

## ORAL HISTORY\* OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN MOTHER.

Here are edited excerpts from an oral history with Beatrice Morales Clifton, a mother of four children when the war began and who grew up in southern California.

My father's family was born in Mexico. They were from Durango. My parents married in Mexico. My dad was a factory worker. He used to weave material for the textile mills. My mother was one of those workers, too, and that's how I think that they met. They had three children in Mexico, two girls and a boy. Later, on the change of life, I came.

I didn't have any particular friends, just the girls we saw at school. When I went to the movie, I'd meet some other girl that I knew and we'd meet the boys in there. I was pretty young when I had a boyfriend, Alfonso Ortiz. He was about seventeen and I was maybe thirteen. We went together for about two or three years.

[Beatrice later met her first husband.] His name was Luis Escobosa, a Basco; real light complexioned. He was twenty-seven years old when he signed the marriage license. I was fifteen. The next year, I got pregnant. I was hardly ever with my husband because he was a salesman. He was always out of town. He'd come and go, come and go. Then I got pregnant again with my daughter. I was constantly fighting with him because of money. Later, I divorced him.

[Beatrice remarried in 1934 or 1935 to Julio Morales.] After Pearl Harbor, we moved to 214 Pasadena Avenue. They took a lot of Japanese away,\* and they left a lot of houses. But I had a lot of trouble because they wouldn't rent to me because I was a Mexican. They'd tell it to my face. That used to make me feel kind of bitter. One time, one of them told me, "Why don't you say you're Italian? You could pass\*." But finally I got this house, that was a pretty good size. There were blacks and there was white, Mexicans, and I guess over there on Pasadena Avenue there must have been quite a few Japanese people. All these people owned their house, but I didn't own mine.

I'd never thought about working. But the more I kept thinking about it, the more I said, "That's a good idea." So I took the forms and when I got home and told my husband, oh, he hit the roof. He was one of those men who didn't believe in the wife ever working; they want to be the supporter. I said, "Well, I've made up my mind. I'm going to work regardless of whether you like it or not." I was determined.

I filled out the papers and I got the job. To me, everything was new. They were doing the P-38s [a fighter airplane] at that time. They put me way in the back, putting little plate nuts and drilling holes. They put me with some guy - he was kind of a stinker, real mean. A lot of guys at the time resented women coming into jobs, and they let you know about it. I messed up something, made a ding. He got so irritable with me, he said, "You're not worth the money Lockheed pays you."

He couldn't have hurt me more if he would have slapped me. When he said that, I dropped the gun and went running downstairs to the restroom, with tears coming down. This girl from Texas saw me, and she followed me. She was real good. She was one of these "toughies"; dressed up and walked like she was kind of tough. She asked me what was wrong. I told her what I had done. She said, "Don't worry." She started cussing him. We came back up and she told them all off.

As time went on, I started getting a little bit better. I just made up my mind that I was going to do it. I learned my job so well that they put me to the next operation. At first, I just began putting little plate nuts and stuff like that. Then afterwards, I learned how to drill the skins and burr\* them. Later, as I got going, I learned to rivet and buck.\* I got to the point where I was very good.

I was just a mother of four kids, that's all. But I felt proud of myself and felt good because I had never done anything like that. I felt good that I could do something, and being that it was war, I felt that I was doing my part.

I went from 65 cents to \$1.05. That was top pay. It felt good and, besides, it was my own money. I could do whatever I wanted with it because my husband, whatever he was giving to the house, he kept on paying it. I used to buy clothes for the kids; buy little things that they needed. I had a bank account\* and I had a little saving at home where I could get ahold of the money right away if I needed it. Julio never asked about it. He knew how much I made; I showed him. My money, I did what I wanted.

I started feeling a little more independent.\* Just a little, not too much, because I was still not on my own that I could do this and do that. I didn't until after. Then I got really independent.

\*Have students research and discuss these.

From *Sherna Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 203-19.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Why did Beatrice's husband not want her to work outside the home?
2. How did having a job and money make Beatrice feel independent?