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Berkeley, California

Elizabeth Lew

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
David Dunham
in 2014

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Elizabeth Lew, 2014]



Elizabeth Lew [far left], Encinal High School garage, 1968

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Interview 1 April 15, 2014

01-00:00:00

Dunham: Today is April 15, 2014, and we're here in the home of Elizabeth Lew, who has invited us today for an oral history interview based on her World War II home front experiences. We usually start at the beginning and get a little family background and such, but let me ask first, when and where were you born?

01-00:00:21

Lew: Oakland, California.

01-00:00:23

Dunham: And when?

01-00:00:26

Lew: August 27, 1924.

01-00:00:30

Dunham: You're turning ninety this year, is that right?

01-00:00:32

Lew: Yeah.

01-00:00:33

Dunham: Congratulations. I know you've written a wonderful volume, chronicling your family's genealogy, and we're not going to go through all of that today, but could you give us a little bit of your family background, particularly their immigration to the United States. Maybe start on your mother's side.

01-00:00:51

Lew: My grandfather came over in 1877, at age 17, and what he did was, they think he was doing some gambling and won a bunch of money, and he bought into a San Francisco business. So that entitled him to come over to the United States.

01-00:01:11

Dunham: Oh, wow.

01-00:01:11

Lew: Otherwise, you can't, you're not eligible. That was during the exclusion years.

01-00:01:17

Dunham: Right.

01-00:01:18

Lew: So, he was into a fruit business and of course, they switch around different companies. Then, in 1904, he lined up with Lew Hing and with another fellow named Lew Wing. My grandpa, Lew Chuck Suey, along with Lew Hing and Lew Wing and the major financed funds, started that cannery in West Oakland in 1904.

01-00:01:56

Dunham: What was the name of the cannery, do you know?

01-00:01:59

Lew: Pacific Coast Cannery. It had a Chinese name too, but that was the American name. It did very well. My grandfather was into the fruit packing with Lew Wing. Lew Hing was into the paperwork part ashe spoke very good English. The others, we don't know. I don't even remember my grandfather. He died in 1922 before I was born.

01-00:02:35

Dunham: Oh, then you wouldn't have met.

01-00:02:37

Lew: No. He suffered a heat stroke. What he did was after, he made some money and went back to China and married, and usually when they do that, they stay a year, make sure the wife's pregnant, and a child is born. And then they go to the consulate and tell them they have a child, and generally it's a son. Then he'll come back and then after another three or four years, he'd go back to China and stay a year, have another child, because they can't bring the wife over. They can't because of the exclusion law. Finally, the wife died. She got sick and they contacted him. He went back there and when she died, he stayed over there and promptly found somebody else to get married to, but he was able to bring her to the U.S. that time.

01-00:03:41

Dunham: Do you know why he was able to then?

01-00:03:44

Lew: They changed some laws. The exclusion laws kind of eased up a little.

01-00:03:47

Dunham: Right. In between, in between.

01-00:03:50

Lew: It's just like my father—they usually bring them over when they're nine, ten years old, able to make it. Grandpa purchased stocks for my father to come to the US as a stockholder as co-owner to the cannery, and that was why he could come over. Well, my father, when he was old enough to get married, he went back to China and got married too, and he could bring his wife over, except that they turned her down. They tried again four years later and he was able to bring her over in 1920.

01-00:04:39

Dunham: Do you know why she was turned down the first time? Was it China that turned her down or the U.S.?

- 01-00:04:43
Lew: The US turned her down—she was pregnant. Then after that, my grandfather married again, brought his wife over, so he had lots of kids too. My father did too.
- 01-00:05:03
Dunham: So did you have nieces and nephews the same age as you then, growing up?
- 01-00:05:07
Lew: No, but I had aunts and uncles. I have an aunt that's still alive and she's two years older than I am. I have an uncle that's about ninety-six, I think.
- 01-00:05:18
Dunham: Oh, I meant aunts and uncles, yeah, who were the same age.
- 01-00:05:23
Lew: But the rest have passed on already.
- 01-00:05:27
Dunham: You mentioned, when we spoke before, that your father worked for the WPA? What did he do with the Works Progress Administration?
- 01-00:05:32
Lew: I have no idea, I have no idea. I guess I was kind of young.
- 01-00:05:39
Dunham: Was the cannery business still going?
- 01-00:05:43
Lew: No. They lost the cannery in 1925. The government seized it, along with sixteen other businesses.
- 01-00:05:57
Dunham: Wow. Do you know the explanation?
- 01-00:06:00
Lew: Yeah, I know why, but that's very vague here, because what happened was Lew Hing's great grandchildren decided to have my brother research, because they didn't know anything either. The ones that did know something covered it up and when they died, acquired the papers over to my brother and he researched it. This was a shared thing that they're doing for the future, and my brother turned it down, after what he found out. He didn't want anything to do with it. That was the result for the seizure of the canneries.
- 01-00:06:52
Dunham: Wow.
- 01-00:06:52
Lew: What happened was the cannery made money and he, Lew Hing, took money and bought shares in Chinese businesses in this area. American banks wouldn't loan to Chinese businesses, so the company bought stocks in other

Chinese businesses to help them. And the end is in this book, why he did. They know about the Canton Bank, China Mail Steamship Line. That was what caused, I think, most of the trouble later.

01-00:07:33

Dunham: Did your grandfather stay after the cannery business folded?

01-00:07:36

Lew: No, he died before. He died in 1922. The company folded in 1925.

01-00:07:39

Dunham: Oh, sorry, sorry, right, right.

01-00:07:41

Lew: What he did was have this whole bunch of kids, 1922, I think, he went back to China with his whole second family, because all the Chinese that could afford it generally want their kids to study there, because here in the U.S., it's after American school for two hours only. You know in the US, you have a teacher that teaches them on the side, because they don't want to learn, and they're not going to learn. So, he took them back to China where all the boys go to boarding school, they live at the school. But he was building them a brand new house in the village and he died of a heat stroke. He supervised the building.

01-00:08:30

Dunham: That's right, right.

01-00:08:32

Lew: So, I imagine they took all the money and stocks out to support that family that was left over there. [Narrator Addendum: Son was kidnapped in 1923, that cost them \$100,000 in US dollars.] We don't know anything about it really but eventually, like I said, the government seized every asset. There was a cotton plantation in Mexicali, that was lost too, along with all the other businesses that he put seed money into.

01-00:09:05

Dunham: So that must have been a tremendous setback for the family.

01-00:09:08

Lew: Yeah. They lost the cannery there, in 1925, and then we lost the other cannery in Antioch in 1931. What they did was built the cannery in Antioch with Chinese labor, and all the children of the three bosses were to run that business. So, eventually, they closed that too, when the U.S. government got through with the paperwork. The only thing was normally, when you have problems like that, they deport everybody, but in this case, no one was deported. [Narrator Addendum: It was a joint project with one company doing asparagus early and the fruit later in the season.]

01-00:09:48

Dunham: Do you think there was criminal activity of some kind?

01-00:09:52

Lew:

Yeah, there were—this book tells it. Canton Bank and the steamship company. The Canton Bank, with that cotton plantation, had Chinese brought in, and they charged the Chinese \$1,000 for the privilege of coming over to Mexico via the U.S. to work for low wages. They came in through San Francisco, they shipped them down to Mexicali. We went down there to see Mexicali and the train ended in the U.S., and they get off, stepped over to the Mexican side, the town of Mexicali. That was closed too, along with everything else. As the problem began there with smuggling men into the U.S., they closed the Pacific Coast cannery and moved to Antioch and when they closed Antioch, everybody lost everything. They had all their money in the business. So everyone is broke, as all their savings were in company stocks, but the only good thing was no one got deported, and so they all went out to find a way to make a living. Other Chinese canneries were also closed too.

01-00:11:13

Dunham:

And this is right after you were born. You were born in '24.

01-00:11:17

Lew:

I was born in '24, yeah, so 1931 when I was seven years old, the Antioch cannery got closed.

01-00:11:28

Dunham:

The second one, okay.

01-00:11:30

Lew:

So, when the Oakland cannery got closed, they brought all the fruits and goodies over to Antioch to process, but then they closed that too. So then my father went on SERA and WPA, and then, during World War II, he worked at the Moore shipyard.

01-00:11:54

Dunham:

Well, let's talk a little bit more then, about your growing up. How many siblings did you have?

01-00:12:02

Lew:

A girl and a boy that died. The boy died in China, right after he was born. You know, when they wouldn't let my mother come in, she had to go back to the village, and she gave birth and he died. And then, like I said, four years later, she was able to make it to the US.

01-00:12:25

Dunham:

Right. And you were born here?

01-00:12:28

Lew:

Yeah. I was number three. My sister was born first, then I had another sister named Pearl, and then me, and then my brother was born, the fourth child. Then, I had a sister Isabel then Vivian then Roy then Theodore then Evelyn.

- 01-00:12:48
Dunham: So what was life like growing up in Oakland as a young girl?
- 01-00:12:53
Lew: We lived down on Fourth Street to the east of the Oakland Chinatown and there was a cement company across the street and the houses were all beat up. There was a Chinese business that made cigar boxes adjoining, and the next block was where they dumped and dumped and dumped all the city garbage, I guess.
- 01-00:13:29
Dunham: So it was pretty noisy?
- 01-00:13:30
Lew: No.
- 01-00:13:31
Dunham: No, it wasn't noisy.
- 01-00:13:32
Lew: I don't know. We were in school during the day when they dumped there. But they filled up all that land and of course, you don't know that now.
- 01-00:13:42
Dunham: What do you mean?
- 01-00:13:43
Lew: Well, they built on it.
- 01-00:13:44
Dunham: Oh, okay, okay. Where did you go to school?
- 01-00:13:51
Lew: I first went to school in West Oakland, Prescott School, up to second grade. And then, I went to school in Antioch, I think second grade.
- 01-00:14:08
Dunham: How did Antioch compare with Oakland?
- 01-00:14:11
Lew: Oh, Antioch, well, Oakland, we were around Chinatown and have everything, but Antioch was anti-Chinese and anti-black. We couldn't get housing, so on the cannery site, they built a whole bunch of barracks. This is in the book. There was one for the bachelor workers and one building each for the supervisory personnel. I have some stories about how they hired a cook that cooked for the bachelors, but then in the Oakland one they had a place where they cooked for all the bachelor people too.
- 01-00:15:02
Dunham: You mentioned that Antioch was anti-black, as well as anti-Asian. Were there black workers in the cannery?

01-00:15:08

Lew: Yeah, they hired. Summertime, all the ladies came, black, Italian, Portuguese, and some called Okies and Arkies and people like that, they held summer jobs. It was all piecework.

01-00:15:25

Dunham: Yes. So they all lived—yeah, before the war, this is before the war.

01-00:15:27

Lew: In the 1920s, after World War I and before World War II. Wherever they lived, I don't know where they lived, but they got to the cannery. Mostly housewives trying to earn some cash.

01-00:15:32

Dunham: When you were going to school in Antioch, second grade, did you live in the barracks then or where did you live?

01-00:15:36

Lew: Yeah, we lived in one of the eight barracks. Barracks were two storied jobs.

01-00:15:38

Dunham: Okay. So what was school like there? You mentioned again, the anti-Asian, anti-black. Did you experience that firsthand?

