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Helen August

Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Samuel J. Redman
in 2011

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Interview 1: February 21, 2011

Audio file 1

Redman: My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today with Helen August in San Leandro, California, and the first question I'd like to begin with is an easy one. Can you tell me your full name and your date of birth?

1-00:00:20

August: My full name is Helen June August, and I was born June 9, 1918.

Redman: Did you get the middle name from the month of your birth?

1-00:00:29

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, excellent, excellent. So where were you born?

1-00:00:35

August: I was born in New York, but I spent most of my life in Los Angeles.

Redman: Okay, were you born in New York City, or were you born in the state of New York, or—?

1-00:00:41

August: No, New York City.

Redman: Okay, so then your parents came out to Los Angeles?

1-00:00:48

August: Yes, looking for work.

Redman: Do you know about how old you were when you came out to Los Angeles?

1-00:00:52

August: I was about twelve.

Redman: Okay, so you have some early memories of New York City.

1-00:00:57

August: I do.

Redman: Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about what your parents were like, what they did for a living and what they were like personality-wise?

1-00:01:04

August: Okay, my father was a journalist, and my mother was a housewife until we were grown, and then she became a clothing worker. She sewed skirts and jackets.

Redman: So did she work from the home, did she take in—?

1-00:01:19
August: No, she did not. She worked in a factory.

Redman: Okay. Your father was a journalist, you said.

1-00:01:25
August: Yeah.

Redman: Did he work for a newspaper or magazine?

1-00:01:28
August: He worked for a newspaper, a Jewish newspaper.

Redman: Do you recall the name of the newspaper that he worked for?

1-00:01:34
August: Yes, [The Morgen Freiheit].

Redman: Okay, and tell me a little bit about what your life was like growing up as a small child early on in New York City, do you remember?

1-00:01:45
August: I remember being very ill a lot. I had a lot of allergies, and they didn't know what they were, and so life was pretty ordinary: went to school, went home, walked to school alone. Children didn't need an escort as they do now.

Redman: So you said life was pretty ordinary, but I'd like to hear a little bit about that, going to school. What was your school like?

1-00:02:21
August: The school was very crowded because we were a post World War I group, all of us.

Redman: So people had all emigrated from overseas after World War I.

1-00:02:33
August: Well, I don't know about that. But I mean that there were a large birthrate after a war, after every war.

Redman: Right, so you were part of a, sort of a baby boom generation.

1-00:02:43
August: Yes, yes. So the schools were crowded, and the teachers were pretty rigid, we didn't even have a regular gym because there was no room in some of the old schools. As I grew up, they built the school, and I left and I went to a junior high, and after I left they built the school there.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:03:06

August: It was just one of those things.

Redman: Yeah, so it was a pretty crowded space.

1-00:03:09

August: Yes, it was.

Redman: Okay, so tell me a little bit about what your parents were like personality-wise. What do you remember about them growing up? What were their personalities like?

1-00:03:20

August: Well, my mother was very jolly. She sang all the time to keep her spirits up. My father was always away someplace. He didn't come home until late at night so I didn't see much of him. I had a younger sister.

Redman: What was her name?

1-00:03:34

August: Barbara.

Redman: Barbara, okay. I'd like to hear a little bit about what your father did for work. Do you know kind of stories he tended to write?

1-00:03:47

August: Mostly on labor issues.

Redman: Labor issues, okay. So was that, because I know we're going to talk a little bit about labor issues later on for your own adult life. Did you hear anything about labor issues growing up as a young girl? Was that something that your parents talked about at the dinner table?

1-00:04:05

August: They talked about it, but it was over my head.

Redman: Okay, so it was something that was maybe there—

1-00:04:11

August: It was good to be in a labor union, that I knew.

Redman: Okay, so that was the perspective that your father had brought home at a pretty early age.

1-00:04:20

August: Oh, yes.

Redman: So then tell me, do you remember any of the effects of the Great Depression? Did it affect your family members or members of your community in any way?

1-00:04:31
August: It affected everybody in our community and in our family, too, because my father's paper was not a very wealthy endowed one, and he was always getting cuts in his wages, and it was difficult for my mother to manage.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:04:54
August: But everybody in our group had the same effect.

Redman: Right, yeah, so everybody else was going through it at the same time, but you could see it—

1-00:05:02
August: Oh, yes. We felt it very much.

Redman: Did it influence sort of the foods or the clothing that you wore?

1-00:05:12
August: Yes. My mother made all our clothing.

Redman: Okay, this was even before she worked in a—

1-00:05:19
August: Yes, yes.

Redman: Then she maybe brought some of those skills of making clothing to the factory.

1-00:05:24
August: Yes.

Redman: Then was she, do you know if she was part of the union?

1-00:05:26
August: Oh, definitely.

Redman: Okay, so the union, sort of the union idea was pretty strong.

1-00:05:33
August: Oh, very strong in our family.

Redman: Okay. So then I was going to ask you what the town was like growing up, but New York City is a pretty—

1-00:05:46
August: Pretty busy town.

Redman: Pretty busy town, so what was that like as a child? I can't even imagine.

1-00:05:51
August: Well, there was a lot of tall buildings, and I really can't say.

Redman: A lot of people from all over.

1-00:05:58
August: A lot of people from all over, yeah, busy crowds.

Redman: Did you tend to interact with mostly people in the Jewish community, or—?

1-00:06:08
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and did you go to—?

1-00:06:10
August: Except in school.

Redman: Okay, so school was pretty blended.

1-00:06:17
August: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, now how about going to synagogue? Did your—?

1-00:06:22
August: No, we were not religious.

Redman: Okay, so tell me a little bit about that because it's interesting to me being part of a Jewish American community but your family not being particularly religious.

1-00:06:33
August: Not at all.

Redman: Okay, so was that an interesting sort of balance, or is that something that you just took for granted?

1-00:06:39
August: No, we took it for granted.

Redman: Okay, so maybe Jewish in more of a cultural sense?

1-00:06:42
August: Exactly. You said the right word. They were very culturally Jewish. We spoke Jewish in the family until I refused any more.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:06:55
August: We went to Jewish School that was secular.

Redman: Okay, but the foods and some of the traditions and the language were maintained.

1-00:07:03

August: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay, that's very interesting. So the next question I was going to ask, and you sort of led me into an answer here, but I was going to ask how early on you sort of become aware of your family being Jewish. It seems like almost from birth you would be aware with the language and the food.

1-00:07:25

August: Well, when we went to school.

Redman: When you went to school, okay.

1-00:07:29

August: Some of the teachers did not like us.

Redman: Okay, because of that cultural background. Can you tell me about that? You got a little bit of a different treatment from those teachers.

1-00:07:40

August: Well, I can't really; some of the children didn't like us either.

Redman: Okay, so there were some issues.

1-00:07:52

August: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Okay, okay, and did it take the form of name calling, or—?

1-00:07:56

August: Yes, from the children.

Redman: Okay, and from the teachers it was maybe just a different treatment as far as how students would get—?

1-00:08:04

August: Yeah. I'm not saying all of them, but some of them were. I'm talking about grammar school mostly.

Redman: Okay.

August: Not junior high or high school.

Redman: So by junior high or high school you feel like some, and obviously you moved at age twelve, but by you getting a little older, you feel like some of that treatment dissipated, that different treatment?

1-00:08:27

August: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, interesting. So then did your family sort of teach you to be proud and open about that cultural heritage?

1-00:08:37

August: Yes.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about that.

1-00:08:39

August: Well, as I say, I went to Jewish School. I had a lot of friends there, and it was interesting. We had activities, we sang, we danced, it was a very nice life.

