Eventually, your father then left school to start working?
- 01-00:12:12
Rodes: Yes, he came up here. Then the first job I think he got, he went to work—
- 01-00:12:16
Redman: In Oakland?
- 01-00:12:17
Rodes: Yes, was a laborer. What year was the coliseum [Memorial Stadium] at UC first built? Nineteen twenty-eight? [1923]
- 01-00:12:25
Redman: That's right in the 1920s. That's right, yes.
- 01-00:12:28
Rodes: Yes. He worked on that with his first—
- 01-00:12:30
Redman: On Memorial Stadium?
- 01-00:12:31
Rodes: Yes. That was the first job he had as a laborer.
- 01-00:12:35
Redman: Tell me about that. California Memorial Stadium. The football stadium at UC Berkeley.
- 01-00:12:40
Rodes: He'd come home and tell us about it. Then one day he comes home and said to my mother, he says, "I'm going to go to San Francisco. They want me to go

there.” He says, “I want to be a carpenter. I don’t want to be a laborer.” He says, “That’s beyond me.” One day he came home and he says, “I got a better job.” He says, “I’m going to go and see this fellow in San Francisco. He said he liked my attitude, so he’s putting me to work as a carpenter.” That’s where he started. They finished the UC, and then he went to San Francisco and worked on I don’t know what buildings then. Then eventually, when they started the bridge, he went to work for the—I think his boss at that time had something to do with the contract. He worked for that man. That’s how we ended up going to Denver, because he—

01-00:13:28

Redman: For the same contractor?

01-00:013:29

Rodes: Yes, because they just [liked him] so much.

01-00:13:33

Redman: You don’t remember what type of contract that he was working with?

01-00:13:37

Rodes: No. He liked heavy construction, like the bridges and big buildings. In fact, the last building he worked on, he wanted to retire. His boss said no. Even when things got rough, people didn’t work in the winter, he kept him on because he didn’t want to lose him. The last place—he was getting ready to retire—was out here at the [St. Michael’s Covenant for Nun’s] over in Livermore. That was the last building he worked on. They didn’t finish it. He said, “I’m tired of this.” He said, “I want to spend the time fishing and hunting.” That was his favorite.

01-00:14:08

Redman: Fishing and hunting rather than the hard work. Sure. Let’s go back for a moment to Oakland, when you first arrived in Oakland. How old would you have been at that—

01-00:14:20

Rodes: I was starting the first grade.

01-00:14:22

Redman: You were starting in first grade. You would have been old enough to remember the transition—

01-00:14:26

Rodes: Oh, I remember a lot of things. Oh, god.

01-00:14:28

Redman: Tell me about what your first recollections were when you got to Oakland. You had mentioned that the bathrooms were different, that life there was very different.

01-00:14:36

Rodes:

We all had to work. The worst time when the crash come along, I picked prunes out here in Fremont, ten hours a day for six dollars. We had to get so much. I could write you a history. I've seen the best and the worst of this world, I'll tell you.

01-00:14:56

Redman:

That was hard work.

01-00:14:57

Rodes:

Hard work. You have no idea. My knees. I still feel peach fuzz. Then they opened the cannery. It was the only place you could get jobs. There was teachers. There's people lined up for miles. The only place you can get a job. My folks and I—everybody—we lined up, and for some reason, maybe because of dad's background, they hired my mother and my dad and even me. I was only about fourteen or fifteen at the time. I went to work. I can still see the peach fuzz. Thirty cents an hour we had to make, and the boxes were fifty pounds. It was three dollars a box.

01-00:15:40

Redman:

Was it predominantly other young women working with you in the cannery, or women of all stripes?

01-00:15:44

Rodes:

Mostly it was older Portuguese people. It was quite the thing, Portuguese people. I watched this woman next to me, what she was doing. To this day, I can still feel that peach fuzz on me. When they started to lay off, they didn't lay me off, and everybody was shocked, because they knew it was the young kids. I was working. They said to me, "No, no, I like you." I'll never forget, our first check was thirty-three dollars, and I never worked so hard in my life. When they started to close down and just go to the warehouse, they said to me, "We want you here." They took me to the warehouse and I labeled the ketchup bottles. It was funny, because they came in one day and said—we were doing—I forget what brand. He says, "Oh, we've got a change of plan." I said, "Okay. Get them off the line." He says, "No, no, we'll just take the labels off the same cans." I said, "Oh my god." I never will forget. I won't buy spinach to this day, because we had to clean the spinach, and I don't know how they ever got the dirt off. It was impossible. The bugs and everything in it. It's funny how these things stay with you over the years.

01-00:16:52

Redman:

What was it like in that day to go—in that era—to go to work with your parents?

01-00:16:57

Rodes:

Well, eventually, they'd take me to work, because they weren't working anymore.

01-00:17:01

Redman:

Oh, interesting. So they had lost work there.

01-00:17:04
Rodes: Yes. I guess dad still had a car. That's the one thing he didn't give up, was a car.

01-00:17:10
Redman: Still had the car.

01-00:17:11
Rodes: Yes, still had the car. I'll never forget that Duesenberg. I couldn't find the picture, but I had a picture of dad with his Duesenberg.

01-00:17:21
Redman: Car?

01-00:17:22
Rodes: Car, yes.

01-00:17:24
Redman: Talk about getting around in the Bay Area before the bridges were completed.

01-00:17:29
Rodes: We had seven transportation systems around here.

01-00:17:32
Redman: Seven transportation systems?

01-00:17:35
Rodes: Nobody drove their car during the week. They only drove it on Sunday. Because you didn't have to. You had buses. You had a train that went from Santa Cruz to Napa. You had another, Sacramento Northern, and I lived in Oakland, on Shattuck Avenue. The train used to go down in front of our house.

01-00:17:55
Redman: Would people use those trains quite extensively?

01-00:17:57
Rodes: Oh, listen, they didn't drive. Everybody used buses and trains. You wouldn't think of driving to work or anything. Then he had the ferries to go to San Francisco. It's just amazing. I think back sometimes, I think, these people have no idea what it was like. We could get to San Francisco faster than they do today.

01-00:18:16
Redman: Tell me about what it was like to take a ferry.

01-00:18:19
Rodes: Oh, it was interesting. It was fun. The only thing you've got to be careful, when the water was rough, you'd get sick.

01-00:18:23
Redman: If the water was rough, you might get a little seasick.

01-00:18:25

Rodes:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. You line up with your car. That's the scary part to me, was they had to bring them so close to the edge and pack so many of them in, and it was really scary. Personally, in some ways, it was nicer, because you could see things. Watch the water, the fish, and all that.

01-00:18:47

Redman:

We're going to get into your father's bridge work in a minute, but I want to ask two questions. One about the bay itself, and then one about politics. First, let's get the politics question out of the way. We talked about Hoover and how your parents thought about Hoover. Tell me, then, about FDR. He comes in and has a very different—

01-00:19:06

Rodes:

He thought he was this man. My husband was a Pearl Harbor survivor. Five of his brothers were in the Navy and one in the WACs, and they all survived. Some of their stories are unbelievable.

01-00:19:20

Redman:

FDR, there was a very different perception of him at home.

01-00:19:23

Rodes:

Oh, yeah, he was idolized.

01-00:19:25

Redman:

How about fireside chats? Did you listen to fireside chats growing up?

01-00:19:30

Rodes:

Yeah, we had one of the first radios in our neighborhood. Everybody would come down and listen to the news all the time.

01-00:19:37

Redman:

So having a radio was—

01-00:19:39

Rodes:

Oh, that was a thing. And telephone. We also had one of the first telephones. Everybody would come at night to listen to Amos and Andy at our house, and it'd be night. Then they'd come for phone calls if they needed to make a phone call.