01-00:15:45

Lew: No. I don't quite remember. All I know is, I think in our school program, they had us write a book about our pasts, and that was at Lincoln School. That's the only thing I remember, looking up that little book. I'm kind of blank on a lot of things.

01-00:16:08

Dunham: That's okay, that's okay. No, I was just curious if you remembered. We certainly know that racism and separatism was very prevalent, but I just wondered if you encountered it or your family shared, you know firsthand.

01-00:16:21

Lew: No. We all went back into the cannery site every day after school. The barracks are all at the cannery site, behind a tall fence.

01-00:16:32

Dunham: What was the ethnic makeup of your class of your school, your second grade class, do you recall?

01-00:16:37

Lew: I don't remember. I just remember I had a cousin that came over from China, and my sister took him to school. They asked what his name was and we knew his Chinese name only. So she made up the name Billy. He didn't like it, you know. After he got a little older, he changed it to Harry. You know why? The kids called him Billy goat, Billy goat, and he had a lot of trouble with all the kids. The story of how he would whack them and then he would go tell the teacher that they hit him. He has died a long time ago. He was on a passenger

ship that arrived in the Philippines and the Japanese, you know like Hawaii, World War II, they took them prisoner and he spent the whole time there.

01-00:17:50

Dunham: Wow. But he survived as a prisoner of war but he's died since.

01-00:17:56

Lew: He survived as a prisoner of war, but he ended up with tuberculosis. Well, it could be worse, he could have died there and not made it back to the US, right?

01-00:18:05

Fukumoto: Yeah.

01-00:18:08

Dunham: So were you—did you come back to Oakland after second grade or did you stay in Antioch for a while?

01-00:18:13

Lew: No. When the cannery closed, we all had to leave. That was in 1931. We went back to the Oakland cannery, the site was still there empty, but there was no business there. All I remember is until every one of the supervisory and members of the stockholders found a job. Then, we moved into Oakland Chinatown. I remember we took a little red wagon and went down and got the food stuff that they offered us. My book will tell about my sister, how she went down and picked up all the stuff that was thrown out on the curb of the street at the wholesale vegetable area down by Jack London Square, cut off the bad spot and bring it home.

01-00:19:12

Dunham: These are fruits and vegetables?

01-00:19:15

Lew: Mostly vegetable I think. I don't remember the fruits. Somebody would give my mother maybe five sacks of potatoes and my mother made us sit outside and grate it in water. You know what she wanted out of it? Potato starch.

01-00:19:37

Dunham: And what did she use that for?

01-00:19:39

Lew: Cooking. She would dry it out and powder, right? Put it in jars. Then, the excess fresh grated potatoes. They had a Chinese man that lived up in Point Richmond that would come by and pick up all that stuff for his pigs. There's no waste. In the old days, all cafes saved food scraps for pigs—they have since changed the laws on that.

01-00:20:02

Dunham: So you didn't eat the potatoes themselves at all?

01-00:20:06

Lew: Well, it was about ten sacks of potatoes at one time and people didn't have freezers then. We had an icebox. You put a piece of ice in on top and then the drain tray on the bottom that you've got to empty. You don't know about those?

01-00:20:20

Dunham: No, no.

01-00:20:22

Lew: The ice is put in the top and when it melts, it all goes out to a tray on the bottom and if you don't empty that tray, water will be all over the floor.

01-00:20:33

Dunham: Sure, sure.

01-00:20:36

Lew: That's a wooden icebox with the doors. Two doors, one for ice and one for food. The drain is under the food section.

01-00:20:41

Dunham: Did you go to Chinese language school as well?

01-00:20:47

Lew: My mother spent more money to send the boys to a higher priced one. They sent us to Chinese language school but we didn't like it and left the class, so she didn't waste her money on us any more. [Narrator Addendum: Chinese schools are after American schools, only two hours.] We went to the Lincoln School in Oakland, that's mostly Chinese. There were a few Portuguese people that lived below us in that area. [Narrator Addendum: and a couple of white people—the fellow was always in trouble with the teachers.]

01-00:21:18

Dunham: Were your teachers Chinese mostly as well?

01-00:21:21

Lew: No.

01-00:21:22

Dunham: They were Caucasian?

01-00:21:23

Lew: Caucasians. But later, I understand you know, there were Chinese teachers a lot later, but wasn't in my times there.

01-00:21:32

Dunham: Did you get along with the Portuguese?

01-00:21:36

Lew: We didn't have much to do with them. All we know was that they didn't mix with us.

- 01-00:21:50
Dunham: What did you do when you weren't in school and what did you do for fun as a kid growing up in Oakland?
- 01-00:21:55
Lew: We played hopscotch, kick the can and we roller skated on the streets, because there was no traffic down there on weekends or evenings.
- 01-00:22:06
Dunham: Nice.
- 01-00:22:09
Lew: I don't remember too much about that. It was an industrial area.
- 01-00:22:11
Dunham: Well, you mentioned your mom and the creativity in conservation, with the potatoes and the starch. What was a typical day like for your mother, do you think, when you were growing up?
- 01-00:22:20
Lew: Oh, she worked every day and our job was at dinnertime, have the table all set and the rice cooked, so when she came in, she started on the vegetables and the meat. After dinner, we did the dishes, took turns.
- 01-00:22:34
Dunham: What kind of work was she doing?
- 01-00:22:35
Lew: It all depends on the time of the year. In the spring, she worked in the greenhouses, transplanting little plants. Some cousins owned the greenhouse in Berkeley. You know, they put the seeds in and they get that big, then you've got to split them and separate them into little pots or something. Then, there's the other time of year she worked in the factories sewing. She sewed on dresses and she brought everything home for us to sew. She had us working at a company in Oakland, between the house and the school, and we went there every day after school. At three o'clock we went there and worked until ten o'clock, every night.
- 01-00:23:25
Dunham: Wow, wow. Sewing?
- 01-00:23:37
Lew: Yeah. We made jeans, you know, not the name brands, the other brands, the unknown brands.
- 01-00:23:35
Dunham: Wow, so five days a week you were doing that?
- 01-00:23:38
Lew: No, Saturday and Sunday were full days too.

- 01-00:23:40
Dunham: Saturday and Sunday too, wow.
- 01-00:23:44
Lew: Well, that made money. It takes a lot of money to feed a big family, right?
- 01-00:23:49
Dunham: Yeah, yeah, sure, sure. Wow. Do you know how much money you each made doing that?
- 01-00:23:57
Lew: Yeah. One year, I note in the book, that my sister Pearl and I worked full-time there all day all summer and we brought home a little envelope, \$21 per month, and we opened it up and stopped by Safeway and buy a three cents Push-Up for each of us. That's that orange sherbet flavor.
- 01-00:24:18
Dunham: The sherbet kind, yeah.
- 01-00:24:30
Lew: Ah-huh, sherbet, yeah, that was our treat.
- 01-00:24:23
Dunham: So you got your three cent treat out of your \$21.
- 01-00:24:27
Lew: Yeah. It was \$21 between the two of us. It was all piecework by the way, all that was piecework to hem the jeans. We were paid ten cents for one dozen pairs of pants. Now, you sewed the pockets, you sewed everything, and the boss's sons all have to work too, and they did the other parts, where they have specialty machine that did the other things. We did the flat stuff. [Narrator Addendum: Many times we would miss and sew our finger too. We'd have to pull the needle out, wrap our finger, and work on.]
- 01-00:24:49
Dunham: Did you have homework too? You're working three to ten every day after school.
- 01-00:24:53
Lew: I don't remember worrying about homework. I wasn't the smartest.
- 01-00:24:58
Dunham: Well, how would you have had time to do homework? Was it a nonstop working from three to ten? Were the bosses tough?
- 01-00:25:08
Lew: No, they weren't tough. Everyone had their job and what happened was a lot of parents took off when their kids got out of school.
- 01-00:25:19
Dunham: Okay, so it was kind of a shift change.

01-00:25:20

Lew: And then we took over, but we had our own machines, there's lots of machines. So our work was there waiting for us the next day.

01-00:25:29

Dunham: And are these all Chinese, all of Chinese descent?

01-00:25:30

Lew: All Chinese, and the windows were painted white and the door a little window had the paint scraped off to see who was there ringing the doorbell, before they let us in.

01-00:25:45

Dunham: Because it was not a legal—

01-00:25:47

Lew: It wasn't legal. It was illegal in the state for underage workers.

01-00:25:50

Dunham: A Chinese owned business?

01-00:25:52

Lew: Yeah, any business on hiring minors. They still have sewing factories in San Francisco but I think they're unionized now. [Narrator Addendum: One year we shelled cocktail shrimps—the whole family made \$2.00 per day at ten cents per pound.]

01-00:25:58

Dunham: But you never had like a raid or anything like that while you were there?

01-00:26:02

Lew: No, no raid. [Narrator Addendum: Not there, but I had a raid in the 1930s for moonshine.] This is when? In the 1930s. No raid. But let's see, my mother worked at the cannery during the summer when fruit was in season. In the spring, she worked at greenhouses and then there was another thing. She brought sewing home too, dresses and stuff to work in the evening. I can't remember too much.

01-00:25:46

Dunham: That's great, no that's a lot that you're remembering. Did you go to church as a child?

01-00:26:53

Lew: Yeah, we were all baptized. My mother had us all go to the Methodist church, because they buried my brother that died of pneumonia, and so she sent us all to the Methodist church. It was either the Methodist church or the Presbyterian the next block over. Both had Chinese ministers.

01-00:27:18

Dunham: Did you go every week?

- 01-00:27:20
Lew: Oh yeah, we went. This was before we had to work as live-in maids.
- 01-00:27:22
Dunham: So what did you think of it?
- 01-00:27:25
Lew: They've got all those pretty religious pictures and stories in, every week I don't remember too much. I still have the Bible we were given.
- 01-00:27:32
Dunham: Were there other community groups or activities you were involved with?
- 01-00:27:36
Lew: No. Oh, I said in the book, after Sunday church, we went over toward Washington Street, where they had some kind of a church, and we liked it because they gave us an orange or an apple every week. So, we went for that as kids do. Then we went to a cousin's house near Chinatown to read the comics on Sunday before going home.
- 01-00:27:59
Dunham: Yeah. And how do you get around?
- 01-00:28:01
Lew: We walked.
- 01-00:28:02
Dunham: Everything was walking.
- 01-00:28:03
Lew: Everything was walking.
- 01-00:28:05
Dunham: Was the—like where you worked to sew, was it very far?
- 01-00:28:09
Lew: The sewing factory?
- 01-00:28:10
Dunham: Yeah.
- 01-00:28:11
Lew: No, that was school and we lived down here, and the sewing factory was between.
- 01-00:28:15
Dunham: Oh, it was in between, okay, fair enough.
- 01-00:28:18
Lew: So it was all convenient, we didn't think nothing of walking. [Narrator Addendum: Nasty at 10 pm, as there was watch dogs for the business on the route home—German shepherds. I broke my nose getting away one night.]

01-00:28:22

Dunham: What was healthcare like when you were growing up? Did you see a doctor or any kind of physician? You mentioned a brother who died of pneumonia.

