

**Angela Dzhigneyan
Jarrell Holgado
Leemai Valensi
Juan Villasenor
Interviewers**

**Dick Lee
Interviewee**

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at Dick Lee's House
Sherman Oaks, California**

Angela Dzhigneyan - AD
Jarrell Holgado - JH
Leemai Valensi - LV
Juan Villasenor - JV
Maya Azoulay (Leemai's mother) - MA
Dick Lee - DL

Leemai Valensi: So we are gonna introduce ourselves first.

Dick Lee: Okay.

Leemai Valensi: So I'm Leemai, Leemai Valensi.

Angela Dzhigneyan: I'm Angela Dzhigneyan.

Juan Villaseñor: I'm Juan Villaseñor.

Jarrell Holgado: And I'm Jarrell Holgado.

DL: Okay.

LV: Okay and we're gonna ask you some questions from the period of 1930s to World War II, that time period, and about your training and experiences.

DL: And about what?

LV: Your experiences.

DL: Okay.

LV: Alright? Okay, so could you tell me what your childhood was like?

DL: Very dull. See, in 1930, we had moved under the house that I grew up in. I was about 6 or 7 years old. I had experience when I was about 3 years old. There were no [unclear] in our neighborhood and I, except a girl who lived here around the corner and we were playing together one day and she got the bright idea that we should undress.

(laughter)

DL: Three years old, four years, I don't think we were four. So I started to do that. We're on her porch. Porch was a screen porch with [unclear] and we got to the point where we were undressed and [unclear] her grandfather. The door was locked. So we had time to get dressed and I got dressed and ran out of there. And I have been running ever since.

MA: Nice memories.

LV: So would you say that was a memorable moment of your childhood?

DL: I think that it was very memorable.

LV: Could you remember any more memorable events like that from your childhood?

DL: Nothing, very [unclear].

LV: Okay, that's fine. So around what period were you a teenager? Around what time were you a teenager?

DL: What time what?

LV: Were you a teenager, around the ages of 13 to 18?

DL: 13 to 18, it was exciting. I'll tell you a story. This is true so help me God. Graduation came around, it was time to graduate. The night before the Tuesday before I met a friend of mine who had just moved from Chicago to Los Angeles and we met and talked and wanted to go to the [unclear] So we decided to go camping. And the other guy, he joined us. It was three of us that time [unclear] I've never met the guy before and I've only met this guy like twice in two months that he was here. We got in my little car [unclear] and, coupe, had a big shelf behind the front seat [unclear] inside the trunk we put our shelves. They had guns. So we got the guns from up the shelves. And we went to Lake Superior, and this is in Minnesota and we went to Lake Superior and we, it was very late when we got there. I couldn't find any place to camp so we just [unclear] to some big property on the lake and camped on their property and made sure they weren't there. We set up our tent and beds and went to sleep and I was, breakfast. First morning

I had to make breakfast. So I was up making breakfast and next thing that happened a man came with a gun in my back.

LV: Wow.

DL: He said he's gonna shoot me and I said "well there's two guys in the tent with pistols so you're gonna be shot." So he finally calmed down. He said he was [unclear] was on the property and I said "well join us for breakfast and then we'll leave." So he joined us for breakfast and then we left.

LV: Cool.

DL: And we went on to another small town and we got three girls. Two of them, two of my buddies [unclear] in the girl [unclear] and I had one girl go with me. And we didn't hit it off at all and so...

(laughter)

DL: We were supposed to meet in a cafe, beer joint. The beer joint was one of these old beer joints [unclear] cushioned curtain [unclear]. So we walked in and pulled back the curtains and my friends [unclear] with guns pointed at us and it turns out that while the girls with our friends was gonna get [unclear]. Her husband was very unhappy with it so we got [unclear] we left there and went back to camp and went to sleep very early and got up very early and

-- [unclear because of airplane passing] --

DL: Axe handles, and they chased us. The only reason we got away from them is in Minnesota, in June, we got these big travel potholes. When the ice goes away it takes the pot away with it. [unclear] so we got away. It was quite a trip.

LV: Yeah, that sounds like quite a trip. Let's see. What did you like to do in your free time? What did you like to do in your free time as a young man?

DL: I used to write.

LV: Write?

DL: Yeah.

LV: Cool. Did you have any pets? Any pets? Animals?

DL: No, I had a dog, yeah.