01-00:19:53

Redman:

Oh, is that right? Oh, that's funny. So you'd have a lot of guests over in the evening.

01-00:19:57

Rodes:

Well, the thing was, when the crash of twenty-nine come, Seventy-Third Avenue—everybody worked in San Francisco, but they didn't live there. They've lived in East Oakland. That was the place you wanted to live. I went by the house my dad built about three, four years ago, and I was scared to death what happened there. See, they built all these homes across Seventy-Third Avenue, these Spanish homes, because everything was booming.

Everybody was getting in debt up to their ears, but you didn't have any credit cards. I saw people jump out of windows in their neighborhood.

01-00:20:32

Redman: That's very interesting. You'd be in debt to the individual bank rather than—

01-00:20:38

Rodes: Oh, yeah. Some were private. But dad had enough—he learned enough. He knew what to do to keep money.

01-00:20:49

Redman: I see. Okay.

01-00:20:50

Rodes: And we all worked. Then, when the crash come, I'll never forget. It was unbelievable. Some of my neighbors killed themselves. Some people disappeared. We never knew what happened. Then these buildings, these new homes, all sat there for months and months and months. I saw this coming, what's been happening now. I said the only difference is that we didn't have credit cards in those days. I said, today, this happens, and I said I saw it coming about seven years ago. I said to somebody, some young people, I said, "You know, don't own a lot of stuff." They said, "Oh, we don't have to worry." Some of my own family said, "Don't worry. This is never going to"—I said, "Do you know anything about history? Have you ever studied history?" I said, "You travel and you find out every time, this has happened for hundreds of years." I said, "But it never quite goes back to how bad it was the first time."

01-00:21:43

Redman: Let's talk about the bay itself, because I understand that the bay is a very different—

01-00:21:51

Rodes: Oh, god, yes. The bay used to come—you know where Emeryville is now? Part of that was underwater.

01-00:21:58

Redman: What did it smell like in those days?

01-00:22:01

Rodes: I never paid that much attention.

01-00:22:02

Redman: Never paid much attention to how it smelled. How did it look? Did it strike you as visually interesting?

01-00:22:08

Rodes: Well, it was dangerous. Very dangerous. My folks went, "Don't you get near it, don't you get there." I heard that for years. But like I say, half of Alameda was underwater at one time when I was a kid. They had Neptune Beach there.

I would go there. I was quite a swimmer. In fact, they wanted to train me for the Olympics. My parents, they had never heard of the Olympics. They said no way. Because I had been showing up in the news columns and everything during the summer for beating everybody at swimming. They didn't understand that. I was a regular tomboy when I was young. I didn't like playing with girls. I liked to play ball and all that stuff. My mother would have a fit. My dad kind of liked the idea. My mother didn't like it. Like I say, it was—

01-00:23:00
Redman:

So there would be some swimming in the bay and things of that nature in the twenties.

01-00:23:04
Rodes:

Not so much in the bay, because it was too rough and too many things going on. Water would come up. You never knew. Just like when we take the ferry to San Francisco. Sometimes it was so bad that we wouldn't even take the ferry. You couldn't get over on the ferry.

01-00:23:17
Redman:

So inclement weather could stop the ferries from getting over to—

01-00:23:20
Rodes:

Oh, yeah, because we got these big storms. When we stop and think, there was no Golden Gate Bridge or any—I look back and think, oh my god. I'll never forget as a kid, how are they going to do this? How are they going to do that? They had to try to explain to me. He says, "You wait and see what's going to happen." It was so interesting.

01-00:23:40
Redman:

Now let's get to the discussion that we're really going to have today. Let's talk first about how your dad found work on the Bay Bridge. Do you recall how he found his job there?

01-00:23:57
Rodes:

I think the fellow he worked for in San Francisco took a liking to him. There were so many different contracts. A lot of people lost their lives on that bridge. It was unbelievable. There were no safety nets or nothing. When you think, I look back, people have no idea how bad things could get years ago, because there was nothing to protect you. If you were working-class, you were doomed. You figured you're either going to get killed, or you're going to die falling off of something.

01-00:24:29
Redman:

So he finds this job in San Francisco.

01-00:24:32
Rodes:

Working for this fellow as a carpenter. He trained him. He said, "I want you to stay here." In the winter, in those days, most buildings stopped because of the

weather. He said, “I’ll find you something where you can keep—I don’t want to lose you.” That’s how good—

01-00:24:48

Redman: He would keep him working even through the winter.

01-00:24:50

Rodes: Yes, [he would] keep working [through the winter]. When they built Montgomery Ward on Twenty-Ninth and East Fourteenth Street, that was the first job that this fellow really had a contract for the company. Dad worked there. They wanted him to go to Denver, when they built Montgomery Ward in Denver. I’ll never forget, because I was going into my junior high school that year, and I didn’t want to lose my— [microphone adjustment]

01-00:25:19

Rodes: He said that he didn’t want to lose him, so he said, “You’re the only one I can take back there.” He said, “There’s a couple of workers that have been working for you,” which is in the picture there, and he said, “Why don’t you go back there? We’re starting Montgomery Ward, and you know how our plants are,” because they built them all alike. He said, “I can trust you to handle all these men.” He said, “I understand the situation in Denver is unbelievable. That they don’t know any big building contracts and stuff.” Dad thought, that’s a good idea. I’ll never forget. We left here in the summertime. So I’d be able to get to school [when] we got there. I’ll never forget, we took these other two. You didn’t travel the highway by yourself. It was too dangerous. You always carried shotguns and everything, because there was no motels. The first night we stayed outside of Reno, and the old highway—oh, god. Oh, dad was ready to kill us kids, because we went up over the old pass and we were screaming in the cars. In those days, if you didn’t get a good run on them, you had to back all the way down. It was just like out here, coming into Castro Valley. That mountain that looks like it’s high, that was twice as high. It was a speakeasy up there. You could see the sign all the way to San Francisco. Then Palmares Canyon you cross over. Al Capone had a speakeasy out there. One of the girls I went to school got tied up with a guy. She was used as a prostitute. You talk about things being—

01-00:26:55

Redman: Wow, interesting. Let’s get back to your dad on the bridge. When he started working on the bridge, I understand—because there’s the west span that’s the suspension span on the San Francisco side, and then the east span, the cantilever span, on the Oakland side.

01-00:27:13

Rodes: He only worked on the Oakland side.

01-00:27:15

Redman: He only worked on the Oakland side, the cantilever span. Do you know what he did, what his jobs were? Can you describe some of those for us?

01-00:27:26

Rodes: There's one [photograph] there that shows the men down inside of it [submersible caissons], where they built those piers. They did that, and those people all worked on that. Then they worked nights. They worked twenty-four hours a day. They built that bridge in three and a half years. Dad had lived—I could hear him screaming at newspapers and everywhere else, “What’s wrong with these damn people?”

01-00:27:48

Redman: I understand that that task of digging those pillars deep into the bedrock there is very—doing it today, I understand, it’s very dangerous and there’s—

01-00:28:03

Rodes: It was dangerous in those days, too, because you didn’t have the equipment, and everything was—I don’t know. One time, I remember dad saying something about they lost twenty-five men in his group. Got hurt on that thing, but—

01-00:28:17

Redman: When he would come home and tell you some of these stories, were you worried about his safety working on these projects, working on the bridge?

01-00:28:25

Rodes: For some reason, you didn’t think about that in those days. The thing you’re more interested, if you had clothes on your back and had food in your house and a pair of shoes. I was the oldest, so I got hand-me-downs from everybody, and that drove me crazy.