01-00:28:32

Lew: He used to always sit at the window before he died. My sister was sitting on top of the rail outside and she fell down and broke her arm, and my mother blamed me. I was sitting on the steps only. Oh well, she was mother's pet anyhow. She was the one that was sent to work as a live-in housemaid, and she cried and cried. They sent her home and then my mother got her a job as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, except she didn't know how to read Chinese so they worked it out by numbers; number one, two, three, four, five, you know, on the menu.

01-00:29:18

Dunham: Okay. So then she was able to do it.

01-00:29:21

Lew: She was smart. She told me that it was all of us when we worked, to give my mother. We kept only enough to get to school and back or whatever, but this sister said she don't see why she should give my mother any money, and she kept all the money for herself to spend. We obediently coughed it up, the older ones, you know. And the boys, of course, never had to go elsewhere away from home like the girls to work. They worked too. They went out to Chinatown and shined shoes for a nickel apiece, and thus had contact with the Chinese language.

01-00:29:58

Dunham: But they were able to keep their money?

01-00:39:01

Lew: Boys, always did because my brother said they had to keep their money because they had to have their money before they can marry for a dowry. They have to pay the bride's family.

01-00:30:13

Dunham: So how did you feel about that, not being able to keep any of your money?

01-00:30:15

Lew: My mother demanded it. I've got no say.

01-00:30:19

Dunham: How old were you when you went to work as a live-in housekeeper?

01-00:30:24

Lew: When I graduated from Lincoln School. All I know is we were just told we had to work away from home.

01-00:30:31

Dunham: By your mother?

01-00:30:32

Lew: Yeah, or my father. I don't know anything about what happened. They worked something out in Chinatown I guess, you know, somebody, agency, that took care of that. We were never told. Just taken to the place with a suitcase and left.

01-00:30:46

Dunham: And it was in Montclair with a white family?

01-00:30:50

Lew: Yeah, a white family, with two little boys.

01-00:30:53

Dunham: So what was that like? You're in high school at this point, so teenage, a teenager.

01-00:31:00

Lew: I went to school in Alameda and he worked by the estuary there, on the Oakland side. I can't remember what kind of a business, except he always carried a leather briefcase, and he had his lunch in it. No papers.

01-00:31:17

Dunham: So would he drive you to school, your employer?

01-00:31:19

Lew: He drove me down to the Park Street Bridge and he went to his job. He let me off and I walked over to Alameda High School on Park Street.

01-00:31:31

Dunham: What was Alameda High School like at that time? This is '38, '39.

01-00:31:37

Lew: Yeah. I graduated in 1942 spring from high school.

01-00:31:44

Dunham: Okay. So what was Alameda High School like then? Do you remember its ethnic makeup and any teachers that stood out?

01-00:31:53

Lew: [Narrator Addendum: Predominantly white that talked about golf, football, etc.] No, I don't remember too much except that at lunchtime, I always went to one end of the school and sat down on the steps and ate my lunch. A boy tried to get acquainted with me, so I found another place to hide. That was him. But I got out as fast as I could.

01-00:32:19

Dunham: Were there other Chinese at Alameda High?

01-00:32:21

Lew: Yeah, there were a few others, some Chinese, and there was a guy, a Chinese fellow that they called a football hero. I don't know, I never made friends with

anybody. I only had one friend, a girl named Eileen Green. She lived close-by. She was very friendly with me, so we were friends, but I lost contact with her after the war.

01-00:32:51

Dunham: Did you have an idea, when you were in high school or as a child, what you wanted to do with your life? Any particular dreams?

01-00:32:00

Lew: No. All I know is I liked art. I wanted to go to school and be an art teacher, but then when the war came on, they said they were hiring at Alameda Naval Air Station, so we all went over and registered and got our training there and went in to work. [Narrator Addendum: I took typing only—no college prep studies. My family couldn't help financially, and my wages were helping them, so why dream? I saved money for art training but got married at age 22 instead.]

01-00:33:24

Dunham: I want to hear about that in great detail. Can I ask you first, do you remember where you were when you first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor? Do you remember when you first heard of it?

01-00:33:32

Lew: Yeah, it was the newspaper headlines and on the radio in 1941, December 7th, so I was still working up in Montclair. As soon as I graduated, I quit and I went to work at the cannery with my mother, that's the fruit cannery on San Leandro Boulevard. And as soon as they hired me, that was the end of the cannery, right? I went to work at the naval air station.

01-00:34:07

Dunham: Yeah, so how did you get the job, how did you hear about the job at the naval air station?

01-00:34:11

Lew: I don't remember. Somehow, I was the only one that went there. My sister was working for the draft board in Oakland, and then later she went to work at the Moore Shipyard, down at Oakland Estuary.

01-00:34:39

Dunham: The Moore Dry Dock, yeah. And your mother or father also worked at the shipyard?

01-00:34:45

Lew: My mother didn't work in the shipyard. She always worked at the cannery. She could get along with her English, she understood, you know, but she wasn't good at it. My father should know English with all the years supervising the employees at the cannery.

01-00:35:07

Dunham: Did he work at the Richmond Shipyards, your father?

01-00:35:10

Lew: No, no. Not in Richmond. I think he worked at the Moore Dry Dock, you know, that's near home.

01-00:35:17

Dunham: Yeah, in Oakland, okay. Well, tell me about how you got the job or your training. What was training?

01-00:35:25

Lew: I went to somewhere out there near Park Street and they had classes there, and after the required training session, we went to work at the base. Every three months, I think they rotated us to different departments. I was in sheet metal. They hired different people for different things, like radar, engines, paint, blueprints, machinist, welding, tires, etc., and all the different phases of aircraft work.

01-00:36:03

Dunham: What was your job title, do you know?

01-00:36:07

Lew: Trainee, sheet metal to begin.

01-00:36:09

Dunham: Okay, in aviation.

01-00:36:09

Lew: And then every so often, we got promoted from journeymen, up to various steps. In 1946, I ran off and got married.

01-00:36:30

Dunham: Oh, wow. Well, let's—can you tell us more about your years working at Alameda Naval Air Station. What were you doing to begin with? Was it hard?

01-00:36:42

Lew: No, it wasn't hard. It was repetitious. You went to the cowling section or you went to the wing areas like small surfaces, or you went to all different—

01-00:36:54

Dunham: So it was like an assembly line of work.

01-00:36:58

Lew: They take the plane apart and they work all the sections to repair as needed. And then there's a section where you go to the plane itself, and that's in another section of the building, in another hangar adjoining. And they've got other hangars for fighter planes, they've got hangars for the big P3s and such. That is repaired directly on the plane itself.

01-00:37:25

Dunham: Which planes were you working on?

01-00:37:27

Lew: All the planes current at that time, 4Fs, they were fighter planes, and they were all taken apart. I remember, I was in cowling for a long time.

01-00:37:43

Dunham: You were where for a long time?

01-00:37:45

Lew: Cowling. The planes have all these little doors that opens up for air.

01-00:37:53

Dunham: And what did you do on the cowlings?

01-00:37:58

Lew: We replaced the flaps if they're cracked, and then you have to put all the flaps together to form a ring, it goes off, and bring another one in. Wings, the same thing, two phases for all new parts—all required pieces are manufactured which requires forming and hardening. Then all pieces are returned to be riveted together to make an assembly that must meet all dimensions and pass inspection. I went into manufacturing, that's making new parts.

01-00:38:25

Dunham: Do you remember what your salary was, particularly compared to what you'd been getting?

01-00:38:30

Lew: Oh, yeah, I remember fifty cents an hour and that was wonderful, in the beginning. Overtime work was extra over 40 hours per week later.

01-00:38:34

Dunham: Yeah.

01-00:38:35

Lew: Because when I worked as a live-in housemaid, I was getting \$15 a month with a half day off Sunday afternoon.

01-00:38:39

Dunham: Wow, wow.

01-00:38:42

Lew: Of course, you know, I kept enough money for bus fare and enough money to go ice skating on Sunday afternoon, and then I went home. No money for snacks or drinks.

01-00:38:57

Dunham: Were you still contributing the majority of your salary to the family?

01-00:39:00

Lew: Yes, always. As long as we were working, we had to contribute. When we were sewing, we contributed. Like I said, the boys kept their own money, so when they married they had to pay a dowry.

01-00:39:16

Dunham: Right. What was the makeup of your coworkers, do you remember? Were they predominantly white and were there mostly women or more men?

01-00:39:29

Lew: All the young men was taken to war, so there was a lot of women. The training, I did know that if they were any good, they worked in the shop, and if they were kind of dumb, they were sent to one room where they sorted nuts and bolts only.

01-00:39:55

Dunham: So you must have been smart, because you got—was there a particular, was there a test you took?

01-00:39:59

Lew: Yeah. You've got to be able to read blueprints manufacture, and some of those blueprints would take you three days to figure out for the assemblies. [Narrator Addendum: One should know what is needed to get the job done to pass inspection. All jobs must pass inspection and when a job is completed, you clock out and go get another job to repair.]

01-00:40:08

Dunham: So how did you learn how to do that?

01-00:40:11

Lew: I went to school, night school, down there by Lake Merritt. They used to have a school there, Laney Trade School.

01-00:40:17

Dunham: Did you have to—did you join a union for the job?

01-00:40:21

Lew: A union? A lot later, the second time I went back. The union was established in later years.

01-00:40:26

Dunham: Okay, not during the war.

01-00:40:28

Lew: No. [Narrator Addendum: My husband wouldn't let me go back to work there because of so many male workers. During the Korean War, those females that did stay stayed until they retired.]

01-00:40:28

Dunham: They didn't have a union at the naval air station.

01-00:40:29

Lew: No. The second time I went back there was a union and they were trying to get people. So I joined it and that was a sorry thing because then, the company wasn't very much towards unions. [Narrator Addendum: Those that didn't join were given cushy jobs—soliciting money for causes and such.]

01-00:40:49

Dunham: Sure, yeah.

01-00:40:55

Lew: I left there, I think back in 1959, and I told the union that I'm out of it. Do you know the union, every five years, they invite me to a luncheon? I had forty-five years in the union, that was last year. It's down there at Jack London Square, a nice meal, a steak or salmon.

01-00:41:25

Dunham: Wow. So you had left the job but you stayed in the union?

01-00:41:29

Lew: No, I told them I'm out, but they kept me on.

01-00:41:34

Dunham: Okay. You left the union?

01-00:41:37

Lew: Yeah, when I quit the job. I had to quit, I couldn't take it. I sort of suffered a nervous breakdown plus some other problems and went on disability for two years. It's not in the book but I took off because of a sickness, and I was gone for two years under medication.

01-00:42:10

Dunham: Was there a particular stress you had been under or it just came on?

01-00:42:13

Lew: Yeah, there was particular stress. Some idiot wanted to marry me and I didn't want anything to do with him. [Narrator Addendum: This guy rented an apartment from my sister. He worked where I did—not in my section.]

01-00:42:22

Dunham: Was this a coworker?

01-00:42:24

Lew: Yeah, it was a coworker and he went around with a gun, chased my kids around later when I was not home.

01-00:42:28

Dunham: Oh my gosh.

01-00:42:29

Lew: And I suffered a sort of breakdown.

01-00:42:32

Dunham: Sure, that sounds very stressful.

01-00:42:35

Lew: I still have some letters. I fixed him though.

01-00:42:40

Dunham: You fixed him how?

