

Male Speaker: Hard question first. Please say your name and spell it.

Carroll Dee Brown: Carroll Dee Brown, C-A-R-R-O-L-L, D-E-E, B-R-O-W-N.

MS: Carroll, what year were you born and where?

CDB: Born in Henryetta, Oklahoma at 1927.

MS: Carroll, when did you come first to the port area – port of Los Angeles?

CDB: 1944.

MS: Okay. One of these that you are going to have to say – I forgot to tell you is that my questions are not going to be heard by anybody.

CDB: Well, I don't care.

MS: It is okay. But you – so, if I say to you, when did you come to the port, and you say 1944, no one knows what you are talking about.

CDB: Yes.

MS: So, you have to say, I came to the port in 1944.

CDB: That's right.

MS: Okay. So we are going to start that again in a second. So, tell me again. Start with, I came to the port.

CDB: I came to the port in 1944. I stayed three months and went back to school the next fall.

MS: I understand that those three months were pretty and interesting months.

CDB: Oh, brother.

MS: Tell me about that.

CDB: Oh, they were really something. I came out – I worked on the farm. This lady asked me to come to California and work for the summer. I did. I thought as the richest guy ever went to – back home to school, to have Christmas, and I broke [laughter]. Is that what you wanted to hear?

MS: No. That is great. You are very good. So, when you came to work at the port, tell me what did you do? What was it like in those days?

CDB: Well, I wanted a job bad. So, they gave me – to learn to be a welder, arc welder. So, the

time I was – I had never – did make the welder completely. So, it put me on another job out working on the ships after they take them from the – where they made the hull and take them down to the outfitted dock. So, I got to work with the one ship pretty well done. It was already under construction. By the time we got through with it, here comes the Navy and had taken over the ship for a thirty-day run. I went from there, back home.

MS: Well, describe the work you did. I mean, it was dangerous work. Was it not?

CDB: Well, I went to school. The hulls were right there beside me, putting that – building them from start. It was all right. Got my eyes burnt one time because the arc – you can't look at a welder when he's welding. I got eye burns for two days. My eyes was in a mess. But other than that, it was really something good for me. I enjoyed – I enjoyed working, period. So –

MS: Tell me about Cal Ship. What was Cal Ship?

CDB: California Shipyards is what it was called. It was during, I think, early [19]40s, up to [19]45. When I came back to California after I'd been out back to school, they were closing it. You couldn't get off. So, I went to work at another place in Torrance.

MS: But what did they do in Cal Ship? What was going on there?

CDB: What they were doing? They were building troop ships. *Victor* was one of them. I can't remember exactly if the other one right or by name. But they got one here in the bay now. It looks like a toy beside these big ones here. But it would just carry troops over.

MS: What did you do when you were working on the ships?

CDB: I was – well, trying to be – go to school there and the shipyards and then I went out to work on the boat. But I hadn't completely finished my – teaching me how to be a welder. But – so, they put me as a helper out there for the next few weeks or whatever it was. I can't remember. But it was – I was – time for me to go back to school.

MS: What did the harbor look? It was middle of the war, right? It was – lots of things going on. What did the harbor look like in those days?

CDB: Well, down by the drawbridge is where the shipyards were set. It had that steak and fish – that cannery across the aisle. It was just a lot of people every day at lunchtime and quitting time. They would sing – they put a band on playing the world music on it. Making the people pick up in their ways of life, take interest in it. But there were so many people at that time had come off the Depression days, and that was a good job for everybody. Why they hired a little boy like me, I could never figure out [laughter]. But I enjoyed working.

MS: Tell me again. I am going to ask you to answer me sometimes more than once.

CDB: Okay.

MS: You can tell me like you did not tell me before. Describe – there are bands playing. Tell me that story again.

CDB: Well, every day at lunchtime, they put the band on music – at the – the people are working there. I guess it's to make them feel good. But it was – they play that music every day. It's good because there's marching music. I enjoyed it. But there's so many things I enjoyed the night I came out here and that was really something different than the way I ever lived.

MS: Now, from an Oklahoma kid, coming to the ocean, there must have been a big change. When you first saw the port, what did it look like? What did you respond to it?