01-00:28:38

Redman: So he was just happy to have a job.

01-00:28:40

Rodes: Just happy to have a job. He worked from just being a regular carpenter to almost being an engineer. Just like when they built the college here in Hayward, he was telling me one day, he says, “That engineer won’t listen,” but he said, “That roof is not going to fit on that building.” He said, “I talked to the boss about it. He said, ‘That’s his job. He knows.’” Dad said, “We get almost finished and the guy says, ‘What happened? Nothing is meeting.’” Dad said, “I told you it wasn’t going to meet.” Dad said, “You’ve got everything down on a piece of paper, but it don’t work when you start building it.”

01-00:29:15

Redman: So there has to be a constant conversation—

01-00:29:18

Rodes: Oh, yeah.

01-00:29:19

Redman: —back and forth between the people who design and engineer the buildings, and the actual people putting the building together.

01-00:29:24

Rodes:

Yes. It was interesting, because some things—this is like what he was telling about that one period, the Bay Bridge on this side, when it gave way during the earthquake. He was telling me. I said, “How come, dad?” Kid-like. I said, “How come you didn’t have any problems with the others?” He says, “This is built, this particular spot,” he says, “we talked about steel, how to get more, before they pull it together.” I said, “You didn’t have that problem.” He said, “No, because this is one spot that they decided that, if we have an earthquake, it will give way and save the whole bridge.” And it did exactly what he told me. I told somebody one day. I said, “These people don’t know what they’re talking about on that bridge.” Then one day I heard somebody on TV say, “The new bridge is not going to stand up like the old one.” He says, “I don’t care what they say.” He says, “Because that was built for some of these things.” Even though they didn’t have a lot of good equipment they’ve got today, but there’s still a lot of that stuff that just don’t make sense.

01-00:30:27

Redman:

Does your dad talk about what safety equipment he might have?

01-00:30:31

Rodes:

For years, there was no safety equipment. I think back, that one day I took him to work and tried to turn that car around in that one little lane.

01-00:30:44

Redman:

All right, now let’s talk about that story. Will you tell me the story about bringing your dad out to work on the Bay Bridge?

01-00:30:53

Rodes:

One morning, dad says, “I’ll let you take me to the island where we’re working, but you’re not going to be able to come back.” He said, “Drive me to where I work on there so I don’t have to walk.” He said, “You’re going to have to turn around.” Of course, he taught me to drive, and, boy, he was strict. I never got a ticket in my life. To this day, I haven’t had a ticket. I was so thrilled to be able to do this. Just excited to think this young girl was going to get on that bridge. Then when I went to turn around, he says, “Be careful.” I’m thinking, “What am I doing on this thing? Am I going to run off the top of the damn thing or what?” When I went out, I was still shaking going through the security, so I went back that night and I couldn’t get in there. I had to step outside. He had to come on down. He says, “How do you feel?” I said, “I’ll tell you. It was a thrill, and it was killing.” I said, “I don’t know if I want to do this ever again.” He laughed. Then the opening day, I took my niece and my brother, who were nineteen years younger than me, across, opening day. It was interesting, because I had to hold them behind me with my hand because I was scared they might fall forward in the car. I told my niece here several years ago, I says, “You know what you were doing today?” I said, “Today you were going across the Bay Bridge.” She said, “What?” I said, “Yeah, you didn’t remember that, did you?” I said, “You were too young to remember it.”

01-00:32:32

Redman:

But you were there with her? Sure. Explain this to me. So you drove back over the cantilever span when they just had one lane constructed.

01-00:32:43

Rodes:

One lane, just for the people to the island. Then after that's when they built Treasure Island. Dad was telling me about that. I said, "They're crazy. That's never going to work. The water's going to wash it away." He said, "You wait and see."

01-00:32:57

Redman:

So he helped out with the construction of Treasure Island as well?

01-00:33:01

Rodes:

Oh, yeah. He did a lot of construction.

01-00:33:05

Redman:

Did that job naturally extend with the same contracting company into Treasure Island?

01-00:33:12

Rodes:

Yes, part of it, because there were sections that were contracted out, just like the bridges of the state of California. Certain people got awarded a contract. What drives me crazy today is that they were allowed so much money, they had to be done in a certain time if you were going to get it done. Now, the last few times my dad worked on it, he said, "They're a bunch of crazy people anymore taking care of it. They've got to use up all this money." He said, "It's crazy. If you get through a job faster, you can get off and go somewhere else. Now they want you to go the full time that you're supposed to do, and spend the money even if you're ahead of time, or they penalize you." I said, "What stupid asses," I said, because if you get a job that early and you've got a chance for another job, it saves the state money. Why wouldn't they let you do it? Oh, I'll tell you, changes that happened in the state I can't believe after World War Two.

01-00:34:09

Redman:

Your dad probably, it seems, based on what I've heard about the workers who were on the bridge, it seems like, at that point, he would not yet have been asked to be in union, but I would be surprised if—later on in his career, he must have been in—

01-00:34:26

Rodes:

Oh, yes, you had to belong to the union. Unions were so strong here eventually that the only way you could have a job, you had to belong to the union. Dad used to say, "The ideas are great." Just like when he was working or something. It was really hot. The workers were fainting on the job. The boss says, "Will you come to work at four in the morning and get off early so you won't be out there having strokes in the sun?" They all were happy for it. Well, at that time, he belonged to the union. The union wouldn't allow it. You had to go to work at eight o'clock. You couldn't come to work early and still

put in your eight hours. Dad said, “This is what I don’t like, what happened to the union.” He said, “Now they try to tell you what hours you can work, and if you drop dead, it’s okay, too.”

01-00:35:13

Redman: Take me back to 1936 one more time, when you’re driving over that stretch of unfinished bridge.

01-00:35:21

Rodes: Oh, god.

01-00:35:22

Redman: When you look down at the bay, what thought goes through your mind?

01-00:35:27

Rodes: You didn’t look much at the bay, because you wanted to make sure you stayed on that piece of road. I’m thinking, oh my god, oh my god. Dad talked about one of his workers getting killed tonight, tomorrow night, what have you. I’m thinking, oh my god, I could be one of these people. I kept thinking, I’ve got to do this right, I’ve got to do this right.

01-00:35:51

Redman: Before then, when people told you that the Bay Bridge was going to be constructed, you must have looked at that span—and you’d mentioned earlier that when people talked about the Golden Gate Bridge being built and the Bay Bridge being built, a lot of people were just skeptical and saying, “It can never be done. It can never happen.”

01-00:36:10

Rodes: Oh, yeah. It was never going to happen. They’re sick. It was going to fall down. It was going to do this and that. Especially when the Golden Gate Bridge was built. Nobody would believe that that was going to be able to turn out like it did.

01-00:36:24

Redman: Those two structures, then, are simultaneously being constructed, and there’s still sort of this—there are many claims out there that they’re not going to work.

01-00:36:38

Rodes: They stood up during the war and everything else. What people don’t realize, that during World War Two, they don’t realize you’re on the bay. I had friends coming up from Los Angeles Highway One that were shot at from a Japanese submarine. I said, “There was a lot of that going on here.” One time, you couldn’t go down to San Francisco, downtown to the beach area, because they had it blocked off. They sunk a couple little baby submarines. Japanese had come in. There still is one down near Monterey that they featured. There was an article in the paper that they found this one down there and it’s full of oil. They’re trying to figure out how they can get it out so the oil doesn’t get up on the beach and everything.

01-00:37:23

Redman:

A lot of people have compared the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay Bridge. Having had your father work on the Bay Bridge, but being in an area where the Golden Gate Bridge—as you said, it’s also an amazing structure.

