

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historical Society

Interviewee: Esther Litton (EL)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Esther [Lozano Clewette] Litton early childhood, parents and grandparents history,

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TM: Today is Friday, May 22, 2020. This is a Grand Canyon oral history interview with Esther Litton. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Esther, how are you?

EL: I'm fine, thank you.

TM: Great. This is a phone interview. May we have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

EL: Yes, you do have my permission.

TM: Thank you. Esther, what year were you born?

EL: Well, I was born in 1919. November 18th, 1919.

TM: And what can you tell me about your grandparents?

EL: Well, my grandparents, both of them, were born and raised and educated in Mexico City. Their antecedents had come originally from Spain many generations before, so they really didn't have any connections or allegiance to Spain. They considered themselves Mexican and Mexican citizens. And they had—they were married, I think, in the 1880s [October 3, 1888, San Sebastián Martir church, Mexico City]. They had four children, two daughters and two sons. My mother was the oldest of the four. She had a younger sister and two younger brothers. But in 1909 (Esther corrected this date), my grandfather was appointed the Mexican consul in Los Angeles, California, so they made their way to Los Angeles. Nobody spoke any English and my grandparents never learned English. They thought it was impossible. But, of course, the others, my mother and the other children—sisters and brothers, did learn English. But in 1909, they established their home in Los Angeles in an area called Westlake Park, which was not in the exact middle of Los Angeles, it was not exactly [a] suburb because it was well-developed, but there was an artificial lake which was called West Lake(?). It was a shallow lake. And there was a nice park there [KR cannot find a reference to the lake]. So that was the area where they settled. In 1910, my

grandfather was sent from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City for a year, and then he came back to Los Angeles and then he was sent to Vancouver, British Columbia. So he had several different sitings. But in 1911, Pancho Villa and Zapatas started the peasant's-- the people's-- revolution. So as it grew, my grandmother was more and more reluctant to go back to Mexico because the trains were being stopped and robbed and burned. Although relatives in Mexico City insisted that was just a gang of peasants and not to worry about them, but my grandmother reluctantly did not—she was afraid to go back. So by 1913-14, the revolution had upset the presidency of President Porfirio Díaz and he was out and Zapata was in and my grandfather no longer had the posting. So they depended on my mother and their children to get jobs. My mother had been a reluctant person to come to California because before they left, she was a wonderful pianist and had been given a scholarship to the conservatory of music [Mexico City Conservatory of Music] to continue her piano studies. So it was not a happy time for her to come to the United States. They did rent a piano so she could keep on playing. But then when she had to—went to work—in one of the department stores to teach women how to knit and sew and crochet and embroider. That was her marketable skill. So in 19... The neighborhood—the boys went on to high school and all and they learned English very quickly and so did my mother's younger sister and so did my mother, in fact. My mother had excellent command of English, with grammar and the pronunciation and everything. She was very adept. But then in 1911, their neighbor, a young man, was—lived in the neighborhood—and it was my father's family. He was not Latin. He was American. And in 1918, my mother was about 25 and my father was a couple years younger. But they got married, and of course, World War I broke out. And he was stationed in Fort Lewis in Washington state. They went up together, she rented the room in a house. But then the war ended in 1918, and they returned to California. My mother was pregnant, and November 18, 1919, I was born.

TM: So hang on, Esther. Can we go back to your grandfather and grandmother for a minute?

EL: Yes.

TM: What were their names?

EL: Oh, my grandmother was Delfina Pradillo, her maiden name. There were many other names in between, you know how they do. [Maria Lioria Dolores Pradillo Montañó, b. 7/23/1864] But anyway...

TM: Yeah, and your grandfather?

EL: And my grandfather's name was José Lozano [José Lozano y Castro, b. 1863 estimated].

TM: And I just want to ask: What did your—how old was your grandfather when the presidency changed in 1913-14 in Mexico?

EL: I think he was about 40 [50].

TM: And what did he do? I mean, he was suddenly out of a job.

EL: Yes, well, that was when my mother stepped in and started working and probably the boys, her brothers, found some work. And that's a good question because I really can't tell what they did. But I do

remember the house where we lived and I remember a horse-drawn cart run by a Chinaman, was a vegetable cart where my mother would buy the vegetables. And one day, when I was about three, the Chinaman asked if I would like a ride on the buckboard. So my mother let me ride just a few feet, and that was it. That's one thing I do remember about that area. But to go on...