CDB: Oh. I just – to me, it stank [laughter]. It was water. I wish it smelled like a stagnated pond. I never felt nothing but fresh water. But it was such a difference in life. That started me to be living my life. Because I like to work. I'm a – was a good worker, even at the company I worked forty years for, after the plant – after the shipyards closed.

MS: Who are some of the fellow workers when you were working on the ships that you remember?

CDB: I can't remember what happened.

MS: Yeah.

CDB: I couldn't even remember the names anyway, (Harley?). But I could remember – I just know they were all good to me. So, anyway, I enjoyed it.

MS: So, when you came out here, have you ever seen a ship that big in your life?

CDB: I'd never even seen the ocean. I – all I knew is working on the farm and milking cows and eating and feeding the stock and go ahead – then I came to California. It was a different life altogether.

MS: This was a dangerous structure. Tell us some of the accidents that you –

CDB: Oh, I was working on the ship, and there's a man that fell two decks. I just hated going in that hole by – after they cleaned it – took him out and cleaned up the ship. But he was on my mind every time I went down into that hole.

MS: Well, describe that again. What did you see? What happened?

CDB: Well, all I saw was him falling on the floor. He fell – it looked to me like two stories high and landed on that – not concrete, steel floor. I didn't go in that hole unless I had to. But I was all over the ship. I was down where the drive shaft drove the ship. That was the biggest piece of steel I ever saw. Then that ships and big old plates of steel that they built up at the – where they [inaudible] the hull. Then after it came down to the dry dock, they put all the tile and floors. It was nice when it rolled out.

MS: What are some of the other accidents that you saw, or anything you heard about?

CDB: That's all. Plus, I got my eyes [laughter] blistered.

MS: Tell me about that story. How did it happen?

CDB: Well, I best looked at somebody that was welding. You're not – they would tell you to have your sunglasses on. Well, I guess I didn't. Anyway, that night, it just felt like my whole eyes was itching off and burning. Well, you put – I got up, and you put hot packs on – they told us at the beginning of a job, if this happens, what to do. So, the day after, I stepped in and out of the doctor's office there at the shipyards with hot packs. Then the next day, it was okay – and eyedrops they put in my eyes. The next day I was all right.

MS: Well, you are lucky, huh?

CDB: Sure was.

MS: Describe what your day was like. What did you start in the morning? What – how did you get to work?

CDB: Well, we came over to Wilmington at the dry dock. Then we would board a – the ships. Then they would carry us over here and let us off at the dock. As good as I can remember, it cost five cents to ride the boat over. But it was a lot – really something. I mean it was a life turning over completely for me. I'd never left home and went over 80 miles from home, and I came all the way to California. I loved that job. I wanted to go back next year. Then World War II was closing. They were getting – letting the men go.

MS: What did you – when you were back home in Oklahoma, what did you know about California? What were your images of California? What did you hear about it?

CDB: Well, I just heard there's a good place to work when I was – before I came out. I was always dreaming of going to California. Then little old [19]36 Fords and fixing whatever, letting them go into California. But I came on the bus. But it was a different life altogether.

MS: What about the time at San Pedro? Did you spend any time in the town?

CDB: No. I spent all my time at Redondo Beach. They called it Sunset Courts. It's two blocks off the beach. In the evenings, you know where I went – the beach. [laughter] So, it was really – I just grew up those years.

MS: Let us go back to the job. So, you arrive in the morning. You have to take me through it. What did you – you get off the –

CDB: First, you got off and get to work. Then you go check out your tools. That was a burner – you had to burn the torch. Then you had to make a V-shaped plate. Then you had to weld that

plate and so it's three or four layers of weld. You've got to – had to make little beads to go right across. Then, you thought you had one of the prettiest pieces of metal to -- welded. You go and have it inspected. That would be a slag hole. So, you didn't pass it.

MS: But because this was war, that had to be a perfect weld.

CDB: Yes. It had to be – yes, you're not kidding. It had to be perfect. It was really a difference. I just enjoyed it though. But you know, a little – a boy at 16 years old but very old.

MS: So, what – so, that is your training. You were doing training welding, right?

CDB: Yeah, training welding. By the time I got out on the ship was getting close to time. Then they just put me doing anything that's around. Nothing – after that, I didn't have to weld because they knew I was going home in a week or so.