01-00:37:37

Rodes:

Oh, yeah. Dad said, “I give the engineers credit, because they know what they’re doing.” He said, “If it’s done right, it will work.” But he said, “I just don’t know if there’s anybody to keep on doing it.” It was amazing, because when I went to Denver, the kids back there said, “What’s this Golden Gate Bridge?” I said, “There’s no Golden Gate [Bridge].” In those days, the bridge wasn’t up. I said, “There’s no bridge there.” They said, “What do you mean, there’s no bridge?” I said, “Well, they’re talking about it, but it’s not up.” They said, “It’s gold.” I said, “It’s not gold. That’s the name because when the sunset comes in there, it’s a beautiful sight.” When I think back on the things that people are missing today, it’s just unbelievable. Kids. They don’t teach the history that they should anymore.

01-00:38:25

Redman:

Tell me about what hours your father would normally work on the bridge. You mentioned that there would be, sometimes, different hours. Can you talk about that?

01-00:38:34

Rodes:

He worked nights.

01-00:38:36

Redman:

Nights?

01-00:38:36

Rodes:

Yes, mostly, because he said it was a lot easier to work nights. You didn’t have a lot of things in your way. Every once in a while, he’d come home, “We just lost another man in the night. This fellow fell from up above.” Hit his shoulder. Almost took him down.

01-00:38:51

Redman:

Can you tell that story? Someone working above him fell.

01-00:38:54

Rodes:

Yes, [the man above him] fell. Slipped or something, and come down where he was working, hit him on the shoulder. He said, “I don’t know how I didn’t go down with him.” Then he had to go to the doctor, and he wore a thing for a while on his neck on account of it.

01-00:39:08

Redman:

Wow. So it was a very dangerous place to—

01-00:39:10

Rodes:

It was a very dangerous place to work. There was no such thing as safety things in those days, nets or anything else, which is unbelievable.

01-00:39:22

Redman: I understand that hard hats were not required, but that many workers fashioned their own hard hats.

01-00:39:27

Rodes: Yes, yes. When I think back today all the stuff you had to have in those days—even us kids. In fact, this might be interesting. My cousin was sent to buy a baseball bat when he was in the seventh or eighth grade. He passed out. They just took him in. Three days later, he died of a concussion. I'll never forget that as long as I live. It turned out that, due to that, that's when the law passed about kids having to have—

01-00:40:01

Redman: Helmets. Baseball helmets.

01-00:40:02

Rodes: Helmets and things.

01-00:40:03

Redman: Oh, that's interesting. Let's talk about how the Bay Bridge changed life in the Bay Area.

01-00:40:12

Rodes: Oh, it was unbelievable, because originally, trains went across it, and the trucks all went [on the] lower deck. The cars went up above [on the upper deck]. It was unbelievable, because when they were building all these outlets on this side of the bay, I said to dad, "How are they going to do this?" He said, "You wait and see what's going to happen." He said, "They'll figure this out. It's not that hard to do." He said, "They have to do some work and what have you in order to do it that way," he said, "But you're going to be surprised what this is going to look like." I can never forget the different things that changed in Oakland that time. Everything changed.

01-00:40:51

Redman: Describe that. Tell me about that.

01-00:40:54

Rodes: Oakland got bigger, because everybody shopped at Oakland and lived out in Oakland. They worked in San Francisco, but most people wouldn't live there. They lived out in East Oakland and Montclair. In fact, the California Hotel, which you don't know—you may see the building way across the bridge now. Do you know where it's at? Well, I had a business there.

01-00:41:15

Meeker: Big brick—

01-00:41:16

Rodes: Yes, that brick [building]—do you know that that's the first—I was trying to find a card today, because I had a card for my business and everything. It's the first building built in the Bay Area that was earthquake-proof. To this day, not

a brick has fallen off of that. Just like Castlemont High School [in Oakland]. He worked on that, and when they decided to rebuild it, dad said, “They need to end it, damn it.” He said, “That’s built better than the schools they’re building today.” He said, “That’s just artificial.” But when they went to build it down, they had to bring a bulldozer, and they knocked the damn school down.

01-00:41:53

Redman:

So your father worked at a number of different sites around the Bay Area, and I’m sure his pay would fluctuate based on being able to find work or—

01-00:42:05

Rodes:

It was funny, because he was so good, he never had to really look much for work, because the boss wouldn’t let him—in wintertime, he found him something to do inside or something. He didn’t want to lose him, because he figured, if anybody hires him, I might not get him back.

01-00:42:17

Redman:

But how did he describe his pay in terms of his other jobs when he was working on the Bay Bridge? Did he feel like he was making a lot of money then, or not much money, or—

01-00:42:27

Rodes:

He was making more money than most people were. When you stop and think, sixteen and eighteen dollars a week was big—eighteen was big wages, sixteen was normal, and if you got twenty, you were really up there. I can’t think when I paid five cents a gallon for gas and five dollars for milk, and I’m thinking, god, these people have no idea what it’s like. I was almost lucky, because when I got through school, I never had to look for a job, because I went back to teaching for a while in my profession, and that drove me crazy. I told Mr. Larry, I said, “I can’t put up with these kids wasting their time and money.” I said, “I’m going to quit because I can’t stand it.” He said, “Don’t do that. I’ve got a job to manage the shop for you.”

01-00:43:13

Redman:

Was the Bay Bridge a point of pride for your father?

01-00:43:17

Rodes:

It was, it was. Anybody who worked on it, it was like a big honor, because that was something that they had said would never happen. That they couldn’t do it. I think now how long they’ve been working on this [new span]. Did you see, this week or last week, where they’re talking about this one engineer up in Sacramento talking about—and I thought, he may be right. All the money they spent on this and everything, and they still haven’t got it finished.

01-00:43:44

Redman:

For your father, he lived for many years after the bridge was finished.

01-00:43:50

Rodes:

Yes. He died the year before the earthquake.

01-00:43:53

Redman:

So he would have lived through, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when there was a big transition of the bridge. You described very well that there was the Key System train on the lower deck, trucks on the lower deck. After that big transition, or during that big transition, did your father take notice of that? Did he talk about that at all?

01-00:44:14

Rodes:

He talked about it. He said, "I think that's going to be bad, because it's going to congest traffic more than ever." He said, "They're not using their head again." He said, "They should keep this separated from that so they can move people around." He was right. I look back and say, oh, god. Just like when they built Highway One and the highway going into Salinas. From here to San Jose, they had three lanes. One, the passing lane. Oh, god, I won't forget that. I was never so scared in my life. We'd go down to my aunt and my grandfather a lot down there. Here they decided they were going to help move traffic. Dad said, "Are they out of their heads?" A two-lane highway, then they decided to put a separate lane for passing, with no guard or anything. I'll tell you, there was more head-on collisions than you ever could dream of. That didn't last too long. They finally decided it was a big mistake.

01-00:45:12

Redman:

You had mentioned how different it was to take a ferry across the bay than how it is now to drive across the bay. Do you think that that's changed the way that people think about actually crossing the bay? It seems to me that when you're going on a ferry, you actually can feel the water a little. You are there close to the water.

01-00:45:35

Rodes:

You know what's strange about that? You can go on a ferry and get across to San Francisco [more than you can] count on a bridge lately. That makes me laugh, because they can put more ferries in and move a lot of these people, instead of have all this congestion.

01-00:45:52

Redman:

It's an interesting comparison. When you're driving across, it's a very different experience.

01-00:46:03

Rodes:

Years ago, you could kind of look around and see things. Today, you can't take your eyes off, because you don't know who's going to run into you.