Redman: Okay, so then tell me about moving to Los Angeles. What motivated that move?

1-00:09:04

August: I was sick, and my mother tried to find work. So my father stayed behind, and my mother and sister and I came here.

Redman: So was it a thought about the climate might be healthier for—?

1-00:09:17

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and what was the effect of that?

1-00:09:22

August: Well, I kind of outgrew a lot of, I still had, I still today have some problem, but I outgrew a lot of them. The culture was different here. I didn't have that complete nonreligious culture here that I did back East.

Redman: Okay, tell me a little bit about that.

1-00:09:43

August: Can you tell me why this is involved with the World War II experience?

Redman: Sure, yes. We'll get to the World War II experience in just a little bit, but I'm curious about some of your early identity formation and then some of, the labor question, too, is interesting because it seems that that may influence some of your thoughts—

1-00:10:07

August: Exactly.

Redman: Okay, so when you arrived in Los Angeles you were outgrowing some of the health issues that you may have had, you were encountering a different Jewish community. So was it more, it was less secular you mentioned.

1-00:10:26
August: Yes, but there were still secular people here with whom we buddied.

Redman: Okay, so you became friends with a lot of people in the Jewish community in Los Angeles. How would describe, was it a pretty small community at that time, or was it—?

1-00:10:39
August: Very small.

Redman: Okay, especially compared to New York City, where there had been a pretty vibrant—

1-00:10:44
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so then let's talk about finishing high school. Did you have any favorite subjects in particular, and what was your high school like in Los Angeles?

1-00:10:57
August: Well, the schools here were a lot better than back East.

Redman: Oh, interesting.

1-00:11:03
August: In those days before your time we had excellent schools in Southern California, and maybe up here, too.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:11:11
August: They're not crowded, and the teachers seemed to take more care. So that was a very good experience.

Redman: So you got less of your treatment about, you said that you had experienced some prejudice in New York City that was less the case in Southern California when you got here.

1-00:11:30
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, interesting.

1-00:11:32
August: We had many races in our school.

Redman: In both New York and LA.

1-00:11:36
August:

Yes, but in LA more. We had Japanese, and we had the Mexican, and there was a Russian group here, religious Russians who came in 1900 for religious freedom and the men wore beards and the ladies wore like that back there.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:11:53
August:

So we didn't exactly blend, but we did a little bit. The Japanese kids wouldn't have anything to do with us.

Redman:

Oh, really, okay. Tell me about that.

1-00:12:06
August:

Well, they weren't so bad, but my sister and I complained that we were too far, we didn't want to walk that far, so my mother tried to get a place closer in, and it was in a Japanese community, and they wouldn't rent to us.

Redman:

Okay, so the landlords there were pretty uncomfortable with the idea of your family—

1-00:12:26
August:

The Japanese didn't like us.

Redman:

Okay, interesting. So do you have any other particularly strong recollections of coming to California and finishing up high school and sort of thinking about what your life was like at that point?

1-00:12:42
August:

It was pleasant. I belonged to the World Friendship Club, and different clubs like that, and that was about it.

Redman:

Okay, so then can you situate me time wise by the time Pearl Harbor happened. Do you remember Pearl Harbor and where you were—?

1-00:13:04
August:

Absolutely.

Redman:

Tell me about that.

1-00:13:08
August:

Well, I was home listening to the symphony on Sunday from New York, it was like a quarter to twelve here, and they interrupted about Pearl Harbor. It was a beautiful sunny warm day in December, unusually warm, and nobody in the house knew where Pearl Harbor was.

Redman:

Okay, sure, you'd never even heard of it.

1-00:13:29
August:

Never.

Redman: Okay, but you knew that something bad had happened.

1-00:13:32

August: Very bad, yes.

Redman: Okay, and do you recall about how old you were?

1-00:13:40

August: Yes, I must have been, let's see, it was '41, I was born in '18, so how much? Twenty?

Redman: Okay, so this was post high school.

1-00:13:46

August: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Redman: So what were you doing at that time for work, or did you continuing at school?

1-00:13:52

August: I was looking for work.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:13:54

August: And I didn't find work, so I was going to junior college.

Redman: Do you recall what junior college or what you were studying or—?

1-00:14:05

August: Well, I went to Compton Junior College. I haven't the faintest idea. I know I was studying literature, and I had an argument with the teacher about the death of a famous British author. Harvey, what was his name? Do you happen to know?

Redman: No. Okay.

1-00:14:22

August: Something Har— and I remember disagreeing with him, and I got a bad grade.

Redman: Okay, so you were a pretty lively student at that point.

1-00:14:33

August: I guess so, yes.

Redman: So then you're about twenty years old, and Pearl Harbor happens, and you're trying to find work at that time. The economy was still pretty tough.

1-00:14:48
August: Very tough.

Redman: Okay, so then following the war, did job opportunities appear almost overnight?

1-00:14:57
August: Yes. Southern California became an industrial area during the war.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about that transition as you saw it.

1-00:15:05
August: Well, they started the aircraft industry. There were little factories around, airplane, but on an individual basis more or less, so there was a lot of money poured in, and big companies started and little companies making aircraft and ships. So we had an influx of people from all over.

Redman: So tell me about—

1-00:15:27
August: And I got a job.

Redman: Okay, right. So I'd like to hear about both of those things. I'd like to hear about both your finding work and then the influx of people that was almost immediate to Southern California, people coming from all over the United States.

1-00:15:40
August: People, as I said to you on the phone, they were coming without shoes and with straw in their teeth.

Redman: Sure.

1-00:15:47
August: And they came with prejudice.

Redman: Okay, right.

1-00:15:49
August: Yes, they did.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about experiencing that because you'd mentioned that compared to, there was maybe some, there was prejudice in New York, but there was also this mixing of culture, and then when you got out to Southern California there was even more of an openness about some of the mixing with some exceptions. But then this influx of people, a lot of them from the South, they had some of their own—

1-00:16:15
August: And the Midwest.

Redman: Sure, or the Midwest, and they had some of their own prejudices.

1-00:16:21

August: Let me tell you one that I do recall. I was working at my machine, and an inspector came over to me, I was there about a year or so, and he started telling me that after the war he wanted to buy a gas station and goes on and on about it, and he wanted to leave it to his son, did I think it was a good idea. I said, "Sure." I didn't realize until later he talked to me that way because he thought that Jews know business.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:16:50

August: Isn't that something to experience? I didn't know why he was talking to me like that.

Redman: Right, even though you had no business background.

1-00:17:00

August: I don't know anything about gas stations.

Redman: Wow, what a story!

1-00:17:03

August: Wasn't that something?

Redman: What a story. That's pretty incredible.

1-00:17:23

August: You want the name of my factory?

Redman: Yes, please.

1-00:17:23

August: I'm proud that I finally remembered.

Redman: It took you a while, huh?

1-00:17:30

August: Oh, I felt terrible that I couldn't remember. Adel Precision Products, Incorporated.

Redman: Adel—

1-00:17:35

August: A D E L.

Redman: Adel Precision Products, Incorporated. Okay, great. So how did you go about finding work there initially?

1-00:18:06
August:

Well, you just looked up the number in the phone book and I went to the employment office. First I was sent— We had been on welfare, and so they sent me to, this was interesting, they sent me to a class to prepare for factory work for the women, to prepare for factory work. We didn't know anything about it.

Redman:

And this was in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor?

1-00:18:14
August:

Yes, yes.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:18:18
August:

So we learned little techniques, the techniques, all the different things you have to do, and then I went to an, oh, a friend was going to this particular factory, so I went with him.