MS: Did you see ships being launched?

CDB: Oh, yes.

MS: Tell me about that.

CDB: They would take and break that bottle of champagne on that thing. It would shoot out in the bay here. Then they – here comes the tugboats along. They took on the tugboats on each side of it. Then they took it down to the – this end of the shipyards and back it into a space there. That's where we worked on it. But when they get there, they had to take all this equipment, set it up on the ship, and everything, including the bathroom, we used. That was a mess.

MS: But – so, during the war, they were turning out ships like –

CDB: It was.

MS: Describe how –

CDB: I think it was about thirty – I can't say about how long it was. I know I worked on – partly on one and partly on another after getting out of school, so – but to – it was so pretty the night they moved us all off, and here the Navy moved in. All you can see are the white hats and their uniforms out on the deck. Then you hit it, back it out into the bay, and off for a thirty-day run to inspect it. But I actually thought that was a big ship. I didn't make up that big a float.

MS: Yeah. It is surprising how they are going stealing everything.

CDB: They take them today, that ship down here in the Bay, looks like a little ship beside the ones we have today.

MS: Did you ever – when you were – how many hours did you work a day?

CDB: Eight hours a day.

MS: What happened at the end of the day?

CDB: I think we went to work at 8:00 a.m. as good as I remember, and off at 4:30 p.m.

MS: What – when did you end your day, and what did you do after you left?

CDB: Went home and took a bath and headed to the beach. [laughter]

MS: How much were you getting paid in those days?

CDB: I was getting – I think it's a dollar an hour, ninety-five cents, or something like that. It's within that area that like – but that was a lot of money. I've never made anything hardly. My bank account kept growing. My mother says, "You send it home to me." So, all I ever did that year was play pool and go to the beach that summer.

MS: So, you never went over to San Pedro across the Bay?

CDB: No, I never did.

MS: It must be a pretty lively place there [inaudible].

CDB: Yeah. The other thing, in Redondo area and all these beach towns, they had this – the lights all painted gray, facing the ocean. Because they had – I heard there was other ship – not ship but out often in the Bay here and round Santa Barbara. They were after those oil wells out there. You probably didn't run into all that.

MS: No. No. No. Absolutely wondering about that. You said this was life changing for you.

CDB: Sure was.

MS: Tell me about that.

CDB: Well, I was going to school, of course, and studying all the time. 10:00 p.m. that night, I'd get down to the [inaudible] – to teaching my class and then go in with – and work on, until I get so sleepy. I had to go to bed and then back up in the morning, go to school. It was such a change in life. It was a complete change in life. Plus, never been away from my home. I didn't leave because me and my parents were this – I went because it's a good place to make extra money. Of course, I was out of a large family. There were a lot of people to take care of beside me.

MS: Do you remember – we were talking about any other kinds of stories, adventures you have when you were here.

CDB: Well, as I say, I went in at 8:00 a.m. and went out at night. I worked hard for being a

welder. But I had – the time I got here, got a job, and time I got a little schooling in and – well, I learned a lot. I learned how to handle your finances. I heard – learned how to take and do something on my own and have something to show for what I did. So, that made plenty of difference from the way I was raised. But I never would want to go back to that farm. This is my life.

MS: So, what about girls? Did you have a chance to meet any girls?

CDB: Well, I was really young. They were real young. They were in school and everything. But after I came out the next year, the women looked nicer. I went with girls at – those days they started smoking. They – well, I wasn't used to kids smoking. Then they were drinking. I went with quite a few different young girls. Then I went to a dance one night. I ran into another girl that's from Canada and had – she was nice and clean. Then I said, this woman's going to be mine. Now, I was with three boys to the dance. I said, "You guys drive your car home. I don't want you even around my car. Number one, you're filthy. My –" this woman's a nice lady. So, she became my wife and three – five months, then we raised ten children.

MS: Well, that is a story we are telling again.

CDB: Yeah.

MS: Describe it. You were at this dance.

