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Patricia Buls

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
Kathryn Stine
in 2003

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Interview with Patricia Buls
Interviewed by: Kathryn Stine
Transcriber: Nadine Wilmot
[Begin Audio File: Buls1 02-12-03]

1-00:00:03

Stine:

All right, I think we're ready on both fronts with the camera and the minidisk. We're here today with Patricia Buls, and I'm Kathryn Stine. It's the twelfth of February. We're going to be talking about Patricia's experiences during World War II. I'd like to just first start out with your full name and when and where you were born.

1-00:00:25

Buls:

I'm Patricia, and my middle name was Adelaide. That's why I dropped that and used my last name as my middle name now, so I'm Patricia Hart Buls. I was born in Humboldt, Iowa, in 1921. I grew up on a farm and probably had the best of all worlds. It was during Depression times, but being on a farm we didn't have to worry about food or—my clothes were all hand-me-downs, homemade, but everybody else was wearing the same things so there was no stigma to this at all.

1-00:01:13

Stine:

How large of a family?

1-00:01:16

Buls:

I have four brothers and one sister. My sister is the only one who is still living. My sister's the oldest, and I'm the youngest. My four brothers were great. They raised me, and someone—I guess it was my grandmother—asked my mother; she said, "Patricia comes down here. She never touches a thing unless she asks if she can." She said, "How did you train her?" Mother said, "I didn't train her; her brothers did." [laughter] I felt very fortunate.

1-00:01:57

Now do you want to hear about—? I graduated from high school at a very early age. This was still Depression time. My brother and I graduated the same year, and then we went back to the high school and took supplemental courses the first year. Then he went on to college at that point, and I found a job. Or actually, I worked at whatever I could find and finally found a full-time job. I worked for forty dollars a week—not a week, forty dollars a month.

1-00:02:35

Stine:

Oh.

1-00:02:36

Buls:

Yes, forty dollars a month. My parents told me that if I saved my money that they would buy the gas for the car to get me back and forth to work. I could live at home, and I could save all my

money. And so I did. At the end of two years, then I had—my brother was then a senior at Iowa State, and I started as a freshman.

1-00:03:08

Stine:

If I could just backtrack a couple of years, I guess, what were some of your aspirations in high school about—what did you want to be when you grew up, or when—?

1-00:03:21

Buls:

I wanted to be a home-extension agent. These were women who were—they would go around to women's clubs and to different places to help the farm women. If they didn't know how to can, they would teach them to can; they would talk about making bread. It was sort of—these were agents, women, who went around to see if they could make life easier for the women on the farms.

1-00:03:54

Stine:

And was this a state-sponsored job or—?

1-00:03:58

Buls:

I think it was U.S. government-sponsored. I think it was probably sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but I'm not real sure about that. But they also had men who did the same thing, because I know that the Future Farmers of America organization—I don't know whether you've ever heard of that—but it's—. These were the courses that my brother took when he went back to high school. Interesting times.

1-00:04:38

Stine:

I wonder just about that position. Had you ever had the experience of having somebody come to your family's farm in that role, or it was something that you knew about?

1-00:04:48

Buls:

It was something I knew about, and I had seen these women in action because—the little girls went to the women's improvement clubs with their mothers and that's when they would have these women come in and talk to them about how to do things. My mother was really a very proficient woman. She had to be to feed a family of eight. She was not what I would call very well. She is probably the first woman who was treated with radium for cancer of the uterus, and I was ten years old when that happened. Then after that, she had X-ray treatments which burned her terribly, but she survived all that and lived to be seventy-eight. So. But she did finally die of cancer.

1-00:05:55

Stine:

Growing up, was that part of how your brothers came to be such role models for you?

1-00:06:02

Buls:

They were all very concerned, but I was the only one who ever stayed in the room with Mother when she was recovering from these because she was just absolutely a nervous wreck. I think it was just the effect of the medicines on her body, so I was essentially her nurse and brought her her food and rubbed Vaseline on her burns, and bathed her. I learned how to do that at a very early age. It was a very sad time. My brothers, of course—one of my brothers did all of the cooking. He essentially took over the household, and the oldest brother was the one who kept peace in the family. It had to be quiet when they were in the house or he would chase them outside. He would literally do that. That probably was part of why they were so protective of me, too. I double-dated with every single one of them.

1-00:07:36

Stine:

Throughout high school?

Buls:

Throughout high school. They started taking me to dances when I was thirteen. They would drop me off—after the dance; they would drop me off at my sister who lived in town, and then they would come back and pick me up an hour later after they'd taken their dates home. So you see, I was—

1-00:07:58

Stine:

That's a lot of freedom for thirteen.

1-00:08:00

Buls:

Yes, for—but I didn't dare step out of line or there would be a frowning face. No lipstick, couldn't wear fingernail polish. You don't giggle. So I had boundaries and they were kind of tight as I was growing up.

1-00:08:26

Stine:

What about when you were finished with high school and you had taken some time?

1-00:08:32

Buls:

The same way, the same way. We would go to all the same dances, because dancing was one of the things that people did. Even if you couldn't dance very well, you went to dances and tried.

1-00:08:48

Stine:

Getting back to your aspirations to be a home—I'm sorry.

1-00:08:54

Buls:

It was a home-extension agent.

1-00:08:56

Stine:

Home-extension agent. Was that a position that required you to go to college and take course work for it?

1-00:09:00

Buls:

Well, I think it did, yes, because they had—all of the courses at Iowa State [University] at that time for women were things that had to do with nutrition or fashion design or teaching. Either home ec teachers in high school—they had to take these courses. This entailed taking chemistry. There was a physics course that they all had to take. You learned a little bit about taking care of plants and use of the greenhouse, fashion design, cooking, nutrition, taking care of kids; these were all things that you had to take.

1-00:10:00

Stine:

Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to go to Iowa State, and the time that you spent there.

1-00:10:05

Buls:

Oh, I don't know. For one thing, it was probably the cheapest place to go. The dormitory, the boarding room was very inexpensive, and the tuition was practically nothing at that time. I think I had saved about \$500. I had about \$250 left that would take me through if I had stayed and gone on to college. Of course, part of that was that my second year, my dad paid for it all. I had worked out in the field all summer and that essentially was my pay for working in the field.

1-00:11:01

Stine:

About your experiences in college, how long were you there?

1-00:11:07

Buls:

I was at Iowa State for two years. I was nineteen when I started, and I thought that freshman girls were so silly. They giggled a lot and, of course, they wore lots of lipstick and they used lots of perfume. I think I kind of liked not—. I mean, my brothers wouldn't let me wear lots of lipstick and fingernail polish. And perfume, if you wore too much—[clears her throat] I'm not used to talking a lot.

1-00:11:43

Stine:

We can stop and take a break, too, whenever. You can just let me know if you want water.

1-00:11:50

Buls:

Anyhow, it was a different world, completely different world. I mean, I really grew up. I could play with dolls, and I had two cousins who lived very close that were like sisters to me, but growing up with boys most of the people who came there were boys. When boys came to play with my brothers, I was not allowed to play. I had to stay in the house. Otherwise, I could play any of the games that they did if there was nobody else around, but girls didn't do those things.

You see, it was an interesting time as I look back on it, and I have often thought I should write all of this down, but I haven't.

1-00:12:48

Stine:

Oh, you should.

1-00:12:50

Buls:

I should, yeah.

1-00:12:53

Stine:

I'm just going to fast forward a little bit. Can you tell me about meeting your husband?

1-00:12:58

Buls:

I met him at Ames, which is Iowa State. He was a senior, and I was a freshman. He has told this story that they used to have tea dances. You could meet everybody in that college if you went to all the dances, because on Friday nights they would have mixers. Fraternities and sororities and all the dormitory people would all have these, and sometimes it would be dormitories with the fraternities, sometimes it would be—. I met him one night. They also had tea dances—they weren't really tea dances, but they were dances from four-thirty to five-thirty, and they'd have records. You would drop in after your classes and dance. Well, that's where I met him. He said he looked around at the women who were there, the girls who were there. I looked a little older than the rest of them, and I had my hair bound rather severely to my head. I was wearing a leather jacket, and he thought to himself I must be somebody who was there for a short course, but I bet she can dance. So that's where we met. We dated from then until the end of school. He got a job in California right away at Shell Development [Company] and so we corresponded for a year, a year and three months, before he came back and we were married. But my brother who graduated that year too, he told me when I started college; he said, "Don't date a senior if you want to finish college." But I did. [laughter] And I didn't finish college then. They said I became—I got my college degree, which was an M.R.S.

1-00:15:10

Stine:

And that was for the two years?

1-00:15:13

Buls:

No, an M.R.S. is Mrs. [laughter] Because that was what the feeling was—a lot of the girls who went on to college went there to find a mate.

1-00:15:33

Stine:

Had that been your plan or—?

1-00:15:37

Buls:

No, no.

1-00:15:39

Stine:

I didn't think so, but I had to ask.

1-00:15:41

Buls:

I wasn't going to get married until I was about twenty-five. In my own mind. I was twenty-one when I got married.