Redman:

Do you know how long the class was? Do you recall how long?

1-00:18:33
August:

I think it was something like two weeks.

Redman:

Okay, interesting.

1-00:18:39
August:

That was interesting because not everybody went to those.

Redman:

Right, yes. That's actually the first time I've heard about that, that's interesting.

1-00:18:44
August:

I'm glad I remembered it.

Redman:

I'm interested in what types of things you learned in that short course. Do you recall any of the particular—?

1-00:19:25
August:

Well, we did learn to, what do you call, book and I can't think of the name. You had to put rivets in parts, so one person had to put the rivet in, the other one had to book them on the other side.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:19:45
August:

So we learned that, we learned how to clean out the burrs, the rough edges, we learned how to read, what do you call it, the blueprint.

Redman:

Just read some of the charts—

1-00:20:02
August: Yes.

Redman: So it sounds like this training course could be useful for someone who would work in a parts manufacturing place like you were or in a shipyard or—

1-00:20:13
August: Yes, yes.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:20:16
August: Very, it was very, very good.

Redman: So that was run through—

1-00:20:25
August: The government.

Redman: Government jobs program.

1-00:20:26
August: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay, and do you recall what the people were like in that class? Because I'm curious to hear about how quickly that influx of new people were coming in. Because if you were so on the immediate cusp of that, were people mostly Los Angelinos, or—

1-00:20:46
August: No, this was for women.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:20:49
August: This was a women's class because men are supposed to know about technical things.

Redman: Right, okay.

1-00:20:56
August: No, this is just local women. The Department of Employment set it up, I think.

Redman: Okay, great, so after that two week course you were able to pretty quickly find work at Adel.

1-00:21:09
August: Oh, yes.

Redman: So tell me about do you recall signing up for work?

1-00:21:15

August:

I do recall, I got there with my birth certificate, and they said, “we can’t hire you, your birth certificate was wrong,” because, I never noticed it, but the doctor had written the date with his name four years before I was born.

Redman:

That’s a pretty amazing typo.

1-00:21:35

August:

I go home and get another birth certificate from the Federal Government. They didn’t have another, no, I had to get the first census that I was in. If you ever have trouble with your birth certificate, get yourself on census.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:21:52

August:

Because they had it, my age, and so on, and that got me in.

Redman:

So that was it, you were able to prove your age.

1-00:21:59

August:

Yes, that was very memorable.

Redman:

Okay, so a couple of weeks later then after sorting this all out.

1-00:22:06

August:

Maybe a month.

Redman:

Maybe a month later, okay. So then you were able to go back to the same place.

1-00:22:09

August:

Yes.

Redman:

Now how, did you apply to different places, or did you know that that’s where you wanted to work.

1-00:22:17

August:

Well, they sent me from that class to a parts place downtown, and I worked there for a few weeks until I got to this job.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:22:27

August:

This was better.

Redman:

Do you recall, was it better pay, or was it better, was it closer to where you lived or do you—

1-00:22:33

August:

Well, none of them were close, and at this parts place I had to go at nights. It was a night shift on the street car, and that wasn't too good, and the job was just one job all the time, and this was better. This was a bigger factory, and we were making parts for airplanes.

Redman:

Okay, so you weren't doing the same job all the time then at this factory?

1-00:22:58

August:

Well, no, at first they sent all the women to the burbench which means they clean out the rough part of the parts. That was not the first preparation. Then, we were able to, if we wanted to, if I asked for, I got sent to the punch press, you went like this and like a milky thing, water came down and you punched holes in square parts.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:23:29

August:

Then I asked to go to the, all the same pay.

Redman:

Oh, okay.

1-00:23:34

August:

I asked to go to the machines, so I went to a turret lathe, nobody's got that any more.

Redman:

Right, sure.

1-00:23:50

August:

Since I'm so short, they had to build me a little wooden thing to stand on.

Redman:

Is that right? Okay.

1-00:23:55

August:

You had to stand on something because the grease was coming down.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:23:59

August:

I had my own bench. Every time I had to move, I took my own bench with—. My stand.

Redman:

So do you know, that's—, so do you know how often you changed tasks at the factory? Because it sounds like you had a number of different jobs, so would it be like a couple of weeks or a couple of months?

1-00:24:15

August:

Couple of months.

Redman: Couple of months that you do, and then was it out of kind of boredom with that particular task?

1-00:24:21

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so you sort of master it, do it for a little while, and then switch to something else.

1-00:24:27

August: Right.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:24:29

August: I was one of the first women that got onto the turret lathe.

Redman: Oh, really? Okay, and was that because it was considered a particularly arduous task, or why—?

1-00:24:44

August: I don't know.

Redman: Okay, yeah, so when you were one of the first women taking on this particular task, what did that mean for you? What sort of—?

1-00:24:52

August: Well, I enjoyed it more, well, it was hard work, but it gave me a little more interest because I did more different things.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:25:08

August: What I did was the second operation they put the pipe through the wall from outside, and I had to cut it with machine, and I turned this around and pressed down, and the grease and the lubricant came down over the part.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:25:28

August: I cut it, and then an inspector would come and see if it's the right size, and I did different things like that.

Redman: So the pipe was always coming through, fed through from the outside, and you were repeatedly cutting it.

1-00:25:41

August: It was good and hot.

Redman: Okay, it was hot you remember.

1-00:25:43
August: Well, Burbank is hot. We were in Burbank, a mile from Lockheed. It was hot, besides which the hot air came in. The heat of the lubricant hit us.

Redman: Right, okay, so that made it even warmer. So then tell me about what that, I'm curious about the relationship of the parts plant to Lockheed, and that there were a number of other aircraft manufacturers.

1-00:26:12
August: Oh, yes. We made landing gear, the valves that handled the landing gear.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:26:25
August: And other fittings like that. <tape pauses>

Redman: Oh, no, that's fine. So we were talking about landing gear. So did you know what the particular parts were going, you had a sense of what planes they were going for?

1-00:27:17
August: Oh, no. They told us. They said if these parts are not good, the plane goes down.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:27:25
August: Sometimes the General would come down and tell us that we didn't do a good job.

Redman: Okay, so periodically you would have visitors come in from the military.

1-00:27:34
August: Oh, definitely.

Redman: Okay, in addition to your supervisors. So there was sort of a near constant checkup of your work.

1-00:27:48
August: Oh yes.

Redman: So tell me about—

1-00:27:48
August: I might tell you that some of the people who came from well, even from LA, the men didn't know any more than I did.

Redman: Is that right, okay. So tell me a little bit about what, let's see, what question was I going to ask you next? Tell me a little bit about your experiences in

Burbank with race, and I understand a lot of areas may not have been as segregated as the South, but there was still a lot of racism at that time.

1-00:28:19

August: There was a lot of racism in the middle of the country.

Redman: Right, okay, so—

1-00:28:21

August: It came from Kansas. If you came from Coffeerville, Kansas, you got a good job.

Redman: Okay, yeah, so—

1-00:28:30

August: Because they had never seen a, maybe they'd never saw a Jew, I don't know. But there was a lot of racism, and I didn't know about one thing that bothered me later on, they used to call me a "Jew girl" behind my back.

Redman: Is that right?

1-00:28:43

August: Yeah, and I didn't know it for a long time.

Redman: Okay, and how did you learn about that later? Did one of your friends finally tell you, or—?

1-00:28:50

August: Somebody must have told me. I really felt very bad about it because I thought we were all friends.

Redman: Right.

1-00:28:59

August: I used to, Friday we used to have a, what do you call it, we gambled with our checks, and I would collect it and distribute it and so on. So I thought we were all buddies there for a long time, but that's what they called me.