TM: Well, can we talk a little bit about your growing up... Well, let's see. I, you know, thinking about your parents, then...

EL: Well I did want to explain about my birth because at that time, obstetrics was not as capable as they are now and my mother had a very difficult birth. She was in labor for two days and the doctor said the only way he could save her and the child was to perform a Caesarean operation, which was very dangerous at the time. But he said that was all he could do. So he did perform the Caesarean, but something went wrong because she had a very bad infection for three months. So my grandmother and my aunt took care of her and me until she recovered. My father got a job at the Southern California Music Company in Los Angeles where he was a bookkeeper. And I think his pay was nine dollars a week. And—

TM: Esther, what was the name of your mom?

EL: Oh, Sara.

TM: And her last name?

EL: Yeah. And her married name was Clewette.

TM: Okay. And your father's first name?

EL: Roger. [Roger Earl Clewette]

TM: Roger, okay.

EL: And his family had come from Nebraska, someplace like that. They were essentially farming people. But anyway...

TM: Did he get some schooling, then, before the war or in the war for bookkeeping?

EL: No, he got the job after the war.

TM: Okay, so he learned about bookkeeping after the war, then?

EL: I think that must be, maybe. I really don't know how he learned it, but it was not a very big job or challenging job.

TM: Okay, and your mom and dad, then, wanted to stay in Los Angeles after the war because your mom's folks and brothers and sister were there?

EL: Yes, and my grandparents. They moved in with my grandparents in the house they had. And my father went to work in Los Angeles at the music company. And my mother, when she was well enough, after I was about three or so, she found that there was work to be done for the studios—the movie studios. Cecil B. DeMille had a studio. There were three studios in Culver City, which was a long way from where they lived in Westlake Park. But my mother found temporary work off and on in Culver City. And it looked like it might materialize into something more permanent, so the family moved to Culver City to a rented house, which was just a block away, and my mother started working off and on and more steadily. First at Cecil B. DeMille’s studio, where she worked with a designer named Adrian [Gilbert Adrian]. And when Adrian—it was around 1926. And when Adrian moved to MGM [Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studio], he was hired by MGM. He asked my mother the head dressmaker, [Hanna Schroeder], to move with him to MGM. And she [my mother] could walk to work. But while they were there, while it was between 19—until 1926—my mother purchased a lot, a few blocks away from where we were renting, and she had a house built. The lot was about 50 by 150. And it was a short block, mostly of duplexes and a few single homes. So we moved into that house, but by this time, my parents got a divorce, so my mother was a single mother and my grandparents always lived with us. And while my mother was working, my grandparents took care of me and I attended the Palms School, grammar school. And my grandfather used to walk me to school, which was about four blocks away. When he walked me to school and [would] come and pick me up at the end of school... [It was a] particularly good situation, it was a short block, but at one end, the transportation was an electric [trolley car] called Venice Short Line and at the other end of the block was a very good bus system. And so... did you have question?

TM: I did. Can you tell me the name of your school again?

EL: Palms. And it was from kindergarten, and at that time I met a girl in kindergarten with whom I went through grammar school, high school, and college. So I knew her for all of our growing up years.

TM: Oh, wow. What was her name?

EL: Carol, and her last name was Schieve.

TM: Nice, and you met her—

EL: We graduated at the same time at UCLA.

TM: Fun, you met her in kindergarten?

EL: What?

TM: You met her in kindergarten?

EL: Kindergarten, yes.

TM: That’s nice!

EL: *[Laughs]* It was a long, long friendship. But in about 1930-1931, a new high school was built about five or six miles away. And it started with the seventh grade, which they dropped after the first year, so it became an 8-12 school. But to get to it, I used the Venice Short Line, which would take me up to a place where I can get off and walk across a field to the school, so the transportation was easy to do.

TM: And did you do that with Carol everyday?

EL: No, actually she lived just a few blocks from the high school. I don't know how she got to the other grammar school, because that was quite a distance. Anyway, we did go... And one of the things I remember about the high school... It was a beautiful school of the two-story brick building. And then there was a cafeteria and a multi-use room. And then there was a building for physical education. And I remember—and I took Spanish because it helped me to learn the grammar, but in addition, my grandmother taught me to read first because we would get a Spanish newspaper, and at the bottom of a page, on one of the pages, was a script, in Spanish, of Tarzan and the Apes. And so she taught me to, every afternoon when I got home, that there was a new cartoon she would have me read it. So I learned to read Spanish before I actually went into high school. But it was four years—well, it turned out to be almost five years, because I entered in the seventh grade—and I graduated from Alexander Hamilton High School in 1937, in January of 1937. And I started college. We all—it was a commuter college. UCLA [University of California Los Angeles] was a commuter college. There were about 6,000 in the school. And so many of them came from east Los Angeles, which was a long commute. And the way I got to school was one of my girlfriends had a little roadster. And this friend Carol and the girl who had the car, her name was Charlotte, and the three of us would get into the front seat and drive to Westwood to UCLA, and that was our transportation.