01-00:46:10

Redman:

There's so much congestion that it's changed, you think, the actual experience of driving over the bridge?

01-00:46:16

Rodes:

Yes, I think you can't enjoy the bridge anymore like you used to, because you haven't got time to look and see. If you do, you might get killed before you get across the bridge. We had a flat tire one night going across the bridge, and

I was having epilepsy. I said, “Get out of this car quick before somebody hits you.” I said, “You don’t know the half of it.” I said, “Get out of this car.” He hadn’t been used to San Francisco, because he was from West Virginia. That is another thing that was an experience I can write you about.

01-00:46:51

Redman:

You mentioned getting a flat tire on the Bay Bridge. Do you have any other memories of your own between the opening and—

01-00:47:00

Rodes:

No. As much as I drove across the bridge, I never had any problems. I was so alert to everything because being built with it and my dad and all. The people used to think I was crazy. I said, “Don’t go trying that. You’re going to get killed.” They said, “What do you mean?” I said, “If you have a flat on the bridge, make sure you’ve got things put on and get off of your car.” I said, “You don’t know the half of it.”

01-00:47:25

Redman:

Tell me about what you recall from—we’ve talked about it a little already, but let’s go over it one more time if that’s all right. Tell me about the opening ceremony for the Bay Bridge. What do you remember about that day?

01-00:47:39

Rodes:

Oh, god. I lined up, and I think I got there at eight o’clock or something, because I didn’t want to be the first one, because I figured it was going to be a miss. I had the kids with me and I wanted to take them across the bridge. I was holding them back. It took forever. I thought, this is supposed to move traffic. Well, gee, you got on the other side, and you had all these problems on the other side. Coming this side, it wasn’t bad, if you were coming from San Francisco, because they seemed to have it laid out better. You could go Emeryville, you could go—I think of Emeryville today. That used to be a place for ballplayers and different people. I said, “But you didn’t know that the El Cerrito way, that was a great gambling nightclub thing.” I said, “The mafia.” I said, “I had a customer who was out here at the time.” I said, “Come to find out when she left that they were looking for her.” I said, “I couldn’t believe it, because they had been chasing her all over the United States, and she was a customer.”

01-00:48:47

Redman:

El Cerrito. I’ve heard that about El Cerrito, actually. That’s funny.

01-00:48:50

Rodes:

It was really strange, because Emeryville—

01-00:48:54

Redman:

Tell me more about the opening ceremony, from what you recall of that.

01-00:48:59

Rodes:

Everybody was excited, but a lot of people were scared to death to cross the bridge. They wouldn’t go. They wouldn’t go for years, because they didn’t

think it was going to be safe. I said, “I’d rather run across the bridge than travel some of these highways around these little bridges we’re going across which you don’t know if they’re going to hold up or not.”

01-00:49:16

Redman: Now I’d like to hear about Treasure Island. It’s an artificial, manmade island.

01-00:49:26

Rodes: It’s a completely manmade island, and it turned out that the World’s Fair—that was the most beautiful World’s Fair I’ve ever seen. I’ve seen a lot of them. That was unbelievable.

01-00:49:37

Redman: In 1939.

01-00:49:38

Rodes: Yes. When they opened, I’ll tell you, we lined up for miles. Of course, I was helping perform that first day, because I was over there every damn weekend performing.

01-00:49:48

Redman: Tell me about what you would perform.

01-00:49:50

Rodes: We were a drill team, California Native Daughters Drill Team. The Native Daughters and the Native Sons were very active in this state until after World War Two. Then all these people came in from the east. We tried to divide the state for years, because everything was up here and the south was nothing. Then they came in and took over. Just like we had the adoption agency, our outfit in the state, and nobody got paid except the secretary that needed a job. All of this was donated. They come in here after the war, and the next thing I know, they’re going to take it away from us. I said, “What do you mean? We’re licensed under the state.” They said, “No, we’re not big enough anymore.”

01-00:50:37

Redman: The drill team, was it all—

01-00:50:41

Rodes: We were champions.

01-00:50:42

Redman: —all young women?

01-00:50:44

Rodes: All women. The men used to sit with the kids, watch us, and we’d perform. This place here was the last place I ever thought I’d live, Livermore, because I called this the hellhole. My dad used to hunt out here years ago. There was no trees, and we’d get 125 and 130-degree heat, and we’d come out and perform for the Rodeso, the parade. Perform after for competition to raise money. The

results of it was, it was unbelievable. When my husband went to work for the lab after he retired from the Navy, he said, “You’re going to be retiring. Let’s go out and buy a house now and get settled, because I think I’ll stay there until I get my twenty years in.” So I said okay. I said, “I’ll tell you one thing. I’m from this part of the country, born here.” I said, “You’re from West Virginia, and I’ll tell you, the first year, if I get seasick from heatstroke,” I said, “I’m going to tell you we’re moving back to the Bay Area.” Well, I didn’t realize by then that this was just building up. These were some of the first houses that were built here from an old contractor in Livermore. There was an orchard behind us here. It was hard to find a place to live here, because the lab had become so famous in those days. Anyway, like I say, it was hard times. After I got out here, moving out here, it got so they cut down the hills and they did so much other stuff that the climate changed.

01-00:52:12

Redman: It’s changed a lot.

01-00:52:12

Rodes: Changed a lot.

01-00:52:13

Redman: Let me ask about, by way of conclusion, a couple of questions. I’ve heard a lot that the bay has changed, environmentally, a lot. That there’s been a lot of effort to clean up the bay. Some people say that’s been very successful. Others think that there needs to be much more done. Has the environment of the bay changed in the last—

01-00:52:42

Rodes: It has a lot. I look around today, you would never see kids or anything throwing stuff around. I’ll never forget my nephew. We were somewhere and he threw this bag down, and I said, “Pick it up.” He says, “What for?” I said, “Pick it up. Don’t throw stuff around.” I said, “You want to live in garbage?” That’s the difference. I see a terrible difference. They don’t care about anything anymore, keeping things clean. Another thing I noticed, in neighborhoods, years ago, people say, “Oh, women and work.” I said, “What are you talking about?” Due to the crash of twenty-nine, everybody worked, kids, in order to eat. I said, “That’s a crock of manure.” I said, “What’s happened, we sit down every night to dinner. We’d plan ahead of time, and we’d discuss everything with the family.” I said, “It was family meeting every night, and we knew what was going on.” Today, they don’t have time. They can’t be bothered. Half these people shouldn’t even have kids. When I had the kids—I said they went to college and everything—I had the weekends, and my husband was gone a lot, so I’d have all the kids over. Everybody would say to me—these are high school and college kids—say, “I wish my parents would do this. We enjoy coming here so much.” Everybody would say to me, “You’re donating your weekends.” I said, “No, I’m having a lot of fun.” I taught my brother to dance. He was in college. He said something about dancing, and I said, “You going to go to the dance?” He said, “I don’t have a

girlfriend, so how about you going with me?" I said, "Oh, god, I'm your sister. You're not going to want me." He said, "Only my friends know that, and they won't give you away." So I had a laugh when we showed up at this dance that night. Everybody said, "I didn't know Cy had a girlfriend. I wonder who she is." Of course, his friends were laughing like crazy, because they didn't want them to know. I had taught him all these things. I'd had have weekends with all these kids, having barbecues and playing cards. But they didn't know, when we lived in Oakland, that I could hear everything upstairs. They had privacy, they thought, downstairs. But I said, "If you need anything, knock on the wall." I could hear all that was going on. We played cards and we'd have the best time. They just loved to come there. I felt sorry for the parents, that they didn't enjoy all of this.