LV: A dog?

DL: Nick.

LV: That's cool.

DL: We lost him when I was about 18 years old.

LV: Awh. Do you remember, uh, the Great Depression? Do you remember the Great Depression?

DL: Oh I certainly do.

LV: Do you remember when it started on Black Tuesday? With the stock...

DL: No, I don't remember that.

LV: You don't remember it?

DL: I was still, it was '29 and I was 8 years old. My dad had a barber school and I would go down there, and this is when I was 10, not 8, so that would make it '31. That time was still very tough and former millionaires would come into the barber school and get a shave and a haircut for 25 cents. That's all they could afford. They were millionaires, they were several of my dad's customers.

LV: Did your dad's shop ever... did your dad's shop ever... did his business ever have difficulty during that time?

DL: I'm sorry. I'm having a terrible time hearing you.

LV: Did your dad's business, the barber shop, did it have...

DL: School.

LV: Or the school, did it have any difficulty during that period?

DL: No.

LV: No?

DL: No.

LV: Okay, that was good. Could you remember any more hardships that you or anyone you knew went through during the Great Depression?

DL: I am not hearing you at all, I'm sorry.

LV: Could you remember any hardships, like difficult events or that you or anyone else you knew went through.

DL: No. The neighborhood I lived in was not affected at all.

LV: What neighborhood was that? Where were you?

DL: In St. Paul, Minnesota. The school I went to was not affected at all. [unclear] wait I realized it was bad [unclear] my dad's barber school and see some of the people that came in there and other than that I was not affected that time.

LV: Okay.

JV: FDR, ask him about FDR.

LV: What were your opinions on President Franklin...

DL: I'm sorry?

LV: What, what were your opinions on President...

DL: On what?

LV: On President Franklin Roosevelt?

DL: Well I thought he was great. I voted for him four times.

(laughter)

DL: He was the only one who, the only president who ran more than once, more than twice.

LV: Do you remember the previous president?

DL: Hoover? No, [unclear] no.

LV: No? Okay, did you have a job during that time, in the 1930s? In that decade?

DL: I worked at my dad's barber school [unclear].

LV: Oh, okay. So, now getting into the period of World War II and your training for before that. So how did you get into your...

DL: In the service?

LV: In the service, yeah.

DL: I volunteered in the air force. I wanted to fly.

LV: Where were you when you volunteered? In Minnesota?

DL: No.

LV: Okay, so what happened after you volunteered?

DL: My girlfriend at that time gave me a New Yorker and gave a story about a fourflusher. You know what a fourflusher is?

LV: No.

DL: A guy who's [unclear] can't defend on anything he says.

LV: Oh.

DL: He had a great story about him. He had married a woman who is 50 years older than him and they fought about money all the time and he said one time, she threw a pack of money at him and he picked up \$30,000 before he could even realize he had been [unclear].

(laughter)

DL: I had a story about [unclear], this resort which was very expensive at that time. It cost you \$10,000 to walk across the threshold. Very expensive hotel. And...let's just start from the beginning. When I got into service I went into barber shop and got a shave. And I got into camp and I had barber's itch, a thing that bothers me a lot. So when the soldiers went out, when my group went out to hike, I went into [unclear]... the doctor's office and got treatment. And after that I could go out and hike. And I could [unclear] going on hiking. So I bummed out and I found out that there were a hundred soldiers, a hundred volunteers in my groups that could go back to [unclear] and of course I was the first one out. And we got there and there was this beautiful hotel and we went right past it [unclear] and had these huts that they put up for us. They were air conditioned. We went right straight through it without an interference.

LV: Okay.

DL: I got there and we goofed around a couple days not knowing what to do and that night, when everyone left the office I went in the office and sat down and write letters home on carbon paper and I wrote what I had to say on carbon paper and each individual one I added a thing. And I got caught at it and [unclear] work. And I was the only one in the office who knew how to do a morning report. Reports of how many are there, how many are sick, how many are missing, all of that and I could put it together. So I was doing that for a while. And then I got transferred to Hawaii and I got some training. And I was in Walla Walla. I was booking for a captain and there were three of us. And the captain wanted to seem important so he sent two of us down to his school, in Florida. And down in Florida, I had a hell of time. We were transferred to Hawaii and the training I got in Walla Walla, from the school I went to qualified me for a teacher and they put me to work there so teacher. B-24 crews. I've [unclear] in the morning and [unclear] and crashed in the afternoon and they had to go through all the maneuvers and told them how to survive in case this crash. And that was my [unclear] experience.