TM: Hey Esther, can we back up a little bit?

EL: Yes.

TM: Did your mother have any more children?

EL: No. No, she was told if she ever had another child, it would require a Caesarean and she would die. She could never [have] a second Caesarean, which is curious because nowadays, it's the procedure of choice.

TM: Right, but the risk at the time of infection was terrifying.

EL: Yes. Yes, it was. Yes, it was. It was very difficult.

TM: And in high school, what subjects did you really enjoy?

EL: Well, I had art classes and I had English and I had some science, physiology and biology. And social studies and history and Spanish. I don't know if there was any particular one that enjoyed more than another. I do remember in the social studies class, it was a male teacher. At that time, the women teachers were single. And if you got married, you got fired. And I remember the social studies teacher, who was a man, mentioned to us in the class that he was having trouble keeping up with expenses

because he was only getting \$3,000 a year. It was hard to make things go, so anyway... Did you have another question?

TM: Well, it's interesting. Just thinking about \$3,000 a year. That was a little on the top end of the average wage, the average earning, back in the late 30s, early 40s.

EL: That could be, could be.

TM: Interesting. But it was in LA.

EL: And when my mother started working on a permanent basis at MGM, she was getting \$17 a week.

TM: Yeah, yeah. Okay. And I was also thinking: Going to college, was that something that was expected of you or was that driven from you as something you wanted to do?

EL: Oh, no. I wanted to go. All my friends were going and my mother was anxious that I go because she wanted me to have something to count on in the future, if the necessity arose. And the majors at UCLA mostly led to teaching certificates, so she was hopeful I would get a teaching certificate to rely on if I needed it.

TM: In those days, women's opportunities were pretty limited for teaching, or—

EL: Very limited. A lot of the students at UCLA, after they finished four years, they went on to get a master's because they couldn't get any jobs.

TM: Right. So when you headed to college as a freshman, what—was there anything that was attracting you, specifically, as far as an area you wanted to learn about?

EL: Well, I was an art major and a French minor. So I knew Spanish already and I wanted to learn another language, so I made French my minor. And supposedly, at the end of the four years, and you did your practice teaching—I would do my practice teaching in French, which would've been a disaster. But as it turned out, I did my practice teaching in Spanish, which worked out very well.

TM: Nice. Were you, then, thinking about becoming a teacher?

EL: Well, that was the goal of that particular major. That was what you were going to get at the end of the four years or the fifth year. So that was where I was headed. It's good a thing I didn't become a teacher. But anyway, I enrolled in the French class—I was a freshman. It was September 1937. And we were seated alphabetically. We were referred to as "Miss./Mr." And there was one seat empty next to me. I don't know why. Somebody dropped out. But Martin [Litton] came in. And he was supposed to have graduated in June of '37, but the languages—he was an English major—and he had failed the English comprehensive, which they take at the end of four years. So he had come back to kind of fill in the time until he could take the test again. And so he signed up for French I. So he came in after the class had started and he looked around and he saw a girl with a last name of "L," and he thought she looked pretty good, but there was no seat next to her. So the only seat available was next to me. So—but he had been in the ROTC and he had also been on the crew, rowing for the four years of his time at

UCLA. And then his senior year, he'd been the varsity stroke, which didn't mean anything to me, because I didn't know anything about crew. But that was his athletic history. Well, he sat down next to me, and one day, he came in with the uniform of the ROTC, the jodhpurs, the boots, the scabbard and blade, and looking, you know, very military. And he had asked me out to a couple of French movies. Since we were taking French, we went to a couple of French movies. And he invited me to the Scabbard and Blade Ball. And forever, he always told about it as if I had just rolled over in the aisle with delight, because I was a simple freshman and he was a senior. I was supposed to have been overwhelmed by this invitation. But the thing is, he was a very poor dancer. It was the only dance we ever went to. But anyway...

TM: Where—so, fill me in a little bit about this guy that comes in and sits down next to you. Where was he born and where was he from?