01-00:54:56

Redman:

Here's my last Bay Bridge question. When you look at the old cantilever span that your father helped build in the 1930s, and then you see the new span that's next to it, what do you think now as you look at that structure?

01-00:55:14

Rodes:

I was thinking if they tear down the old bridge—which they're planning on doing, which I think they're crazy. They ought to keep that for something else. What gets me, what are they going to do when they get to the island on the other side? Didn't enlarge that any. That doesn't even make sense. But I look at it and think, I don't know if I want to go on that new bridge. It's scary going on it. There's nothing there. I guess it's safe, but I don't know.

01-00:55:46

Redman:

When you think back on your father's experience on the Bay Bridge, what does that make you think of?

01-00:55:55

Rodes:

I think of the lives that were lost and the work that went into it, and the honor, when we built it, and how it was done so quickly, and everybody thought we were crazy. Yet it's funny, because California, in the Bay Area—I don't care where you go in the United States or where you go in Europe, because I've traveled all over the world in my time, you tell them you're from the U.S., they just kind of look at you. But you say where you're from, then they do everything to help you, because everybody is interested in California, especially the Bay Area. It is amazing when I was in Europe.

01-00:56:32

Redman:

Do you think that some of the bridges, the opening of the largest bridge in the world, the longest bridge in the world, and this gorgeous Golden Gate Bridge, and the fair in 1939, shaped that perception of San Francisco as a special city? That moment in time?

01-00:56:54

Rodes:

I think it did. You go back far enough, I think a lot of it was the goldmines. That's how my grandfather comes over here. I'm about five generations now

just the last year that's alive in my family, and I'm trying to keep everything separate. I'm the only one, the aunt, that's alive. Everybody else is second and third cousins. My niece, my brother's children, just had a child, and that's a fourth generation now.

01-00:57:30

Redman: That's amazing. Well, Evelyn, those are the questions that I have on the Bay Bridge. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Martin, just for a moment, who might have some follow-up questions.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 Rodes_evelyn_02_08-07-12_stereo.mp3

02-00:00:05

Meeker: I feel bad that we're just covering such a small slice of your really fascinating life. I mean, all of the little bits that we've touched on are thrilling, and actually extremely relevant for this project we're doing on the Bay Bridge. I only have really a few follow-up questions. Not much, really [mostly] just points of clarification. I think that Sam did a really great job. You had mentioned your family moved to Oakland when you were quite young.

02-00:00:36

Rodes: Yes.

02-00:00:38

Meeker: Where did you move to, do you recall? Where in Oakland?

02-00:00:41

Rodes: East Oakland.

02-00:00:42

Meeker: East Oakland. Do you remember the name of the street or—

02-00:00:45

Rodes: It's Holly [St.] now. It used to be Bistle [Ave.], I think. It was just one little section. Then they developed Seventy-Third Avenue. They built all those Spanish homes across at that time. That's when they decided Holly Street, bring it all the way through, and take that extra block from Sixty-Ninth Avenue to Seventy-Third Avenue and make it the same, because it was only one big, long block. Then my aunt, my mother's twin sister, come up from the Valley. When they got down to the ranch, they sent away for all the family. In those days, when you brought somebody in, you had to guarantee that there weren't any—you had to take care of them. They all got good jobs. The house was on our street. There were only about six houses when we moved there, and then they built up all around us. My mother, in order to make a little extra money at that time, got to selling these houses. My two aunts lived two houses apart, and another friend across the street. Then for a long time, it was vacant houses, then eventually they built up around there. Like I say, Seventy-Third

Avenue now is not safe for your life anymore, I'll tell you. I couldn't believe it. I went by to see the house that did built there, and I thought, oh my god. I wouldn't believe it. It was such a nice little—

02-00:02:05

Meeker: Is the house still standing?

02-00:02:06

Rodes: Yes, it's still standing.

02-00:02:08

Meeker: How long did you live in that house for?

02-00:02:11

Rodes: Hmm. That was 1928 or something. I went to school at Lockwood High School. Junior High, then went to Lockwood. That was a year before the Fremont fire that New Year's Eve. They had just opened up Castlemont [High School]. They finished it. That's when dad decided to take us to Denver and travel. Talk about scary.

02-00:02:40

Meeker: You moved to Denver for—how long did you live there?

02-00:02:43

Rodes: We lived there four years. I started junior high school back there. I was so mad, because all my friends were here, going into junior high school, and I wasn't back there. Then I couldn't wait, because we stayed there through July, I think, until November. The weather got so bad. They finished the job he was doing there and they brought him back here. He said, "I'm not going to move you again." That's when he went to Spokane and all these other places where they built Montgomery Ward.

02-00:03:11

Redman: So about five years in Oakland?

02-00:03:14

Rodes: Yes. Then we came back and I stayed. Went back to Castlemont High School, but things were so bad that I had to help the family out, and that's when I decided—I went and worked for a cosmetology class, and then finally I went and talked to the owner, Mr. Perry, I said, "If I go back and work at academy this year and make enough money, how much will I owe you if I pay?" I decided I had to pay car fare and what have you, so if I could save enough money, I could get through school and not have all these extra expense. He says, "I'll give you credit for three months," because you had to go nine months. He said, "Then I'll give you a good price on the rest of it." That's what I did. I'll never forget, because the state board in those days—California in those days, any license you had here was good anywhere. I went back to Virginia with my husband, and he didn't have to take a state board or anything, because we had a California license. We were so far in advance that they recognized us. The only thing is, that made me mad, if you worked in

Norfolk, the city, you had to pay fifteen dollars to get a city license, but if you worked out in the county, you didn't have to have that. I said to them one day when I went back in—they had a doctor's certificate and all this crap, and I said, "You know something?" I said, "You only do it once a year. Do you know anything about cosmetology and diseases?" She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "This is a racket. If you were worried about me transposing people to diseases, you would want to see me every month or so." She looked at me like I was crazy. I said, "That's a big racket." If you said you were from the Bay Area of California, if you had any kind of state license and went through the inspection here, they recognized you. Today, we're fourth or fifth on the list.

02-00:05:11

Meeker:

So you worked in the cannery so you could pay for your cosmetology school?

02-00:05:15

Rodes:

Yes. My folks couldn't afford it. I had to get the money somewhere.

02-00:05:22

Meeker:

When you came back to California after living in Colorado, where did you live?

02-00:05:28

Rodes:

We went back and lived on the same street.

02-00:05:30

Meeker:

Oh, the same street? No kidding. Not the same house, but the same street.

02-00:05:33

Rodes:

Yes, yes.

02-00:05:33

Meeker:

All right. Do you recall the name of the contracting company your father worked for?

02-00:05:40

Rodes:

I think it was Robinson. I'm not sure.

02-00:05:43

Meeker:

Robinson?

02-00:05:43

Rodes:

Yes.

02-00:05:44

Meeker:

Okay. Just curious. Off the top of your head, you never know. You had talked about this time that you drove and dropped your father off on the bridge, and then you had to obviously drive off the bridge. You described it as kind of being a harrowing, scary experience, because the bridge wasn't complete. Do you recall what was incomplete about the bridge at that time? Had it been paved? Were there no railings on it? What was—

02-00:06:17

Rodes: There were no railings, nothing. The only thing, there was one road that went to the islands, going over there.

02-00:06:23

Meeker: Okay, so the entire deck hadn't been paved yet? They had only done one lane.

