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Berkeley, California

Betty Coates

Rosie the Riveter / WWII Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
Sam Redman  
in 2012

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Betty Coates Bertelsen

ENGINEERING SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT  
WAR TRAINING

GIVEN BY

*Stanford University*

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

BETTY ELAINE BERTELSEN

has satisfactorily completed a course of 480 class hours  
in

*Aircraft Drafting*

as authorized by the

*United States Office of Education*

April 2, 1943

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA

*Samuel Morris*

DEAN, SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING

Aircraft Drafting Certificate

THE AMERICAN NATION.

*Q.L.* +

**BLOOD DONOR CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that  
*Betty E. Bertelsen*  
 is a voluntary blood donor of the American Red Cross  
 Blood Donor Service.

*Margaret Price* DIRECTOR

Place SAN DIEGO Date EB 7 1944

25



THIS CERTIFICATE SIGNIFIES THAT ITS POSSESSOR HAS RENDERED A PATRIOTIC SERVICE BY GIVING HIS OR HER OWN BLOOD FOR THE TREATMENT OF THE SERIOUSLY INJURED.



FORM 18-1

**RECORD OF BLOOD DONATIONS**

| Date               | Place              |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| FEB 7 1944         | SAN DIEGO          |
| <del>4/18/44</del> | <del>Oakland</del> |
| MAY 23 1944        | OAKLAND            |
| OCT 9 1944         | OAKLAND            |
| DEC 19 1944        | OAKLAND            |
| MAR 13 1945        | OAKLAND            |

Eight weeks must elapse between donations. When making future donations please present this certificate.

"Give Your Blood to Save a Life"

Blood Donor Card

Dec. 8, 1941.

What is the meaning of war? Bloodshed, death, and destruction, they seem so far away. Have you ever been through a war? I haven't. I can't conceive of hundreds of people, men and women, being killed their lives ended, just because one or two men up in the sky release a boom; I can't imagine the horror that there must be in the sound of an air raid warning, a warning that means the possibility of your death; I can't help but wonder why it is possible for one or two men to give the signal which will put other men to death; I can hardly believe that these Extras and War Bulletins are real, true fact. And yet it is true, all of it and much more. They news commentators aren't fooling when they say 500 people killed in Hawaii, Manila Bored, Singapore invaded. But the United States knows the war is real and she is doing her fighting with the greatest courage. Japan has the upper hand now but that was due to the surprise attacks. Defeat isn't bitter if you don't swallow it. We haven't even taken a mouthful yet and we won't either. The United States will fight never failingly on to victory. And we're all behind her aren't we? V. for Victory.

AT WORK -  
UNITED ENGINEERS AT APRIL 8, 1944  
JUST A BY STANDER & HOW IT HURTS  
I SAW A SHIP SAIL OUT TODAY  
THERE WAS NO BAND OR WAVING  
CROWD.  
HER DESTINATION NO ONE KNOWS.

'BOARD HER ARE MEN, BOYS OF  
YESTERDAY  
WHO WORRIED ONLY OF THE  
SCORE OF NEXT WEEKS GAME,  
BUT NOW ARE OFF TO WAR!  
AND HERE I SIT, A GIRL.  
AND THERE'S NO PLACE ABOARD  
THAT SHIP FOR ME.  
NO I MUST STAY BEHIND,  
AND THOUGHT TO GOD I PRAY THAT  
HE WILL BRING HER SAFELY  
BACK.

I CAN NOT HELP BUT WISH  
I WAS ABOARD THAT SHIP AS  
~~SHE WENT~~ <sup>GOES</sup> SILENTLY ON  
HER WAY TO DO A JOB.

April 8, 1944 letter [see page 25 of transcript]

Arthur E. Butts  
United Engineering  
June 6, 1944

INVASION - SUCH A little word to hold so much at stake

What it means to you or I no one can tell as yet.

My job is just the same this morning a ~~war~~ job its called

But had remote it seems to be from war.

Today as usual I woke up in my room, rolled over for an extra 45 winks

Today as usual I ran to catch the street car on my way to work

Today as usual I combed my hair until 8:00-5

And as I sit here in the office I see other for which today is just as usual.

What of the lads who dropped from speeding planes, what of the boys who clambered up on Francis shores  
What of the men whose task it is make is invasion a success, today is not as usual for them. I <sup>want to</sup> pray for them this morning as they face

their depth, and yet just how to pray  
I don't know. If I sit with them I'm  
sure of that and I feel that many know  
it and feel better for it too. God bless  
you all and may you find happiness  
at your journey's end, whether it is  
ending now or tomorrow or 50 years  
from now.

June 6, 1944 Letter Part Two [see page 25 of transcript]

Dec. 11/1944.

The sirens are screaming.  
The air raid is on.  
The lights ~~with the~~ <sup>are</sup> blaring.  
But the enemies have gone.

I hope they don't harm us,  
As they fly over head.  
I wish that they'd leave us  
And go home to bed.

The bombs now are dropping,  
But still I ~~have hope~~ know  
That ~~they~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~will~~ <sup>will</sup> be stopping  
And they will all go.

Don't scream silly madams  
Don't cry little babies,  
As the air becomes laden  
With destruction for air raids.

Just  
Saratoga Blackout

**TAX LIST**  
**SALE OF SALE OF PROPER-**  
**AT PUBLIC AUCTION, FOR**  
**DELINQUENT TAXES OF 1936.**  
**PROPERTY FOR DELIN-**  
**TAXES OF 1935, 1933,**  
**1928.**

...ance of law, public  
...reby given that, com-  
...the 24th day of Feb-  
...at the hour of 10  
...of that day, and  
...from day to day there-  
...Additional time is re-  
...te. nplete the sale, in  
...of the Tax Collector of  
...of Los Gatos, County of  
...ca, State of California,  
...igned Tax Collector,  
...the delinquent taxes  
...ner redeemed, or  
...ed as provided  
...for sale at  
...highest bid-  
...ful money of  
...the several  
...property here-  
...on which date  
...ve elapsed from  
...de of the proper-  
...No bid for said  
...e, accepted for less  
...nt of taxes, penal-  
...s due on said prop-  
...year the same was  
...own in the year 1937  
...s of the year 1936,  
...um amounts are set  
...te the description of  
...l properties.

...to entitle the success-  
...a deed of the prop-  
...he must, in ad-  
...ice paid pursuant  
...h sale, within  
...redemption

Funeral services will be  
this afternoon at 1:30 o'clock from  
Ashley and McMillan Funeral  
Home at 6th and Geary in San  
Francisco. Interment will be at  
Cypress Lawn.

A native of New Jersey, Mrs.  
Jones had lived most of her life  
in San Francisco. She was the  
widow of the late William O.  
Jones. Besides Dr. Jones, she  
leaves a daughter, Mrs. Eleanor  
Heninger of San Francisco.

**Saratoga Girl Wins**  
**Drafting Job With**  
**Aircraft Company**

Though she's only seventeen  
years old and has not yet com-  
pleted a special training course,  
Miss Betty Bertelsen of Saratoga  
is already under contract as a  
draftsman for a major aircraft  
company.

Betty was signed by Consolida-  
ted Aircraft upon the completion  
of a basic three-months course in  
engineering and drafting at Stan-  
ford University. Her record was  
so brilliant that despite her youth,  
the company has placed her on  
salary while she completes a  
specialized course in aircraft  
design. She is scheduled to be-  
gin work at the Consolidated  
plant in San Diego March 8.

Betty, daughter of Mr. and  
Mrs. Bert Bertelsen of Saratoga,  
graduated just last June from

a delicious dinner  
jacketed waiters,  
clubmembers; they  
tained with a clev  
skit; they joined i  
time railroad tun  
the Pullman Pe  
Haywire Orchest  
their attempts  
rudely interrur  
getic porter  
Bruntz, and  
vondor, Jee

On the mor  
were given th  
story of a r  
wartime as tol  
district freight  
agent for the South  
Mr. Ostle, illustrating  
with large charts, gav  
statistics on the milea  
of freight, and num  
ians and troop  
by the S.P. Con  
made between the  
first war year and t  
years preceding it.