EL: Okay. Martin was born in Inglewood [California]. Actually, he was born in the same hospital I was born in, Los Angeles General. His father was the veterinarian and his father had started out with big animals, in the town called Gardena, where there were many Japanese farmers, dairy farmers. He dealt with their horses and their cows. But then the times were tough and so he moved to the small animal business in Inglewood. He had a little hospital on the main boulevard and the house next to it. And Martin's mother, who had been raised in San Francisco... Anyway, she would help him—her husband, Martin's father—with the animals, not the veterinarian business, but if people brought animals in or came in to collect animals, she would help, you know, just give them their animals. And so she was right next door. And I think Martin always thought that [laughs] that was what I would do, not the animals, but that I would be the little homebody. And anyway, his father was the veterinarian. He had learned veterinary medicine in San Francisco, where he met Martin's mother, who had grown up in an area called Twin Peaks. And during the big earthquake in 1906, she and her family had to camp on the sidewalk, while they watched the city burned. But the veterinary school at that time, when she was growing up, or when my father-in-law was growing up, was in San Francisco. And he had been encouraged to do this, because as a teenager, he had made his way from Tennessee to California and had worked in Imperial Valley on a big ranch owned by a man who had quite a bit of money and who encouraged him to get a degree. So that was why he made his way to San Francisco and took the veterinary school [course].

TM: What was his name?

EL: Clyde. I think his middle name was Thomas. The last name was Litton.[Clyde Thomas Litton]

TM: And Martin's mother?

EL: Her name was Elsie [Phillipa] Martin. And Martin's name was really Clyde Martin Litton. His first name was really Clyde.

TM: Yes, and so now that makes sense. He was named Clyde for his father and Martin for his mother. That's beautiful.

EL: Yeah. But they ended up calling him Martin. And he had two sisters and a younger brother.

TM: Esther—

EL: He was the oldest.

TM: Let's go back for a minute. Who were you named after?

EL: Oh, I was named for my mother's younger sister, who was named Esther. And I was Esther Lozano Clewette.

TM: Lozano.

EL: Which was her maiden name.

TM: Oh nice. Okay. Okay, so you were mentioning that Martin had brothers and sisters?

EL: Yes, they're all gone except his younger sister, who is in a nursing home at the moment. [now deceased, 7/4/20]

TM: And were they older or younger than him? Can you go through that again?

EL: He was the oldest.

TM: He was the oldest.

EL: He was the oldest.

TM: Of how many?

EL: He had—it was Martin, then a younger sister, and then a younger brother, and then a younger sister. They were—first Martin, then his sister, then a brother, then his sister.

TM: So just like you and your—no, no. I'm sorry. Just like you with two girls and two boys. Okay. Okay. So there he is—sits down next to you. And you must've started talking and...

EL: Yes. He was very annoying because he'd reach over and write in my book and I thought, you know, this is a bit kindergarten.

TM: That's funny.

EL: [*laughs*] But anyway, we did date and then he did pass the exam in the following year in 1938. And he went to work. His first job was in December and January and February in Arizona in a dude ranch called the Wigwam, which was near Litchfield Park, which is near Phoenix. And his job was to take pictures of the guests. The Wigwam was owned by Goodyear, because Goodyear had large acreage of cotton—a special cotton that they used for the tires. And they had built this dude ranch, which anybody could go to, but it was especially convenient for Goodyear executives. And in the winter, when they were back East in the cold, they would come out and spend some time in sunny Arizona.

TM: That makes sense.

EL: Yeah, and Martin's job was to interview the guests and take their pictures and take pictures of the activities and send pictures of the guests to their hometown saying "Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so are vacationing at the Wigwam in Arizona." And one of the guests asked Martin if he could arrange to drive him to the Grand Canyon. His lady friend was coming out from Chicago and he wanted to take her to see the Grand Canyon. So Martin arranged for—borrowed a car—and drove the couple to the Grand Canyon and that was his first view of the Grand Canyon.

TM: And you hadn't seen it by then?

EL: He had not seen it, no. He'd never been anywhere...

TM: No. No, you.

EL: Oh, no. Oh, heavens no. *[laughs]*

TM: Okay. You know, hang on a minute, Esther. Did—you know—during the summers when you were in high school, did you travel out of the city at all? Did you get a chance to go up into the mountains or out to the beach?