Redman: Okay, interesting. So you mentioned that you were the first woman working on a particular—

1-00:29:25

August: The turret lathe.

Redman: The turret lathe, but you also mentioned that there were a number of women in the class that you were taking. How many women were there at the factory as far as— Was it fifty percent women by the time you started there? Was it twenty percent, or—?

- 1-00:29:38
August: No, no, it started maybe ten percent and then they had to recruit women. They had ads on the radio all the time, come and make some money and save the country.
- Redman: Right.
- 1-00:29:52
August: So then we had many, many, many women.
- Redman: Let's talk about some of your motivations for working at this plant because I've heard from a number of people that there was a newfound independence of being able to make money and having your own job and having stable work. There's also being able to have a little money in your pocket, to be able to for some people go out and socialize to have a good time, for others to save. But for many people the driving force was sort of a patriotic feeling.
- 1-00:30:26
August: Absolutely. My husband was in the service.
- Redman: Okay.
- 1-00:30:30
August: He was in the second draft. I didn't see him for four years, and I wanted to win the war, definitely.
- Redman: Okay, so there was a motivation of money and stable work, but—
- 1-00:30:42
August: Yes, but patriotism, many women went in due to patriotism.
- Redman: Okay, so many of your friends had spouses or boyfriends
- 1-00:30:49
August: Oh, yes.
- Redman: Okay, tell me about, so you were married at a fairly young age, or—
- 1-00:30:55
August: I wasn't married, I was engaged, but he was drafted before we could get married.
- Redman: Okay, and then where did he serve overseas?
- 1-00:31:03
August: He served in England.
- Redman: Okay, so he was writing to you periodically, and he was kind of always on your mind probably when you were working.

1-00:31:10

August: Definitely.

Redman:

Okay, interesting. So let's talk a little bit more about these people coming in and being from different parts of the country. In what ways was that sort of readily apparent that these people were different? You mentioned that they had straw in their teeth and sometimes they came barefoot. I've heard other stories about people not understanding what a check was or what that meant. What are some other sorts of recollections that you may have about, "Gee, these people are not like—?"

1-00:31:45

August: I only had the prejudice feeling, I don't know much about anything else.

Redman:

Okay, so you—

1-00:31:51

August: A lot of the men, well there were two feelings among the men. One wanted to go in service so their sons later on would not ask, "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" And the others wanted let Europe kill itself and let us make money over here making airplanes.

Redman:

Okay, so some people just didn't care to, and do you feel because one of the—

1-00:32:15

August: Well, there were some things you couldn't put your finger on that they didn't know how to act in a big city.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:32:22

August: But I can't put my finger on it.

Redman:

So some of the social norms that you were maybe used to, they weren't—

1-00:32:25

August: Exactly.

Redman:

Okay, I see.

1-00:32:29

August: Then I ran into one of my really good friends. This was sparkling. It had nothing to do with your report. But she said she holds the money in the family because she used to hold her husband's graft. I said, "What?" She said graft. They came from Chicago, and he was a policeman, and he and his partner had graft, and she would hold it for them. She just said it just like this, no feeling of guilt or hiding, so these different attitudes really struck me from different parts of the country.

Redman: Okay, so in terms of your actual plant and the people you worked with on a day to day basis, were there African Americans and Mexican Americans there as well?

1-00:33:14

August: No, not a one. It was completely white.

Redman: So it was completely white. Did that surprise you at all, or was that pretty normal back in that—?

1-00:33:25

August: No. It was pretty normal.

Redman: Okay. Now let's talk about Japanese American experience because you had had some encounters you had mentioned in the—

1-00:33:38

August: Oh, yes, and I had some friends in the, I was a member of the YMCA, so were all different nationalities.

Redman: So you'd see these folks at different occasions, you had friends, and then when the war comes—

1-00:33:55

August: Oh, it was terrible for them.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about—

1-00:33:55

August: I'll tell you about it. A lot of people that were not Japanese would run down and try to buy up their household goods because they were going to be sent away. They were very worried, but still patriotic, it was funny. I had a friend from the camps who wrote me, she said, "We sang UCLA songs on the way to the camps."

Redman: Okay, so you were still corresponding with some of [your friends who went to camps].

1-00:34:22

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, tell me a little bit about, did you, I mean obviously that made you feel bad at the time, but—

1-00:34:31

August: Very bad.

Redman: Did you have any sort of, was that sort of the primary feeling when you'd read these letters, it was bad, and did it make you feel any particular way about the government, or—?

1-00:34:40
August: No, unfortunately, if the President said it, I believed him. But then I didn't because I knew these people were not spies. They just lived a few blocks away. The Japanese here were not spies.

Redman: So was that a confusing—?

1-00:34:57
August: Yes, it was, very confusing because if the President said, and I voted for him.

Redman: He couldn't be wrong.

1-00:35:04
August: He couldn't be wrong, but he was.

Redman: Okay, interesting.

1-00:35:10
August: Some of them had a very difficult time in the camp, but the children didn't though.

Redman: Okay, and then when they came back, some of your friends, they had sort of a mixed experience, in some of them, you said children, for instance, you thought didn't have as tough of a time.

1-00:35:31
August: Yeah. Some of the adults never came back to Los Angeles.

Redman: Okay, right. It was too hard for them—

1-00:35:35
August: Yeah, they settled in other places.

Redman: Okay, interesting. Do you have a thought on why maybe that was? I mean it was too—

1-00:35:43
August: Well, they just didn't want to come back to the community of the people around or something—

Redman: Sure.

1-00:35:51
August: They kept it inside. They never would talk about it. Never. To their children, too.

Redman: Right, interesting. So let's talk about unions for a little bit. Did you join a union immediately when you—?

1-00:36:04

August:

Well, it was open shop when I came in, and the shifts were terrible for a single person. I had to come in on two relief shifts. On one part of the week I could almost not go home to sleep because I was on a different shift. Then we voted in the union, and everything got straightened up. We had regular shifts and so on.

Redman:

Okay, so that was the primary concern was the way that the shifts were ordered was unfair, and then the union came in and it was able to address that concern fairly early on in your time there? Or was this—?

1-00:36:42

August:

Yes, a few months after.

Redman:

Okay. Now do you recall what union?

1-00:36:46

August:

Yes, it was Electrical Workers, I E W something.

Redman:

Okay, so the—

1-00:36:57

August:

Wait a minute. I E, it was something and electrical, what was it? Because we were working on machines, so I don't know exact, can't remember.

Redman:

Not on a Machinists' Union?

1-00:37:08

August:

Well, it was.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:37:11

August:

But it was machinists and electrical.

Redman:

Okay. So I'm curious about in light of your father's experience in writing about labor issues and growing up in a pro-labor household, what then that experience was like joining this union and participating.

1-00:37:33

August:

I joined and participated, but I was very foolish. I quit after almost three years, it got too much, you know, and the union man said to me, "Why are you girls quitting because we're trying to get higher wages?" And I simply accepted the fact that we got lower wages than the men.

Redman:

Interesting. Alright, so did you know—?

1-00:37:58

August:

So I was naïve although I was pro-union. I would talk up the union to other people, but—

Redman: Tell me about that so the—

1-00:38:07

August: That was the feeling, not the feeling, but that was the way it was.

Redman: I'm interested in how you mentioned that you'd talked up the union to other people because you came from this background where unions, even if it wasn't totally dinner table conversation or if it was sometimes over your head, you maybe knew more about how a union worked—

1-00:38:26

August: Right.