Clubhouse decor, car  
the evening's theme, f  
miniature railroad depot  
on the stage. Around  
were stacks of luggag  
and magazines usually  
train overhead racks.  
tables were decorated w  
iatore trains and lig  
shaded candles used  
cars. Of particular i

Newspaper article on Betty

Betty Bertelsen Coates - School and Employment Record.

June 1942 - - - - - Graduated Los Gatos Union High School

Aug. 1942-Feb. 1943-War Training Course - Stanford - 2 Courses  
(6 mon. - all day) Drafting - Aircraft Drafting.

Feb. 1943-June 1944-Convair, San Deigo. Aircraft Drafting  
(16 mon. - moved)

July 1944-Sept. 1945-United Engeering Co., Alameda. Marine Drafting  
(14 mon. - left to go to school)

Sept.1945-June 1946-Central Trade School, Oakland. Millinery  
(Design and making of hats)

June 1946-Jan. 1951-Harry Camp Millinery (Firm leases space in Dept. Stores)  
(Moved - Quit as assit. manager)

Married 1949

June 1951- Feb. 1953- T.T. Lunde, Marine Architects, San Francisco  
(17 mon. - 3 mon. leave)

Children born - Oct. 1952  
Aug. 1955  
Sept.1956

Four years, five months training and experience.

Training Records

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Interview 1: February 16, 2012

Tape 1

Redman: Today is February 17, 2012, and I'm in El Cerrito, California with Betty Coates. The bulk of our conversation today will focus on her life during World War II, taking a war training course, I understand, at Stanford, in drafting before working at Convair in San Diego and United Engineering Shipyards in Alameda. I'd love to learn all about that. But before we get into that, I'd like to get a few basics about your early background, who you are, and your early upbringing. Would you mind starting off by just telling me your name and when you were born?

1-00:00:37

Coates: Okay. I'm Betty Coates, and I was born January 21, 1925.

Redman: Great, and could you spell the last name for us?

1-00:00:45

Coates: C-O-A-T-E-S.

Redman: Whereabouts were you born? Were you born in California?

1-00:00:54

Coates: Yes, in Saratoga, which is down in Santa Clara Valley.

Redman: Could you tell me a little about your parents?

1-00:01:02

Coates: Yes, my father was an immigrant from Denmark. He was a blacksmith. My mother was Danish also. She was born in San Jose, and her father was a carpenter. They met—Daddy was playing cards with her father. Daddy had a business for himself in Saratoga by that time, and they bought a house on Oak Street. The number at that time was only eight-five. The grammar school was at the top of the hill, and the cemetery, and the bottom of the hill was the church.

Redman: So they were immigrants, were your parents religious?

1-00:01:45

Coates: No, not particularly, but we went to Sunday school. I have three sisters, one older and two younger. I just lost Caroline this last year, but my oldest sister Viola is still alive and my younger sister Nancy. They live up near Placerville.

Redman: What was it like to grow up in that area?

1-00:02:11

Coates: Easy. When it was summertime you took off your shoes and ran barefooted. We had a dog that lived outside, and Daddy walked down the hill to the blacksmith shop. Saratoga at that time was just—the main town was just two

streets, and it wasn't even incorporated. When we went to town we drove ten miles to San Jose. It was orchards, and every once in a while there would be a house, but mostly prune and apricot orchards.

Redman: So did your family did eventually get a car?

1-00:02:50

Coates: Oh yes, yes. In fact, Momma's story was that one day Daddy was over playing cards and she had to go to her cousins to get some fruit, and she was going to hook up the team to go and Daddy says, "Oh well take my car." She says, "Oh well you're just saying that because I don't know how." So he taught her how to drive.

Saratoga was easy to grow up in—at least for me. During the Depression, when that hit, nobody had any money. You didn't feel bad—at least as a child you didn't feel bad. I didn't because I always had a home to go, and food on the table, and loving parents.

Redman: Was there an awareness of tough economic times in those areas for kids, or was that something your parents sheltered you from?

1-00:03:51

Coates: Hobos used to come through.

Redman: Can you talk about that a little bit?

1-00:03:54

Coates: Well, there was a bridge over a creek, and the hobos usually made a camp down there. But they would come by and ask for work, and Momma would feed them. They would sit on the back steps to eat and chop some wood or something, but she always had an extra plate for somebody who came.

Redman: So they may offer to do a little chore here and there?

1-00:04:22

Coates: Yes, right. Right.

Redman: And then your mom might feed them?

1-00:04:24

Coates: Yeah, but you weren't afraid of them. You weren't afraid, and that's the thing that—I appreciate having grown up in that era. At least in a small town because you weren't afraid. You knew most everybody. The library, which we had a Carnegie Library down at the bottom of the hill that I loved. [Narrator addendum: Sundays when the weather was good we'd drive to the coast. Because the road at that time followed the canyon curving up the grade, one of the three of us would lose their breakfast on the way. So Mama said enough, and we took our breakfast with us. There was a small area up the coast from Santa Cruz we parked the car off the road. Daddy cooked us

breakfast, pancakes and bacon. We had a lunch along. There was a path down to the beach. It was a little cove. Daddy fished off the rocks and we played in the sand and surf.

When the smelt were running, Daddy and Uncle Wesley would get in the surf with a net, and a wave would come carrying the fish. They'd put the net down as the tide went out, they would fling the fish up on the sand, and we would rush to pick up the shiny fish and put them in a bucket. Daddy also made clamming rakes. These were special. He had a wide belt with a chain attached to the rake and a U-shaped piece with exactly five inches of space. That was the legal size clam you could keep; any others you should throw back.

Mama taught all of us to cook and sew. In the summertime, besides cutting apricots we canned a lot of peaches—over 100 quarts. We all became good peelers. I baby sat quite a lot, fifty cents for the evening, seventy-five cents after 12:00. Mama always seemed to find us a job.

Danish Lodge in San Jose was held every second and fourth Saturday night. Often when I was about fourteen—Carolyn twelve and Nancy eight—we would be dropped off at a movie on First Street. When it was over about 9:00 pm we walked three to five blocks on First down in Santa Clara three blocks from the Odd Fellows building where the meetings were held. That's what I mean when I say I grew up not being afraid.]

Redman: Can you talk about what it was like to walk to elementary school, or go to elementary? I assume you walked each day to elementary school?

1-00:04:57

Coates: Yeah, we just ran up the hill. In the summertime, when we were old enough, we would cut apricots. You were in what they called a dry shed, and you got a forty-pound box, which is twice the size of a lug box. If you know what a lug box is you see those sometimes. Anyway, you cut the apricots, took the pits out, and laid them in this huge tray. Every time you finished a box you hollered, and they punched your card and you got ten cents. But at the end of the summer, and the end of the hot season, you made about ten dollars. But that was enough to buy two outfits for school so, you know, it made a big difference.

Redman: Were all of your sisters doing this together?

1-00:05:57

Coates: Well at different times. Viola was four years older so she went first. We all did it.

Redman: When she started working, was it something that you sort of—as a young girl did you look up to your older sister? Were you jealous at all of her getting to go to work?

1-00:06:13

Coates: No I don't think so. But then I could take a walk with my dog. [laughs]

Redman: So you weren't so eager to get to—

1-00:06:21

Coates: No, but it was great. Momma always found us a job to do something. Anyway—and then the other thing—we got to go to camp at that time—even though it was the Depression. There was a Girl Reserves camp up in Big Basin, which is a State Park. We went up there for a couple weeks, and the church ladies paid half of our tuition, and then my daddy came up with the rest. I loved that. I still know the Girl Reserves song that we used to sing, around the campfire, and that was a lot of fun. At that time, they had CCC camps up there in Big Basin, also.