EL: Oh, yes. Yes. I'll tell you what. My mother, who was working, would only have maybe only a weekend to do something, and so I think when I was ten years old, she took us all—my grandparents and me—on the liner that went out to Catalina. And we stayed in a hotel which, of course, I had never done. And it was the St. Catherine Hotel. I don't think it's there now. But the casino was being built at that time. The island belonged to Wrigley of Wrigley gum. And he developed Avalon, the town, and I can still smell the wonderful fragrance of the area. And I explored the hotel and the trip over was only 25 miles, but it took some time on the liner, so it took the whole day to get there. Now they have something that goes faster. But at that time, I was ten. And my mother and I did return there a couple of times in later years for a weekend. And we'd go on the glass bottom boat and then we'd, you know, see the—had a wonderful zoo. But then, in addition, my mother knew that my grandparents were pretty much confined to the house all the time, so she tried to find things where she could take them. And one summer, she rented a house in Balboa, Newport Beach, that area. And we were there for several days, with my grandparents. And then another time, I took music lessons in the center of Los Angeles. And at the depot, the end of the line, a depot—there was an ad for Mount Wilson and also Mount Lowe. We never made it to Mount Lowe, which had a hotel, but we did go to Mount Wilson, which has the observatory. And I think it was by car, that we went there. And we stayed in a little cabin when I was about, oh, maybe 13... like that. And I remember looking through the telescope and seeing the moon.

TM: Wow.

EL: Well, it wasn't so wow. It just looked like a photograph. And I thought, you know, it was going to be something really fantastic. But there was that strange feeling of being in outer space. And there was a large tower [they] did some studies of the Sun. And there were the homes there of the astronomers

and, of course, Hubble had been there, working on his experiments and it was he—the telescope is named for him. But he started at Mount Wilson.

TM: Right. Did you learn how to swim?

EL: Yes, I did. I learned to swim when we went to Balboa. Yeah, I never had lessons, but I did kind of learn to swim there in that shallow water. Yeah. I think it's so important that children know how to swim.

TM: Yeah. And, you know, get out... Did you—I'm assuming it would've been tough for your mom to do any kind of camping or anything...

EL: Oh, we never did anything like that. We did go later in my teens. We did go to Lake Tahoe to Emerald Bay and I think I was maybe 17. We did manage to go to Sequoia National Park, the Giant Forest. And she loved the mountains and the forest, but she was not a sports person at all. Due to the infection that she got when I was born, she had a lot of trouble with her legs. She developed phlebitis. And she had a lot of trouble. She loved to walk and in a higher elevation, she could walk more easily. But anyway, we did go to Sequoia, we did go to Lake Tahoe, Emerald Bay.

TM: Did you go to Yosemite?

EL: No, no. We never went to Yosemite until I was married and we took my mother there.

TM: Okay, alright. Yeah, just trying to get a sense of how much outdoor exposure you might have had growing up.

EL: Yes. Well, she enjoyed the mountains very much and nature and all that, but she couldn't be very active. And I never joined the Brownies or the Girl Scouts or anything. She didn't—she was very protective. I was not allowed to do things like that. However, when I was 15... When she built the house, she also had a large two-car garage, not attached to the house, but in the back. And I think that the contractor convinced her she should put a garage, but we didn't have a car. But when I was 15, the tailor with whom she worked—it was a large room that held the tailors and the milliner and her embroidery people—knew the sheriff, and in 1935, the sheriff wanted to get rid of his Buick, which was a big four-door black Buick. And I don't know what he charged for it, but the tailor—my mother never learned to drive—but the tailor convinced my mother that she should buy that car and have me learn to drive.

TM: Wait, wait, wait. So your mom doesn't know how to drive and someone she works with convinces her she needs to buy this car for you?

EL: I didn't catch the last thing.

TM: Well, you know, the friend convinces your mom to buy the car for you. That's pretty good.

EL: Yeah [*laughs*]. Well, he figured I could learn to drive. So she got a driving instructor to teach me to drive. And one of the first things we did when I learned to drive—well, I about about 16 or 17—we drove up to San Francisco, my mother and I. We stayed in Daly City in a motel and by that time, the Golden

Gate Bridge had been built. But she asked for a driver to drive us around because I didn't trust myself in San Francisco and I didn't know my way around. So the driver took us to all over San Francisco and across the bridge, and we came back—I drove back home—we came back by way of Monterey and Pebble Beach and... well, not Big Sur. We got back onto the main drag.

TM: Where was the main drag then? This is the early 1940s?

EL: It was about 1935, '36, '37.