1-00:15:46

Stine:

Did you decide to get married while you were corresponding that year?

1-00:15:52

Buls:

Um hmmm.

1-00:15:54

Stine:

Where you ever able to come out and visit in California, or did he come back to Iowa?

1-00:15:58

Buls:

He came back when we got married. I asked my mother. I said, "He would like to get married, and how do you feel about that?" She said, "I don't really know him very well, but he impressed [me] as being a very positive, maybe a little bit stubborn, person." And she said, "If you plan to marry him, you'd probably better marry him now because," she said, "you're the same way," figuring that we wouldn't get too set in our ways. Her feeling was that everyone really needed to get married. She said, "Everybody needs a helpmeet."

1-00:16:49

Stine:

Was that something that you also thought, too?

1-00:16:51

Buls:

I did plan to get married eventually, and my brothers all said I was going to be an old maid.

1-00:16:59

Stine:

Probably just being one of two girls.

1-00:17:01

Buls:

They felt that I would not be—I would want to do it my way. And we all do, we all do. But a successful marriage, you learn to bend.

1-00:17:18

Stine:

How was that decision for you? Was that a hard decision to make, to know that you were not going to be able to complete college at that time and that you were moving across the country?

1-00:17:28

Buls:

Oh, no. I knew that even if I moved across the country and got married, I could still complete college.

1-00:17:34

Stine:

Were you hoping that you'd be able to do that relatively quickly, or did you think—?

1-00:17:39

Buls:

I felt that—in my mind, I felt, “I need to get a job when I get to California.” Vernon was I-A all the time although he had a—because he was doing government work, he was supposed to stay in his job.

1-00:18:05

Stine:

Okay. So he wasn't necessarily part of the draft because his job was—

1-00:18:12

Buls:

His job was more important than going into the army. So I knew I had to get a job if I was going to stay out here. But, because I had done quite a bit of secretarial work, I was sure I could find a job. No doubt in my mind there was a job out here for me.

1-00:18:36

Stine:

So that made it easier to come to California, maybe.

1-00:18:39

Buls:

Sure.

1-00:18:40

Stine:

How did your family react to you moving out?

1-00:18:45

Buls:

Well, Mother always felt you that you follow your husband wherever he is. If it's a good marriage, it's going to last. Even then, it was a lot easier to get to California than it was twenty years earlier. She said, “It isn't as if I'll never see you again.” That was the way it was.

1-00:19:13

Stine:

Did you have any expectations or impressions of what California would be like before you came here?

1-00:19:21

Buls:

Not really. It was supposed to be the land of sunshine. The first three months that I was here I carried an umbrella—actually longer than that—but I carried the umbrella because with all that

fog up in the sky, there had to be rain. And, of course, it would all burn off. We lived in an area where the fog went through the Golden Gate and right up into the hills of Berkeley, in that fog belt. I took the umbrella with me and never used it for the first three months, but then in January I did. That's when the rain started.

1-00:20:09

Stine:

Can we just plug a date in here? This is 1943?

1-00:20:14

Buls:

1942–43. I was married in October of '42, and this would have been the earliest days in California.

1-00:20:30

Stine:

How did you go about finding your first job when you got here?

1-00:20:34

Buls:

You know, I don't really remember that. I know that my first job, I started working at a place where one of the women who became one of my best friends was working. She was working at—I think it was Roos Brothers. I'm not real sure, but it was a store on Shattuck and University. I think she had a bookkeeping job, and I was working in the credit department. And I don't even remember what I used to do there, but it had to do with secretarial work. Then I took a civil service test and worked at the Oakland Port of Embarkation in the Quartermaster Corps for three months, and then I went to the shipyard. There was no problem. You know, they were really looking for people who could work, so there was no problem in getting a job.

1-00:21:46

Stine:

It sounds like just the whole climate of the Bay Area was very open, and that there were jobs to be had.

1-00:21:57

Buls:

Jobs to be had, yes.

1-00:22:02

Stine:

We'll get back to the jobs that you had, but I wanted to first ask about how you found housing here.

1-00:22:07

Buls:

Now, because Vernon had been here for a year, he had been able to find an apartment for us. The government housing in Richmond took care of a lot of the workers so that's where they lived, but people would move into motels and live in one room. They'd either eat out all the time or get a hot plate to cook their food. The first place we lived was in an old house that had been remodeled to make four apartments. In an old house, the soundproofing is almost nil. You could hear what

went on upstairs and downstairs and next door. Is it proper to tell the story of Hattie Bell? She's the one who was scolded by the young man who lived in the apartment out back. Apparently—I don't know what sort of an altercation they had had, but—

1-00:23:23

Stine:

And this was your landlady?

1-00:23:25

Buls:

The first place we lived, and she lived next door to us, upstairs. We could hear every sound they made if we went into the bathroom. The bathroom in the house, upstairs, separated their apartment from ours, and the young man from the apartment out back, he was talking to Hattie Bell in a very loud voice as we were getting ready to leave the apartment. He said, "Doggone it, Mrs. McWayne, if you weren't such a stubborn individual, you'd live a lot happier life." And I suppose she felt harassed. You know, there were four—they were trying to make a little money out of their house, and they had moved from living in the whole thing into moving just into a small part of it.

1-00:24:27

Stine:

When all these workers came in?

1-00:24:29

Buls:

When all these workers came in, yes. Let's see, a friend of Vernon's was a good friend of a woman who lived in an apartment on—. I can't remember the name of the street, but it was adjacent—it ran parallel to University [Avenue].

1-00:24:54

Stine:

Had you told me Walnut Street was—?

1-00:24:56

Buls:

Well, we lived on Walnut Street, but she was a good friend of the manager of the apartment house on Walnut Street, so she put in a good word for us so that we got one of the apartments there after we had lived in a house for three months. So we breathed a sigh of relief. But the housing, you took what you could find. We had dinner one night with some people who worked at the yard, Shipyard Three, and they lived in a basement of a house. And they cooked on a hot plate, and their walls were sheets that were put on little rings that were pulled across the wire. That was what separated them from the furnace room. I don't think I saw their bathroom facilities, but I suspect it was probably just a stool and a shower that had been rigged up in the basement for them.

1-00:26:05

Stine:

And was this in Richmond?

1-00:26:07

Buls:

This was in Berkeley. But you heard stories about people who didn't deserve to have decent housing because they didn't know how to treat it. I suppose in some cases that might have been true.

1-00:26:27

Stine:

Was that a sentiment that you heard explicitly said in those terms, or was that just kind of a feeling that was floating around?

1-00:26:35

Buls:

No, no. You heard of people who moved into apartments that had never had a bathroom in the house before and who cut a hole in the floor. Now, I don't whether those are true or not. [laughter]

1-00:26:54

Stine:

Would these have been stories that you would have heard while you were working at the shipyard?

1-00:26:59

Buls:

Yes, yes.

1-00:27:05

Stine:

Are there any other stories like that that you can think of?

1-00:27:09

Buls:

No. There was quite a bit, I think, of racism, too, just from the way I heard people talking.

1-00:27:23

Stine:

Specifically related to housing or just in the general work environment?

1-00:27:27

Buls:

Well, no, in the general plan.

1-00:27:37

Stine:

I definitely want to talk about that. I also am curious of the migration of people from all over the country and specifically the South and a little bit from the Midwest that came into the East Bay, and if you ever felt yourself, or heard anybody kind of espousing, negativity towards newcomers coming in.

1-00:27:58

Buls:

No. With the group of women that I worked with to start with, I felt that this was sort of a whole new field for some of them, and they were beginning to know that they could be respected citizens of this country. You could almost see some of these women blossom. They had jobs that were meaningful and they felt needed. So that was nice. People have—I guess I must have a sympathetic ear because I heard so many people's stories about where they started from and what they are doing and the problems they've had with other people, with their spouses. Maybe even more than I wanted to hear, but I do think that the shipyard days gave women a whole new outlook on life: that I am an individual and I am important, and I can earn my own living. And I think that was a big thing that happened during the war.

1-00:29:29

Stine:

You had already had experience having your own paycheck, having your own job, and I wonder if most of the women you worked with, was their job in the shipyard maybe their first job ever? Was that the first paycheck they had ever gotten?

1-00:29:44

Buls:

It may have been.

1-00:29:46

Stine:

It sounds like there was a pretty supportive network among the women, at least where you were working.

1-00:29:55

Buls:

I think there was. I think we supported each other.

1-00:30:02

Stine:

Do you remember of any of those stories that people might have told you that would have been maybe the most striking or the most memorable?

1-00:30:12

Buls:

I think the stories that I heard were—these were women who had been locked into a marriage with no way out because they had no income. Some of them—these are the ones that would talk to me about how they couldn't trust a man again, but they could support themselves. But one woman who had a small child said, "I just pray every day that nothing's going to happen to me so that I can still come out here and do my job and take care of my little girl."

1-00:30:58

Stine:

Was that because she was in an abusive relationship?