02-00:06:26

Rodes: No, just that one section to take the people back and forth to work there. Like I say, I had no idea how scary that could be when you're looking down and seeing all this stuff and thinking, oh my god. It was narrower than it is today, that one lane. The cars were not as easy to move around either. I'm thinking, oh my god. Dad said, "Don't worry about it." He said, "I've taught you right how to drive." I think about the driveway we had at that time. One lane for each tire coming up to the garage. He worked on me on that. He said, "You make sure you're in the lane. Don't you get off it when you're driving up the driveway to go to the garage." He'd sit out there and look at me and measure, and I thought, oh, god. I thought when I went on that bridge that day, I thought, thank god he was so strict. Everybody thought he was crazy getting me a driver's license and go through the thing. He said, "But I can't take my wife to the doctor every time," because she was very sick. He said, "She can, and she can get a driver's license if I sign the insurance and everything." Everybody says to me, "How come you've got a driver"—I'll never forget the first day I took the car by myself. I went to Fruitvale [Ave] on East Fourteenth Street in those days, and I turned—I was going to go up one of these streets that was East Fourteenth Street. Of course, the traffic—street cars run on there and everything. I thought, oh, god, how am I going to get across and get to that other street? I'll never forget. I was trying to remember everything my dad was telling me, so I got out in the left lane to go turn, and I stood there and I thought, when do I go? When do I go? When do I go? Have I got enough room now before the other car comes? Finally, I just gunned it. I spun the tires. Oh my god, what did I do, break the car? Later on, I told him about it. He said, "I guess that was a good lesson, wasn't it?" I said yes.

02-00:08:15

Meeker: It sounds like when you're crossing the bridge, it's almost like you're driving the car on a catwalk or something.

02-00:08:20

Rodes: Yes, it is. It's just so scary. I've been in lots of conditions in my life throughout the world, driving conditions, and I thought that, to me, was the scariest, I think, of all of them, even some of the places we were in Europe that we drove. I'll tell you, you don't ever want to get in the highway over there, that special highway. I forget what they call it.

02-00:08:42

Meeker: The autobahn.

02-00:08:43

Rodes:

Autobahn. My experience with that, I was on something. If you get in that fast lane, a hundred miles an hour, you've got to wait. They're going to run over you. I got out there to pass a car. My husband, we break up the driving. I got out there and I thought, oh, this car is coming and I can't get over right now. So I stepped on it, and I kept saying, "I'm going too fast." My husband said, "Don't worry about speed. Make sure you have enough to get over to the other lane."

02-00:09:09

Meeker:

Okay, so two more questions. You had talked about the pleasure of taking the ferry across the bay, and also about how people so widely utilized the trains and the buses before the bridge was built. I wonder, in your own experience, after the bridge was built, how did you get over to San Francisco? Did you take the Key System train, or did you continue to take the ferry?

02-00:09:39

Rodes:

On Seventy-Third Avenue up there near the hill, there was a big Chevrolet plant there where they built these houses, and that dig out there. That is the most stupid thing I've ever seen, because I used to go up there as a kid and skate down Seventy-Third Avenue. I couldn't believe what happened there. But the thing is that the Key System run out to Hayward. It went between there and our house. You'd walk about six blocks and you'd get on the train. You'd go down to East Fourteenth Street, you had the streetcars, and then you had the bus that would come up Seventy-Third Avenue. You had so much transportation that you didn't need to drive a car.

02-00:10:22

Meeker:

Even after the bridge was built, you would continue to use the Key System and take it into San Francisco?

02-00:10:27

Rodes:

Oh, yes. It was too hard to park. What we did, we'd park on this side of the bay, and at Fortieth, you go on now where the hotel is, and you'd park in that area there, and then go over there on the train, and come back and pick up your car and go shopping downtown or go to the restaurants or whatever.

02-00:10:49

Meeker:

The last question I have—it was interesting. In passing, you were talking about the impact of the opening of the bridge on Oakland. You said that once the bridge opened, Oakland actually grew quite a bit.

02-00:11:04

Rodes:

It grew. Twentieth and San Pablo and—what is it? Telegraph I think it is. That's where [Capwells store] built their big building. There was a Nordstrom's across the corner. That was a great area there. All the better shops moved in there.

02-00:11:23

Meeker:

I thought those were built before—those were built after the bridge, then?

02-00:11:29

Rodes:

Yes, yes. Emeryville [grew], the A's started, and the California Hotel had some lovely apartments. They'd come up and stay at the hotel. Then they had a nightclub downstairs. It was interesting. It's amazing. That and another one that were here at the Oakland Hotel. That was a beautiful place downtown. They were supposed to, after the war, turn it back. They never did. But it was a beautiful hotel. All the wealthy people were in there. I know I had my first official visit there years ago, and it was such an honor to be able to do it.

02-00:12:38

Meeker:

It's interesting that you say this, because we've talked to some people and we've heard some people say that the opening of the bridge actually spelled doom for retail in Oakland, but it sounds like your perspective is somewhat different from that.

02-00:12:54

Rodes:

It did, because people shopped at Oakland in those days. All of Oakland was quite the place. I haven't been down there recently, but I don't know if I want to go down, from what I hear. It was quite the shopping center. San Francisco was working. People worked there. East Oakland. San Leandro wasn't nuts yet. San Leandro was cherry land. They used to grow the best cherries there. Oh, I got so sick on eating so many cherries, I landed in the hospital. My mother was ready to kill me. We never thought Hayward was ever going to amount to anything. San Jose, that was mafia country. You just didn't realize it, but that was mafia country. I worked on a woman who I didn't know she was connected with the mafia, until one day she said to me, "I've got to go. I won't be seeing you." I said, "Oh, that's a shame." She said, "No." She said, "You know what? I'm glad I'm getting out of here." The next thing I know, the FBI is coming into my shop because they had heard she'd been there and wanted to know what I knew about her. Another case I had, when the FBI comes in, a funny thing happened. This young girl was brought in by this fellow, and I thought, she must be riding a motorcycle, her hair was such a mess. Come to find out it was a young girl he had gotten. He was prostituting her. She had come across country. When he come in and asked me, I said, "I thought maybe she's a motorcycle rider." I said, "They stayed here at the hotel a couple days. When I got through, he wanted me to clean her all up and do her nails and everything." I said, "But I don't know, they left." He said, "Yes, we've been chasing them for several months now across country."

02-00:14:36

Meeker:

Where was your salon?

02-00:14:38

Rodes:

At the California Hotel.

02-00:14:40

Meeker:

Oh, it was? Oh, interesting.

02-00:14:41

Rodes:

I sure hit a goldmine there. I went to work for this woman, because she was having a baby and managed the shop for six or eight months. Finally, she comes back. She said, "You've done such a good job. I've decided to stay home and take care of my baby." She said, "I'll give you a good buy if you want to buy it." I paid the rent. I knew everything. I didn't have quite enough money saved, because I was saving quarters to get a bank account. I went to my dad. I said, "Dad, I need a little extra money." He said, "What for?" I said, "I got a chance to pick up a goldmine." He said, "What do you mean? Nobody your age, any woman, has a business at your age." I said, "Dad, I'll never run into this again." I said, "I'm lucky." I said, "I'll pay you back before the year is out." He said, "Okay, I believe you." Well, I paid him back and I bought a car, a used car, for myself. I had money in the bank. I couldn't believe it turned out it was the best thing I ever did in my life.

02-00:15:37

Meeker:

When was this? Was this in—

02-00:15:38

Rodes:

This was back in the late thirties.

02-00:15:41

Meeker:

Okay. How long did you hold onto that place for?