Redman: —than some of the other girls, so did you see yourself as someone in a position to sort of explain some of these things to—?

1-00:38:34

August: A little bit, but I didn't go to the meetings because I had no transportation.

Redman: Okay. So looking back on it, it sounds like you maybe wish you would have participated a little bit more in some of those—

1-00:38:46

August: Yes, if I had a way of getting around.

Redman: Do you think that some of, you'd mentioned the feeling of being naïve, do you think some of that comes from just your youth and inexperience at the time?

1-00:38:57

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, Now—

1-00:38:59

August: It was always like that, women got paid less even in Civil Service.

Redman: So that was sort of the assumption that you'd come in and women were just paid less. Did you know that pretty much from the get-go when you signed up for the—?

1-00:39:17

August: Yes, yes..

Redman: The men signing up even at the same time—?

1-00:39:20

August: Right.

Redman: Okay. Now let's talk about health care and child care. I know you were a young woman, so did you sign up for any health care—?

1-00:39:33

August: They didn't have the health care.

Redman:

Okay, and no child care options I presume?

1-00:39:36

August: No.

Redman:

Okay. Was that an issue for the union, or was that, do you think the main thing were the wage disparities and the shifts, you had mentioned trying to align the shifts in a more fair manner.

1-00:39:51

August: As far as I know there was no health care in any union. What there was was the government in certain areas set up kindergartens that the government paid for for working women to leave their children there for the day, and it was very low pay.

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:40:10

August: In fact, I did that for a few weeks.

Redman:

Is that right? Tell me a little bit about that. So was this after you left the—?

1-00:40:14

August: Before.

Redman:

Oh, really? Okay.

1-00:40:18

August: While I was waiting for my birth certificate.

Redman:

Right, waiting for the birth certificate to get sorted out. You tried teaching for a little while?

1-00:40:22

August: Yes.

Redman:

Okay, and this was at one of the federal government kindergartens.

1-00:40:29

August: Yes, and that was very good. I don't know how expensive they were—

Redman:

Okay.

1-00:40:32

August: But no factory anywhere had any child care or anything, and I had a very good factory. It was clean. Some of the smaller places were very dirty, and the women had to carry heavy stuff, and we did not.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:40:46

August: That was also, I think, union rules. I didn't carry anything. Men had to carry it for me. So it was a good, clean, modern place. It was a bigger place. There were a lot of little shops that were really sweat shops.

Redman: Okay, the factory that you worked in, was it fairly new in terms of, you mentioned it being a clean facility and pretty modern facility.

1-00:41:13

August: Yes.

Redman: Do you get the feeling that it sort of popped up around the wartime or—?

1-00:41:16

August: No, just before the war. It expanded during the beginning of the war.

Redman: I see, okay. So I'm curious, we can get back to unions if you have any other thoughts on that. I'm curious what sorts of things people did for fun at that time in Los Angeles or Burbank. Did you socialize with some of the people that you worked with?

1-00:41:36

August: No.

Redman: No, okay.

1-00:41:38

August: Because they lived all over the place. All I did was go to the movies twelve o'clock at night by myself in Hollywood.

Redman: Okay, so you—

1-00:41:50

August: Nobody bothered me.

Redman: Your fiancé being away, you would kind of lived a period of kind of solitary—

1-00:41:59

August: Yes. The family would go to dinner or the theater, go to dances, but I never could because of the timing.

Redman: Okay, so what's interesting to me, did you mention, I may have misheard you earlier, did you mention that all of the shifts got paid the same at this plant that you were working at?

1-00:42:19

August: I believe so.

Redman: Okay, because at some—

1-00:42:22

August: Wait a minute, I'm not sure. We would get like five cent raises every once in a while, but, no, we didn't get money, but we worked if it was like a night shift, we'd work seven hours and got paid for eight. I think that was the only difference.

Redman: Okay, I see. So there was maybe some advantage to working on the night shift in terms of pay and being let off an hour, but there was other advantages to being—

1-00:42:51

August: No home life or no social life hardly.

Redman: Right, sure. So, now people have told me in some of the Bay Area communities that so many workers came in that things were all of a sudden almost overnight, open twenty-four hours a day seven days a week, so a movie theater would be just constantly playing movies.

1-00:43:12

August: Yes, movies, right.

Redman: Was that a similar sort of thing in—

1-00:43:16

August: I think so, but I didn't go to clubs or anything like that myself.

Redman: Okay, so you'd maybe go see movies and you could go at any time.

1-00:43:23

August: Right, twelve o'clock at night.

Redman: Right, sure. So let's see.

1-00:43:29

August: Let me go back to one health issue.

Redman: Oh, sure.

1-00:43:30

August: We used carbon tetrachloride a lot because they kept the tools from wearing out too soon.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:43:43

August: "Carbon tet" is a terrible thing to inhale. It turns out nobody uses it any more. But we used it, and we used to get sick, nauseous, headache, complained to

the nurse, and the nurse would say, "Well, if you're a drinker, that's what," and here I don't drink or maybe once in a month or something.

Redman: Right.

1-00:44:09

August: I'm a drinker? And they denied it all the time that we were there. Finally, I heard after the war one man did get a settlement because he got terribly, terribly ill. I heard it accidentally. But they all denied it; the whole government, the whole nursing and the doctors, and we were good and sick.

Redman: Okay, so, did your, now I know you had some allergy issues previously. Did you recognize immediately that this was a different sort of illness?

1-00:44:39

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so it was something that would make you like sick and nauseous in a way that your allergies never would?

1-00:44:44

August: Absolutely. It was very, very bad.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:44:49

August: Do I have anything else on health? Let me think.

Redman: Oh, that's right.

1-00:44:56

August: Well, we also had to buy our own tools.

Redman: Oh, is that right? Tell me about that. How would you go about doing that?

1-00:45:04

August: Well, they were getting kind of hard to find. I found one little tool downtown in the very early days, but I was lucky enough to win a whatchamacallit. We had a little like a bingo thing.

Redman: Right.

1-00:45:20

August: And I won a tool box.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

1-00:45:21
August: Right, it was a little decimated by the time I got it, but it was a beautiful wooden box, and it was very well received. But you had to buy your own tools.

Redman: Okay, so that's a heck of a raffle prize or a bingo prize.

1-00:45:37
August: That was wonderful, yes.

Redman: That's interesting. So do you recall what sorts of tools you maybe had to come to work with?

1-00:45:45
August: Yes, we had to have, oh, boy, I'll think about it tonight.

Redman: Okay, that's fine, sure.

1-00:45:57
August: Measuring tools.

Redman: Measuring tools.

1-00:45:58
August: We had to have measuring tools.

Redman: Okay, so these were tools that would complement the larger machines that maybe the factory would have.

1-00:46:06
August: Oh, yes, you had to measure your work, such as with a comtrometer.

Redman: I see, okay.

1-00:46:07
August: This was in thousandths of an inch.

Redman: Okay. So let me ask, you'd mentioned a couple of the names that people had called you behind your back. Do you remember any of those, or some of the instances where it was clear that people were being prejudiced toward you?

1-00:46:31
August: Just the two I told you about.

Redman: Just the two, okay. So those are the only—

1-00:46:34
August: I don't know any, you know.

Redman: Okay. Now, let's see, do you have any other thoughts, I know I've brought up unions a couple of times, but I'm interested if you could sort of sum up some of your feelings about how the union advanced the position of workers at your plant in your experience. What were the good things about unions did you think?

1-00:47:04

August: I really don't know. I think they did establish the wage rate, and I really don't know any more.

Redman: Okay, and you mentioned the shifts as being a major issue.