1-00:31:01

Buls:

I think she had been in an abusive relationship. She didn't talk too much about that. But then I've had men who have told me about their wives who no longer wished to have any sex at all. And, of course, being twenty-one and this one fellow said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have told you that. I'm embarrassing you." And he was. [laughter] But I think he was searching for reasons.

1-00:31:38

Stine:

In this instance, his wife was also working?

1-00:31:41

Buls:

I don't know. Anyhow, his wife all of a sudden wouldn't have anything to do with him. I mean, he didn't seem—he looked like he was the kind who took a bath every day. [laughter] I never detected any bad halitosis or anything like that. He just couldn't understand it, and I couldn't either. He saw that I was really embarrassed about that, and I was.

1-00:32:14

Stine:

That's a very frank and open thing to be telling a co-worker, and do you think that there was maybe a shift from kind of cultural attitudes before the war to what was—?

1-00:32:27

Buls:

Being more open.

1-00:32:29

Stine:

Yeah, was that something that you felt?

1-00:32:30

Buls:

You know, I don't know. I hadn't thought of that, but it may have been.

1-00:32:35

Stine:

To phrase it another way, would you have expected to hear that kind of comment in a job before the war or in another context?

1-00:32:43

Buls:

I don't think so.

1-00:32:50

Stine:

I'm just curious.

1-00:32:54

Buls:

There were a lot of interesting people that you met. The job was hard.

1-00:33:04

Stine:

Well, why don't we go into that and kind of talk about—just back up a little bit and talk about the jobs that you had at Shipyard Three and how that all came about.

1-00:33:16

Buls:

Well, I started working with a pool of stenographers and then because I had—. I knew how to take shorthand, and I had had some experience in working in an office, that when the naval architect secretary was not around, if she was out for any reason, then I had to do that job. I don't really know how I was fortunate enough to get moved into the requisitioning department, but I was not one to turn down an advance, because it would improve my wages. I would suspect that if they had done anything at all in looking at my background, they might have looked at this chemistry and physics and thought maybe—and I did take a course from Cal [University of California, Berkeley]. It was offered, sort of a beginning engineering course, and because I was working at the shipyard, I thought maybe that would be a good course to take. So I took it. It was offered at night, and I took an engineering course.

1-00:34:41

Stine:

Did Kaiser help pay for that?

1-00:34:43

Buls:

No.

1-00:34:46

Stine:

Was that out of your own—?

1-00:34:47

Buls:

Because I thought it would be something I might enjoy doing. That all may have lead to the change in my title, because then I became a junior engineer, requisitioning material for the troop ships. Now, the bill of lading that was on the upper left-hand corner of these blueprints was supposed to give you all the information you needed for your requisitions, but they didn't. When they didn't, then you had to find out from the field what was needed, and what did they need to have in order to get the right stuff on board. The most colorful individual that I ever worked with was a Scotsman who had an accent that was so thick, but he was the one who was in charge of all the rigging. And he would come up and tell us what we needed to order. Most generally the people from the field would come up and tell us what they needed. Occasionally, we'd go out, and I think sometimes we were taken out because they thought it would be good for us to see what we were ordering for. I think my most embarrassing moment was when they took me into the section of the ship where they had the equipment for the prophylactics, and I had no idea what I was looking at. Of course, the two men I was with, they just were hysterical because they knew what those instruments were for. It was for the—well, Vernon told me. He said, "Sailors, if they went out and if they had sex, when they came back on board, they had to have the use of these machines which would make sure they didn't come down with some sexually transmitted disease."

1-00:37:10

Stine:

I'm trying to figure out how the machine part fits into this.

1-00:37:18

Buls:

Because I looked at them—I don't know exactly how these machines fit into them either, because I didn't have to order them.

1-00:37:23

Stine:

But this was something that was—

1-00:37:25

Buls:

This was something that was on board the ships. As I say, I was absolutely so embarrassed I could hardly look at the men or these machines that were in the room. When we went into the galley where they did the cooking, that was something different. You could see the machines that were used to take the peels off the potatoes and things like that. I could understand those.

1-00:37:56

Stine:

So this was just like a dispensing machine. Am I getting that correct?

1-00:38:03

Buls:

Well, more or less. You could probably find out how these machines work. I don't think I ever did even find out. I think that what they do is they would insert something up through the penis to sterilize or whatever. As I say, I'm not sure, but you can see why the men thought it was hysterical—my reactions to it. Of course, the one guy says, "My reaction would be the same way."

1-00:38:38

Stine:

Did anyone have to explain anything to you on that occasion, or you just knew?

1-00:38:45

Buls:

I just sort of knew what it was all about, but not all the details, not the details. [laughter]

1-00:39:08

Stine:

What were some other of the things that you were looking for on the ship? You mentioned going into the galley and other—

1-00:39:11

Buls:

It was mostly just a tour of the ship to see what we were dealing with. We were not lucky enough to go out on any of the maiden cruises. But we were told that that was no great shakes either because they'd go out through the Golden Gate Bridge and everybody'd get seasick. Apparently there's an area between the Farallons and the mainland that they call the potato patch—at that

time they did, because it was so rough. People who went out on these cruises, the first cruise, would all get seasick.

1-00:40:04

Stine:

Do you know how it was decided who would be able to go on the cruise?

1-00:40:06

Buls:

I have a feeling they probably chose all the people who were really the main designers, the people who—probably the head of the requisitioning department, the head of the purchasing department.

1-00:40:25

Stine:

So, the bigwigs.

1-00:40:27

Buls:

Expeditors. I have a feeling that's the way they were chosen. I didn't mind. [laughter]

1-00:40:37

Stine:

As with everything at the shipyards, the requisitioning office was kind of a cog in this larger machine of working and had its place. I'm just curious how the chain of information passed along from people on the ships to your office and then what would happen once you had determined what parts were needed.

1-00:41:00

Buls:

Then our requisitions went to the purchasing department, and the purchasing department would be on the phone talking to all the people about what they could supply or what specifications they'd need. I presume this was all handed over to the expediting department because they would be the ones to make sure that the materials came to the shipyard on time. Now, the place where we worked was above the cranes, I think, in the plate shop. I think that's what they called it. The mold loft was up there. Now, the mold loft was supposed to have all the—give you all dimensions in a miniature. It was a miniature shape of everything that was needed on the ship in the way of plates, the steel plates.

1-00:42:15

I don't really know how many steps it was up there, but when I first started working there was no elevator and you walked up the steps, and I'm sure that in my own mind, I felt there had to be at least a hundred.

1-00:42:30

Stine:

Did they eventually put in an elevator?

1-00:42:34

Buls:

You know, I think they did. I think they eventually did, but as I recall, I always climbed the steps because I thought it was good physical exercise. I probably would still try to climb them if I were working there even though I might not be able to any more.

1-00:42:59

Stine:

Can you describe what other departments shared your space and also what you remember of the space of your office itself? What it was like?

1-00:43:11

Buls:

There was a stenographic pool and the drafters took up a tremendous amount of that space. They must have really needed a lot of people to draw pictures, and they, I guess, came from all walks of life, too. I know that there were a couple of men who worked in the drafting department during the day, but they played the violin at night. They would talk about the gigs they would go to or the weddings they would go to. They apparently played at weddings. One of the young men that worked up there was not able to go into the army because he was born without part of his eyelid, part of his eyelid was missing. You told about the seventeen-year-old high school graduate that went up there and got a job.

1-00:44:20

Stine:

This is another person that we've interviewed for the Rosie project.

1-00:44:24

Buls:

Yes. There were Chinese; I presume they were Chinese draftswomen, who was quite upset with me when I told her that she was the first Chinese that I had really ever talked to in my life. I said, "Well, you're Chinese; I'm part Irish. So what's the difference? It's just a cultural background."

1-00:44:57

Stine:

What was her reaction?

1-00:45:01

Buls:

I think I mollified her a little bit. I wasn't trying to be racist at all. It's just one of those things. I did not even meet anybody that I knew was Jewish until I went to college. I thought, well, what's the difference? It didn't mean anything to me. She was just of a different religion than I was. That was it, but there were—you know, people made a lot of comments that were very bigoted comments. I think that probably the only time of that, that I may have bumped up against was when you would pick up the telephone when I was a kid growing up, and we probably had eleven people on our country line, and there would be some woman talking in a different language. When I first heard this, I said, "Mom, come hear this." She picked it up and she said, "Oh, those are the Danes that live down the road." So we had had some Danish people in our neighborhood who still spoke Danish.

1-00:46:26

Stine:

That was kind of your first exposure to—

1-00:46:28

Buls:

First experience that we weren't all just white. We had nationalities to us. We had Danish, and we had Norwegians, and we had Swedes, and we had Germans. But it didn't mean anything to me; they were all white people.

1-00:46:51

Stine:

When you were growing up in Iowa, did you ever meet or see any other non-white people?

1-00:46:59

Buls:

There may have—. Yes, we did see Chinese. There was a Chinese family living in Fort Dodge where we would go to do shopping occasionally. If you went farther afield, there were some blacks in Waterloo, I think, and in Des Moines. There weren't too many. These were all people who had emigrated from Europe into the heartland.