01-00:42:42

Lew: I phoned the police as he demanded some prick (sex). He transferred to the valley after that

01-00:43:00

Dunham: Okay, well why don't we continue and we can talk about it later if you like, I'll turn it off. But let me ask about this, because I know you don't want to focus on that for now, but when you first started working, you know with women in traditionally male roles, some women have talked about men, even though it was so needed because young men were in the Army or the military, but men making life pretty hard for women when they first were starting in these roles. They weren't very accepting.

01-00:43:26

Lew: One year before I retired in 1985, I had some guy file a complaint because I filed for a job and I got it. That guy couldn't even read a blueprint. He couldn't see a female get a job.

01-00:43:44

Dunham: So it sounds like you were a very strong, independent woman, who wasn't afraid to apply for—

01-00:43:49

Lew: Yeah. You apply if you think you can do the job. Well, there were other women like that too. This one guy, he's a loafer. He did the most elementary jobs and he tried to grab the more advanced jobs, as he always grabbed apprentices to train, and then he would hide it under the bench when he didn't know how to figure it out or read a blueprint which shows how the job is done. [Narrator Addendum: There was no trainee program after 1942. Later all positions got trained under a four year apprentice program to become journeymen—in all trades.]

01-00:44:08

Dunham: Oh, really? Wow.

01-00:44:11

Lew: I fixed him though. When I became temporary foreman, I dragged all those jobs out and told him to fix it, but of course he didn't.

01-00:44:21

Dunham: He didn't know how, I assume.

01-00:44:26

Lew: Yeah, every single day, buy the newspaper, go into the head and sit there for an hour or so. Me, I've been told I could have—they've going to give me outstanding performance, but why didn't they write it up? They would go tell my foreman to write it up and he didn't want to write me up. I'm not fighting

them, who cares, you know what I mean? Minority people learned they don't fight discrimination in those days.

01-00:45:00

Dunham: You mean you didn't get the job appraisals you should have you're saying, at times.

01-00:45:05

Lew: Another foreman I worked for would recommend me but my foreman would not do it. But I never fight any of those things. As long as I've got a job with good pay, you know, that's men's pay, not women's pay. I'm Asian and generally don't rate—nothing new, I won't stir it up.

01-00:45:15

Dunham: Right. Was there a difference when you first started working? Did men make more than women for the same job?

01-00:45:21

Lew: No, it all depends on upon your rate. They had sailors working in there too and not too many men, there were some men. The men with families that wasn't eligible for the draft, no real young ones, you know? So a lot of the girls that stayed, and some of them quit because they didn't like the work.

01-00:45:45

Dunham: What were the problems that the women who quit had with it?

01-00:45:48

Lew: I guess she didn't like that type of work. She just died a few months ago.

01-00:45:53

Dunham: Oh, someone you kept in touch with?

01-00:46:55

Lew: Yeah. Well, whatever, you know. She went to work for the city I guess, doing paperwork, I think.

01-00:46:11

Dunham: Well you must have been quite well respected, I mean I know this is later, but that you ultimately became a foreman.

01-00:46:17

Lew: No, that was a temporary foreman.

01-00:46:20

Dunham: Oh, okay. How was it being a temporary foreman?

01-00:46:23

Lew: Not all the foremen that ever made it are slackers. They never did their work. They made it because the rules were to have minorities in all positions. Some were chosen whether they knew anything or not.

01-00:46:27

Dunham: Oh, really?

01-00:46:28

Lew: Yeah, they just socialize all day. I have carried some and they get the credit for the job.

01-00:46:31

Dunham: So that's the manager.

01-00:46:33

Lew: Yeah, that's the coworker who is given the 'lead' job to lead it to completion. And then they brag about how they made it by attaining to other means, was the ones up above. [Narrator Addendum: Females used sex with the higher bosses that had handsome pull.]

01-00:46:46

Dunham: Wow.

01-00:46:46

Lew: Hey, not only that but they'll steal my job, because they know I still have lots of time on it and the job is finished.

01-00:46:55

Dunham: How do you mean then, how would they steal it?

01-00:46:56

Lew: All the jobs are given so many hours to complete and some people have to ask for more and more time. I always finished mine on time and I always got under the scheduled time. I didn't visit or go out of my shop either, except to the head or the blueprint room.

01-00:47:19

Dunham: How did they steal your job though?

01-00:47:22

Lew: One time I had to go someplace. I came in late, they hauled the whole job away and it still had eighty hours on it.

01-00:47:30

Dunham: So they just, they stole your work and said it was theirs?

01-00:47:34

Lew: Well, they always did manage to, you know, never do much. They sit around all day and socialize until the time is up to clock off. [Narrator Addendum: I did not fight her as she was in bed with a higher rank boss upstairs.] I was on loan to that section and that was small surfaces. [Narrator Addendum: This job was in the 1980s.]

01-00:47:49

Dunham: So you worked from '42 through '46 initially, at the naval air station, is that right?

01-00:47:56

Lew: I think so.

01-00:47:57

Dunham: All the way through, past the end of the war.

01-00:48:00

Lew: Yeah. I went off and got married then.

01-00:48:03

Dunham: Let me ask first about, I mean how did the naval air station change during the course of the war? We've spent a lot of time interviewing folks at the Kaiser Shipyard, which was growing dramatically during the course of the war, with tremendous migration of folks from the south. You mentioned like Okies and Arkies earlier. Were there a lot of those folks coming to work at the naval air station?

01-00:48:24

Lew: No, they have to be trained later on or experienced. I don't really know about the hiring. [Narrator Addendum: A lady apprentice was so dumb, but not kicked out of the program. She had the nerve to complain that they were giving her the run around but didn't wise up on her own stupidity. There was one white guy who provided lots of meat and sausages to my boss. He didn't know very much and like the other one mentioned, tried to take the jobs when he didn't know how to read blueprints. Probably worked as a janitor for an aircraft company elsewhere.]

01-00:48:31

Dunham: It was more local folks?

01-00:48:33

Lew: Local and a lot of Chinese girls worked there but in different sections and departments. There were Oakie and Arkey ladies, nice people that I helped train.

01-00:48:40

Dunham: Why was the Chinese—why were there so many Chinese in that particular job?

01-00:48:46

Lew: [Narrator Addendum: Not that particular job—there were many other fields too.] Because before that time, the Chinese could never get a job outside, you only have to work for a Chinese. My sister worked for the National Dollar Store and that's a Chinese outfit. So, if they can't hire you in Chinatown what have you got? So when the war broke out, all these places would hire, and after the war, it really helped us go out into the world. I mean before that we

were limited and we had to live in that one section. There were some scattered here and there, Berkeley, but on the whole, the majority lived right around Chinatown or worked for a Chinese business or restaurant elsewhere.

01-00:49:37

Dunham: So after you began to have these jobs and opportunities and make more money, did you move out of Chinatown?

01-00:49:45

Lew: Eventually, with us helping my mother, we moved out to East Oakland, only two miles, and she bought a house there.

01-00:49:56

Dunham: Was that a diverse neighborhood then?

01-00:49:59

Lew: Yeah, and that was in the forties. When I came back in the 1950s, from Japan, on vacation one year, that same neighborhood, everybody was running out of the neighborhoods because it was turning to more crime. Eventually, during those years, everyone else, if they can afford it, took off elsewhere. I went back there to the old house and my kids, ten, twelve years old, and I decided to move to San Leandro, away from the kids that my kids wanted to associate with. Oh, well. I never went back to Oakland. This friend of mine that lived in Oakland all those years, she went out to go to the store and got mugged at the corner, to her knees. But she fixed them. She recognized him, turned him in, they caught him, and I don't know what happened to him.

01-00:51:35

Dunham: You started to say how you met your husband. How did you?

01-00:51:38

Lew: Oh, at the ice rink. We wore short skirts and skated in the middle only, and a couple of sailor boys ventured in. We had one that liked to take all the girls and hold onto them and swing them around close to the ice. He swung us around in circles, you've seen that. I ran off with the other one and my family disowned me. Those days, I had a distant cousin that married somebody by the same last name and she got disowned too. Nowadays, I was told it's okay to marry somebody with the same last name, as long as it's five generations past. [Narrator Addendum: Which my brother did and mother said, "Don't tell Grandma!!" to us.]

01-00:52:43

Dunham: Why did they object to your fiancé?

01-00:52:45

Lew: I married a white man.

01-00:52:53

Dunham: What was that like, aside from the significance of your family disowning you, what other challenges were there with that?

01-00:53:00

Lew: Well, the only place it was legal for us to get married was up in Washington State.

01-00:53:07

Dunham: It was illegal in California until—

01-00:53:09

Lew: Yeah, it was in Southern California until a lot later, when a couple took the case to court.

01-00:53:12

Dunham: It was '50 or '60 time.

01-00:53:16

Lew: Since then I've looked it up and there were other states that was legal and illegal as well, but we didn't know about it, we're out here in California.

01-00:53:27

Dunham: Did you ever have any doubts about going forward with the relationship or did you fall in love and you were sure?

01-00:53:35

Lew: He took me back to his hometown.

01-00:53:38

Dunham: Where's that?

01-00:53:39

Lew: Ironwood, Michigan He kind of worked a little at this, a little of that, and we built onto our house.

01-00:53:51

Dunham: Was his family accepting of you?

01-00:53:53

Lew: No but oh well, nothing they could do. But she picked a house for us to buy and I coughed up the money.

01-00:54:09

Dunham: You had the money, all the money for the house?

01-00:54:11

Lew: Yeah, I was working, I was saving. I was saving money besides giving my mother money. When I worked at the naval air station, I gave her a fair share for like rental. So I had money and we spent five years up there and decided—it was an old mining town and he hated working as a miner. You go a mile down and come back all red, you know, the ore color, reddish and never washes out too. He tried shipping on Lake Superior, Duluth, and there was no work in winter. He delivered ore to the foundries, you know, in the other states, in the Great Lakes section. So finally he decided we'll go back to

California. So, we got rid of everything, everything in one car with two kids, and the car broke down in North Dakota. So, we spent the last money buying another car and got to California, and then he couldn't find much in work. So, he ended up with sailing, commercial ships, part of the union in SF. What else?

01-00:55:48

Dunham: What was it liked when you lived back in—did you say Minnesota?

01-00:55:52

Lew: Ironwood, Michigan, it was upper Michigan.

01-00:55:53

Dunham: Michigan, excuse me. Were there any other Chinese Americans around?

01-00:55:57

Lew: No.

01-00:55:58

Dunham: So what was that like for you, that big adjustment?

01-00:56:01

Lew: Well, I didn't get very far. Even when I worked at naval air station, I never made friends. I kept my nose to the grindstone. This friend I told you about later, she said they all knew all their friends and I didn't know anybody. Oh, only one girl, she's mulatto, she was very friendly. We got reacquainted years later, as her husband and mine were on the same ship.

01-00:56:39

Dunham: She worked at the naval air station?

01-00:56:41

Lew: Yeah, she worked at the naval air station too, but she got sick and never returned.

01-00:56:45

Dunham: Can I ask also, backing up, when you went to get married, like how did you find out you could marry in Washington State, or what was that like?

01-00:56:53

Lew: Well, I guess someone mentioned it and we checked it out. I don't know how we found out, except that my sister sneaked me out from the second story window at night.