CDB: I was at – I went to the to the dance down in Redondo. We went in there until late. Then I ran on to this girl. I danced with her one. Then I danced with her again. Then I asked her to take her home. Well, after the dance, we walked down to my car. I had a pretty [19]41 Ford. I was so proud of it. We put her in – she – we got in. I took her home. Then I took her out the next night. From then, we danced – sometimes I danced until 5:00 a.m., let her off, and I had to be at – that was when I was working in Torch. I had to be at work at 8:00 a.m. that morning. Here I was, dead [laughter].

MS: What attracted you to her?

CDB: What did I like her for? The way she was raised. She was – never smoked. She never used any poor language. She was really what I liked. I was raised in a church. So, I still wanted to be with the – all I saw were girls that's going to school. Now then I'll tell you what happened. I'm going to my 1945th school reunion. This girl that I'd liked in school is still alive. So, I've got to – she's waiting on me. She told me – my sister-in-law – wait until he gets here, see how he looks. So, I take in the – married my wife. We would stay married fifty-four years. Then I lost her with cancer and memory. She lost her memory so bad, I had to babysit her practically everything.

MS: That is a terrible disease. So, you never worked at the port again after those three –

CDB: No, that's all. Because – now my daughter and her husband worked at the naval shipyard up until they closed. So, they liked that. There was a Todd Shipyards. There was LA, I think,

something LA Shipyards here when I worked there. But this was so much coming to me at such a young age. A lot of stuff I didn't get.

MS: You look at the port today. How would you talk – what is the difference from where you were to the way it is today?

CDB: It's much cleaner.

MS: You have to say, "The port is different or something."

CDB: Huh?

MS: You have to tell me, "The port is much cleaner than it was."

CDB: That's cleaner.

MS: Yeah. Start again. Okay. Go.

CDB: I think it's much cleaner. They have removed all these old buildings that we've had here. I went around all the tour through the bay here – the port. I saw all these old buildings getting torn down. They're putting – things torn down. They could land. They're getting ready to build more. It's all over the Bay. I went – took a boat ride. It was really something very educational to me to see it that way.

MS: Well, describe the way it was when you were working here and then describe the way it is today. What was it like then?

CDB: It's hard to me to tell that exactly because then everything was new to me. All I remember was there's just a lot of metal [laughter] around and a lot of workers. Of course, it was so different to have to work for – probably starting out. You know, I always knew my father worked hard. I worked from – on a farm for my dad. He worked at a public job too. So, I knew he had to work. I never was in debt, from the time I started until today. So, I don't think I'll have to have to worry anymore [laughter].

MS: Good for you. That was an unusual accomplishment.

CDB: I have friends that's turned the same age as I am. They can't get enough money to live today because things are so expensive. But they're trying to get by on social security. I don't receive my social security retirement or nothing. It goes to the bank. So, I've been blessed very much, just having a good job, a good, sound body, and I'm still in pretty good shape.

MS: It is good to me. Are there any other stories you want to share with us about your days in the port?

CDB: Well, I can't think of anything right now.

MS: Well, they are great stories. Thank you for coming by.

CDB: Sure.

MS: Is there anything else you wanted to share with us? That is it.

CDB: Well, I'm thinking I guess not right now.

MS: Okay. Well, this is great, Carroll.

CDB: Yeah, I'll pick up the – my pictures and some pictures of when I was 14 years.

MS: Good. Well, now I will show you where Nancy is, and we will –

CDB: Then there are ships – the pictures of me but not so many of the shipyard because –

MS: Tell me that again. You said you worked with your hand. Tell me that story again. "My life is my hands," you say.

CDB: I did construction by day. Sometimes I was building a garage. Sometimes I was tearing a room off; I was adding another room on. I did concrete work as good. When I built garages, I built them for \$1,500. That was two of – me and another guy. He was a Redondo policeman. I worked at a ship down at the National Supply in Torch. What we would do, we would do the slab, frame it, put the roof on it, and then I'd stucco it. Many a times, late – after I retired completely, quit working from the companies, I went to work with a guy repairing apartment houses. There was one day, I pulled a kitchen ceiling out. Before I went home that night, that kitchen sink was in. The ceiling was in. The stucco finished to be painted.

MS: I should have known you when I was working on my kitchen ceiling.

[laughter]

CDB: I've done a lot of houses, a lot of rentals.

MS: That is great.

[end of transcript]