1-00:47:35

Stine:

Back to the shipyards, what kind of examples of bigotry did you see, or what kind of examples of racism?

1-00:47:45

Buls:

Well, I know that I would get in arguments with one of the fellows in our department. We didn't see too much of this, but it was there. I don't know that we had many blacks in the drafting department or if we even had any. I know that the woman I used to work for came out, and I took her to Richmond to visit a cousin of hers. She mentioned to the cousin that I had worked in the shipyard, and her cousin said, "I'd never let a daughter of mine work in the shipyard."

1-00:48:38

Stine:

Did she give a reason?

1-00:48:43

Buls:

He just felt that they were all riffraff if you worked in the shipyard, particularly those who worked out in the field.

1-00:48:57

Stine:

I was curious about that. When you were working in the shipyard, did you feel a real kind of distinction between working in the field, doing more labor-intensive jobs, working in the office?

1-00:49:08

Buls:

I never felt that was any problem. I mean, it was never a problem to me, but I have a feeling that it was a problem to a lot of people. If you have been born in the deep South and you have heard the blacks called “niggers” all the time, you’re going to carry that with you for a long time. I even heard a woman at our last DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] meeting mention that, use that word. She said, “You’ll have to pardon me. I was raised in the South.” I don’t think that’s a pardon—that’s no excuse. None whatsoever. That’s something inside.

1-00:49:54

Stine:

Was that word used in the shipyards that you ever heard? Did you ever hear people using that?

1-00:50:02

Buls:

I didn’t, except when his friend—co-worker, I’ll call him—called me a nigger-lover. He said, “You’re always standing up for them.” I said, “Maybe it’s because they need it.” That was all that was said. But I guess I had—I had made myself a little unpopular with him. My folks were probably the most liberal persons you could meet when it came to people. It was what was inside that counted.

1-00:50:50

Stine:

I’m curious also if you knew any Japanese workers or encountered any Japanese families or by this time—

1-00:50:59

Buls:

I never knew any interned families until after the war. But the receptionist to my dentist was one who was interned, and she doesn’t seem to bear any ill will. We went on a tour with a group of teachers. It was arranged through the CTA travel agency, and there was a couple there that had both been interned. They lived in the valley somewhere. He said, “My neighbor looked after my ranch for me and took care of it so that when I was released, I could go right back to my farm.” Now, he was very fortunate, and I think he realized he was fortunate because so many of them lost everything, but the only person I really know quite well is the receptionist.

1-00:52:24

Stine:

When you were working in the shipyards and just during the war, being in the East Bay, what kind of—was that something you knew about, the internment?

1-00:52:33

Buls:

All I had heard about, there were no Japanese around. All the people that I talked to were really quite incensed about this and talked about that stupid general who pulled them all away; that they were after all citizens. If they wanted to intern anybody, they should just intern those who weren’t citizens. But I was at another Elderhostel, and some woman said, “Well, you have no idea about that yellow peril.” So there you have it.

1-00:53:23

Stine:

Yeah, a very different opinion.

1-00:53:24

Buls:

But as far as—you know, there was no publicity at all about it. There was a book written about it, I think, *Tales of Manzanar [Farewell to Manzanar]*. I think that was really the first children's book that came out that told about it. And it was on my required reading list in school. Everybody had to read that book, and "Did that really happen?" I said, "That really happened." Pretty sad, it really is.

1-00:54:03

Stine:

Yeah. I wanted to just maybe go back and while we're on the subject—and we kind of brushed on it a little bit—how did you feel being a woman in the shipyards? I know when you started it was in 1943, and so women had already been working there for quite some time. Maybe the initial kind of shock had worn off quite a bit at that time, but how did you feel in terms of being a woman?

1-00:54:35

Buls:

Nothing. Maybe because I had been raised with four boys, working with men was okay. It was fine. I didn't think they were all out to seduce me. I had no problem with that.

1-00:55:04

Stine:

Did you see anybody else ever having, or where there—?

1-00:55:09

Buls:

Well, I know that some of the draftsmen would make remarks to one of the very rather pretty stenographers, and she'd come in and she'd say, "What in the world did he mean?" And these were men who were making suggestive remarks to her. We had—the supervisor of these younger women was probably in her fifties, and she went out and—. If anything like this happened, she'd go out and she'd just read the riot act to whoever was responsible for it. Because she said, you know, "There's no need for that. These are young women and they haven't been exposed to this sort of thing, and they don't need to be exposed to it now."

1-00:56:08

Stine:

So there were channels at least a little bit—

1-00:56:12

Buls:

That dealt with these. I remember one of the women who had her tax forms all ready to go, and she said, "Now my husband will take them to a tax specialist." I said, "Well, why?" She said, "I don't know." She said, "He's been taking them ever—" She said, "I make out the taxes and he takes them to the tax specialist, and they send them in," and she said that he sends in exactly what I write. There again was a man who didn't appreciate his wife, and I think she was the one

who was beginning to understand. “I don’t really need him.” That’s what I mean when I said that I think a lot of women began to become persons in their own right when they went out and started working.

1-00:57:18

Stine:

I’m going to stop the tape just because I realize we’re going to run out.

[End Buls1 02-12-03]

[Begin Buls 2 02-12-03]

2-00:00:07

Stine:

I might just take a second to make sure you look good in the frame here. I think that’s good.

2-00:00:15

Buls:

I probably should talk with my hands more.

2-00:00:18

Stine:

You know, actually, in this one I’ve got you all the way—just your face in the shot. I had your hands in the last tape.

2-00:00:32

Buls:

I don’t think I talk with my hands very often, but I don’t really know.

2-00:00:38

Stine:

I think you did. Okay, so we’re back. This is tape two with Patricia Buls. Again, I’m Kathryn Stine, and it’s the twelfth of February. We were just going to pick up where we had kind of left off, just talking about men’s and women’s roles in the shipyards, and if you really felt there was a distinction between what the men were doing and what the women were doing or if you felt that that was not really an issue.

2-00:01:08

Buls:

Well, I did not go out into the yard very much, and I have no idea what the differences were there. I have a feeling that the women were probably judged more on their capabilities in the field than the fact that they were women, but up in the area where I was, I think the—. Most of them were women who I think had not had too much experience dealing with a lot of different men. I know that even—when I came home one night and talked about some fellow and what he was saying, and Vernon says, “Well, he was hitting on you.” It didn’t mean a thing to me. This was some nice young man who was being very attentive to me. But I do think that women were a lot more naïve when I was growing up and when I was a young adult than they are now because they have such an influence from TV and movies that they see. They probably still know more than I do.

2-00:02:35

Stine:

Off camera, I had asked you about your interest in engineering, and you had mentioned that engineering wasn't necessarily something that women would have gone into. In terms of just planning for the future or planning ahead, how did you see women's roles versus men's roles?

2-00:02:52

Buls:

When I was growing up, women's jobs were to become nurses or teachers or caretakers. And I don't think that's true any more, although I've had a lot of very intelligent young women going through my classes. I've often wondered—they may have been miles ahead of most of the boys, and I've often wondered if they have gone ahead and done something with that brainpower they have or whether they have settled for something less. I do think women are accepting the challenge of doing a lot of other things now that they didn't used to do. In medicine, and—they even had two women on the shuttle that didn't make it back, and that speaks a lot for the steps that women have made. That's probably the most advanced thing that women could do.

2-00:04:13

Stine:

For you personally, I was curious—this is a little bit related, but I was just curious—when you first moved out here, there was no question that you were going to get a job, is what you had said, and I wonder if you and your husband had made that determination that you were going to both be working and how you came to that—

2-00:04:29

Buls:

No, I don't think we—. We had not reached that conclusion together, but I was not content to just stay at home. Of course, staying home and preparing meals and eating, I began to put on weight, too, which was sort of distressing to me because I had never in my whole lifetime put on weight. So all those things entered into it. Besides, I needed to support myself if he were going to be drafted, which was a possibility the entire time. With a deferment, you aren't always sure that that's going to continue.

2-00:05:14

Stine:

Maybe we could go into that area a little bit. I was curious what he was doing at Shell Development, and maybe we'll ask him a little bit later.

2-00:05:29

Buls:

You can ask him. They had government jobs and they were—. He does research, and I think they were doing investigations into things that needed to be done. I don't know whether—at that time, they were very secret. He never ever talked to me about it. They were secret projects of the government, and it could have been for chemical warfare. It most likely was.

2-00:06:07

Stine:

So the whole time, at least during the war, you really didn't know what was—

2-00:06:14

Buls:

After my shipyard job ended, I went up to—I got a job at the radiation lab, secretary to Dr. [Melvin] Calvin, and I had about six Ph.D.'s, young Ph.D.'s who were all working on secret projects. All these secret projects were elements that had been [ir]radiated so they could be tracers, but it was all considered secret material. It was quite interesting. I was able to get that job, I suspect, because I already had a clearance, and I'd had some background with chemistry, and I was also a secretary.

2-00:07:07

Stine:

This was up at Lawrence Berkeley?

2-00:07:09

Buls:

This was at Lawrence Radiation Lab[oratory] on the campus. Donner Lab?