01-00:57:03

Dunham: Out of your house, like your parents had locked—

01-00:57:05

Lew: Yeah, they were home. [Narrator Addendum: I didn't want them to know I had sneaked out to get married—we were upstairs and our parents' room was downstairs.]

01-00:57:07

Dunham: Had your parents sort of locked you—they'd forbidden you from?

01-00:57:10

Lew: No, they didn't forbid, we just knew it was forbidden to marry out of one's race from years of family talk on the subject.

01-00:57:14

Dunham: Did they know you were seeing a white man?

01-00:57:16

Lew: No, not really. This is well, '46, yeah. So, that was my—every Sunday I went ice skating, that's it, and like I said, I never really made much friends anyplace.

01-00:57:39

Dunham: Had you done any dating before?

01-00:57:44

Lew: Yeah. Some of these Chinese girls I had worked with tried to arrange dates with these Chinese guys from SF but—

01-00:57:51

Dunham: Nothing had worked out.

01-00:57:52

Lew: It never worked out. I guess I wasn't very talkative and I'm still not talkative. I've lived here and the neighbors don't want to talk. That one over there, when I have excess vegetables, I take it and drop it by their front door. I used to have one over there. I grow a lot of oriental vegetables.

01-00:58:28

Dunham: What do you grow?

01-00:58:30

Lew: So I give excess vegetables to others. We've got Spanish and black and whatever, you know, a mix in this court, as well as Vietnamese and Filipino.

01-00:58:38

Dunham: So you give it to your other Asian neighbors?

01-00:58:41

Lew: Filipinos, they eat all the same foods, and a Vietnamese but she moved away.

01-00:58:49

Dunham: What vegetables do you grow?

01-00:58:53

Lew: I grow bitter melon and luffas, that's a long thing. Luffas, when it gets old, you know you have that scrubber? I grow cucumbers and other oriental vegetables so I don't need to go to an Asian store in Stockton.

01-00:59:18

Dunham: When you were in Michigan, did you have—were you growing Chinese vegetables or did you have access?

01-00:59:26

Lew: No. I grew potatoes for the year, you know like a city block. I used to plant potatoes, as that was my husband's main staple food.

01-00:59:39

Dunham: Had you grown up with a mainly Chinese food diet and was that a big adjustment?

01-00:59:45

Lew: No that wasn't. My husband didn't like it, he said it stinks, but he wouldn't eat rice either, because he said they look like maggots.

01-00:59:59

Dunham: Wow.

01-01:00:00

Lew: That's because his mother always made a roast, a lamb roast, and the juices around the edge, she put the cover on, put it down towards the basement and the flies would buzz it and all the maggots would be squirming on the rim. And she'd cook it back up I guess, so he won't eat rice as it looks like a maggot. And of course I didn't have that problem—I had a refrigerator in 1946.

01-01:00:33

Dunham: Were you making meals at that time?

01-01:00:35

Lew: All American food. The milkman used to bring the milk, put it by the back door, and by the time I'd get out to it, the whip cream would be shooting up three inches above. It had a paper cap. So I'd take all the cream off and I'd whip it up and made all kinds of cakes and pastry for desserts.

01-01:01:02

Dunham: Wow. How did you learn to do that?

01-01:01:05

Lew: Well, you know, you buy whipping cream. Us Chinese love whip cream and sponge cakes. So, you went to a Chinese bakery, they have all that fresh fruit on top of it, but they're stingy with their whipped cream. So, we used to go to a place called Neldam's in Oakland, and the whip cream would be that thick instead of that thin. For years, I made these jelly rolls with all this whip cream and sponge cake with strawberries or bananas in it and we grew up with it. There's no cream available like before—milk is now homogenized or skimmed.

01-01:01:45

Dunham: All right, well let's pause and take a little break.

02-00:00:00

Dunham:

So today is April 15, 2014, and this is tape two with Elizabeth Lew. We just got a wonderful tour of your impressive garden, with a variety of things. You said that only you and your brother were gardeners in the family, so where did you develop your—

02-00:00:20

Lew:

My mother.

02-00:00:20

Dunham:

From your mother, oh so your mother did, but you and your brother were the only other children. So did you garden, did she have a garden when you were growing up?

02-00:00:27

Lew:

She always had a garden and she always kept chicken, and she dried her own fish and Chinese bacon. She had a rack that she took on top of the roof, and a special case so the flies don't get it. We just about made everything, like you know about dim sum, right?

02-00:00:51

Dunham:

Mm-hmm.

02-00:00:53

Lew:

We couldn't afford to go to the restaurant for it so my mother made up all the fillings and we did all the shaping, and then we had plenty of dim sum to eat. Children and teenagers are big eaters. [Narrator Addendum: For your information, the Asians still patronize stores to pick their chicken and such. They pick then leave and it gets butchered for them. Available in Oakland, SF, and Sacramento.]

02-00:01:03

Dunham:

Family dim sum, wow. During the war, were there victory gardens that you were involved with, were you aware of the victory gardens?

02-00:01:12

Lew:

Well, they heard of victory garden but my mother didn't have a big backyard.

02-00:01:17

Dunham:

You already were doing what you were doing on the roof and what have you.

02-00:01:20

Lew:

Let me think. That was in East Oakland, but the other one, she always planted a little something, not much.

02-00:01:28

Dunham:

You didn't have much room earlier, before you moved to East Oakland.

02-00:01:29

Lew:

Not much room. She always kept a chicken, so all the food, rice and table scraps, would go to feed them.

02-00:01:35

Dunham: Do you remember, back to the war years, experiences with rationing and any challenges or things with the ration coupons?

02-00:01:45

Lew: We didn't buy canned soups and stuff, ration coupons. I gave it all to the guy I worked with.

02-00:01:52

Dunham: Did you get anything for it?

02-00:01:54

Lew: No.

02-00:01:55

Dunham: You didn't use any of your ration coupons?

02-00:01:58

Lew: I don't know, I didn't use it. My mother, all I know is the excess, I used to give to my coworker to buy canned soups and things like that. [Narrator Addendum: He didn't do much either, just played the horses and went off to place bets and later to see if he won.] We didn't use canned soups. We were still eating all Chinese food for dinner. While at school, my brother and I did all the cooking for the siblings, cooked from scratch. We used to take a big pot canning sized and make spaghetti and so forth. My brother and I did the cooking mostly, and then we made sandwiches for school lunch and we would go through two or three loaves of bread. I remember that.

02-00:02:44

Dunham: During the war years—do you need to take a break? Sorry, let me get the cord. Actually, you were just showing us some of the Chinese genealogy, which I know you've done a lot of research on that, but that made me wonder, did you learn Chinese, to read and write Chinese, growing up?

02-00:03:13

Lew: We spoke Chinese.

02-00:03:15

Dunham: Yeah, you spoke Chinese.

02-00:03:17

Lew: I lost it when we went out to live as live-in housemaids, and with marriage.

02-00:03:20

Dunham: Oh, yeah, because then you were with a white family, speaking all English.

02-00:03:25

Lew: Then, that half a day off, I went ice skating and all English and when I got home, I'd go to bed and there's no more communication.

- 02-00:03:34
Dunham: But did you also learn to read and write Chinese?
- 02-00:03:39
Lew: In school, no.
- 02-00:03:41
Dunham: So these books, are you able to—no? Oh, okay, they're just reference books.
- 02-00:03:46
Lew: I have people—I paid for translations and then I had a whole bunch of ladies help me because you've got to be highly educated to read these books, you know, in classical Chinese and other types. Most Chinese can read their newspaper but they're unable to read those books.
- 02-00:04:05
Dunham: So they're very specialized.
- 02-00:04:07
Lew: Yeah. I found these ladies, they're all from Northern China, and they were here going to college when Mao Tse-tung took over, and they got to stay in the U.S., because if they went back, they sent them to farm to do labor work, and they didn't like educated people.
- 02-00:04:34
Dunham: As academics, yeah, yeah, as educated people.
- 02-00:04:39
Lew: They were all living at Rossmoor and I got some of these ladies to help me. Many of them were from the radiation labs in Berkeley and Livermore, others were retirees, men and women.
- 02-00:04:48
Dunham: Great. I was wondering, back during the war time, I know all your life you've been a very hard worker, not a lot of play as you've said, but during the war years, aside from the skating, did you go to movies or dances or any other recreational type activities?
- 02-00:05:02
Lew: No dances, but we went out once a week to the restaurants and ordered American food.
- 02-00:05:10
Dunham: What restaurants?
- 02-00:05:11
Lew: It didn't cost very much, they were all Chinese restaurants and they had veal cutlets and roast chicken and, you know, all American style food. [Narrator Addendum: A complete soup, salad, and dessert too. A complete dinner for a reasonable price.]

- 02-00:05:20
Dunham: They had Chinese restaurants with American style food.
- 02-00:05:22
Lew: Chinese and American food. [Also Chinese food too, all up in the American business areas like Broadway and 12th/13th/14th St. and higher. Chinese men were cooks in many fancy hotels and Chinese cafes catered to both Chinese and American food. Only in Chinatown they would serve only Chinese in those days. Now it's different.]
- 02-00:05:28
Dunham: So who did you go out to the restaurants with?
- 02-00:05:31
Lew: Sometimes my sister. Then we went to movies a lot. I remember going to the movies and paying ten cents. That was the kids price as they didn't know we were much older.
- 02-00:05:43
Dunham: What theater, do you remember what theater?
- 02-00:05:45
Lew: Fox and Paramount on Upper Broadway in Oakland. I remember paying ten cents. [Narrator Addendum: This was before working as a housemaid.]
- 02-00:06:00
Dunham: Did they have the newsreels and a cartoon or anything like that, do you remember?
- 02-00:06:04
Lew: Yes. We went to see mostly US Western movies in town.
- 02-00:06:11
Dunham: Do you remember any of the movies you saw?
- 02-00:06:13
Lew: No. I remember the movies when I go see in Japan, they always showed that sexy stuff between the main ones that shouldn't be seen by the children.
- 02-00:06:27
Dunham: What do you mean, things that shouldn't be seen?
- 02-00:06:30
Lew: Well, they would stick it in between.
- 02-00:06:35
Dunham: I'm not sure I'm familiar with that. How do you mean, they had what kind of movie, like an adult movie?
- 02-00:06:41
Lew: Yeah.

02-00:06:43

Dunham: In the middle?

02-00:06:43

Lew: No, not in the middle of a movie but before. In between movies, short stuff of sex one. When we first lived in Yokohama, we were hitting all the Japanese theaters, since there wasn't much else for entertainment.

02-00:06:52

Dunham: Was that fun, did you enjoy that?

02-00:06:56

Lew: I don't remember what we saw any more. I've forgotten a lot of stuff.

02-00:07:02

Dunham: When did you go to Japan and why, what brought you to Japan?

02-00:07:06

Lew: My husband got a job working for military sea transportation. It was Navy ships but an all civilian crew, and they supplied all the different bases and islands and stuff, with what they need. They were based in Japan.

02-00:07:34

Dunham: Yokohama?

02-00:07:35

Lew: Yokohama.

02-00:07:36

Dunham: This is the early fifties?

02-00:07:39

Lew: The later fifties.

02-00:07:40

Dunham: The later fifties. So what was it like there? You'd come from—you'd been back in California, in San Leandro in the '60s?