1-00:47:14

August: I don't know of any, and as I said, the union man said to me I should have stayed around, they were going to try to raise the wages of the women a little, but I don't know, I don't think they did much of anything.

Redman: Okay. So maybe a mixed record of success, but some good ideas and good programs.. Now, did your experience in the union did that shape your perceptions of unions following the war? Because it seems maybe up to that point you had been pro-union pretty much your entire life. Did you continue that feeling as the war came to a conclusion?

1-00:47:53

August: Well, I don't know labor history, but there was a split in the labor movement, and the AF of L kicked out the ones that formed in the CIO, and this was an AF of L union, and this was after the war. The CIO was the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and they were the more progressive union because they took in blacks and whites, and the other unions were only for whites. So I was on the side, and after the war I worked for a newspaper union, so I was very union minded, but I'm not for the AF of L for my union.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:48:42

August: Because they were established and very conservative.

Redman: Okay, excellent. I think I'm going to put in a new tape, and then I'd like to continue talking about that.

Audio file 2:

Redman: Okay, so when we left off you were going to continue telling me a little bit about labor unions and some of the split that occurred immediately after the war, and then sort of some of your feelings about labor unions and labor developments. I also wanted to ask did you have any sort of awareness of in 1946 there was a general strike in Oakland?

2-00:00:30
August: No. I lived in Los Angeles.

Redman: Okay, sure.

2-00:00:30
August: But I know there were many strikes.

Redman: Tell me about the strikes that were happening in the immediate post war year because I'm interested in Southern California as well. There were a lot of strikes down there?

2-00:00:39
August: No, not a lot.

Redman: Okay, some small—

2-00:00:42
August: But, let's see. There were some strikes down there, but I don't remember what they were.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:00:51
August: I wasn't involved, but I was on the side of the CIO, and I worked in the Newspaper Guild right after the war. No, wait a minute, I worked no, I worked at another place and then I worked for the Newspaper Guild, and we were part of the CIO.

Redman: Okay, and so that was the more progressive—

2-00:01:13
August: Yes, it was because we took in every nationality.

Redman: That was a sticking point for you, that—

2-00:01:22
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and do you have some sort of a feeling about where that came from, that that was important to you? Do you think that came from your recent experience in terms of—?

2-00:01:32
August: No, my background.

Redman: Okay, so it came from growing up in New York City and interacting with all sorts of groups and thinking that those groups deserved to be a part of the process.

2-00:01:44
August: Well, it was a matter of racial equality. We were always intent on that.

Redman: Okay, interesting. All right, so, let's see, can you tell me about what your housing situation was like during the war, do you remember any of that because—?

2-00:02:01
August: It was very difficult, extremely difficult. My mother, sister and I were in a one bedroom apartment, and everybody I knew was bundled up like that.

Redman: Right, sure.

2-00:02:16
August: It was very difficult.

Redman: So with three people in one bedroom it seems like that would be kind of a tight space.

2-00:02:23
August: It was a tight space, and they were not allowed to raise the rent.

Redman: Okay, so there was at least that, that your salary—

2-00:02:29
August: Yes, there was that, we had price control.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:02:31
August: So they couldn't raise the rent, and they were very angry about that.

Redman: Okay, so did you live in Los Angeles and then commute to Burbank?

2-00:02:37
August: Yes, I did.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about what that commute was like because you mentioned that one of the reasons you weren't able to participate in the union as much as you would have liked was because you didn't have regular transportation.

2-00:02:50
August: Well, I had no car.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:02:53
August: So the company would pair us up with people who would take us for a fee, and it happened to be the first winter was very rainy, and I would stand on the corner, wait for the guy, and sometimes he wouldn't feel like coming.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:03:07

August: People had money, and that was one of the problems of World War II and working people factories because there was a lot of absenteeism.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

2-00:03:18

August: There was a big campaign on radio, we didn't have television, and newspapers, "Please go to work, we need the work," and so on. A lot of girls would take off and go shopping. You couldn't go shopping on the weekends.

Redman: I see.

2-00:03:35

August: You couldn't shop at night. It was different because they didn't have the materials anyway.

Redman: Sure, so that's, it's interesting the notion of absenteeism for girls, the idea was that people were off shopping, but for men it seems like the accusation was, "Well, you were drinking," or "You were hung over."

2-00:03:55

August: Right.

Redman: Did you get the sense of were those kinds of stereotypes, or were people really—?

2-00:04:03

August: No, they were really, yes.

Redman: Okay, so the men were really off hitting the bars after payday, and then they maybe wouldn't make it to work the next Monday.

2-00:04:13

August: Yes, a lot of them.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:04:15

August: It wasn't all over, but it was a lot. There was a big federal campaign against absenteeism.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:04:22

August: It was ironic. You're making money for the first time in your life.

Redman: Right.

2-00:04:26

August:

You're making more per hour even though it was nothing, than you did before. I got fifty cents an hour before I went to the factories, then I got sixty-five, big deal.

Redman:

Right.

2-00:04:39

August:

But there was a big issue of absenteeism.

Redman:

It's interesting to me what people do when they get money, and especially coming out of the Great Depression and some of these folks coming in from the Midwest and the South. Suddenly, then, you have money and some people spend it on booze, and some people spend it on clothes, and some people save it, and there are all sorts of different reactions to that. I'm curious, did you sort of get a feeling based on the way people talked like, "Oh, this is what he's spending his money on," or "Oh, this is what she's doing," but even though you were living kind of solitary life and just going to movies and going home, you got a sense of what other people were sort of doing with their money, is that right?

2-00:05:19

August:

Sure, yes. The women were shopping.

Redman:

Okay, and they were shopping, that's very interesting. So then I was curious, you mentioned you didn't grow up attending temple and you weren't particularly religious. Did that continue on throughout?

2-00:05:41

August:

Oh, yes, to this day.

Redman:

Okay, to this day. Now, can you tell me, learning about any of the atrocities that took place in Europe with the Jewish people and when you sort of started to become aware of that in Los Angeles?

2-00:05:58

August:

Well, I became aware of it before the general public in a way because it was in maybe in the left wing press, I don't know.

Redman:

Okay, so it was in some of the maybe some of the more radical newspapers in Southern California?

2-00:06:17

August:

Yes.

Redman:

Would you—?

2-00:06:18

August:

But they were national papers.

Redman: Okay, so would you pinpoint these as being Jewish American newspapers, or were they just sort of left—?

2-00:06:29

August: No, Jewish American papers.

Redman: Jewish American papers, okay. Did that give you any sort of feeling or sentiment in addition to what you were already feeling about the war?

2-00:06:38

August: No, it just made it more intense.

Redman: Okay, it just made your patriotic feeling more intense.

2-00:06:45

August: Yes, I lost a grandfather and an aunt and a cousin during that time in Ukraine.

Redman: How did you find out that your family members—?

2-00:07:01

August: I don't know how my mother found out.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:07:03

August: Maybe the Red Cross.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:07:04

August: I don't know because I don't know if the Red Cross went that far. I don't know.

Redman: Okay, that's an interesting question. Can you tell me a little bit about—?

2-00:07:18

August: Maybe a letter, I don't know what letters could come. I have no idea.

Redman: Okay, so you were corresponding during the entire war with your fiancé.

2-00:07:31

August: I sure was.

Redman: Okay, and then when he came back, did he come back?

2-00:07:36

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so then the two of you were married. Then what was your life like in the immediate aftermath of the war?

2-00:07:45
August: Oh, well, everybody was struggling to set up a home, and we had no place to live like many people in Los Angeles.

Redman: Right.