Redman: Tell me about the Civilian Conservation Corps—for someone that is unfamiliar with the CCC, or what it is, or what it did.

1-00:07:11

Coates: Well, I think it's—I don't know my husband was at a CCC camp.

Redman: So what did he do in a CCC camp?

1-00:07:21

Coates: Well he cleared brush and stuff like that. Reforestation. I think they made trails.

Redman: So it was a government program that provided jobs for these young men.

1-00:07:29

Coates: That's correct.

Redman: To go and do things like this—like clear trails—fight forest fires.

1-00:07:35

Coates: Work—I don't know that they fought forest—I don't that much history of the CCC. But the reason I know they were in Big Basin is they used to come down in a truck about 4:00 o'clock, and all of us little girls used to wave. [laughs]

Redman: So you'd see kind of the older men, but I assume young guys?

1-00:07:58

Coates: Yeah, they weren't too old.

Redman: They'd be like teenagers?

1-00:08:01

Coates: Yeah, yeah.

Redman: Young guys.

1-00:08:03

Coates: Because I was in grammar school when I went to this camp.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about what everyday life might have been like going to school in the morning?

1-00:08:11

Coates: Okay, well we—Daddy got up first, and he lit a fire in the kitchen stove. We would get dressed, and he would make breakfast lots of time for us. Then we would run off to school, and I loved school. I started early because in—I started younger than five, younger than five because they didn't have enough children in the first grade, and there was no kindergarten. So they collected everybody in order to pay a teacher, so you had to have so many students to pay a teacher. So the ones that didn't quite make it were too young. They stayed back a second year, and I went on to the second grade. So I graduated from high school when I was only seventeen, and that was in 1942.

Redman: So we'll get to that in just a moment. That's really interesting timing in terms of when someone could graduate from high school. I'd like to ask, did your family have a radio growing up?

1-00:09:22

Coates: Yes, we had one radio, which we listened to—you know *The Creaking Door* and the—oh, and the *Little Theatre off Times Square*, that was a favorite. My father, he always listened to the Joe Louis fights that were on the radio. I don't think we listened to it for news or anything; we got the newspaper. Daddy would—we all came home for lunch too; we ran back home and had lunch at home. My father always had lunch, and then he'd go in the dining room, sit in his chair, read the paper a minute, and take a snooze.

Redman: Before heading back.

1-00:10:08

Coates: Before heading back to work, yeah. He grew—he had rabbits behind the shop and we used for food. In fact, we had rabbit practically every Sunday, and we just loved it. Momma fixed it, it was wonderful.

Then growing up, I had eczema all over my hands so I couldn't have lots of things. So we went to UC Medical Center in San Francisco, and my little sister had it too. So they didn't—well, I was allergic to everything. I took all these skin tests. [laughter] But anyway, finally I had grown out of it, thank goodness. But anyway—so—that—I don't know why I started on that story but—

Redman: So, going to UC Medical Center, I'm curious about that. Let's pause there for a moment because I'm curious what it must have been like as a young girl, growing up away from San Francisco.

1-00:11:20

Coates: Well we didn't—no, no—oh, away from San Francisco?

Redman: And then going to San Francisco for the first time.

1-00:11:27

Coates: Well, we just went to the hospital, and I had these skins tests. The solution was this tar medicine, because I used to have it all the way up and down my arms. I was in the sixth grade at the time and Momma made me—because it stained everything it touched—so she made me some shirts that had long sleeves, white long sleeves. And I had to wear that underneath everything because it would take care of the staining.

Fortunately, I didn't care about anything like that. It didn't bother me, and nobody teased me. I just lived with all this. [laughs] I loved our sixth grade teacher because she had all different kind of crafts that I'm sure she paid for herself, you know. She taught us to do block printing and other things that were so much fun that I loved. So, if you got your work done you got to do this, and you know me. [laughs] I wanted to do this.

So, I don't know, it just was a happy—we went to the eighth grade. So, in the seventh and eighth grade—the other thing is at the time we had a nice assembly room and every Friday we had some kind of assembly. The classes had to put on something, you know, a play or something. So, in the seventh grade we did the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and of course we had—it was only a class of sixteen I think. The boys didn't want to take the part, so the girls—I was the mayor in the poem and my girlfriend was the pied piper, and to this day I can recite lots of that—

Redman: That play, that poem, yeah.

1-00:13:36

Coates: That poem, yeah.

Redman: I was going to ask about boys and girls, and growing up in that era, what sort of the expectations were for young girls and what young boys were expected to do?

1-00:13:49

Coates: Well, you know, some of the boys—like we had a father who was a plumber, and we had fathers who were ranchers. The girls we had—in my class we had one Japanese girl who was my girlfriend, May Yamamoto, and of course when the war started she had to go away.

Redman: Can you talk about that for a moment? Her name was May Yamamoto?

1-00:14:20

Coates: Yes.

Redman: And she was a friend of yours as a little girl?

1-00:14:22

Coates: Yes. The only problem I had with that—we only could be friends at school because on Saturday she had to take Japanese classes. She lived on the other end of town, and I didn't get to play with her on the weekends. But in school we were friends, and I still write to her. She's back in the Bay Area, and finally they graduated her from high school.

Redman: So she had to leave—sorry you had mentioned to me already—Pearl Harbor happened your junior year of high school?

1-00:14:59

Coates: No, no, my senior year.

Redman: Your senior year of high school. So she was pulled from school before graduation.

1-00:15:05

Coates: Yes, and right next to my father's shop on Big Basin Way was a Japanese laundry, and all those people were taken away.

Redman: What did you think about that as a young girl at that time—to see your friend brought away, and to see these other—but in the context of the war?

1-00:15:27

Coates: Well, you didn't really know they went away, although the laundry got—was vacated. I never knew actually that she was gone. I mean, I knew she was gone, but I mean this process of having to go—I didn't know any of that.

Redman: So the notion of these relocation camps and things like that—that wasn't very well understood?

1-00:15:58

Coates: No, no, they just—well there was hatred toward the Japanese, you know—after Pearl Harbor everybody—but I really didn't feel hatred toward them. But—you know—sort of thought that the President took care of it.

Redman: Let's talk about Pearl Harbor for a moment because I suspect that was a big turning point—like for many people of your generation—that was big turning for your life.

1-00:16:22

Coates: Absolutely.

Redman: Can you tell me about what December 7, 1941 was like for you.

1-00:16:30

Coates: Yes, I thought the world was going to stop. We were due to go to a wedding that afternoon, and I can remember that my mother—I asked my mother if they were still going to get married like—you know—like everything—you should stop and do something else. I didn't—you know—and then I wrote this crazy letter to myself.

Redman: Can you read that to me?

1-00:16:58

Coates: Yeah.

Redman: Tell me—before you read it aloud, tell me what this letter is and then read it for me.

1-00:17:03

Coates: Well it's a letter that I wrote to myself. It's dated December 8, 1941.

Redman: Great. Would you mind reading that for us?

1-00:17:11

Coates: Okay. I said, "*What is the meaning of war? Bloodshed, death and destruction? They seem so far away. Have you ever been through a war? I haven't. I can't conceive of hundreds of people, men and women being killed, their lives ended just because one or two men up in the sky release a bomb. I can't imagine the horror that they must be in with the sound of the air-raid warnings. A warning that means the possibility of your death. I can't help but wonder why it is possible for one or two men to give the signal which will put other men to death. I can hardly believe that these extras and war bulletins are real true fact. And yet it is true, all of it is and much more. The news commentators aren't fooling when they say, "Five hundred killed in Hawaii, Manila." "Manila bombed and Singapore invaded." But the United States knows that the war is real and she is doing her fighting with the greatest courage.*"

I'm getting emotional.