TM: Okay. How did—where did the road go, from LA up to San Francisco?

EL: Well it was called El Camino Real. And there was no freeway. It was just a four-lane road, and it went through, well, San Jose, and up through the peninsula, up to San Francisco. But it was just a four-lane road. It was called El Camino Real. We always referred to it as El Camino.

TM: Nice, okay. That's pretty good. And I'm—were you, you know, are you a tall woman or a short woman, did you have trouble getting to the pedals and looking out over the steering wheel?

EL: *[Laughs]* I think so. I'm 5'3". And people, some friends used to laugh, because when they saw this big black car, they could hardly find me. And, of course, it had a clutch, you know. And then the front seat, you could sit three people in the front seat, because there was nothing to interfere with sitting in the front seat.

TM: Nice, nice. Big, giant... big, giant all-the-way-across seat. Yeah, yeah. Fun.

EL: Yeah, but my mother especially wanted the car so that I could take my grandparents out on a weekend. I could drive them to Griffith Park, I could drive them to the beach, I could, you know, do something for them. — My grandfather used to do the shopping, the grocery shopping. My grandmother would give him the list in Spanish and he would go to the neighborhood grocery store, which was just a block or so away. And he ordered—he stood in front of the counter and the owner of the grocery store stood behind the counter and behind him were the shelves with all the cans. And so, you'd tell him what you wanted in the way of cans and he would get the cans down. And I think there were obviously some fresh vegetables. So he would get the fresh vegetables. And there was the meat counter, he would get the meat. And I remember that as a special treat, my grandmother asked my grandfather to buy some filet mignon. And it was 25 cents a pound. Because ground meat was ten cents a pound. Anyway, he did the shopping every day. He would go down with a shopping bag and do the groceries for the day and my grandmother would start preparing the meal around three o'clock, and unfortunately, she never taught me to cook. She said, "Oh, you're gonna need cooking for the rest of your life. Don't start now." It was too bad. It was not tortillas and beans, believe me. It was a more of a European menu. And the [clothes] washing was done out in the garage. There was a big tub in the garage and there was a clothesline in the back. And Monday was for soaking the clothes, Tuesday was for washing the clothes and putting them out on the clothesline to dry. And Wednesday was something else, on Thursday was something else, so each day had a particular chore.

TM: Okay. Yeah, yeah. And so when you worked at school, it sounds like you were kept busy... pretty busy with chores, then?

EL: Yes, but also, in the summer school, the art teacher in high school suggested I might like to take some art lessons at an art school, which was near Westlake Park—the same place where I had grown up. There were three art schools there. There was Chouinard, Art Center, and Otis. And she suggested Chouinard. So in the summer—two or three summers—I went there in the summertime for classes and enjoyed it very much.

TM: Nice, nice. What was your favorite type of art?

EL: Well, I kind of started from scratch. I did enjoy the landscape painting very much and I think I enjoyed that one—that particular craft—the most. And so anyway, in 1939, in the summer, I went to Mexico City for summer school. And because I wanted to meet some of my relatives who were there, my mother's relatives, my grandmother's relatives... And so I signed up for summer school for some classes and I went with a lady who was a Spanish teacher at a private girls' school [in Los Angeles]. And the owner of the private girls' school came along too. Her name was Ruby King. And she had a friend, also an adult lady... So there were two adult ladies and Mrs. Chavez and Mrs. Chavez's two teenage girls. So I went with them and I roomed in a private home. I had a room in a private home along with the two adult ladies who roomed in the same house. And I don't know what they did with their day, but I would take the trolley car and go to the school, which was some distance from the house where I was staying. And while I was there, we did manage... I don't know whether there was a bus—not a bus service, but a private car—that took us, several of us, to about 30 miles north of Mexico City to Teotihuacán, which was a ruin of the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon and another building, another ancient building and quite a few remnants of other buildings. It was a fascinating place. There was a small village nearby. And some little boys were selling things that they had picked up on the ground, some little carvings. So we climbed up—the teenagers and I—climbed up one of the pyramids and not like the Egyptian pyramids, they were very easy to climb up. And since then, I have seen a documentary about Teotihuacán which indicates that over the years, they have done much, much exploration and have discovered a great deal of the civilization and the buildings that were there. It was a very extensive civilization and it covered many, many acres. In addition, the two ladies and I did go on a private car to Cuernavaca and to Taxco. And we stayed a couple nights in Taxco, which was a historic town. It was an old silver town which had been the site of the Borda mines, silver mines. And one of the ladies took a picture of me seated in a little stucco house; a very simple dwelling. It was marked "Humboldt's House." I didn't know at the time, but it had been where Baron von Humboldt had stayed during his exploration of Mexico. Later I found out—I read a lot about Humboldt... And he was very upset about what he saw in the silver mines, the treatment of the miners. And when he got to the United States in 1800, he met with Jefferson and told him about the mineral resources of Mexico and suggested heartily that Jefferson explore the unknown west of the United States. And it was at the time that Jefferson had sent Lewis and Clark in 1804 and 1805. But anyway, it was curious that I was sitting in Humboldt's house...