2-00:07:17

Stine:

Right. And how was that for you during the war, knowing that he could have been—that your husband could have been drafted at any time?

2-00:07:31

Buls:

How was it? Well, you know, you just take what's going to happen. I wasn't going to fret about it. I knew I could survive without him.

2-00:07:51

Stine:

Maybe we'll have a chance, I hope to talk to him a little bit about what he was working on. But I remember that you mentioned to me that when you guys moved here, and he had come here before you, that there was already kind of a social network of people that were working for Shell Development that you were able to—you weren't coming here cold. You were able to have a network of people.

2-00:08:17

Buls:

Right, and none of them were connected with the shipyard. I think there were four fellows who started working at Shell Development on the first of July in 1941, and they became very staunch fast friends. We've had those friends that length of time, ever since then. And then there were other young people that were working there in the same departments, and they had their network of social life. So my network of social life was predestined.

2-00:09:05

Stine:

And what about some of the other wives? Were any of the people working at Shell Development that form the circle of friends that you have—were any of them women in the research department?

2-00:09:19

Buls:

You know, I think it was mostly men. The librarian or the secretaries, but they were women. They hired quite a few women to work in the plant. I was amused—one of the fellows said, “Well, she’s not much good, but when she sees the gauge get up to a certain point, she can yell.” [laughter]

2-00:09:48

Stine:

In terms of some of the other wives, did they have jobs or work in the shipyards or work in the defense industry in any way that you remember?

2-00:09:57

Buls:

When I first went out there—no, they weren’t working in the shipyards. Now, I know that the woman across the hall worked—she did secretarial work, and her husband was working at Shell. Our close friends were really most of these people that started when he did.

2-00:10:27

Stine:

What about the social network of people that you met at the shipyard, or was there a social network? Did you hang out with your co-workers outside of—?

2-00:10:39

Buls:

Sometimes. It wasn’t always easy. You know, we worked six days a week. In most cases, they had families to go back to. I do remember one time of going across to San Francisco with Mrs. Bloomer, and a friend met us in San Francisco and we went somewhere for dinner that night.

2-00:11:05

Stine:

And she was just a colleague from—

2-00:11:07

Buls:

She was an older woman who worked in the shipyards. [laughter] She probably was sixty. I would guess she was; her son was a doctor, and he lived around here somewhere.

2-00:11:31

Stine:

So you would socialize with her?

2-00:11:32

Buls:

So you’d socialize. Another woman who worked with me—and she was older than I was. She was married with two teenage children, and they lived in an apartment in Berkeley. I mean in Richmond. I know that he was really quite a bigot because he was—she made a comment to me one time, “Well, my husband says there’s no way he’s ever going to step aside for”—well, he called him a nigger. There again it really shocked me to hear people say that. Way back then we called them Negroes. Of course, they probably would not like that now either, but they were Negroes, which means black.

2-00:12:23

Stine:

There's definitely a distinction there. That's not something that you really heard so much in Iowa?

2-00:12:33

Buls:

No, no. Not at all. In my sheltered experience in Iowa, not at all.

2-00:12:44

Stine:

Most of the people that you encountered when you were working in the shipyards, were they from Richmond or had they come from other parts of the country?

2-00:12:53

Buls:

Oh, I think they came from all over, particularly the ones that were in the steno pool. One of the ladies had come down from Canada, and she was one who was escaping an abusive husband. One couple I know that came from Tennessee, but we didn't talk a great deal about where we came from. It was sort of understood that everybody sort of came from somewhere else, but they stayed. I imagine most of them did. I'm sure that some of them went back. I wouldn't have. [laughter]

2-00:13:50

Stine:

Just a couple more questions about your work in the shipyards and then I might want to move on a little bit to talk about just your kind of day-to-day living experience during the war. At the shipyards, I was curious, were you in a union?

2-00:14:11

Buls:

I don't think so. I don't recall that any of my fees were taken out. I never, ever felt that I belonged to a union. Did they have unions?

2-00:14:25

Stine:

Oh gosh, yes.

2-00:14:27

Buls:

In the shipyards?

2-00:14:26

Stine:

Um-hm.

2-00:14:28

Buls:

You know, I may have been paying a fee and didn't even know it. I have nothing against unions. They've served a very useful purpose in this world.

2-00:14:43

Stine:

But not that you remember.

2-00:14:45

Buls:

Not that I remember.

2-00:14:46

Stine:

You don't remember anybody coming as a representative or talking in your office about—

2-00:14:51

Buls:

Belonging? No.

2-00:14:52

Stine:

Okay. You know, I think initially, maybe some women had problems getting into some of the unions, and definitely African Americans had problems getting into some of the other unions.

2-00:15:02

Buls:

Oh, I'm sure.

2-00:15:03

Stine:

And there was discrimination within a lot of them, but that's not something that you remember?

2-00:15:08

Buls:

Uh-uh.

2-00:15:10

Stine:

Another question is: what kind of benefits did Kaiser provide to the workers that you experienced in your office in particular?

2-00:15:21

Buls:

Well, the only thing that I really felt that I benefit, was the opportunity to get my health care taken care of for twenty-five cents. I think it was twenty-five cents a week or maybe two weeks. It was good health care. We went to the Kaiser hospital in Oakland when we needed to have a doctor. When my job at the shipyard stopped, we went on an independent contract with Kaiser, independent coverage. And then about, two years—

2-00:16:05

Stine:

Was that an easy transition?

2-00:16:07

Buls:

Very easy. I don't remember now what it cost us, but it wasn't very much. And then Shell Development developed a health plan with Kaiser, so then we continued on the Kaiser with Shell Development health plan. That continued all the way through '63 when I started teaching, and the school district had a Kaiser health plan. So I'm still on the Kaiser health plan that the school had in addition with the Medicaid.

2-00:16:56

Stine:

So you got to follow it along.

2-00:17:02

Buls:

They've taken good care of me.

2-00:17:04

Stine:

The care that you got at the shipyard, you felt was—

2-00:17:10

Buls:

I felt was more than adequate. I mean—more than adequate, no, but it was at least all I needed. I only remember one time when I was really very sick, but it was when everybody had the flu. I missed two weeks of work and lost twenty pounds.

2-00:17:33

Stine:

And this was a flu epidemic?

2-00:17:33

Buls:

This was a flu epidemic.

2-00:17:35

Stine:

Can you talk a little bit about that? About how production kept going at the shipyards.

2-00:17:42

Buls:

I have no idea. They didn't seem to miss me.

2-00:17:47

Stine:

How many other people from your office—?

2-00:17:49

Buls:

I have no idea.

2-00:17:50

Stine:

Really.

2-00:17:51

Buls:

I have no idea how many other people from the office were affected, but I do know that I was really sick with the flu and spent two weeks in bed. Actually, when I went back, they had to re—let's see what did they call it? It was to start my employment again because two weeks I was absent. I don't think Vernon ever—I wouldn't have even known who to call to tell them, "I'm sick."

2-00:18:21

Stine:

Oh, wow. So you were just down for the count and didn't even—

2-00:18:26

Buls:

I was just down for the count, and I really didn't care what happened to me.

2-00:18:34

Stine:

Did you face any complications or problems when you came back to work?

2-00:18:35

Buls:

No, not at all.

2-00:18:36

Stine:

Did they kind of infer that all these people had gotten sick, and clearly you might have—

2-00:18:42

Buls:

No, no. I don't remember anything about that at all. I just know that when I went back, they reinstated me, and I started working again and never did gain the weight back.

2-00:18:57

Stine:

Outside of health care was there any kind of—in a lot of instances, we know that people started working at the shipyards in positions that they weren't necessarily qualified for or didn't have the background in, and kind of had to learn very quickly on the job. Were there any kind of on-the-job training opportunities or mentoring—kind of informal mentoring—that happened?

2-00:19:23

Buls:

I really felt—I mean, informal mentoring, yes, because the man I worked with, a man called Ray Weldgen, was the kind of a person who you could lean on whenever you didn't know what to do. He was there; he was the manager of that section. I have a feeling that, yes, there was job training, but it was individualized. You got the training that you needed to do the job you were handed. I'm sure that that isn't something that I would have just picked up, or maybe it would

have been. I don't know. I just know that I don't recall that there was any job training or any mentoring, but there had to have been.

2-00:20:19

Stine:

Had the engineering class you took at UC Berkeley helped?

2-00:20:25

Buls:

It might have given me a little more confidence, but I'm sure that that would have been all.

2-00:20:33

Stine:

What were some of the skills that you feel like you left that position with, that you wouldn't have necessarily had going in or that would have seemed complicated or beyond you when you started?

2-00:20:44

Buls:

I have a feeling that probably what one takes most with them is self-confidence, and knowing that you can do the job. That if you stick to it and learn the ropes, well, you'll succeed. I think that probably is the biggest thing that you learn. I have never had to requisition anything, you know, fill out requisition forms. I didn't mind calling people to tell them what I needed. I learned some phone skills, but I think you learn self-confidence as much as anything else.