LV: Awesome. So after your training in Hawaii, where did you go?

DL: I stayed in Hawaii.

LV: Oh you stayed there?

DL: Yeah.

LV: So you didn't actually serve in the war, right?

DL: Well I didn't do any active service...

LV: Right.

DL: ...any fighting.

LV: Why didn't you actually get to serve in the war?

DL: We were scheduled to go to Japan but we dropped the bombs and Japan [unclear] and then go to Japan.

[camera interruption]

DL: [unclear] Japan [unclear] got me out of service earlier.

LV: Yeah. Do you remember where you were in the Pearl Harbor attacks?

DL: I was driving, God forsaken spot, and I had my radio on and heard it on the radio.

LV: So how did you feel about the Japanese during that time.

DL: I'm sorry?

LV: How did you and others feel about the Japanese during that time?

DL: We didn't love them.

LV: Right, yeah. Do you remember seeing or hearing about the Japanese internment camps?

DL: Yeah.

LV: A lot people didn't like the idea of Japanese being near the coasts.

DL: I'm sorry, a lot of people didn't like what?

LV: Japanese-Americans being near the coast, especially the west coast like in California.

DL: I think it was the same. These were Americans.

LV: So you were against the...

DL: Yeah.

LV: ...internment camps?

DL: As a matter of fact, I was working for the government at that time and one of my duties was to take a crew out and pick up the [unclear]...

LV: Oh.

DL: ...[unclear] guns and we picked up fresh fruit, fresh vegetables. We ate it right out of the garden.

LV: So this was after your training in Hawaii?

DL: No, this was before.

LV: Before? Were there any tremendous, like, experiences or difficulties that you experienced in your training?

DL: In my training?

LV: Yes.

DL: I didn't have any training really.

LV: Oh.

DL: I went to the...go see the doctor to get treatment for barber's itch so I missed all my training. [unclear] go to [unclear] Florida. And I jumped on that.

LV: So what did you do in Florida? At the time?

DL: Basically, in Florida, working in the office.

MA: You mentioned that you were the trained, training other soldier, I believe, how to survive?

DL: Yeah, the B-24 went down the ocean. And we [unclear] the plane and put on, May West we call them [unclear] and [unclear] crash [unclear]. Getting into the crash [unclear] was a hell of a job [unclear] and we got the May West and [unclear]. It's really a job. So that's why I essentially taught them and then we were off to sea, at the ocean and [unclear] ocean [unclear] procedure.

LV: So where were you when America started to participate in World War II?

DL: In '42, I was working for the government at a silver base in California.

LV: Are there any memories you have from...are there any memories from during the wartime?

DL: That's about it.

LV: How do you feel about the war?

DL: It was a terrible thing. Terrible thing. All wars are terrible. The next one is going to be that awful.

JV: Ask him about the...what were your thoughts on the Alphabet Agencies? FDR's Alphabet Agencies?

DL: On the what?

JV: What were your thoughts on FDR's Alphabet Agencies?

DL: That's when I first got my Social Security card there, in that period. There were millions of people out of work and they took people to work and they saved the country.

LV: Do you think that Harry S. Truman was a good president?

DL: I'm sorry?

LV: Did you think that Harry S. Truman was a good president?

DL: Yeah.

LV: Do you remember D-Day and V-Day?

DL: VE-Day?

LV: VE-Day, sorry.

DL: Yeah.

LV: Do you remember where you were? The day of...

DL: I had taken a chief [unclear] country.

(long pause)

DL: You got a question you wanna ask?

(laughter)

LV: Yeah, sorry I'm thinking about it. So what about your wife? When did your wife and you meet?

DL: I didn't meet my wife until 1948. That's long after the end of the war.

LV: Right. Do you think if anything had changed if you had served in the war? Do you think your future would be changed today?

DL: Oh, tremendously. Tremendously.

JV: Do you have any friends that went off to serve or were they on the frontlines?

DL: Oh yeah, a lot of my friends. A lot of them died, unfortunately. They were killed rather than died, killed. Some wonderful, wonderful people. Such a shame.

LV: Do you remember the time where Hitler was very powerful in Europe?

DL: [unclear]

LV: Hitler?