02-00:07:50

Lew: What happened was we were living in a house outside. The only privilege we got was commissary and PX. Military members lived on bases in military housing.

02-00:08:02

Dunham: What's a PX?

02-00:08:03

Lew: A post exchange is for their military personnel only, where American goods are sold at US prices. They also had the commissary where American foods are sold and in much demand by the Japan black market. Well, I went to their hospital but in the end they couldn't handle me and I went to a Japanese hospital for my treatments. We lived outside and the rent was very expensive.

Some of the sailor boys were paying \$10 a month for a room, you know, live with their girlfriends, and we were paying, American dollars, \$350 a month for a house with septic tank and not much of a kitchen. It was a two bedroom house with septic tank, living room, you know almost like an American house, but had their tatami mat floors, except for in the halls and kitchen.

02-00:09:07

Dunham:

So he was making good money doing the work then there?

02-00:09:12

Lew:

He was being paid whatever the wage was for the position he held, so if we want to be there, we pay the rate for it.

02-00:09:19

Dunham:

It's just that \$350 sounds like a lot maybe, at the time.

02-00:09:23

Lew:

Yeah, that's a lot of money, higher than I think the U.S. [Narrator Addendum: Yes it was higher in the Japanese home. There was no flush toilet, the weekly stuff was in a pit on the inside outer wall of the wall (like the outhouse) so by the end of the week, it was very smelly.] But then, when they changed ports and ship, I'll pack up the kids and we'll drive down to his next town. [Narrator Addendum: I was renting my house out for \$25 per month to an uncle in Oakland.]

02-00:09:41

Dunham:

Were there any challenges, being a relatively young interracial couple, you know Chinese and white couple, in Japan?

02-00:09:48

Lew:

Oh, yes. The Army, the wives had their clubs, sewing clubs and other types, and they refused to let me join them, because I was Asian.

02-00:10:05

Dunham:

So how did you find that out?

02-00:10:07

Lew:

I asked and they wouldn't let me join.

02-00:10:10

Dunham:

They just said, point blank?

02-00:10:14

Lew:

No, so I didn't. I went down to Sasebo and they let me in their club.

02-00:10:23

Dunham:

The same kind of club?

02-00:10:24

Lew:

Yeah. [Narrator Addendum: Clubs are generally for wives only (meetings, lunch, etc.)]

02-00:10:25

Dunham: Okay, and was that predominantly white?

02-00:10:30

Lew: They had an officer, American Japanese descent, that was in the group with a Japanese wife, and they let me in, so I went to all their luncheons and meetings and took pictures, and we would dress up nice and wear a hat and things that were different like that, you know. We dressed up in comparison to everyday stuff. Yokohama, they wouldn't let me in. I wanted to take a course on how to sew and pattern making. I never learned it because they have Japanese teachers that taught them. So, years later, I went back up to Yokohama and they asked me to join them and I refused. You know why? I guess they were anxious then and they got used to all the Japanese wives, because all the civilians and some of the military guys married local Japanese girls too. [Narrator Addendum: They had clubs for the common soldier or sailor, and also clubs for the petty officers and the officers wives must join depending on the husband's rank.]

02-00:11:39

Dunham: Right, sure, sure.

02-00:11:41

Lew: By that time I said hell with you, I'm not going to join.

02-00:11:48

Dunham: When did you go or what was it like in Okinawa?

02-00:11:55

Lew: It was 1958 to 1959. We bought our own house there, the house is leased, and the land was also land on the beach to unload, when my husband was transferred to a ship that served islands with no dock. Good roads, with police giving tickets for speeding. It was out in the suburbs and all I know is day and night, I'd hear those engines roaring away from the air base a short distance away. Day and night, year round.

02-00:12:24

Dunham: Just loud, wow. Were you doing gardening during this time?

02-00:12:32

Lew: Flowers, no vegetable garden. We had banana tree, papaya tree and things like that, and I was a den mother for ten kids, Cub Scouts.

02-00:12:45

Dunham: Cub Scouts, okay.

02-00:12:46

Lew: They were all Cub Scouts, the American civilian dependents. We were kind of far from the Army base, we were out in the suburbs, but then that's when I took off, went back to the States and got my divorce.

- 02-00:13:09
Dunham: So that was—okay, so what happened from there? This is in the late fifties or early sixties then?
- 02-00:13:20
Lew: I can't remember. [Narrator Addendum: It was in 1959.] All I remember is when I came back, I had an operation for a tumor. I didn't have any hospitalization, somebody paid for it. I don't remember. Later, I got a job with a hospital plan.
- 02-00:13:44
Dunham: You've had a lot of jobs.
- 02-00:13:46
Lew: Oh, yeah, I worked at a lot of jobs. Some with no medical plans. I worked for the office. I remember getting \$200 every two weeks to run the family with.
- 02-00:13:57
Dunham: What office was that?
- 02-00:14:01
Lew: I was working in a government facility that sold all the surplus equipment, and it was down there where BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] goes underground? Then, I went to work for military sea transportation service and I think they gave me an award and I quit them.
- 02-00:14:36
Dunham: What were you doing for them?
- 02-00:14:38
Lew: For military sea transportation at Fort Mason. I quit because they wanted me to go in a relationship with some guy that's tied in with all the girls. I refused. [Narrator Addendum: He was married and also had to join the club to get along. I got an award for my work and then they told me and started to complain on petty things.]
- 02-00:14:56
Dunham: Your employer wanted you to?
- 02-00:14:58
Lew: No, not the employer, the coworkers got it all worked up. So I just quit. I went back to the naval air station. [Narrator Addendum: Lot more in wages too, I was entitled for a raise but they wouldn't give it to me.]
- 02-00:15:08
Dunham: So that's when you returned. Was this in '66?
- 02-00:15:11
Lew: Yes, because I went back to Japan again another time and then I came back. Whenever it is, I have to go look up my income tax paper and find out where

I've been. That's the only thing I've got saved. I've been throwing away everything else and can't remember.

02-00:15:34

Dunham: You went back into Japan on your own or reunited with your—

02-00:15:36

Lew: No, I went back and also remarried him to be qualified to be there.

02-00:15:39

Dunham: You tried reuniting?

02-00:15:41

Lew: Yeah. But one of my sons got awful, so we came back to the U.S. instead. He was in his teens, that awful age.

02-00:15:55

Dunham: Yeah, that can be challenging. So you, with your children, came back, and you're based—what city are you living in now?

02-00:16:02

Lew: I was in San Leandro again.

02-00:16:04

Dunham: San Leandro, okay. Because you had four stints, four different times you were at Alameda Naval Air Station, is that right?

02-00:16:12

Lew: Mm-hmm.

02-00:16:13

Dunham: So is this after the second one, because you said '42 through '46, then '66 to '69.

02-00:16:22

Lew: What year was the Vietnam War?

02-00:16:23

Dunham: Well, it was a long time, it was through the sixties and early seventies.

02-00:16:26

Lew: Okay, I was there working at naval air station and just not too long, when the war ended and they laid me off the very next day. [Narrator Addendum: To try and get a job, there would be lots of paperwork. It could take up to 6 months to get accepted in my case because of my job.]

02-00:16:37

Dunham: Wow.

02-00:16:40

Lew: You know why? I didn't have status. You know, when you get back in on a job like that, you've got to file for it and everything else, and they get your retirement time back in, but it takes time.

02-00:16:55

Dunham: So it wasn't necessarily at that time, that they just laid off all the men or women, because at the end of World War II, that happened to a larger extent.

02-00:17:00

Lew: No. All the ones that didn't have tenure. After I went back in, it takes time and you had to have openings that you applied for.

02-00:17:10

Dunham: When you came back to work there, were you doing similar work to what you were doing in World War II.

02-00:17:13

Lew: Yeah, exactly the same thing.

02-00:17:14

Dunham: You were always aviation, metal smith.

02-00:17:19

Lew: Yeah. It was in that same building, same area.

02-00:17:27

Dunham: Did it change much? Was there a lot of new training you had to get?

02-00:17:30

Lew: No, it didn't change much.

02-00:17:32

Dunham: Different planes but the same kind of work.

02-00:17:34

Lew: Different planes, whatever is current, all new types. The fighter planes were all in a different building and where I was, everything was torn apart in pieces, where we overhaul in another building. And there was another large building where the big planes were and sometimes I got sent to the big planes. As a female, not too big, you would always get shoved to the end of that wing.

02-00:18:12

Dunham: Why is that, because of your size.

02-00:18:14

Lew: Yeah, your size.

02-00:18:15

Dunham: Where you could fit.

- 02-00:18:17
Lew: Yeah, not a choice.
- 02-00:18:18
Dunham: So was it hard to maneuver?
- 02-00:18:22
Lew: I remember when I worked at Lockheed, when I lived in Oklahoma, it was the little small planes. The two men were putting in the windows outside, we were doing the foot pedals and whatever, and we were hunchbacked working on our knees and everything they drilled, metal, plastic, anything, would fall down into the back of our pants.
- 02-00:18:50
Dunham: And would it be hot?
- 02-00:18:52
Lew: No, it was drilling through, you know the little aluminum shavings and such. Drillings are generally curly and metal ones could cut.
- 02-00:18:56
Dunham: Okay, I just didn't know for sure if it could burn you.
- 02-00:19:00
Lew: No. It all fell in. I only stayed that summer.
- 02-00:19:08
Dunham: Yeah, so since you dropped that, I know you had too many jobs for us to go through them all, but when was that, Oklahoma, at Lockheed?
- 02-00:19:16
Lew: In the seventies, I think.
- 02-00:19:18
Dunham: That was in the seventies. So you have these mechanical skills and you applied those skills at different places.
- 02-00:19:24
Lew: Well, I'm not picky. They wanted me in another section and I'd never been on an assembly line, so I wanted to work assembly line, and that's bottom of the heap, right? [Narrator Addendum: I didn't like the pay at other plane factories in Kansas, so I got a job as a prep cook in Oklahoma City when I left Lockheed.]
- 02-00:19:35
Dunham: I would think so but you wanted to, you said or you didn't want to?
- 02-00:19:38
Lew: Yeah. I wanted to see what it was like.
- 02-00:19:38
Dunham: Why did you want to?

- 02-00:19:39
Lew: Because I never worked assembly line.
- 02-00:19:41
Dunham: Oh, because you want to do a little bit of everything, right?
- 02-00:19:44
Lew: I want to see what it's like. Maybe I would have stayed if I had gone to making patterns and jigs and things, you know.
- 02-00:19:53
Dunham: The templates.
- 02-00:19:55
Lew: Things like that, yeah.
- 02-00:19:57
Dunham: But you didn't have the opportunity to do that?
- 02-00:19:59
Lew: No, I didn't pick it. Because I had experience already in that field.
- 02-00:20:02
Dunham: How did you end up going to Lockheed, I mean Oklahoma?
- 02-00:20:06
Lew: Oh, I married some guy and he lost his job and somebody told him about Oklahoma. So we went to this little town of Mangum, and where the black widow spiders, the big ones, and the rattlesnakes, ran all over outside of town, and every year, they had a rattlesnake hunt.
- 02-00:20:33
Dunham: Did you participate?
- 02-00:20:37
Lew: No. I worked at a restaurant.
- 02-00:20:40
Dunham: After Lockheed?
- 02-00:20:42
Lew: No, this was before Lockheed. After I left that place, I would work at a place that converted apartment houses to condos and sold them. There were too many apartments and a lack of renters.
- 02-00:21:04
Dunham: So this is your second husband?
- 02-00:21:04
Lew: Yeah.
- 02-00:21:05
Dunham: And was he white too?