*Japan has the upper hand now, but that was due to the surprise attack. Defeat isn't bitter if you don't swallow it. We haven't even taken a mouth full yet, and we won't either. The United States [crying]*

I'm sorry.

*The United States will fight. Never failing, on to victory. And we're all behind her aren't we!! V for Victory.*

I've never read it aloud before.

Redman: That's a really powerful letter.

1-00:19:17

Coates: Well.

Redman: After you take a moment, I'd like for you to tell me what it was like to read that letter now? It's been so many years since you've written that.

1-00:19:28

Coates: Well, I mean, I just read it to myself and I thought, "Well, that's pretty good. I wonder why—"

Redman: It's beautifully written. I think it's amazing. It's amazing. So to think back on that now, so many years later, does that—it seems like there is a sense of fear and there is a sense of the unknown for that young girl who was writing that.

1-00:19:52

Coates: Absolutely. Well in 1942 and you heard about—I mean in 1941 you heard about guys going into the Army and the draft. You knew it was real—and then—actually in Saratoga, I think it was in January, they sent a whole unit of field artillery up from Fort Ord and they occupied Saratoga. [laughs] Headquarters was in the Odd Fellows Hall above my father's shop.

Redman: There was no avoiding the war apparently.

1-00:20:34

Coates: No, and they used to patrol down—there's a little—actually a First World War Memorial Park in the center of Saratoga, and they used to patrol down there. But anyway—these were—you know young men and they just didn't know what to do with them right then so they sent them to Saratoga. My birthday is the twenty-first of January, and Momma talked to the officer and they invited any January birthdays up to the house to have a party, and that was kind of fun.

Redman: So you got to meet some of the young men?

1-00:21:12

Coates: Yes.

Redman: I want to get back to that in a moment, but there are a few questions that I neglected to ask. One is just about FDR. How did your parents feel about FDR?

1-00:21:23

Coates: Oh yeah, we were very pro-FDR. Yeah.

Redman: I'm curious if—you probably were a little young to know much about Herbert Hoover and his legacy. Did your parents have any strong feelings about Herbert Hoover before FDR came along?

1-00:21:42

Coates: I don't remember them discussing politics but—

Redman: But FDR was such a—

1-00:21:45

Coates: Oh yes, yes. He was a—the Fireside Chats he did and—I don't know. He just seemed like he was going to take care of us.

Redman: Let's talk for a moment about a big development that happened here in the Bay Area that I'm wondering if you know much about, in the 1930s. In '36 the Bay Bridge is completed and in '37 the Golden Gate Bridge is completed.

1-00:22:10

Coates: Yes, yes.

Redman: Were you aware of those things happening?

1-00:22:13

Coates: Oh sure. We had a Saratoga-Los Gatos day and we all boarded the train in Los Gatos, and it came up to the Oakland Mole at that time, and then we got on a ferry and we went over to—oh I'm talking about Mare Island, that's not right—oh, to the fair—

Redman: Oh, to Treasure Island.

1-00:22:36

Coates: Treasure Island, yes.

Redman: Tell me about the 1939 Fair at Treasure Island.

1-00:22:41

Coates: Oh, that was so exciting. I mean, you know, it just—well, one thing, we had—each county had a display and visit, you know, and special place. So the County Agriculture Committee—in Saratoga—he was a good friend; his name was Vince Garrod. He invited us up the—I guess the office of the Santa Clara Valley thing, and so I remember sitting in some big chair. But anyway, I have this picture over here of Santa Clara Valley, and that was full of blossoms. That was the official picture for the county, and Mother was given a copy.

Redman: That must have been a very exciting thing—

1-00:23:39

Coates: Oh, it was exciting. I mean, we went on these rides, and I can remember going on this ride and yelling so loud that I was attracting a crowd. I swear the operator ran it longer because [laughs]

Redman: Because you were having so much fun.

1-00:23:59

Coates: I was having so much fun, you know.

Then, I can remember the Hershey Building. They had two big things bigger than this table full of chocolate, and they had big things going around stirring it the whole time. The buildings were so pretty, and everything was exciting.

Redman: It seems that a lot of people that attended that fair remember one of a few different things, the rides, the colors, the lights, the sounds. But then there were also, either new displays of technology, or—

1-00:24:33

Coates: Oh yes.

Redman: —Native American displays, things like that. Did any of those sorts of things catch your eye?

1-00:24:41

Coates: No, not that I remember this—that long ago, no. It was mostly the ride and the [laughs]

Redman: Having a good time at the fair. I imagine it's the type of thing that you could go back over and over again. If you wanted to, but maybe that wasn't—

1-00:24:57

Coates: Oh no, no. Financially we never go back. It was too long a trip, and actually it was a long time before I ever went farther away than San Jose, you know. Or Palo Alto.

Redman: In those days you would have taken the train up to the Oakland Mole and then caught a ferry to travel across—

1-00:25:23

Coates: A huge ferry. Yes, yes.

Redman: So times are quite different now in terms of driving everywhere. People—you know there is less ferry service. So was that a pretty dramatic change for the area, do you think?

1-00:25:36

Coates: Oh, well I'm sure. The bridges were, you know, made a big difference. In fact, they cut out the ferry system after the bridges, you know.

Redman: Things changed.

1-00:25:50

Coates: Yeah. But of course that one didn't bother me until I was much older.

Redman: Let's turn back to the war for a moment. I'd like to ask one sort of general question before we get back into your life in particular, your life story at the end of high school. It seems that before the war there were a number of people—there was a movement in the isolationist movement—of people who wanted to keep the United States out of the war as long as possible. But then after Pearl Harbor, that sort of seems to just disappear, that there's this patriotic sentiment.

1-00:26:28

Coates: Absolutely.

Redman: You know, after that—can you talk about that a little bit?

1-00:26:32

Coates: Well, of course I didn't know much about isolation; that didn't occur to me. I mean, I have not recollection of that. But I do know that once we went to war, everybody was in the war. I mean, somebody was always doing something. They were collecting metal, or they were—whatever. Of course, you had rationing. You had rationing tickets.

Redman: Can you tell me about rationing? What that was?

1-00:27:00

Coates: Well Momma took care of that. But you had only so much sugar, and so much flour, and so much gas. You just dealt with it sort of, you know, like everything else.

Redman: Right, yeah, and I suspect coming out of the Depression that maybe wasn't—

1-00:27:19

Coates: No, no, no. Well, I know the Depression hurt lots of people differently. By being this young, it didn't hurt me. I had a friend once who was in college, and she had to quit college. So it really made a big difference in her life, and it made a big difference in lots of lives. A city people—it was different than being in a small rural town.

Redman: Tell me, then, about what happens in your story at the end of the war. I'm sorry, at the end of high school. At the start of the war you have one more year, a senior year of high school.

1-00:27:59

Coates: I was finishing high school, and there was always a Senior Sneak Day, and because of the war the principal told us that we couldn't go. Well, we did. The class came together like they had never had before. They organized carpools, and we went to Santa Cruz to the Boardwalk, and I had more fun that day than any other day in high school, I think. We came home safe and sound, and the next day the vice principal read the riot act. The following day, the principal, who had been away, took it as a personal affront, and he said we disregarded the shortage of tires, and gas, and all that thing. He just—we were so un-

patriotic. I have a six-page letter I wrote to Dr. Brown, which fortunately I never sent. [laughs] And I just let him have it. I won't read that to you.

Redman: Oh, that's funny. That's really funny.

1-00:29:19

Coates: Anyway, we graduated, and I had no idea what I was going to do. I had four years of math, and in my yearbook I was going to be a math teacher. I loved math, and—

Redman: For a moment, can you tell me about what it was like to learn math as a high student in that era? Were there any techniques in particular that stand out in your mind, or methods of learning math?