2-00:07:56
August: A lot of the soldiers stayed here.

Redman: Sure.

2-00:07:58
August: So we rented a place with my sister and her husband, my mother and her husband, and me and my husband.

Redman: Wow, alright, so you had gone from three people to six people.

2-00:08:11
August: Pretty hard, pretty hard.

Redman: What did he do for work then when he came back, or did he go to school, or what—?

2-00:08:16
August: Yes, he eventually— He tried several jobs, didn't like them, and he eventually became an apprentice plumber, and he became a plumber under the G.I. bill.

Redman: Did you keep in touch with any people at the plant where you had worked during the Second World War?

2-00:08:35
August: Yes, two people.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:08:37
August: But after a while, you know. Everybody was busy building their homes, having families, and if you lived near somebody, okay. If not, you were so involved in yourself.

Redman: Sure, so did you get the feeling that there was, because a lot of people lost their jobs at the end of the war, did you get a feeling of that maybe happening at the plant where you had worked or you were just kind of disconnected from it—?

2-00:09:05
August: I was disconnected, but a lot of people lost their jobs.

Redman: Okay. Do you have a sense of how long you worked at the factory?

2-00:09:13
August: Three years.

Redman: Three years, okay, so from pretty early on in '42—

2-00:09:19
August: Forty-two, yeah.

Redman: Through—?

2-00:09:19
August: Beginning of '45.

Redman: Okay. So then I'd like to ask about the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war in both Europe and Asia, do you recall hearing about any of those, I know those were a lot of things: VE Day, VJ Day, do you recall hearing about that?

2-00:09:42
August: Oh, sure.

Redman: What was your reaction? What did people do?

2-00:09:49
August: People were so excited they didn't know what to do. It was really heavenly.

Redman: Okay, sure, so it was a big celebration that—?

2-00:09:54
August: Oh, a big celebration.

Redman: Did you participate in any of that? Did you go anywhere, or were you happy with your family, or how did you—?

2-00:10:03
August: Just with the family I think. We all got together.

Redman: Did you have any particular thoughts on the atomic bomb at the time? Did you think it was necessary? Did you think it was a bad thing? Did you think it was a good thing?

2-00:10:17
August: I didn't know what to think. I thought it was necessary at first, but when the stuff came out about all the destruction I thought it was terrible.

Redman: Okay, so as you learned a little bit more about it—?

2-00:10:27
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:10:33

August: Nobody knew anything about it. I had worked in a school at that time. People were calling up asking for lectures, and nobody knew anything about it.

Redman: Right.

2-00:10:39

August: They were happy that the guys didn't have to go to Japan.

Redman: You maybe felt a personal connection with that in that your fiancé, you hadn't seen him in what, four years you said?

2-00:10:48

August: Yes, yes.

Redman: Then the war in Europe coming to an end. You wanted to see the war in the Pacific end.

2-00:10:57

August: Yes. He would have been sent to the Pacific.

Redman: So you wanted to see that end as quickly as possible?

2-00:11:02

August: Yes.

Redman: I see, okay. Now I want to step back to the war for one last question. Did you participate in any war bond drives or—?

2-00:11:14

August: Definitely.

Redman: Okay, so I want to ask about war bond drives, and then I also want to ask about food in terms of Victory Gardens or canning or things of that nature. Did you—?

2-00:11:28

August: We tried—

Redman: Oh, really? Tell me about that.

2-00:11:30

August: We tried, my sister and I to grow some plants, and they didn't come out very well. Then some friends and I went to pick, they always asked for volunteers. We went to a place in Burbank to pick tomatoes, and we weren't very good at that either. It took us forever and maybe we raised \$1.45 or something.

Redman: Okay, so those you'd sell from the Victory Garden, and they would raise money for war bonds then? Do you know where that money was going, to the Red Cross?

2-00:12:03

August: No, whatever, you could put it in your pocket, but they wanted the crop to be picked.

Redman: I see.

2-00:12:10

August: But we city people weren't very good, but we tried.

Redman: Right so you maybe didn't have a green thumb for that.

2-00:12:18

August: No, but in the war plant I did help in the war bonds.

Redman: Tell me about that.

2-00:12:23

August: Well, a lot of people didn't want to kick in any money, and I was surprised and agitated and I said, "Well, I just bought one, why not you?"

Redman: Right, yes.

2-00:12:32

August: Maybe I got some anti-Jewish remarks at that time. I don't know.

Redman: Interesting. You know what's fascinating to me is your sort of semi-social and political role in the plant and that you'd tell other people about what the union activity, you know, what was a union, what was an open shop, what was a closed shop, and then talking to them about war bonds and the importance of participating in that. It seems like you had an interesting social dynamic in the plant as well.

2-00:13:04

August: Oh, sure, I felt a little, yes.

Redman: Sure, so you had some friends, some people were friendly.

2-00:13:08

August: Oh, yes, very friendly. Not the men. The men always wanted to take you to bed.

Redman: Is that right, sure. Let me ask about hanky panky in the plant. Was there—?

2-00:13:23

August: Lots of hanky panky.

Redman: Okay, so there were a lot of people who were hooking up or meeting people, but you were engaged, so—

2-00:13:35

August: Oh, no. I didn't do any hanky panky.

Redman: Right, but the men would hit on you anyway.

2-00:13:37

August: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

Redman: Were they pretty forward and aggressive?

2-00:13:43

August: Oh, yes.

Redman: Can you tell me about what that was like?

2-00:13:46

August: Well, I didn't like it.

Redman: Okay, sure. So sometimes they'd say some overly aggressive things that would be offensive and—?

2-00:13:55

August: Right. I wasn't used to that.

Redman: Okay, so that's not something that happened in the setting of high school in quite the same way.

2-00:14:01

August: No.

Redman: So this was a little less gentlemanly and a little more vulgar?

2-00:14:06

August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so then would you sort of rebuff them by ignoring them, or—?

2-00:14:14

August: Oh, I was very snappy. I snapped back at them.

Redman: Okay, and you'd tell them you were not interested.

2-00:14:18

August: Yes.

Redman: Now would that maybe end it most of the time, or were people pretty—?

2-00:14:25
August: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay. So once people got the idea—

2-00:14:26
August: There was one guy who was an inspector, and he said he was a Russian Count, and he had papers to show that, and he kept bothering by me, so I said, I used a Russian word against him, prig, and he never bothered me again.

Redman: What about other women's experiences with that? Can you, do you think other people went through a similar experience? Because there weren't the sexual harassment laws that we have today, so people—

2-00:15:03
August: Oh, I don't know. If you had an affair, you were quiet about it. Everybody knew, but you didn't discuss it, and you never reported somebody being aggressive toward you.

Redman: Okay. So you—

2-00:15:15
August: Not until the last fifteen years—

Redman: Okay, sure. So you'd just maybe snap back at them and—

2-00:15:19
August: You just accepted, yes.

Redman: Okay, interesting. So then you'd mentioned being active in the YWCA, and I'm curious—

2-00:15:30
August: YWCA.

Redman: YWCA, yes. [Cough] Excuse me, sorry. The YWCA. Were you participating in any other civic or community groups at—?

2-00:15:32
August: No.

Redman: Okay, so that was your primary. We talked a little bit about the end of the war. I'd like to ask you a question that you may or may not have thought about. Do you think of yourself as a Rosie the Riveter? And what do you think of that iconic image of maybe the Norman Rockwell painting of—?

2-00:16:02
August: Well, I think of myself as Rosie the Riveter, and I was very sorry that they never had a picture of my type, not me, but working on my machine. They

only had these girls bucking, what do I call them? Well, they had the more dramatic picture.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:16:21

August: Well, the riveter, bucking rivets.