02-00:21:06
Lew: Yeah.

02-00:21:07
Dunham: How did you guys meet?

02-00:21:10
Lew: I hired him to do some electrical work at my house.

02-00:21:15
Dunham: And the sparks flew.

02-00:21:17
Lew: I don't know.

02-00:21:19
Dunham: I'm sorry, that was a bad pun.

02-00:21:21
Lew: Whatever it is, I divorced him in Oklahoma.

02-00:21:26
Dunham: Aside from the fact it didn't work out, was marrying a white man at that much later a period of time, were there less barriers to that?

02-00:21:34
Lew: My uncle told me no Chinese ever want me any more. Other Chinese females that have married out got the same lecture.

02-00:21:41
Dunham: Was that an issue for you at all, did you feel that way at all?

02-00:21:44
Lew: Well, I'm not among the Chinese, remember now. I'm working where there was no Chinese around.

02-00:21:47
Dunham: So you had already felt extradited sort of.

02-00:21:52
Lew: I was living up in Eureka those years.

02-00:21:56
Dunham: Okay, that's how you met.

02-00:21:58
Lew: I had bought five acres, an old mink farm, and had lots and lots of buildings that the people came in and cannibalized for all the material, and the main building—it had a lot of buildings, but I bought one section and I converted that one building into a home. It took me a few years I guess. I left that home because that fellow went to Oklahoma, and he couldn't keep that job, and I got this job at this conversion condos. Then, when I finished that one, I went

on to the next place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where they had some more buildings conversion. And then from that one, when I finished, I went on to Norman, Oklahoma.

02-00:23:10

Dunham: So working for the same company, doing that same kind of work.

02-00:23:16

Lew: I did sheetrock, I did carpentry work, I did tile.

02-00:23:26

Dunham: So how did you learn to do all that kind of work?

02-00:23:27

Lew: It was easy for me.

02-00:23:27

Dunham: Yeah, you just, all that comes easy to you.

02-00:23:29

Lew: Yeah, it comes easy. Everybody that works there lives in town and they messed around and never finish anything. I finish my job and move on to the next.

02-00:23:45

Dunham: Can I ask, what led you to Eureka?

02-00:23:54

Lew: I was living in South San Francisco then. I heard about this place for sale for \$17,000.

02-00:24:03

Dunham: And you had some—at this point, you had some savings amassed.

02-00:24:07

Lew: I always was a good saver. I never spent everything. I didn't have any frivolous expenses. I used to give dinners for friends and I'm one of those that every holiday or Mother's Day, I bought myself something.

02-00:24:32

Dunham: That's nice.

02-00:24:33

Lew: So I've got too much stuff to get rid of now, honest, because my grandson don't want any of it. He's not familiar with all the luxury items and so forth. So, I'm bringing him out this summer some time to see, but he's lived in a studio apartment for years. He's working for a store that sells computer parts now, but he got himself a degree in art, I think. I paid off his schooling for him.

02-00:25:17

Dunham: That's nice. Now you mentioned as a child, having an interest in art, and I see you have some nice artwork around. Do you still have an interest in art?

02-00:25:30

Lew: Every time I move, I throw some in the furnace. You know, you can only take certain things and art wasn't an essential. No, I have some in my bedroom that I did.

02-00:25:40

Dunham: Oh, that you made. What kind of art do you do?

02-00:25:42

Lew: I did the western type in public school. On my own, I studied oriental art in San Francisco evenings. To start with, I did—I have that picture on the wall, I did that one.

02-00:25:50

Dunham: Oh, wow.

02-00:25:53

Lew: Most everything else, no. These are Japanese, you know that huh? Yeah. When I lived in Japan, everyone in the family wanted me to buy them things — I shopped and shopped.

02-00:26:07

Dunham: So you did all this, you learned roofing and all these other, tiling. Self-taught or I mean, you had apprenticeships or mentors?

02-00:26:14

Lew: When we built our first house in Michigan, my mother in-law had us buy a little three room; kitchen, living room, bedroom. So, we decided to enlarge it and comes the winter, September, October, my husband started things and never finished anything. So, when I was seven months pregnant, I was up on the roof, putting on the roof. Hey, you know what winters are like up there.

02-00:26:45

Dunham: That's one of the things I meant to ask you about Michigan, was how was—that was your first winter like that, right?

02-00:26:53

Lew: Forty degrees below zero. I stayed there for five years and you know, the snow plow would come through and the banks on one side, maybe seven, eight feet tall. On the other side, not so tall. Well, I remember you can't plant the garden until June some time, I think, because April, sometimes it's still snowing. Well, of course, they're getting it this year all across the U.S., but what we did was check the news for weather in North Dakota, and we would know we were going to get it next. I remember going up to Duluth in winter before, the lake froze over completely. I see the telephone lines, you know

they hang down like this, and the wind blows it. Swings around like for jumping rope.

02-00:27:58

Dunham: Can, did you have any questions regarding any of the stories you looked through there?

02-00:28:02

Fukumoto: No.

02-00:28:04

Dunham: I'm curious, you know we're interviewing here in large part on behalf of the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Park. I'm struck by, you know, how—what an independent sort of life you've lived. I'm wondering if you think that sort of that initial job and opportunity at the Alameda Naval Air Station had anything to do with sort of your life path and pursuing all these adventures and all these—many of which are traditionally male type jobs you've done, not all of them.

02-00:28:33

Lew: I don't know. I was sort of natural with it. Like I said, I used to follow my father around when he did sewer work and things like that.

02-00:28:48

Dunham: So you followed him around and just kind of learned, picked up quickly, what he did?

02-00:28:53

Lew: Yeah. I don't know, I was interested. When we were young, we had a wood stove and my brother and I was always the one that had to saw the wood downstairs.

02-00:29:09

Dunham: Did you consider yourself a tomboy growing up at all?

02-00:29:14

Lew: No, I just jumped rope and roller skated.

02-00:29:17

Dunham: I'm just struck again too, because for many women who, during the war years proved and demonstrated that they could do this work, earn the pay, but there was that notion too then, that many of them were laid off at the end of the year, in favor of men being able to have those jobs, and that lost opportunity, and it was hard for them to regain those opportunities in many cases. I'm struck with how you found a lot more of these types of opportunities throughout your life, in a variety of places.

02-00:29:49

Lew: I'd just apply. One time I applied for a man that had stoves and equipment, and it needed to be cleaned, so he hired me. His other employee men raised

Cain and hell over hiring a woman, so I said forget it, I'm not going to go work with them — it was a low paying job, beside crappy. [Narrator Addendum: Settling down to be a housewife and raising kids, I've gone through that stage too.]

02-00:30:15

Dunham:

The other thing you've mentioned, I think, that comes up, and it comes up sometime during the wartime work, is that you worked efficiently and effectively compared to your coworkers many times, and sometimes that sounds like that created issues, because people sometimes resent people who are working too hard, if you will.

02-00:30:34

Lew:

Yes, the slackers would, but I never compete with them. I was never a socializer. I just kept my nose to the grindstone. If I had a job, I'll do it and I didn't go yak, yak, yak, you know gossip, or other. They told me that years later, that the others all knew about what the others were doing and their personal lives and things like that, but me, I never went away from the job to gossip and socialize.

02-00:31:04

Dunham:

Would you say it's because you loved the work itself?

02-00:31:07

Lew:

I don't know. I still don't go out of my way to socialize. It only means trouble I guess, for some people. Gossip sure can be false, I've learned. It's just like I have—I'd better not say.

02-00:31:24

Dunham:

Yeah, that's okay. Well, I'm just struck, I think, it feels like your passion—I mean, as you said you've saved and it's helped you earn and be able to have an opportunity to have and do things, but it strikes me that it was the work itself that you loved and the variety of new work and learning new things that you had a passion for.

02-00:31:48

Lew:

I always kept a garden, no matter where I lived. You know, if I could.

02-00:31:52

Dunham:

So when you were in Oklahoma?

02-00:31:54

Lew:

No, I had no garden, because that was living in large apartment houses in town that had no yard space and it was living in somebody else's. I don't know, I don't quite remember.

02-00:32:11

Dunham:

Is there anything else you'd like to especially share with us today, thinking back on your life and other highlights and experiences?

02-00:32:19

Lew: Anything else you want to ask me?

02-00:32:21

Dunham: You know, we've kind of been all over, because you've had so many different interesting experiences. Well, maybe I'll ask about your last stint at the naval air station in the eighties, if you can differentiate. Do you remember the last time you went through? Was it different in any way? Now that was not wartime.

02-00:32:42

Lew: The boss wouldn't give me overtime. He said, "You just came back, you don't know anything or remember much." Hey, I didn't forget anything, I just went right to work. I can do house repairs, anything, and I always did my own. I don't generally hire people. When you hire people, it's a mess. I've hired some people to do some tile work and they screwed it up. I hired somebody to put a bathtub in and it went awful — men too at the job.

02-00:33:17

Dunham: Yeah, that's frustrating. I wish I could do half, a tenth, of what you can do, because I have the same frustrations with hiring people, but unfortunately, I don't know how to do it myself. I don't have the same aptitude.

02-00:33:32

Lew: Well, now, I'm awful weak, so like I went to the dumps this morning, so I carried one, two, three, four cans; one for messy garbage, another for plastic junk, two of them, and one for green stuff. So this time I cleaned—it didn't rain much last winter, so the stuff didn't rot. So I had to sort through every lousy thing by hand and got three or four bags full of stuff that didn't disintegrate. So I loaded up the car and I have a passenger car, so I have something over the seat so it won't get all messed up in the front, and I load it all up.

02-00:34:22

Dunham: Have you had passenger cars most of your life or have you had trucks?

02-00:34:24

Lew: No, I always had trucks.

02-00:34:26

Dunham: I kind of thought so.

02-00:34:29

Lew: Pickup trucks all the time. I had a pickup truck and a little Honda CRX, and that darn car gave me fifty miles to a gallon. I ran it up and down Washington State and Rossmoor, and ran over 250,000 miles. I thought I'd better get rid of it before it leaves me somewhere where I don't want to be. I really miss that little car but it didn't haul much. It did haul a real heavy engine thing, because we had a bulldozer in the yard and something broke down. I had to come, I don't know where, far away, to buy the part, and it collapsed the trunk panel.

So I put a plywood one in, a replacement. It was better than that old sort of cardboard thing.

02-00:35:26

Dunham: I guess so. Did you have any questions, Can, at all? How long were you in Rossmoor for, what was that time like?

02-00:35:37

Lew: I went there when I sold my Eureka house and they told me if I move out of state, I have to pay all the taxes on the profit. So I bought at Rossmoor.

02-00:35:48

Dunham: Right, to transfer.

02-00:35:50

Lew: I stayed there. I moved my good furniture in there only, so where did the other stuff go? Oh, what I did was I bought a place up on Whidbey Island and started building on that place from scratch.

02-00:36:09

Dunham: By yourself?