1-00:29:51

Coates: Well I was lucky. I had a teacher who was a civil engineer, and he was surveying, and he broke his leg. He broke it a second time and it shortened. So he couldn't do that, and he became a math teacher. Well, I sat in the front row and if Mr. Burke put something on the bulletin board, I had it.

Redman: It was important.

1-00:30:20

Coates: Yeah—well, I mean I just learned it; I just knew it. I just ate it up, and I had him for four years. We took geometry—well first we took algebra, and then we took geometry, and then we took solid geometry, and then we took trig. I asked my mother and father for a Christmas present, for a slide rule. And they had no idea what that was. But they bought me a really nice slide rule, and I just ate it up.

Redman: I'm thinking—I'm anticipating a little bit your later interests, and I'm wondering if drawing was a skill that you had acquired around this age?

1-00:31:07

Coates: I didn't take drafting in high school. That was a boy's class, you know. We didn't get to take shop, but I did take arts and crafts. I was very athletic. I played—we played field hockey, and I played badminton, and I was girl's commissioner the senior year of, you know, athletic commissioner.

Redman: So at the end of high school you take a war training course—

1-00:31:48

Coates: Yes, yes.

Redman: —in drafting at Stanford University. Is that correct?

1-00:31:51

Coates: Yes, somebody told me about—the closest I came to going to college was I went to Cal and took bonehead English, and passed that. But there was no

money, and we didn't really—nobody in my family knew anything about scholarships. So there was a war training course; in fact, I have my certificates from it. Where are they?

Redman: Are we good on time?

1-00:32:24

Coates: Oh, wait a minute. Some place here.

Redman: You can just hold that up—

1-00:32:36

Coates: Okay.

Redman: —whenever you're ready. As if you're showing me.

1-00:32:47

Coates: This is the first one. It says, "Engineering science and management war training given by Stanford University. This is to certify that, Betty Elaine Bertelsen has satisfactorily—a course of 480 class hours in—" Wait a minute I'm reading the wrong one; that's aircraft drafting. That's the second one. This the same thing, or it says, "in engineering drafting and technical calculations for women, by the authorization of the United States Office of Education." That's that one.

Redman: So that was all women in your course?

1-00:33:28

Coates: No there weren't. I don't know why they said that. [Laughs] No, there were several men, but mostly women, and they were all ages. Some were—a house wife and a couple of kids. So it was just anybody trying to do their war effort I guess.

Redman: How did you first learn about that program, do you remember?

1-00:33:52

Coates: No, I don't really remember that.

Redman: Tell me about what it was first like, then, to arrive at Stanford University for this program. Do you recall some of your first impressions? You wrote it down.

1-00:34:04

Coates: No. But I did stay with that sixth grade teacher who lived in Palo Alto. I stayed with she and her husband, bless their hearts. I did a little cooking and little stuff like that. And I rode a bicycle to Stanford because it's nice and flat. And—well, it was exciting, you know, because I had never been on the campus before. I remember break time, we used to go and have a cup of coffee or something. I had never had coffee before, and so it was the thing to

do. I had a big sister who said you weren't supposed to put anything in your coffee. So I had to learn to drink coffee black. But I managed.

Redman: So were there set courses that you would take—?

1-00:35:06

Coates: We were all in one room. And I don't really remember the courses. Although I think maybe, I might have something—no, that's not it. Oh gosh, I'm sorry—

Redman: Oh no, that's fine.

1-00:35:22

Coates: —disorganized here. Here, this looks like something I might have done. It's an exercise in construction. It's a—well, I can't explain it but it's—no, I didn't do it there. I did it some other time because I used b-squared—oh I was still—when I was in high school my initials were B.B. So when I saw that beta—that's why I write my name like it is because I do a beta for my first name. I used—I started in high school and used b-squared as my initials.

Redman: Oh that's funny. A nod to your love of math I think.

1-00:36:06

Coates: So yes, I could've done this in the class. It's learning to—

Redman: Betty, how did the men and women interact in that course? What types of things would the men say to each other? Was there any sort of harassment, or were they pretty respectful to each other, the other students?

1-00:36:25

Coates: Oh I can't imagine it. No. It was a very congenial experience as far as I'm concerned. Oh, and then I have this funny—this little piece of clip. Oh that was after I finished the course—the aircraft course. See I took the course twice.

Redman: Tell me about the difference there because—so you mentioned the first one—

1-00:36:51

Coates: Well the second—I actually have the manual here from the second course. It's called, "Aeronautical Drafting." It just shows—it teaches you the parts of the airplane basically is what it—the only way it was different because people took this course that had not taken the first course. I took it over because they paid me. And guaranteed a job.

Redman: That seems like a great deal for a young person.

1-00:37:20

Coates: It was. It was a hundred dollars a month for three months, and I had a job down in San Diego.

Redman: So that's at Convair, correct?

1-00:37:31

Coates: Yes.

Redman: So I'd like to get into that, but first can we just wrap up at Stanford. Is there anything else you would like to add as far as your training course at Stanford?

1-00:37:42

Coates: Um, I have this—

Redman: What that was like?

1-00:37:43

Coates: —I have this little clipping.

Redman: Oh, go ahead.

1-00:37:45

Coates: “Betty was signed by Convair Aircraft upon completion of a basic three months course in engineering and drafting at Stanford University. Her record was so brilliant that despite her youth—”

I think my mother wrote this.

“—despite her youth, the company has placed her on salary while she completes the specialized course in aircraft design. She is scheduled to be working in the Consolidated Plant in San Diego, March 8<sup>th</sup>. She's the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Burt Bertelsen of Saratoga, and graduated just last June from Los Gatos High School where she majored in mathematics.”

Redman: So your parents were pretty proud, it sounds like?

1-00:38:37

Coates: Oh of course. Of course.

Redman: But not only because you were participating in the war effort in some sense, but also I imagine because you were becoming a young woman?

1-00:38:47

Coates: Yeah. But anyway, it was a little dramatic for me to leave home. I was the first one to leave home, and I wasn't even eighteen. So they had to get letters of recommendation that I would be—a proper woman, I guess. [laughs]

Redman: So people had to vouch for you?

1-00:39:07

Coates: Oh, absolutely, yes, vouch for me. So I have some pictures—I have a few pictures of me; they're in an envelope—too many papers—get rid of these—

Redman: So that was in the clipping.

1-00:39:34

Coates: Oh, here is my blood donations.

Redman: I think that's the letter, yeah. Can you talk a little bit about blood, donating blood during World War II? That became a big thing for people to do.

1-00:39:48

Coates: Oh, absolutely. Well, I did it—it says February 7, 1944, in San Diego. I guess that's the only time I did it in San Diego. The rest of them I did in Oakland. I—let's see—one, two, three, four, five there. Six times I've donated blood.

Redman: So you got to be pretty good at it?

1-00:40:14

Coates: Well, yeah. Well it wasn't difficult. In fact it was in this—we went down by streetcar, down to this old church that's still there. They restored it, and that's where they took the blood. What was I looking for?

Redman: The next question I'd like to ask is what San Diego was like when you arrived down there?

1-00:40:42

Coates: Pictures—well, it was a little scary. 1944.

Redman: Oh, is this the assembly—?

1-00:40:52

Coates: Oh, yeah. There's pictures, okay. The funny thing is—here's a graduation picture; here's me. But anyway, the funny this is, when I was going away, my mother and I went to San Jose and bought a used steamer trunk, if you can believe it. It was like I was going—

Redman: Away!

1-00:41:16

Coates: To the next country. Anyway—and we started sewing too. Anyhow, this picture of me is at the depot when I was going away. And this is—

Redman: Do you mind if I see that?

1-00:41:34

Coates: This is my four sisters. These are my sisters.

Redman: So I notice everyone is wearing skirts.