2-00:21:31

Stine:

Just another question about the atmosphere at Kaiser, were there any publications that came out from Kaiser? I know there was the *Fore and Aft* newsletter that—

2-00:21:47

Buls:

Not that I know of, except the only publication that I showed you here. That's the only thing I have that I've kept, and I think if I'd had publications of some sort, I probably would have kept them.

2-00:22:07

Stine:

What about patriotism in the workplace, or maybe what kind of spirit was around in the shipyards that you could sense?

2-00:22:21

Buls:

I think most everybody who worked there felt that there was a job that had to be done. I mean, there was a war to be won, and everybody had a job to do to help win that war, although it might not seem to relate too much to the war. Everybody watched the newspapers, particularly if they had friends or loved ones or relatives overseas anywhere. They would be keeping track of what was happening to them. You've got to remember you were working six days a week and you didn't have much time or much energy left. You spent the Sunday recuperating.

2-00:23:19

Stine:

Thinking about that, if you could kind of reconstruct a typical day—going to work, how you got to work, the pace of what the work was like when you got there, where you would eat lunch, who you would talk with.

2-00:23:38

Buls:

I was fortunate later on to be able to be picked up at the door. The first time I went out there I think what I did was to take the F train down the San Pablo, and then I think they had a rail running out the shipyard, but I'm not positive of that either. I didn't use it, but just long enough to get into a ride pool. The first ride pool I was in, there were six of us. We became very well acquainted with each other, some more so than others because in every ride pool, you're going to have probably two people who do all the talking. And then I got the ride with this older gentleman who had a coupe, and there were two women who rode with him. This was like riding with Mr. Toad. I'm sure that it probably wouldn't hold a candle to the way people drive on the roads now, but I was pretty wary and sort of scared riding with him. But he'd pick me up, and he was a nice man. We'd stop on the way home and do our shopping. He'd drop me off at the door, and you really couldn't ask for anything better than that. He took all the shortcuts; none of the well-traveled roads were for him because he apparently knew the Bay Area very well.

2-00:25:33

You would meet the night shift coming out as you went in. It was a busy place, and I was trying to remember, and I'm sure that we punched a time card as we went in. Then we had to trek up the hundred steps to above the plate shop. I think I took my lunch, rather than running back down those hundred steps to the—they did have a snack bar. The snack bar, I usually would use that more to buy a pack of cigarettes for Vernon than I ever did to buy food for myself. I never have been one to eat much in the way of snacks. Coming home would be the same routine.

2-00:26:46

Stine:

So, you'd just eat your lunch at your desk?

2-00:26:49

Buls:

You'd eat your lunch out of a sack.

2-00:26:52

Stine:

This is kind of a detailed question, but do you remember what kinds of things you would wear to work?

2-00:26:58

Buls:

I wore slacks most of the time. The mold loft was cold and very breezy. It just seemed the appropriate thing to wear. I've worn slacks all my life even when I was a little kid. I started out to school wearing overalls, and I wore them most of my way through school, country school, one-room country school. Part of the time, I was the only girl in the school, so you put on overalls. I think my mother was a little unhappy because I did not wear dresses too often. At Iowa State, the winters are freezing and you had to go from class to class—sometimes walk a

mile to get to your first class in the morning—so you wanted something warm to cover up your legs. So I wore slacks at school and so did a lot of the girls. It was only logical I'd wear slacks when I worked in the shipyard. When I wore a skirt, the comment that I would get was, "Oh, she's got legs." [laughter]

2-00:28:34

Stine:

Did most of the other women wear skirts or slacks?

2-00:28:38

Buls:

A lot of the women did wear skirts, but I would say the greater portion of them wore slacks, particularly out where we were. If you worked in purchasing, you didn't have to walk as far. But when you had to go through the gates and go up into the yard, then you had to walk farther, and that probably had some difference. And the purchasing department may have been meeting a lot more people and may have felt the need to be a little more dressed up. But we were not meeting the public at all. We were working.

2-00:29:25

Stine:

You mentioned going to the grocery with your carpooling—the guy who was your carpooling driver. Do you remember: did you shop in Richmond ever? Or did you wait until you got back to Berkeley?

2-00:29:38

Buls:

It would either be in—I think we came through Albany, and he had a favorite store that he liked. So we'd stop there, but the shopping that I didn't do with him, I did at a store that was just two blocks up the street from us. It seems to me as though it was a Safeway store, but I'm sure it—were there Safeway stores?

2-00:30:04

Stine:

I think there were.

2-00:30:06

Buls:

Back, way back when?

2-00:30:09

Stine:

I think even on Macdonald Avenue in Richmond, I've seen a picture of a little tiny Safeway. Still on the shipyard, did you ever get to see any of the noontime events when they would bring in entertainment?

2-00:30:27

Buls:

Yes, if we wanted to go down, we could watch. Or if we were real lucky and got to a window before anybody else did, the stage was set up below the windows that swung in and out up above. But we could always hear it. I can remember the Andrews Sisters, and that's really the

only one I remember. I think a bunch of us walked down to hear the noontime concert that was given.

2-00:31:01

Stine:

How often were those?

2-00:31:04

Buls:

It didn't seem to me as though they were real often. But it seems to me that every time they were well publicized.

2-00:31:20

Stine:

Did you ever, at any of these or on any other occasion, get to see Henry Kaiser?

2-00:31:24

Buls:

I don't think I ever have seen him, unless he might have been at the ship launching that we were able to go to. As I told you before, a ship launching is not an exciting thing in Yard Three because they just open up the gates and let the water come in. There the ship is already in the water. As it goes out, then they beat a champagne bottle on the hull.

2-00:31:59

Stine:

Were people really excited, though? Was there an atmosphere—?

2-00:32:02

Buls:

Oh, yeah. It was an exciting atmosphere, but it doesn't hold a candle to the ones where the ship was down the—whatever they call it.

2-00:32:14

Stine:

Did you get to see any of those at the other yards?

2-00:32:16

Buls:

We got to see one of those at—I don't remember. Was that Yard Four? It might have been Yard Four, but I'm not sure.

2-00:32:30

Stine:

Were there any other times that you got to go to the other yards or that you would have any reason to go?

2-00:32:35

Buls:

No, not at all.

2-00:32:45

Stine:

This question—you already, like I had said, had had these other jobs, like you had told us, but do you remember what you did with your first paycheck at the Kaiser shipyards or it was just to save away?

2-00:33:03

Buls:

It was to save. We saved quite a bit of money while we were both working. You didn't have time to go; we were not frequenters of bars or anything like that, and we were able to save quite a bit of money. That's why we were able to buy a piece of land.

2-00:33:26

Stine:

And that's land out here in Alamo?

2-00:33:30

Buls:

Um-hm, yeah.

2-00:33:31

Stine:

And when were you able to do that?

2-00:33:38

Buls:

Well, it might have been as early as '44 or maybe '43. No, it had to have been '44, or early '45. I really could figure this out. It probably was in summer of '43, but I'm not sure.

2-00:34:20

Stine:

That's okay.

2-00:34:22

Buls:

Doesn't matter.

2-00:34:23

Stine:

Yeah. How did you find out about land being for sale out here, and what prompted you to make that decision?

2-00:34:28

Buls:

We started to look for a place to buy, and we looked up in Richmond. Vernon had always wanted to build his own home. Apparently, it was the childhood wish to build his own home, and he wanted a piece of land. We never could find exactly what we wanted, and then we found this ad in the paper for this property that we bought. We were going to build our house in the middle of it and raise walnuts and have four boys. [laughter] God was hearing me and he said, "I'm going to play a joke on her." And he gave me three girls.

2-00:35:23

Stine:

You said you had looked in Richmond. What deterred you from—?

2-00:35:28

Buls:

We actually did not look in Richmond. We looked in Concord; we looked in Walnut Creek. We just never found anything that seemed to be the location we wanted and the kind of land we wanted. I think in the long run we were—well, obviously we chose the right place.

2-00:35:46

Stine:

You've been here in this house since—?

2-00:35:54

Buls:

Well, let's see. Our oldest daughter will be fifty-six, and we moved in here when she was twelve, so we've been in this house forty-four years. We lived next door from the time she was I guess five years old. We lived there seven years, and previous to that time, we lived in a shack in the middle of the property.

2-00:36:36

Stine:

But you had continued to live in Berkeley—

2-00:36:41

Buls:

We lived in Berkeley until our oldest daughter was a year old. She was born in '47, so we lived there until '48.

2-00:36:53

Stine:

I want to go back to the transition you made from living directly in the East Bay to coming out through the tunnel, I suppose, when you started your family, and talk a little more about that. But before we get there, there are still some questions I have about wartime. I know you didn't live in Richmond, and you lived in Berkeley, but is there any impressions that you had of Richmond? What kind of stuck out most in your mind in terms of the character of Richmond during the war?

2-00:37:30

Buls:

It was a very temporary feeling, and it was crowded. There were so many people in Richmond, and those houses, it was all temporary barracks. That's essentially what they had. This was my feeling about Richmond, and I don't know, people who've lived there may have other feelings about it.