02-00:15:43

Rodes:

Eight years I had it. Then I met my husband in the meantime, in the Mission in San Francisco, because they were parading over there. We were putting on a performance. It turned out that we were always helping the service people. They had just come in after Pearl Harbor. I said something to him. I said, "We're going up. There's a big dance going on." I said, "Would you like, you fellows"—I had a bunch of younger girls with me—"go up there tonight?" They were going back on the train with me. Everybody was going to go downtown later. They said, "Oh, yeah." Well, I didn't know my husband didn't know how to dance. We got out on the floor and had a terrible time. When it got to one o'clock, I said to the girls, I said, "Thank god." We said goodnight to them. I said, "Got rid of this." We got on the train to come back to the Bay Area, and we were talking, and all of a sudden, hear all these sailors come aboard that were at the dance. I went, "Oh no." They took me aside and decided to see your home. I said, "What?" I said, "I'm not going home. I'm going to downtown Oakland to have me a rib steak at Tiny's [Steak House, Oakland]." Everybody went to Tiny's to have these steaks. Everybody left, and just him and I were there, and finally I start thinking back. I said, "The train will be leaving. There won't be any trains going until early morning." I said, "I'll take you back and"—[doorbell rings – brief pause tape]

02-00:17:07

Rodes:

So anyway, I come on this side [of the bay] and everybody was leaving. I said, "I'll take you down to Fortieth and San Pablo to get the train back." We got to talking. He was telling me all about his life and everything. Pearl Harbor

being bombed and all that. He said, "Give me your phone number." I said, "What do you mean, phone number?" Finally I gave him my phone number. I thought, well, if he calls, I can find an excuse or something. I got home, and I was living with these friends up in Montclair at the time. I got up there. My folks had moved back down to the Valley. I got home Saturday after shopping downtown, because I was shopping that day. She said, "You've had so many phone calls." She said, "He's got a nice voice." I said, "Oh my god, I don't know what he looks like." So finally, he called when I was there and he says, "Where do you live? I'll come up." I said, "No, you don't want to come. You'll never find it up here." I said, "I'll tell you what. I just got home. I'm tired." He said, "Let me take you to the show." I said, "Okay. I'll meet you at Fortieth and San Pablo, and we'll go down to the Paramount Theater." My friend I was living with said to me, "Go, it will do you good. You need to get out." I went down and when I got there, he was walking up and down, up and down, looking for me. I drove up. He said, "Let's go eat." I said okay. I said, "How about going to the show? The Paramount." There was a good movie on at the time. He said yeah, so we went and had something to eat, come back, and we had to wait in line. He was jiggling his legs like he had to go to the bathroom. I said to him, "If you have to go to the bathroom, they'll let you in to go." I said, "But you have to come back out here." He said, "No, that's because I had infantile paralysis. As a kid, was completely crippled. My family worked on me enough and brought it back. They thought it never would." Then I felt like two cents. I thought, god.

I got to talking to him, and it was really interesting. He told me all about his life and his family and everything. I finally felt sorry for him. He said, "We're only going to be here a short time." They had brought the ship into Seattle, and then they were coming out of Oakland after Pearl Harbor. He talked to me. He was telling me all about his family and everything. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what." He didn't know when they were pulling out. I said, "If you want, I'll write you." To help him out for memories and stuff. It turned out that he left, and we saw each other about two months, and the ships kept being stalled about going back. Then all of a sudden, he left. I wrote to him, and it was funny, because I said I'd never get married during the war. My friend I was living with said, "You know something?" She said, "Don't be surprised if you marry that man." I said, "You've got to be crazy." The next thing I know, we were engaged, and then my wedding was all set up, and then Uncle Sam changed it all at once. I never got married in my wedding clothes or anything.

In fact, I went down to Los Angeles thinking—because he was supposed to be off, come up here, and I had to send out all these invitations. I sent them with my help at the shop. I said, "What am I going to do?" I said, "I feel like a fool." She says, "Close the damn shop up, but put a sign, 'Emergency.'" Because nobody knew what was happening in those days. The conditions were so bad, especially near the West Coast. I went down and talked to the owners of the hotel. She said, "Oh, yeah, we'll watch the place upstairs. Go ahead." So I put on the door, "Emergency. I'll call you when I get back." I

thought, I never dreamt that I'd ever do such a stupid thing. Of course, by then I had saved some money and a car and everything, and so I thought, god, how am I going to go down there? Because those days, the trains were all for service people. I had a friend that was working for the Red Cross, and I called her. She said, "I'll get you on a train tonight." I said, "I don't know if I'm going to get to see him when I get down there or not, because he's on restriction." I called him and I told him where I was going to be. I thought, well, I'll get there in the morning. I didn't sleep all night in that train going down there. I thought, what am I doing here? Am I absolutely crazy? I got off the train and he was walking. He was there. I said, "What did you do?" He said, "Somebody is standing by for me." He said, "I don't know if we're going to leave tomorrow or the next day." He said, "Let's get married down here. I already made arrangements." I thought, what? I said, "I got everything up there ready to go for the wedding, and here—oh, god. Closing the store." I thought, oh, no. This is ridiculous. But we did, we got married.

02-00:22:13
Redman:

And you were married for how many years?

02-00:22:15
Rodes:

Sixty-seven years. It was funny, because he said, "You'll never regret it." It was an awful year, because we'd write to each other—I'd write every day what was going on, and he did, too. Sometimes I would get mail I didn't know because so many people I knew that I was helping in the service. Families, kids that come out, because I was very active [in letter writing] at that time when the ships would come in. The thing that I never got over, after they got released, the nurses at Corregidor, they brought some into [trouble]. This one girl had come in. She was pregnant, and part of her tongue was cut out {inaudible} They didn't keep her very long. I wonder what ever happened to her. Some of the things I saw—and just like we entertained the service people at night, and I was out dancing at suites, and I did see the fellow's face, but you'd have tags to help. I loved the way he danced. I tapped him for a tag dance. He turned around. I almost fainted when I saw his face. He was so badly burned. I thought, oh, I can't say anything. I'm just going to pretend I—and I never felt so sorry for anybody else. Then I danced with another fellow. Young and stupid is what you are sometimes. They were releasing him from the Navy. I said, "How come? You've got nothing wrong with you." I didn't see anything on him. He said, "Yes, I do have." He said, "I had my privates blown off from crossing on a bomb." After that, I apologized. I thought I'd never ask anybody again or say another word. These are tales that people don't realize.

Then when I went east, the first thing they said to me, "Are you a serviceman's wife?" I'd heard all these tales, but I didn't believe how bad they were about taking you to Norfolk where the big base was, about not wanting service people there because they didn't want any of the outsiders. Then this woman I went to work for, finally I went to see her, ask her if the job was

filled, she said no. So I went to see her and she was asking me a lot of questions. The first thing she asked me, "Are you a serviceman's wife?" I said, "What's that got to do with my qualifications?" From what I hear back here, you have to build your own following, you don't get any salary, and that went on and on. I said, "I just sold a business, and I take service wives any day, because they'll come to work. They need the job. Local people may show up today, and tomorrow they may not." She looked at me. She said, "I already hired somebody." I said, "I don't appreciate that either." She said to me, "I like what you have to say. I'm going to tell that gal not to come tomorrow." She had every one of the girls fighting when I told what happened. It was a nice shop. She had me [tending to] Navy wives and service people there. When I left, she cried. She said, "I learned more from you." One day, I blew my stack up on this woman's table. "I don't like service people. We get more money because it guarantees his life." I listened to so much of this for so many days, and finally I said—I didn't care if I got fired, that's how mad I was. I said, "They're talking about moving the base, and you people are"—I said, "I hope they do, because this is ridiculous." I said, "You're living here like nobody. Got all kinds of money, all these houses and stuff. Yet they're fighting for you to keep you guys safe." I said, "This is ridiculous." I turned around and I thought, well, I guess I'm fired. My boss winked at me and she said, "I'm glad you told her. It's about time somebody told these people."

[End of Interview]