1-00:41:47

Coates: Oh, yes, yes, absolutely. But here—I'm in jeans here. This is in San Diego. That's where we—I went with a friend. Lorna and I were—she was just a high

school graduate too, and she lived in Livermore. So we became good friends in the class. So we went down together. We found a—steered us to housing—first we went to the Convair office, and they steered us to housing, which was—it had been officer’s quarters. So it was just—you had a bed, and a dresser, and a sink, and then the facilities were down the hall. That was—well, we could get a bus from there to get to Convair, and the thing about San Diego was that, well, it was open twenty-four hours a day. Everything was open twenty-four hours a day.

The transportation was fantastic. San Diego is laid out on a grid, and so the avenues are all named for trees. They start with “A” and they just keep on going. So you could find out where you were pretty easy. The others were numbers, and then when the shift changed at the plant, buses were lined up and you were—you could get right on a bus when you got out of work.

The other thing is, they had passes. You bought a pass depending upon how far you wanted to go on the bus.

Redman: So it was pretty well set up, it sounds like, for both—

1-00:43:50

Coates: Oh, it was very organized.

Redman: I forgot to ask two questions about Stanford. One, it reminded me when you said you went down to Convair with one of your friends from Livermore. Were the young men and women in the course that you were taking—courses that you took at Stanford—were they mostly from California? Or were they from all over?

1-00:44:13

Coates: Oh, no, no, no. They were local.

Redman: Local—okay—mostly Bay Area kids.

1-00:44:17

Coates: Yes, right.

Redman: How about your teachers? Were they—?

1-00:44:21

Coates: We had one teacher to the course, and I don’t remember how the thing started. Actually—basically—you learned to use a t-square and a triangle, and learned how to make arrows and dimensions, how you would dimension things. Printing, you had to print everything.

Redman: It sounds like these are really practical skills that someone could then immediately get to use one they got down to Convair?

1-00:44:52

Coates: Oh yes, yeah, sure.

Well the section I got into when I was at Convair was called furnishings. It was on the B-24 Bomber.

Redman: The Liberator, correct?

1-00:45:08

Coates: Yes. One project that I remember was called a—it was made of canvas, and it was above the pilot's head, and it was covering the hole that the life raft was in. Around the edges were things called Lift the Dots, and they could snap them off really easy to get to it. So that's the one thing that I remember drawing. And the other thing was the—what would I call it—it fitted in the nose of the plane, and it was a piece of aluminum that was pressed, and it had to be big enough to hold the motor for the windshield wiper on the bombardier's window. So, I drew it, but most of it I told them it needed to be determined by loft because it was curved in three directions. But then, unfortunately—and I never knew the reason why I got transferred to—oh, the other interesting thing about the engineer I worked for, he was pilot in World War I. He was a very nice man. I must have asked him something funny—I don't know what I asked him—but he wrote me this nice letter and gave me some good advice. I have the letter, but I won't read that.

Redman: I'm curious about working on the B-24s, because you described in some great detail a couple of examples of places in the plane that you would have worked on. Was it the type of thing where you would work at the drafting table and then maybe have to go look at something in real-life? Or would you sort of imagine how these pieces might fit together inside?

1-00:47:13

Coates: Well we had plans to look at. The other thing is—I started to tell you—that I don't know why but they transferred me to a swing shift, and on the swing shift they didn't give me anything to do much. I don't remember anything that I drew on the swing shift, and the job that I was working on was sitting over there, and it wasn't being done. So, it just confused me.

However, I was lucky in the fact that, if you had a Number 6 Badge—that was engineering, and you could go any place in the plant. You weren't restricted. I think I got a hard hat some place, and I took a plan in my hand and I walked the plant. I walked—the assembly line—these planes were coming—they kept coming and they kept getting more parts. I walked all the way down the plant. It was huge. Then across the street was the parts plant where they were doing all the riveting. I did get to see the windshield wiper in place. I just absorbed it all. It was incredible!

Redman: It seems like, in both LA and in San Diego, the way—my sort of impression of how things were set up is that there would be the central factories, and then

these parts manufacturers sort of propped up around, and maybe the military was keeping track of where the parts were coming from and that they were all fitting together. Was that a confusing thing? I mean, it's fascinating to me that you're soaking all this up and seeing how this huge factory works.

1-00:48:54

Coates:

Well, as far as I know—I have no idea whether parts were made other places, but there was a huge—right across the street—this long street—I have no idea what its name is. But anyway, this long straight—across from it was the parts plant, and that was big too. The plant was right next to the airfield down there.

Redman:

I see. So they could—

1-00:49:25

Coates:

They could—yeah.

Redman:

—get planes right to the airfield.

1-00:49:27

Coates:

Yeah.

Redman:

I want to ask one last question on this tape. Can you tell me, when you started work at Convair, how many men there were versus how many women? Because I understand that as the war progressed, more and more men had to go into the military, and there were more and more women, like you, working in the factory.

1-00:49:44

Coates:

Yeah. Well—of course this was kind of early, I guess, and I saw lots of men working. I did see Rosie the Riveters, though.

Redman:

Okay, so there were women—?

1-00:49:57

Coates:

Oh, there were women riveting. Especially in the parts plant across—I mean the pre-assembly plant across the way.

Redman:

How about with the drafters? You mentioned this other young women that you were working with, but was it still predominantly men that were in the drafting room?

1-00:50:14

Coates:

Yes, I think so. I think some of them got excused because they were vital—I have a clipping here from the Consolidated News. It's called, "The Song of the Liberator," and it was August 12, 1943. The bottom of it says, "Work to win." We had rallies at noon time, and gave everybody a pep talk about how good they were doing and that kind of thing.

Redman: Did you ever have any sort of performances, or special guests, or things like that to cheer up the workers? Programs, or—?

1-00:50:57

Coates: I don't remember anyone specifically that came.

Redman: I think with that, maybe, it would be a good time to pop in a second tape if that's all right.

## Tape 2

Redman: Today is February 17, 2012. I'm in El Cerrito, California, with Betty Coates, and this is our second tape today. There are a few questions I wanted to ask about life at Convair. What life was like as a young woman working there? I asked how the men and women got along at Stanford, and you said it was a pretty collegial environment. Was that the same—?

2-00:00:29

Coates: Oh yes, yes. It was very nice.

Redman: Did you notice a difference in terms of the workers that were in the drafting room versus the Rosie the Riveters? Maybe you didn't get to know them very much.

2-00:00:43

Coates: No, no. I knew no one that was working in the—building the plane actually, no. So, actually you just worked with the people in your own department. Lorna worked in a different department, and we just got out to work together. You had to eat out, so we did that. Although eventually—I belonged to the Congregational Church, she belonged to a different one, and we were allowed to rent a room in the parsonage of her church for a while, and then we were able to cook. That was good. I spent most of my time, a good time, at the church; they had a drop-in center for young men. The director was fun, and I can remember making potato salad up to my elbows.

Redman: So any young man could drop by this thing?

2-00:01:54

Coates: Oh yes, yes. It was a—I have these letters that this director kept track of everybody. It's full of addresses of people, and these I got when I moved back up in the Bay Area. So I was on the list. And it has all the Marines and the sailors, mostly Marines and sailors in San Diego.

Redman: But she kept everybody in touch?

2-00:02:22

Coates: Oh yes, she did. These big long letters with, let's see, three or four pages of addresses. It was a wonderful program because it was relaxed. There were games to play, and they had a juke box for dancing. They fed them a couple of

times. Well, I think we had snacks, but we had full meals like on Sunday night or something like that.

Redman: San Diego was not only growing, I understand, in terms of the factories that were moving in during World War II, but it was also growing as a port, and then also I imagine a lot of uniformed sailors, a lot of soldiers who were preparing to leave to go to the Pacific.

2-00:03:10  
Coates: Oh, yeah. Sure. They were training, they were—I don't remember the camps that were around, but they were close by, and the ships were in the harbor.

Redman: So seeing military personnel around the city would have been a normal part of life you think?

2-00:03:26  
Coates: Oh absolutely. Yes.