2-00:38:02

Stine:

Did you ever have occasion to do any shopping in downtown Richmond or walk up and down and experience it firsthand?

2-00:38:10

Buls:

Never.

2-00:38:12

Stine:

You just came to the shipyard and that was your day?

2-00:38:14

Buls:

That was my day, and then I went back to Berkeley.

2-00:38:24

Stine:

What about the East Bay in general was the most different for you, coming from Iowa?

2-00:38:31

Buls:

Well, it was people, lots more people than what I was living with except in college dorm, when I was in college. Lots more things to do. You could satisfy most anything you wanted to do. You could go to the theatre or to the light operas or to the ballet. Vernon doesn't like ballet, but I did get maybe to see it, maybe a little bit of ballet. Concerts, we went up to quite a few things in Berkeley that they had for the students because they were so close. So that it was just a walk up the hill when we could participate in some of the activities up there. It was just more vibrant. A university town is a good place to be.

2-00:39:32

Stine:

There's a lot going on. What kinds of things would you do for social occasions with friends or with co-workers?

2-00:39:43

Buls:

We went to lots of dances. We used to have lots of parties where people would just gather and have a party. On weekends, we would go to parks to walk, to hike, to see what was available. We frequented Golden Gate Park a great deal. We'd hop on the F train which would take us over to San Francisco, hop on a streetcar which would take us to Golden Gate Park and then do the return. We probably explored Golden Gate Park from one end to the other and the museums and the tea garden, the flowers. We used to do quite a bit of hiking up in the Berkeley hills. Who goes for a hike in the country in Iowa?

2-00:40:48

Stine:

That just leads me to the next area I wanted to talk about is rationing and how you dealt with that. It sounds like in your social life it was pretty easy in this area to find opportunities where you wouldn't have to spend a lot of money, where you wouldn't have to use up gas. How did rationing affect your day-to-day?

2-00:41:11

Buls:

See, rationing didn't affect us either a great deal. We didn't have much gas to use. Vernon was in a ride pool; he drove once a week. We would on occasion—we could drive out to Mount Diablo, and we did do some driving around but not a great deal. The food stamps, I exchanged my food stamps with my parents who had lots of meat stamps, and I had lots of sugar stamps. So they were happy and I was happy. Vernon's mother sent us a box full of butter that lasted forever in the refrigerator in the apartment. We did share some of it, but not too much.

2-00:42:02

Stine:

How did you end up having more sugar coupons and your family had more meat coupons?

2-00:42:09

Buls:

Because I didn't have to, didn't do much baking. I did do some canning during the war. I think one of the first pieces of equipment we bought in forty—it probably was in '43, early in the spring. We bought a pressure cooker so we could process some cherries, because we'd all carpooled and went up to Petaluma or Sebastapol to pick cherries and came home and canned them. We canned peaches. So we had a place in the basement in the apartment house where we could keep our canned goods. I did use the sugar there, but we just seemed to not use as much sugar. My dad loved sugar and he would use two or three teaspoons in every cup of coffee, and Vernon never used sugar in his coffee. I didn't use sugar in mine or didn't use sugar in my tea. So that we just had more sugar stamps than what we needed. I don't know why.

2-00:43:36

Stine:

And how did your family have more meat stamps?

2-00:43:40

Buls:

Because they lived on a farm, and they did their own butchering. That was why they didn't really need their meat stamps. Most farmers also probably could have gotten by without gas stamps because they needed that for their tractors and their farm works and enough of it would always spill over into the car tank, I think. But I don't know. That's just my surmise. We ate very well, and Vernon had mentioned the fats that they wanted women to save. You turn in your fat and you get meat stamps back. The butchers were always very careful to probe the fat all the way through to the bottom and turn it over to see if there was water in the bottom, make sure they were getting the proper poundage that they were supposed to get. We never had fat to turn in, as far as I recall. I think I either used it all for seasoning or we didn't have fatty meat. I don't know what.

2-00:45:21

Stine:

If you could just explain a little more about the butcher—people would bring cans of fat?

2-00:45:30

Buls:

They'd bring cans of fat in, which was supposed to be used for ammunition. The butchers just threw it away because it really was not used at all, but it was one way that people thought they were helping, by saving fats.

2-00:45:49

Stine:

When did that come out, that it was never used?

2-00:45:53

Buls:

Well, I don't know. I mean, Vernon probably knew that it was not going to be used. It's a process that's not used any more, but you know recycling—even then you did it—but when people recycled during the Depression, it was to make it over, use it up, something or other or do without. I can't remember now how that goes, but during the war, it was essentially the same thing. You were supposed to use up what you had, or do without. Sometimes the government went to great lengths to make sure we did without, and there again Vernon mentioned the fact that as soon as the war started, the bakeries could no longer slice the bread for their customers because it would save on electricity. But then everybody had to go out and buy a bread knife, which used high quality steel, to slice their bread. So the government worked in strange and mysterious ways as always.

2-00:47:29

Stine:

And this information—would you get this information from the newspaper, or do you remember also seeing posters or any slogans that might have been on the radio from the WPA [Works Progress Administration]?

2-00:47:40

Buls:

Oh, I'm sure I did, but I don't remember them. And I don't even remember that there were lots of posters, and I'm sure there were. I do remember this: "Loose lips sink ships," because that would be at the shipyards. I do remember that sign.

2-00:48:04

Stine:

During the war, a lot of previous New Deal programs were either augmented or continued. For example, the WPA was a wartime government agency, but it imposed regulations in a way that I don't think necessarily people would have tolerated before the war or necessarily after the war. I think there had been some controversy about the dismantling of the WPA after the war. I was wondering if you personally had any opinions about how the government was implementing these programs, maybe before and during, if you could contrast that?

2-00:48:52

Buls:

I don't think that I even paid much attention to it. I can remember when Roosevelt died and Truman came into office. I was a Democrat at the time, and when I walked into the office that morning, my boss said, "Now, see who we have for your president. Do you think he'll be any good?" Well, as a matter of fact, I think he's probably one of the better ones we've ever had.

2-00:49:35

Stine:

During the war, before the war, did you have any impressions of Roosevelt as a president?

2-00:49:44

Buls:

He probably helped my dad to save his farm. I don't really know, but I can remember—I was pretty young—I can remember they were having farm sales where the farmers were having auctions on their farms because they could no longer farm their farm. A lot of farmers were able to save their property because they had a moratorium on foreclosures, and consequently there were a lot of farmers that were able to save their farms. I don't know that my dad was in that category because he was the kind who tried not to spend more than what he had, but there were a lot of farmers who had borrowed a lot of money. Some of them lost their farms before this moratorium occurred. And some of them saved their farms after this. So I do know that—and there was a great deal of controversy about this.

2-00:50:57

Stine:

Outside of things happening on the home front, do you remember—and this is just rewinding to before you even went to California—but do you remember Pearl Harbor when the war started and our—as a country what we had been doing up to Pearl Harbor, and your feelings on how we have been interacting on the global scene, just in terms of what you had seen in the newspaper?

2-00:51:26

Buls:

Well, I don't think the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor—it did not come as a shock to a lot of people because they already knew it was going to happen. I was in the dorm at a dinner, noon dinner, and my brother who was in the army was there visiting at the time. When we came up from dinner, they told us what had happened. He said, “Oh-oh, I'm on my way back to Camp Polk,” I think it was. So I know he left to go home and pick up his things and then head back to camp. So he knew what he was, or he knew where he was going right away. Except he didn't go in the South Pacific. He went into Europe.

2-00:52:32

Stine:

How was that for you? I know you said you had been very close with your brother.

2-00:52:39

Buls:

I was really quite devastated at the fact that he was going to have to go to war. I think mothers probably suffered the brunt of that more than anybody else. It must have been terribly hard on them; I mean, it was hard on anybody who had a loved one, and they knew that they were at war. It's not a pleasant thought at all for wives or kids or mothers or just friends.

2-00:53:25

Stine:

Just to frame this a little bit, we're talking more kind of about the history of what was happening in the country, and this is fast-forwarding probably too much, but do you remember the end of the war and reactions? When you first heard? What was that day like?

2-00:53:47

Buls:

We had been in Modesto, no, Madera, I think, on a ranch where the fellows were helping with the farm work during their vacation or during a weekend. I think it was during vacation, and when the surrender of the Japanese occurred and I can remember that we were all very happy. We were coming home and the war was over. I knew that my job would be over too, very soon. And it was.

2-00:54:38

Stine:

How much longer did you work at the shipyards?

2-00:54:41

Buls:

I don't remember. The last days were not really very hectic at all. We were doing, I suspect it was—I don't know. We were taking inventory probably, and it seems to me that [Dolores Lampson?] and I were the only two people who were left up in the mold loft. All the drafters were gone, and we knew we would be too very soon.

2-00:55:17

Stine:

How did people in the shipyards react to—I mean, all along people had to know that these jobs were limited, that they would end when the war ended—but how did people react once the war had ended, and they knew they had to find other appointments?