02-00:36:11

Lew: No, I hired a carpenter to build the main building, and I did all the rest inside, things like that. Then, the outbuildings and it was on over two and a half acres. It was land that I landscaped it. It was a lot of work, taking care of it, but it's real pretty. I had the house plans but when my son died, I decided not to do anything more.

02-00:36:47

Dunham: Oh, I'm sorry.

02-00:36:50

Lew: Meanwhile, I was working between that and Rossmoor. I bought them a house in Hayward, but then that's when my son died, I sold the house. I could have lived there, except that every morning the police cars were up and down that street, you know, somebody has been burglarized during the night. So why did I want to live there?

02-00:37:22

Dunham: Sure.

02-00:37:24

Lew: So where did I go?

02-00:37:24

Dunham: So you were in Rossmoor during that. What was Rossmoor like for you?

02-00:37:32

Lew: It was a one bedroom, living room.

- 02-00:37:35
Dunham: Did you like the community though?
- 02-00:37:38
Lew: I went into lost-wax. Do you know about lost-wax?
- 02-00:37:43
Dunham: I don't think so.
- 02-00:37:44
Lew: The Chinese ancient castings that you see in Chinese museums.
- 02-00:37:48
Dunham: Oh, I have your microphone on still, but you want to show me? It's okay, we can take it off, or you can show me after.
- 02-00:37:54
Lew: I've got them in there.
- 02-00:37:55
Dunham: Okay, maybe at the end show me, and I can take a photo.
- 02-00:37:57
Lew: I'll show you later. I did jewelry for myself.
- 02-00:38:02
Dunham: Oh, you made—so it's a type, you created that.
- 02-00:38:06
Lew: You make it out of wax and then you put plaster all over it, and then you fire it and all the wax melts away and leaves the plaster. Then you take the plaster out and put it in another thing, and you melt the gold, the silver or the bronze, and it shoots it into that plaster that's hollowed out. That's lost-wax. It is used for dentures, jewelry.
- 02-00:39:42
Dunham: Interesting.
- 02-00:38:45
Lew: Shang Dynasty made all their stuff lost-wax. It was sort of like that, that's a system. I had it up there but I was trying to sell it, or maybe give it to a museum as a replica. Up in Sacramento, they have a Chinese group up there, they have all these poor replicas, oh they don't look good. Mine look real nice.
- 02-00:39:17
Dunham: Have you been, later in your life, connected with Chinese cultural or arts organizations?

02-00:39:25

Lew: Well, when I was younger, I took Japanese painting, things like that. See that Japanese screen? That's what they put in front of the door, right? You go in on each side, after you take off your shoes.

02-00:39:42

Fukumoto: Yeah.

02-00:39:45

Lew: That's a miniature.

02-00:39:54

Dunham: I'm just curious, your perspective on that for your own life.

02-00:40:02

Lew: I kept Whidbey Island, I sold Rossmoor, and went to New Mexico.

02-00:40:10

Dunham: First time there?

02-00:40:11

Lew: Yeah. Because, I negotiated with my grandson that I'll buy a house in Albuquerque and he'll live with me, I'll pay all the expenses and get him through college. When the house is ready, he didn't come. I heard a different story later, that he was sweet on a Japanese girl. By the way, he speaks Japanese. I don't know if he reads and writes it. His mother was kicked out on a palimony case, so she moved in with him at that the same time. I stayed five years in Albuquerque and had a problem with the renters on Whidbey Island. So, I sold Albuquerque, went back to Whidbey Island, cleaned it up, it was a mess, a big mess. The people, the stairs, they kept a dog there and it smelled 100% urine, and they painted all the walls a different color upstairs and also downstairs. Anyhow, they had thirteen cars in the front, and they put in a million staples on my shop area by stapling plastic up on the open area. They painted cars and they painted the whole place different colors.

02-00:42:10

Dunham: So did you end up selling that?

02-00:42:12

Lew: I went back, I cleaned it up and I sold it and I came down here.

02-00:42:17

Dunham: And how long have you been here?

02-00:42:18

Lew: Here, in this house, four years, and up in Thornton, I had a friend that wanted me to live there. She bought six acres for her husband to do an organic farm, and I'd be ideal there, except that she end up with cancer and she died last year, after five years. But she was going to sell the place and then the bottom dropped out a few years ago.

02-00:42:52

Dunham: Sure, sure.

02-00:42:54

Lew: So I left there and bought this place when she said she was going to sell the place. So, I got my nephew in there watching the place, for free, but then he had to leave too, some disagreement over something. So, I figure I didn't want to stay the last minute while there were all these foreclosed homes for sale. So, this is a foreclosed home. It was a mess and I spent a lot of money fixing it up.

02-00:43:33

Dunham: Yeah, it's very nice now.

02-00:43:36

Lew: They were real dumb people, they were East Indians, and the furnace vent, they had a fur coat hanging from the vent. They never changed it once the three years they lived here. You know, that filter, you've got to change it two times per year? That one was hanging down about 9 inches that far.

02-00:44:03

Dunham: That's scary.

02-00:44:06

Lew: You know, the rest of the house, they chipped everything and they messed up the rugs.

02-00:44:12

Dunham: Well, it's very nice.

02-00:44:14

Lew: It cost me quite a bit of money fixing it.

02-00:44:17

Dunham: So I know we talked about your two husbands. Did you ever marry again or were you—

02-00:44:22

Lew: No, no. Well, I figure if I can take care of myself financially why bother? I did what I want.

02-00:44:34

Dunham: Right. Well, I can see that. That's what I started to say when we were off tape, kind of about there may be sort of this stereotype of an Asian female sometimes, you know.

02-00:44:44

Lew: I guess there's others.

02-00:44:45

Dunham:

But yes, not that the stereotype is valid, but I think you certainly prove, are counter to that.

02-00:44:50

Lew:

My first husband, I had no friends, he didn't want me to know anybody, and we went nowhere except when he took me. We'd hire a babysitter, and then he chased the babysitter. Things like that, on and on, so finally, the ultimatum he liked to tell me, "Well if you don't like it, you can git." So one day I said, "I'm leaving."

02-00:45:19

Dunham:

Well I think beyond that is just how independent you are and how many different things you've done and accomplished is very inspirational to us, I think.

02-00:45:31

Lew:

When he came back the second time, he told me he's never going to work another day, and the kids are just teenagers. He said he will do it now, run the show. He's never washed a dish, even when I went to the hospital to have a baby, the dishes stack up. He never cleaned house, never did anything, and he's going to take over. I said you know, you have a choice. Go get a job, do something. So, what he did was I came home from work one day, the bedroom door was locked. So I unlocked it and he had a suitcase all packed. I said okay, if that's what you want to do, go. So then what he did. I was working in an office paying job, not enough to support a family and him with a drinking problem. He sued me for my house. It wasn't his. You know why? When we left Okinawa, we had a duplex, I gave him the duplex. I took the old house in Oakland and then when the kids gave me trouble, I bought the new house. He then lived there with a female who dumped him after 20 years. So he had no claim on anything. So, he came back twenty some years later, his old girlfriend brought him up to my place, dumped him, and she took off by Greyhound, back to her new man she's living with and he was to die within two months, because every morning when he got up, he was all purple. And he asked for forgiveness. He made a mess out of his own life doing what he wanted. He bought a Jaguar and other fancy cars, he bought all kinds of playthings, he had boats, they bought everything all those years and what do you end up with? Nothing, right? Come back to me, and he wasn't very happy because I had taken months and months to get that job back at naval air station. I wasn't going to give it up because of him — I quit that cooking job. They were paying me \$3.50 an hour. The lady boss was insulting me behind my back to others and skimming money from my kitchen budget too. I was going to the naval air station for \$10 an hour when I left, I was making \$14, \$15 an hour when I retired, and I got myself up into pattern making and layout, another increase. Why did I leave? It was time to leave to collect my pension and hospital plan — I need 5 years more to collect the federal pension.

02-00:48:13

Dunham: In '86, the naval air station.

02-00:48:14

Lew: Oh, I know why. They changed the laws. They were taking away my social security because I wasn't paying into it. You know there's a law for that. When you're working for the federal, you can lose your social security, a year at a time. So I said, I'm not going to lose any more of my social security because I need it for my Medicare. I had thirteen years with the feds with higher earnings than under social security doing wage board minimum work. You don't have social security, you don't get Medicare.

02-00:48:44

Dunham: I didn't know that.

02-00:48:46

Lew: Because when my brother retired from the naval air station, he had no social security time. So after he retired, he went to work for Orchard Supply Hardware for five years and then, he's using his wife's Medicare now.

02-00:49:04

Dunham: Speaking of your brother, I want to close pretty soon, but I just wanted to know, did you reconnect with your family or to what extent were you able to do so?

02-00:49:15

Lew: I'm still friends with my brother, except he's got heart trouble and everything else, like cancer and his wife just suffered a stroke.

02-00:49:22

Dunham: With your mother and father, did you ever have the chance to reconcile?

02-00:49:27

Lew: They took me back when my father was dying and they paid for my trip from Michigan to Oakland, and then I went back to Michigan and he died.

02-00:49:39

Dunham: So was that—how was that reconciliation?

02-00:49:44

Lew: Well, she wanted me to see him before he died, so that meant in other words, it was reconciliation.

02-00:49:53

Dunham: And then you maintained a relationship with your mom?

02-00:49:54

Lew: And then later, when we moved from Michigan, they got me to buy the house next door and they loaned me the money for down payment.

02-00:50:09

Dunham: Well that's good.

02-00:50:11

Lew: After I came back from Japan, I went to that house to live for a couple of years, and of course, the kids would get into teenage problems.

02-00:40:22

Dunham: Well, I wanted to wrap up today, it's been fascinating. I'll just say, are there any last things you wanted to say, reflecting on the war years or anything else, aspect of your life, before we close?

02-00:50:36

Lew: When I was out, those few years, I went to school in San Francisco and took a floristry class and worked as a florist for many years. I did work full-time for a while, but then after I retired from naval air, I went back to work holidays, when they're busy. Before that, I worked for Pacific Phone supplying company trucks with their needs at night.

02-00:51:10

Dunham: Sure, sure.

02-00:51:12

Lew: Then when my son died I just quit and went, you know, that was it, because I was carrying the house, you know, and you have payments. I sold the house, got off of that, but that was a nice house in a way, but not as modern as this and not as large. It had a big yard.

02-00:51:40

Dunham: Well that would be a big playground for you, I would assume then.

02-00:51:44

Lew: Yeah, it would.

02-00:51:45

Dunham: Well, I just want to thank you so much on behalf of both Candice and me today, for sharing your stories. You have had a very inspirational, oftentimes challenging, I think, but also you've been able to handle a lot and persevere it seems like, so thank you.

02-00:52:02

Lew: I always make it, I guess. I'm not afraid to work, so now I'm into trying to get rid of everything. I still have my ladders.

02-00:52:11

Dunham: Well I'm sure somebody would appreciate them.

02-00:52:14

Lew: I've got a lot of tools. I gave my taxman's wife all my lawn and garden tools that I didn't think I ever need here, so I took it up to Rio Nido and gave that to her a couple weeks ago.

02-00:52:29

Dunham: That's very nice, very nice. Well, thank you so much. Again, I'm going to close here for now if that's okay.

[End of Interview]