TM: Did your grandmother and grandfather ever go back to Mexico to visit their—

EL: No.

TM: Never?

EL: No. My mother never went back and neither did my grandparents. However, my mother's brother, the oldest one, did go back and visit my grandfather's brother, who was still living. And at one time, when I was a teenager, my grandfather longed to go back to see his two brothers. And my mother had arranged that I would take him. And so it was all set up. I was gonna go and take him to see his brothers and one of the Mexican ladies who worked for my mother said, "You know, he may have trouble getting back in." So the whole thing was cancelled. But the ladies who worked for my mother were never American women. They were always Mexican women, Hispanic-speaking women. It was curious, because the large room where she worked and the wardrobe had all of the tailors. And she had a section for the embroidery, the work that she did. There was another section for the milliner. So there was a lot of Yiddish going on and then Spanish going on. And the whole working community of the studio was very cosmopolitan. It was a very interesting community, but they were the people who really made the movies. My mother had nothing to do with any of the movie stars. Her work was with the designer[s], of whom there was more than one.

TM: Okay. What was, what—I'm gonna shift for a minute back to Mexico City. You're 20 or 19 or about...

EL: I was 19, yes. I was 19.

TM: What most inspired you about that trip to Mexico City? You came away from there, what was—what were one or two things you brought away from that trip?

EL: Well, I enjoyed the people and I enjoyed the classes. The teachers of the classes in their summer school. And some of the students who were there. And I enjoyed going out to a city called Amecameca, from which you could see the two volcanoes very easily. And I enjoyed a restaurant on the main drag of Mexico City called Sanborns. It was referred to as the House of the Tiles because it had a lot of Spanish tiles on the walls. And I enjoyed that and another side trip, friends took me to the city of Puebla, which was historically very important. And so there were some side trips that I particularly enjoyed. And my mother's cousins took me to the Virgen de Guadalupe, the church that has the burlap of the painting of the Virgin. It's very famous in Mexico. Pilgrims come on their hands and knees to that particular little church to do homage to that particular painting. The strange part is that—I think every—that Portugal has a virgin and, of course, France has a Virgin of Lourdes. I don't know which is the one in Portugal and I think Italy has a virgin, so everybody has a painting of the Virgin. And, of course, the church at Taxco was really wonderful, I enjoyed that very much. It was an old, colonial city.

TM: How long were you on the trip to Mexico City and all the country around?

EL: How did I find the area around it?

TM: No, how long was the trip? You went down with the teachers and—

EL: Oh, I went there for two months. I was there July and August. And when I came back, I came back on the train by myself, for some reason. And it was while I was on the train in September that I heard about the Blitzkrieg, [Hitler's] entrance into Poland. And during that time, while I was in college, nobody paid any attention—much attention—to what was going on in Europe. Oddly enough, the political science class that I took, the professor said that the country to have worry about is Russia. He didn't mention a thing about Germany and all we knew about what was going on in Germany was in the Fox Movietone News, where we would see something about the youth camps and the gigantic audiences Hitler was getting, you know, for his speeches. And there was a great deal of pro-Hitler feeling in the United States at the time. And everybody said, you know, that there was nothing special going on. There was no criticism of it. However, when I was like a sophomore, the son of the president of Czechoslovakia came to speak. And he warned—he told us what he saw going on. Czechoslovakia was very concerned that they were gonna be next [after] Austria. Also, the writer Thomas Mann, a German writer, spoke to us about what was going on in Europe. But unfortunately, Dr. Mann had a very thick German accent, so I couldn't understand what he was saying. But we knew that they were all saying things to try to make us aware of what was going on in the rest of the world. There were peace demonstrations off campus. I never attended them, but anyway... In 1939, when the Blitzkrieg happened, we were suddenly awakened to what was happening. And then the Fox Movietone News, then we saw a little bit of what had occurred in Poland and in Czechoslovakia. And Austria, of course, had welcomed Hitler. They thought, "Oh, it's gonna be just fine." But from Austria, he went to Czechoslovakia, and then the Blitzkrieg in '39 in Poland. But we were pretty much ignorant.