2-00:55:35

Buls:

You know, I don't really know. You see I was not in Richmond. I know that everyone was looking for jobs, a lot of people were looking for jobs. I was going to see if I could find a job doing secretarial work, and I went to one store, some sort of a manufacturing place, to make an application, and I heard the woman in there say, "Well, you can't expect us to be paying you the amount of money you made in the shipyards." She said, "A hundred and twenty dollars is it. That's the most you'll ever make here." When I heard that, I got up and left. I thought, I'm sure I can do better than that, and I did. I don't even remember now what I got paid up at the radiation lab, but it was more than that, and I liked the work.

2-00:56:43

Stine:

So you didn't have to take a pay cut at that position from what you—?

2-00:56:47

Buls:

I probably did take a little pay cut, but not a great deal. I think I earned my money there, too.
[laughter]

2-00:57:00

Stine:

Did you have the impression that jobs were getting harder to find or that the market was tighter?

2-00:57:04

Buls:

It probably was because they couldn't help but be harder to find if the shipyards were closing down, and the manufacturing areas were closing down. Where would they go?

2-00:57:20

Stine:

Yeah. I think that was hard for a lot of people that moved here, especially moving from other parts of the country for this really great job in some ways, you know, that paid so much more. It probably influenced a lot of people on whether or not they wanted to stay here, and even Vernon stayed here, and I wanted to ask you about that. I think that we're almost out of time, though, so we'll put that on another tape.

2-00:57:50

Buls:

We're talking too much!

2-00:57:51

Stine:

I know—another hour's gone by. Goodness.

[End Audio File Buls2 02-12-03]

[Begin Buls3 02-12-03]

3-00:00:12

Stine:

We're going to wind down, but Patricia off-camera just told me a story about a woman who had come from Iowa for a job in the shipyards.

3-00:00:21

Buls:

Her husband came for the job in the shipyards, and they were newly married. The only housing they had was a motel room. He worked in the shipyard, and she became pregnant, and nine months later they had their first child. And they were still living in the motel room. He was in the navy, I think, after that, because he was drafted into the navy, and she moved in with her sister-in-law who also had a baby. I don't know whether they were still living in a motel room by then or not. I hope not. Housing was very, very difficult. Motels could make a lot more money renting out by the month than they could by renting out by the night, except I don't think they ever tried to rent them out by night. It was all permanent residents.

3-00:01:34

Stine:

It sounds like for a lot of people they had that family support too, in a pinch.

3-00:01:43

Buls:

That's right, they did have it. That whole family moved out from Iowa to California, on both sides of the family. California was the place to come, and it wasn't all necessarily during the shipyard days. They gradually filtered out here over the years.

3-00:02:05

Stine:

And how about your family? Did anybody make it out here?

3-00:02:11

Buls:

None at all. They are farmers or they were farmers, and Iowa is good farmland. And most of them had their own farms. So there's no way they're going to leave there. And my sister who is ninety-three, she'd never leave there because her roots are there. All her friends are there. And I'd never go back.

3-00:02:35

Stine:

Well, let's talk about that. What made you stay in California?

3-00:02:40

Buls:

Well, because Vernon stayed. His job continued. I mean, research goes on, and we were busy building a house, so I had lots to do.

3-00:02:55

Stine:

How long did Vernon work at Shell Development?

3-00:02:57

Buls:

He worked there thirty years, and then when Shell moved to Houston, he didn't want to go. I had a job, and I didn't want to go, and we didn't want to leave our house. So we stayed. That was in '73, I think. Our kids were all through college so we didn't need to have two salaries, and here we are. He has been busier since he retired than he ever was before. But he liked his job; he said he always felt he was getting paid for doing for something he liked real well. And I have too.

3-00:03:49

Stine:

When you knew that you had—well, you always knew that you would be staying in California—how did you start thinking about starting your family? Did you make a conscious effort to wait until the war was over?

3-00:04:10

Buls:

Well, we had been married for, I guess, five years. It was a very comfortable life. We didn't really need kids to make us complete, but we did. We felt that we wanted a family, so I had the first child two days before my twenty-sixth birthday.

3-00:04:42

Stine:

So you can celebrate together.

3-00:04:48

Buls:

Um-hmm. I have a grandchild whose birthday is the seventh of July which was my mother's birthday. Anything further?

3-00:05:03

Stine:

I was just curious when you had your daughters, did you continue working?

3-00:05:10

Buls:

I was working out here building houses all the while they were growing up. I think that one of the funniest things, what could have been a tragic thing, I was putting the roof on the house next door and Maria and Trish were playing down below, and Liz was in school, kindergarten. Soon I heard a little voice say, "Mommy, Trish is climbing up the ladder, but it's okay, I'm right behind her." And she must have been three years old, and Trish was about eighteen months old. I could almost just feel my heart go [dropping noise]. So I quickly ran over the edge, got them both up to the top on the roof, and started down. I took Trish down first and put her in a playpen, and then I went back up and took Maria back down, but I was under here. You know these are things that you don't think about. They knew they weren't supposed to come up the ladder, but...

3-00:06:45

Stine:

And then you went back to college?

3-00:06:50

Buls:

I went back to school, back to college, and finished up the last two years in three, drove back and forth to Hayward.

3-00:07:01

Stine:

And this was in the late 1960s, you said?

3-00:07:06

Buls:

Nineteen sixty to '63. And then I started teaching, but it's an ideal job for having children because you're with them when they're home.

3-00:07:24

Stine:

Maybe this will be my last question: if you could, just think about how the world was different for your mother, for you, and for your daughters, and how maybe your experiences during the war and after had influenced how you raised your daughters?

3-00:07:47

Buls:

Well, I think with Mother's generation it was so labor-intensive. You had to do all these things. She was taken—when they were married, she said the only things they had were a wagon, a plow, and a team of horses, and any household possessions that she had managed to gather up. They started farming; they had no electricity. They had a phone, no plumbing in the house except

for a sink and a pump to pump the water. And doing a laundry for eight people, keeping your kids clean and keeping them fed, raising chickens, carrying a little calf to the barn while the cow follows along, helping to keep the pigs out of the front yard. Gee, I look back at what she did and I just marvel at these women. I really do. I can remember when we got the first washing—I can remember when we got electricity at our farm. I was fourteen years old. Up until that time, we had used an outhouse. So you see, it was no problem for me to come out here and help build this house. Well, the kids have all—I don't know that it has changed the way I raised kids except that I've tried to teach them to be independent, and I think they all are, and “do something you like to do for your job,” and they do that.

3-00:10:08

Stine:

Have they all balanced having a job with motherhood?

3-00:10:13

Buls:

I think so, very well. At least, their kids all seem to be very well-balanced normal kids, and that's the only way you can judge. Life has been good.

3-00:10:35

Stine:

Well, I feel like I could talk to you all day. But I know we've taken a lot of your time already. Is there anything that I haven't asked—and I know there are things I haven't asked—but is there anything that you think is missing or that you would interject?

3-00:10:53

Buls:

No, I think that all I could say is that, if we had a war again that is meaningful, people will be willing to do their job. But no more things like Vietnam or the Korean War. I don't think they should have been fought. Do I dare be politic and say I don't think this one should be either? There has to be a better way to solve problems, or else send all the old men and old ladies to fight the war. [laughter] That's it.

3-00:11:49

Stine:

Well, thank you so much for going through this process with us. I feel like we've gotten so much from this interview. Thank you.

3-00:11:59

Buls:

Well, I hope it would be useful.

3-00:12:04

Stine:

I'm sure it will.

3-00:12:06

Buls:

Do you want to take the—?

3-00:12:07

Stine:

There are some pictures that I think we're going to—

3-00:12:11

Buls:

How about taking a photo of me during my shipyard days back? Oops.

3-00:12:23

Stine:

Let's have you hold it up. A lot of times we'll take the camera off, but this is such a stunning picture of you. Maybe I'll get this down just a little bit. This is before you were married. And what year was this picture taken in?

3-00:12:52

Buls:

Probably 1940 or '41, I'm not sure which.

3-00:12:59

Stine:

You were still in Iowa. I'm just going to zoom in a little bit. And let's see.

3-00:13:16

Buls:

Oh, you don't need any of these, I don't think. These were the day of our wedding.

3-00:13:30

Stine:

Oh, we could see one or two, if you don't mind.

3-00:13:34

Buls:

Well, which is the one that is least fuzzy.

3-00:13:36

Stine:

There's that one.

3-00:13:42

Buls:

Which one of these is better?

3-00:13:44

Stine:

Oh, this one's probably just fine. And this is—

3-00:13:48

Buls:

That's the wedding.

3-00:14:00

Stine:

And is this in front of your front porch?

3-00:14:03

Buls:

That's right. I was married in my own home. Take that one too?

3-00:14:16

Stine:

Oh, yeah. This is the *San Francisco Chronicle* from the day that Japan surrendered.

3-00:14:34

Buls:

August 15, 1945.

3-00:14:40

Stine:

I'm going to take the camera off so that we can look at that blueprint. If you wouldn't mind opening it up, we can look at it maybe on the table.

3-00:14:50

Buls:

Sure. On the floor?

3-00:14:53

Stine:

Oh yeah, whatever you think—

[End of interview]