DL: Yeah?

LV: And the... the event of the Holocaust?

DL: No.

LV: Was that big news in America when you were... during that time, was it... did it impact people in America.

DL: Oh yeah. I went to the University of Minnesota and they showed up in uniform.

LV: Oh really?

DL: Oh yeah.

LV: American soldiers or...?

DL: No, there weren't any soldiers anywhere. That was before the war.

LV: Oh.

DL: They showed up in Nazi uniforms. We had a lot of them.

LV: Wow. Was there any, like, fear or terror of the Nazis and Hitler's power and the way he ruled in Europe and Germany?

-- [unclear because phone rang] --

JV: Were you afraid of another attack from the Japanese?

DL: I'm sorry?

JV: Were you afraid of another attack from the Japanese?

DL: I don't understand you.

LV: Were you afraid that the Japanese were going to attack after...?

DL: Our country?

JV: Yes.

DL: Yeah, I guess so, little worried about that.

LV: So how was... what were the views on African Americans during that time? Had the discrimination settled down a little?

DL: It was terrible.

LV: So it was still a big, like, phenomenon in America?

DL: It was terrible [unclear], it didn't affect me. I had black friends. Like, one of my friends gave me some answers to a test at the university that helped me passed the test.

LV: So you didn't really discriminate on any particular, like, races? There wasn't really a big, like, there wasn't a lot of particular discrimination in that, in the area you grew up?

DL: No. You got some questions?

(laughter)

DL: You got two questions? Go ahead.

JV: Were there ever any financial issues for your family, for yourself, during the Great Depression?

DL: No.

JV: Do you have any stories that maybe your friends went through, or you went through during that time?

DL: I was not affected at, at all. I just lived in a [unclear] in St. Paul where everything was fine.

LV: So what was the biggest form of media? Like, how did you listen or how did you hear about big events that were happening in that time?

DL: Radio or newspaper. [unclear] had a sunroom, they called it. And the [unclear] kept our radio [unclear] and listen to the radio.

LV: Do you remember Roosevelt's fireside chats?

DL: Oh yes, oh yes. Very inspiring. He knew how to talk.

JV: Which one was your favorite? Do you remember?

DL: Oh I don't remember. I think one of it is "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

(pause)

DL: I didn't hear what she said.

MA: What's your date of birth?

DL: 2/24/21.

LV: So when did you leave home? Was that around when you volunteered?

DL: No I left [unclear] for California for about almost a year.

(pause)

LV: Have you noticed how California has changed over time since you came here?

DL: Yes. It used to be [unclear] La Cienega and Beverly Boulevard, in the middle of the street. The first house that I bought, that we bought was [unclear] unpaved street on the corner. Neither street was paved. [unclear] Traffic of course there was [unclear] about traffic.

LV: Right.

DL: And there was, of course, there was no buildings that you have now. All of the stuff that you see was all open ground, vacant ground.

LV: Do you remember during the Great Depression... or did you hear about people attempting to come to California?

DL: Oh yeah, the Okies. The Okies.

LV: Okies, right.

DL: Yeah.

LV: Did you have any particular experience with...?

DL: No. When we came to California first time, the car was Minnesota plates on. They didn't know who Minnesota was. So we went right straight through.

LV: Do you remember hearing about the Dust Bowl?

DL: Hm?

LV: Do you remember the Dust Bowl and the states that were affected by it? Do you remember the Dust Bowl?

DL: No. I remember but I never was in any of it.

(pause)

DL: All done? Solved American?

LV: Do you have any last...

JV: Stories... that you would like to share with us?

LV: About your training or the Great Depression or World War II?

DL: No.

MA: Who's your favorite president of all?

DL: It has to be Roosevelt.

LV: Yeah? Why is that?

DL: Why? Because among other things, before the war, Roosevelt started building a Navy. It was unauthorized but he started building it anyway. He knew the war was gonna hit us and he sort of got the country ready for it.

[camera interruption]

DL: Federal government?

LV: And the citizens of America? Roosev... the federal government?

DL: Yeah?

LV: And American citizens? Would you agree?

DL: Well, we were all [unclear] citizens at that time. This is a war. A lot of people who were not that [unclear] of this country were not [unclear] about it.

(pause)

DL: Okay, kids.

MA: You're tired? You're tired?

LV: Okay, I guess we're finished now.

(37:37)