TM: By '39, you're in college and you're dating Martin?

EL: Yes. And then from his job in Arizona, he went to work at... '38, '39. '39 when I was in Mexico, he was working at the Los Angeles Times. And his job was in the basement. He said he was digging up the glue the kept dropping off of the presses and whenever the newspapers came rolling down, bundled, and ready to be distributed. And so anyway in '39, that was it. And then in '40... I'm trying to think what... I guess he was working—eventually worked up to the classified ads. He was writing classified ads. And since he had been ROTC, he was called in in July '41. And he was stationed in the Hamilton [Field] in the Bay Area [northern California], which is in Marin County. And he invited my mother—his mother and me—to come up... No, no, no. He invited my mother and my cousin and I to come up and see him at Hamilton [Field], which we did. I could drive. And we drove up to see him while he was there. And that was July '41.

TM: Took the Buick up there?

EL: What?

TM: You drove the big black Buick?

EL: [*Laughs*] Yeah, yeah. And so anyway, he was assigned to a fighter group, a fighter plane group. And he wanted desperately to learn to fly. He wanted so much to learn to fly. So he applied for the fighter group but was rejected because he's colorblind. And so then the whole group was sent back east to Arkansas, Louisiana, and North Carolina for what they called "army games." And they came back just

before the first of December 1941. And that was when he invited his mother and me to come and see him in Oakland [California]. And at that time when I saw him, he proposed, so I accepted. And then, of course, Pearl Harbor happened a week or so after that. And he saw a notice that they wouldn't let him in flying the fighter planes [since he was colorblind]. He saw a notice about glider pilots that needed volunteers for learning to fly gliders. So he applied and was accepted. But—and the training was in Texas. It was in Waco and Dalhart and even in Little Rock, Arkansas. So we were engaged, and at that time—I don't know whether when we were engaged or after we were married—but we purchased a lot in an area of Los Angeles called Brentwood. And Brentwood had very wealthy homes, but it also had very modest homes. I think O. J. Simpson had a home in Belvedere—Bel Air—not Bel Air, Brentwood. And Shirley Temple had a home in that Brentwood... But the lot that we purchased was at the end of a street that went up about, elevation about 600 feet. It wasn't very high. But it was lovely. It was—the lot that we purchased was the last one [remaining] on the street. And there was a middle-sized Cape Cod house that was the last house on that street and then our lot. So I'm trying to think...

TM: You know what? You know what? We've been yik-yakking for about an hour. Maybe it's a good time here in 1941 to wrap up part 1 here and we'll yik-yak again in part 2. Does that sound like a plan?

EL: Well that sounds just fine. Except I should shorten it, because it's...*[laughs]*

TM: No, no you shouldn't. No.

EL: He had a chance to, after he finished the training [for] the glider pilot. He said, "I have two weeks off. I'm coming home so we [can] get married." So with just a week's notice, we were married on October the 27th, 1942, and our honeymoon took—and streets were blacked out, cars were blacked out, and all that. And we were married in [the] Inglewood Church across the street from his mother, from where his parents lived. And we spent our first night at the Riverside Mission Inn. The next day, we made our way through the for—to the [Mojave] desert. Amboy Crater and Needles and all that. And we ended up at night, quite late, at the El Tovar Hotel in the Grand Canyon. And the next day, we—with the car—we cruised around South Rim and then started off north because he was gonna let me off at Colorado Springs and send me home on the train while he went on up to Denver. So we made our way...

TM: Okay. Esther, Esther. Wait, wait. I have now a bunch of questions about 1941, before we get to 1942. So I tell you what. Why don't we wrap this up here and we're gonna come back and pick up 1941.

EL: Well, I hope I can remember. I'll have to make some notes.

TM: You have been doing an amazing job. I'm just tickled. So if you can hold the line for a minute. This is going to conclude part 1—

EL: Well, I hope I didn't go into too much detail.

TM: Well, you're doing fine. You're doing just fine. And so this will conclude our part 1 oral history interview with Esther Litton. My name is Tom Martin. Today is the 22nd of May, 2020. And Esther, thank you so much.

EL: Well, you're very welcome. Just let me know when you want to start again.

TM: Okay. Hang on a second.

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