Redman: What about African Americans? Were there African-American workers at the Convair factory that you can remember?

2-00:03:35  
Coates: Not that I noticed.

Redman: How about unions?

2-00:03:39  
Coates: Unions?

Redman: Unions. Did you join a union?

2-00:03:42  
Coates: I joined—did I join a union—I think I joined a union in Alameda.

Redman: When you came back up here?

2-00:03:50  
Coates: Yeah. But I don't remember doing it down there.

Redman: You had mentioned an identification badge that could get you around the factory because it had the number six for engineers.

2-00:04:00  
Coates: Right.

Redman: Did it have your picture on it as well?

2-00:04:03  
Coates: No, no.

Redman: But you were issued that badge when you started work?

2-00:04:07

Coates: Yeah, because I was in the engineering department. It was huge. Everything was huge. Great big loft, great big huge building. I think it was on the second floor. It was just a great-big-huge space, with drafting tables.

Redman: It seems like kind of a mind blowing experience for someone coming from a small town, to see that.

2-00:04:32

Coates: It was sort of. I'm sure my folks were kind of scared for me, to be going away so far. But, I guess they trusted me. Momma actually gave me an American flag when I got on the train, [laughs] and it was special because they had gotten it—Momma married my dad when there was a crazy law right after World War I if you married a foreigner you lost your citizenship. She was born in San Jose, but she married Daddy, and she had to get—

Redman: Naturalized again?

2-00:05:16

Coates: Yeah she did. So they gave them an American Flag, which I still have.

Redman: Can you talk a little bit about job safety? Was there any talk of job safety—I imagine there was much less danger in the drafting room? But you had mentioned a hard hat, having to acquire a hard hat. Were there any other safety procedures?

2-00:05:39

Coates: Not that I recall.

Redman: I also noticed you wearing jeans in this picture?

2-00:05:43

Coates: Oh, but that was away from work. I don't think I wore jeans to work. I don't remember to tell you the truth.

Redman: Did you ever wear jeans before World War II, as a young girl?

2-00:05:54

Coates: Oh sure.

Redman: So around—just around for a—

2-00:05:57

Coates: Or shorts. In summertime it was warm, we wore shorts.

Redman: But that's not the type of thing that someone would have worn in to say—into a nice day in San Francisco in those days?

2-00:06:07

Coates: Oh no, no. Well you would wear gloves and a hat. In fact, I have a picture of me with gloves and a hat.

Redman:

I sort of get the impression that blue jeans for women was pretty uncommon before World War II, unless you were around the farm or things like that?

2-00:06:26

Coates: Yeah. Right. Yeah.

Redman:

Tell me then about what time you leave Convair to find this follow up job?

2-00:06:38

Coates: Well, Lorna left early, and I was there alone. I started in February of '43, and I left in June of '44. Mostly because I was on this swing shift and I wasn't doing anything, and I got bored.

Redman:

Did the different shifts pay any different?

2-00:07:04

Coates: No, no.

Redman:

Was there a night shift at Convair, do you recall?

2-00:07:08

Coates: Yeah, I think so. I think they went twenty-four hours a day.

Redman:

Hence the city of San Diego needed to operate twenty-four hours.

2-00:07:16

Coates: Well that's right, sure, and the thing is, all the bus transportation came into town, and then all the street cars took over. It just worked perfectly.

Redman:

But eventually you were down there by yourself working on the swing shift, and there's not a whole lot of work going on.

2-00:07:34

Coates: No, no, and I guess maybe I got a little homesick. I don't know. Although I enjoyed being down there. My dad did visit me one time. He came down on the train to LA, and I went up to LA and we met. He stayed overnight and we had a—he wanted to check up on me, I think. But other than that, I just felt I had to leave because Lorna was gone anyway. So I went back. It took me a while to get a job. I started in July of 1944 at United Engineering in Alameda. They put me in the piping department, and I must say, all along engineers have helped me. Of course I asked a lot of good questions, but I mean they have been very helpful in my education because they educated me.

So I was in double-line piping, which is—you had to draw it in three views in order to make sure that your pipe would fit into whatever was there. We were making sea-going tugs. They had huge diesel engines in order to help people

that were out in there. I have a little publication that was printed. I don't know if you can see that.

Redman: "Fleet tug changes revealed, United Tug." Oh, so this is the Thanksgiving 1944 edition.

2-00:09:20

Coates: All right?

Redman: I noticed you have showed a couple of news clippings now that seem to be newspapers from—little newsletters or newspapers from either Convair or United Engineering. So those seem common. It seems like there was a newspaper—

2-00:09:34

Coates: Oh yeah, sure. Because they were encouraging. It says, "The Japs are still strong warns A.P. Authority." Who is that anyway? Oh, Associated Press. You had to—the war effort feeling was still there. In fact, I've written a couple of other things. I don't know if I should read those or not.

[Narrator addendum: One gives a sense of how I felt about the war in April 1944: "*Just a bystander and how it hurts. I saw a ship sail out today. There was no band or waving crowd. Her destination no one knows. 'Board her are men, boys of yesterday who worried only of the score of next week's game, but no ware [sic] off to war. And here I sit, a girl. And there's no place aboard that ship for me. No, I must stay behind. And though to God I pray that He will bring her safely back, I cannot help but wish I was aboard that ship as she goes silently on her way to do a job.*"

The next one I wrote on D-Day: "*Invasion—Such a little word to hold so much at stake. What it means to you or I no one can tell as yet. My job is just the same this morning, a war job it's called. But how remote it seems to be from war. Today as usual I woke up in my room, rolled over for an extra 40 winks. Today as usual I ran to catch the streetcar on my way to work. Today as usual I combed my hair until 18-0-5. And as I sit here in the office I see other for which today is just as usual. What of the lads who dropped from speeding planes, what of the lads who clambered up France's shores, what of the men whose task it is to make invasion a success? Today is not as usual for them. I want to pray for them this morning, as they face their death, and yet just how to pray I don't know. God is with them, I am sure of that, and I feel that many know it and feel better for it too. God bless you all and may you find happiness at your journey's end, whether it is ending now or tomorrow or 50 years from now.*"

This one is August 10, 1945. It says, "*The world is strange and I am young. The day is cold and gray, as only day can be around this San Francisco Bay. The drafting room is warm, and brightly lighted. The scene is familiar. For over a year I have worked here, helping in my small way to repair our ships*

*and send them back to fight again. This morning I feel like a cold gray day. The peace is near, and soon we will forget the bigger task, that war which we have been fighting. But what is my place in this new world? What can I do to be helpful? Helpful of the dreams of men who died. I want so much to do the things I should. God grant me that He will help me find the path that leads to the joyous end—love, serenity, a home, children. These are my dreams. Let them not forget that others have dreams too. I must do my best to help them fulfill their highest hope. Amen.”*

Redman: Wow. That’s another beautiful essay.

2-00:11:43

Coates: [sigh]

Redman: It’s emotional for you to read these.

2-00:11:48

Coates: I guess it is. Oh.

Redman: So that essay, that little essay was written on August 10, 1945 you said.

2-00:11:58

Coates: Yeah.

Redman: Can you tell me about when FDR passes away toward the end of the war—your parents seemed to have admired him and liked him very much.

2-00:12:09

Coates: Oh yeah. That was awful.

Redman: He had been president almost your entire life it seemed.

2-00:12:14

Coates: I know. Yes.

Redman: So when he dies, was that a hard thing for you?

2-00:12:19

Coates: Well, it was emotional for the whole country. You saw it in newsreels. Every time you went to the movies they had a newsreel. So you saw what happened in the newsreels, and you listened to it on the radio, and it was a—well, I don’t know, we just had to feel that Mr. Truman could take over, and well he did. He was a great president.

Redman: So there’s this new, sort of unknown man who is Vice President—

2-00:13:03

Coates: Right.