Redman: Sure, right, yes.

2-00:16:26

August: But they never had a picture, I could never explain to my family what I was doing.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:16:34

August: I definitely think of myself as Rosie the Riveter.

Redman: Okay, so looking back on that image and what sort of that's now become, it's a pretty iconic image in that we find it in history textbooks or it's on T-shirts and coffee mugs. What do you sort of think of how people remember that time in history as someone who lived through that?

2-00:16:53

August: I think they would remember it in a congenial way. Yes, I'm sure.

Redman: So you're pretty happy and proud of—

2-00:17:07

August: Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely.

Redman: That time in your life, it seems—

2-00:17:13

August: But a lot of women lost their jobs and couldn't get back to work. That was a tragedy. I didn't want to go back to a factory job.

Redman: But a lot of people wanted to stay on.

2-00:17:19

August: I could tell you that in the survey so you have a bigger percentage, but it's not true, I didn't want to go back. It was too hard work.

Redman: Yeah, so you wanted a career doing something—

2-00:17:32

August: Yes, something else.

Redman: I see.

2-00:17:37
August: Did many women say they were sorry they lost their jobs in the factory?

Redman: I've heard as high as forty to fifty percent of people who wanted to stay on, or said so in those kinds of surveys, but would you think that that's about accurate or is that a little high or low?

2-00:17:51
August: I think it's a little high, but—

Redman: Okay, so you think most women—

2-00:17:57
August: They were anxious to get home and get married, or their husbands come back and have babies.

Redman: I see.

2-00:18:06
August: So maybe thirty percent.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:18:07
August: But there were women who had no other way of making a living, and the factory was really saving them.

Redman: Sure, so then tell me about in your instance did you then have a family and children with your husband?

2-00:18:19
August: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and you stayed in Los Angeles.

2-00:18:24
August: All the time.

Redman: Until fairly recently.

2-00:18:27
August: Two years ago, I came.

Redman: Two years ago, okay.

2-00:18:30
August: My daughter lived here. She didn't want me to be down there.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:18:31
August: I became a widow, so she wanted me to come up.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:18:35
August: I miss it, though, I'll tell you.

Redman: You miss Southern California, well, the weather up here is a little cooler than what you're maybe used to now. So we've covered a lot of territory. We've talked about all the way back to your birth and being born and raised in New York, and then we talked about early schooling and learning about unions early on and coming to Los Angeles and finding work, and training for work, and what people were like at work and what the job was like, and everything from war bonds to Victory Gardens, but I'm just curious if there's anything else that you'd like to share or talk about today, or do you think that that—

2-00:19:21
August: Well, let me see if I have any more notes here.

Redman: Sure, yes.

2-00:19:30
August: Well, it was very hard on us when you couldn't go to the store, and the rationing was very hard on working women. I should have said that.

Redman: We didn't talk about rationing. I know food was rationed, tires, rubber for tires.

2-00:19:43
August: Food was rationed.

Redman: All sorts of things were rationed.

2-00:19:47
August: All sorts of things, shoes were rationed, but we were lucky in the factory, in our factory, you could get a coupon for shoes because you would wear it out with all the grease on the floor.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:19:59
August: So that was helpful, but only for us, the working people.

Redman: Now did you then—

2-00:20:07
August: You see we weren't home when the trucks would come to the grocery store, and people at home could watch, you got to be very canny about that, could

watch when the trucks came to the store and then they could go down, you had points for meat and other things.

Redman: So would you want to be the first at the truck with your coupons in hand?

2-00:20:29

August: Yes, but we couldn't, neither one of us, my mother, my sister or I. We weren't around.

Redman: Because you were all working.

2-00:20:33

August: Yes.

Redman: So how would you get food?

2-00:20:36

August: We had a heck of a time. I guess we must have had a lot of vegetables. We could always get vegetables, and I don't know what we did about meat, it was very, very hard. Once in a while you could find something, but you didn't have too many points as they called them, little coupons, yes.

Redman: Now I know a lot of people exchanged some coupons for other coupons depending on what they could easily get or what they needed. You mentioned that you got extra coupons for shoes. Did you need or require all of those or did you then trade those?

2-00:21:14

August: No, I got one pair of shoes with that coupon.

Redman: And then—

2-00:21:18

August: But people did, I suppose. I was very patriotic. I didn't do anything wrong.

Redman: Okay, sure, so you kept your rations, you used it the way it was supposed to.

2-00:21:27

August: Yeah, well, I'll tell you what we did. We went out to dinner as much as we could. We didn't care where they got their meat, but we had it in our meal.

Redman: Okay, so maybe you—

2-00:21:41

August: Once a month or once in two weeks.

Redman: Right, sure. Given that it would be hard to go to the grocery store, you maybe had to go out to eat a little more often—

2-00:21:54
August: But we couldn't go together because we worked different hours, so—

Redman: Okay, so—

2-00:21:57
August: We must have eaten a lot of vegetables and healthy grains I guess.

Redman: So that's—

2-00:22:03
August: But this is true for all the women.

Redman: So would people talk about that?

2-00:22:09
August: Oh, yes, a lot.

Redman: Okay, so that sort of consumed a lot of the dialogue at the factory.

2-00:22:15
August: Absolutely. We were always talking about food, what I can make and what they made, oh, yes.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:22:20
August: It's a big deal.

Redman: Because I know one of the things, too, was that butter was replaced with a margarine.

2-00:22:26
August: Yes.

Redman: Where you had to put in a yellow powder.

2-00:22:29
August: Yes.

Redman: I've been told it didn't taste like butter.

2-00:22:30
August: No way.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:22:33
August: There was a little packet of white and there was a little like a red or orange button, and you had to squeeze it to make it colored yellow.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:22:46

August: You know who put that in? People who made butter. They didn't want it to look too much like butter.

Redman: Okay, so—

2-00:22:53

August: It was terrible.

Redman: Sugar.

2-00:22:58

August: Rationed.

Redman: Yes. Did food taste a little different then?

2-00:23:03

August: That's when I gave up putting sugar in my coffee.

Redman: Is that right?

2-00:23:05

August: Right.

Redman: Okay, and that was because—

2-00:23:10

August: I couldn't get it.

Redman: You couldn't get it. Okay.

2-00:23:12

August: Then we got used to it.

Redman: Okay. I found that there were some campaigns for people to maybe use less coffee or use less sugar in their coffee, but for you it was you just couldn't get the sugar. Okay, interesting. So any other thoughts on rationing, and food, that's really interesting to me.

2-00:23:33

August: Oh, food was very important, and there were a lot of black dealers.

Redman: Black market?

2-00:23:37

August: Black market, oh, yes.

Redman: So people would—

2-00:23:40

August:

The funny thing is people who came from poor areas in the country, South or Midwest, had never had steak in their lives, or butter unless they made it; all of a sudden they had to have steak and butter.

Redman:

Right, yes. It's something that once you don't have something then maybe you crave it a little bit more, is that the case at the time, too?

2-00:23:59

August:

Yes.

Redman:

Okay, very interesting.

2-00:24:07

August:

Oh, it was very important. We talked about food all the time.

Redman:

That's so interesting. Well, is there anything else that you'd like to share with me?

2-00:24:16

August:

I don't have anything else. I can call you, but I think I did a pretty good job of remembering.

Redman:

Excellent. That's fantastic. Well, I'd like to thank you once again for sitting down with me.

2-00:24:26

August:

Oh, it was my pleasure. I enjoyed it.

Redman:

Excellent.

[End of Interview]