Redman: —and I get the impression that a lot of people were looking around, sort of like, “Harry who?”

2-00:13:09

Coates: Yes I’m sure—

Redman: When he takes office.

2-00:13:10

Coates: —because vice presidents were never in the news like they are now. Especially with television, it’s changed everything. Absolutely.

Redman: Sure, there is much more coverage.

2-00:13:22

Coates: Yeah, sure. You see him, and he gives speeches now, and he does things that—the President gives him jobs to do. So I don’t know—I don’t think Truman even knew that the bomb was being made. I mean, that was the impression that we got.

Redman: So, I’d like to then ask about the armistice with Germany, and then turning my attention—it seems like there is a lag there and people turn their attention to the Pacific. But it seems like around that time people knew that the war would end, but there were a lot of people who thought that the war might drag on with the Japanese for—

2-00:14:08

Coates: Well, without the atomic bomb it certainly would have.

Redman: So can you talk about the decision to drop the atomic bombs, and your learning about the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—when you first found out about that?

2-00:14:21

Coates: Well you see, it wasn’t so dramatic if you didn’t have television like we have today. I mean, you heard about it, and the war was ending, and it was just joy.

Redman: But I understand it was weeks before people in the United States saw pictures.

2-00:14:38

Coates: Right, right. So that what I—Ethel and I went across the bay to try to get to San Francisco on J-Day, and San Francisco was just packed. You could barely get off the bus in San Francisco. We managed to walk up a block of Market Street, and we gave up and went home.

Redman: It was just so crazy.

2-00:15:05

Coates: It was solid people.

Redman: Can you talk about the mood?

2-00:15:12

Coates: It was *happy*. I mean, you know, the war was over. It was a joyous feeling. You couldn't help but be happy about it.

Redman: It seems like, in that essay, in the back of your mind you're sort of wondering what's next for you?

2-00:15:33

Coates: Well, of course. You better believe it. I had no idea what I was going to do next. And of course I left my job right away.

Redman: Can you talk about that for just a moment? Were you expecting a pink slip?

2-00:15:49

Coates: Well, you know, the boys came home and they were supposed to get back their jobs they had before. That was the theory, you know; they were supposed to get—of course the fact they put in GI Bill was the best thing that ever happened to the country; let's face it. The colleges filled up, and people got educated, and we—it just made all the difference in the world, and I wish they would—I think they're doing it today, but I'm not sure they're really following through.

Anyway, I went home. Then some lady told my mother about this course in Oakland about learning to design and make hats. Well, that sounded interesting. So I went back to Oakland, and I went to—it was called Central Trade School at that time. I took this course in millinery, and I got a job in San Francisco. Actually, I first got a job in this millinery *factory* in San Francisco, but then someone called and said they were opening a new store and they needed someone to be able to alter hats and stuff. So I got this job, it was called "Assistant Buyer," which meant you're a glorified stock girl. [laughs] So I worked at that for quite a while, and then I got married, in 1949.

Redman: How did you meet your husband?

2-00:17:36

Coates: We lived in a boarding house. This family owned three huge houses above the lake in Oakland, and two of the houses were filled with residents and the main house—they had taken the living room and dining room and made it one big area. So they gave us breakfast and dinner, and you could buy lunch if you wanted to. I lived with three other girls in the living room in this porch, and my husband lived in the basement. All the parties were in our room, you know, so that's where I met Howard. He's upstairs now, he'll be coming down pretty soon.

Redman: Did you miss drafting at all in those early years?

2-00:18:34

Coates:

Well I did. When we first got married we lived in Oakland and Howie worked in San Francisco. We moved to San Jose for a while, and then we moved back and the second—when we moved back to Oakland I said, “I don’t want to get a job in millinery? I’m tired of the public.” Of course when I was selling hats—I mean everybody had a hat, at least for Easter. If you didn’t have a hat for Easter it wasn’t right.

Redman:

So these were almost exclusively women’s hats, or were they some men’s fedoras?

2-00:19:15

Coates:

Oh no, all women’s hats. They used to just almost take them away from me. I could hardly ring up the sale. [laughs] This was just before Easter that is. But then I got tired and I thought, “Oh, I’ve been working all this time, and I’ve never had unemployment insurance.” I’d been working, you know, since I was eighteen, and I was in my middle-twenties, and I thought, “I need to look for another job and collect a little unemployment insurance.” Well, in those days, you had to go to the office and they have you places to go and contact, and I was looking for a drafting job. Well, I hadn’t done it for quite a while. So anyway, I think I got one or two checks, and then the lady in Oakland sent me over to San Francisco. She said, “I don’t have anything for you Betty; you go to San Francisco.” Well I really didn’t—I didn’t want a job; I wanted to collect a few more checks. [laughs] Anyway, I went to San Francisco and this woman told me—she called up and said she had a job for me, and I had go up and take a interview.

Well, I get up to this drafting job; it was at Tom Lunde’s. He was a naval architect. I get up there, and the gentleman who gave me the slip to fill out, he said, “What was your name when you worked for United Engineering?” I said, “Well, it was Betty Bertelsen.” So while I was filling out this slip they called over there, and I got a recommendation. So I went to work for Tom Lunde, and I worked there until I had my first child.

[Narrator addendum: Tom Lunde had contracts with the government as well as private companies. One I remember was from Mare Island; it was to raise a missile out of a submarine. Under direction I drew all the plans for that. I don’t know if it was ever built. I left after a couple of years to raise our three boys. When the youngest was in the sixth grade I contacted Tom Lunde, hoping to find work on this side of the bay, but he said come to work. Soon after I was given a job on a barge that was to be used to pump the sand out to construct what is now Foster City. It was a beautiful thing to behold, and I bragged about it at the dinner table. The next day the engineers made a lot of changes, and my beautiful drawing now had a bunch of erasures. So I complained equally about that. My son Ken, about fourteen, asked, “Did you get paid for it?” I decided that was good advice. That, plus the fact I always had Howard to back me, I was able to enjoy employment.

I worked on many things from complete SF cable car plans to barges made to carry big turbines up the Congo River to be used in the hydroelectric plant at the top. We designed oil rigs used in the Gulf of Mexico and container locking devices. The engineers were always teaching me.]

Then I left, and stayed home, and we have three boys. The youngest one—it had been about thirteen years—the youngest one was in junior high. So I thought, “Well maybe I need to get a job.” So I wrote to Tom Lunde and—I printed this letter—and said, “I’d like a recommendation.” I was going to look for something across the bay; well, he told me to come to work. So I worked there ten years, until he closed his office.

Then, one of the engineers had moved onto American President Lines [APL], and Tom Winslow got me over there. I was off work three days, and I went to work for them for ten years until I retired.

[Narrator addendum: When I went to work at APL they were finishing on the C-9's, a total Container ship. They were built in New Orleans. Their width was maximum, to be able to navigate the Panama Canal. Then they designed the C-10's. They are wider and only move cargo in the Pacific. Those were built in Germany. The last five years I was at APL they decided to use computers in the engineering department. They sent us to a one week class. I was still confused but later knew my way around the program. It turned out to be fun each morning to look forward to a puzzle to solve. The printouts were always to exact scale, and beautiful, no matter how many changes the engineers made.]

Redman: So it seems to me pretty clear that the—it seems like you had a lot of relevant work experience, and you talked about how these engineers that you’d work with—you’d ask them questions and they would just continue to add on to your knowledge.

2-00:22:20

Coates: Oh, absolutely.

Redman: What about, in retrospect, those war training courses at Stanford? It seems like they gave you skills that you were able to apply after the war.

2-00:22:32

Coates: It just gave me a basic skill of how to draw, and how to dimension and things like that. Then, when I worked for Tom Lunde, we did all kinds of things. We did material moving. It was a really interesting job. He subbed—

Redman: But that basic drawing skill was still very important.

2-00:22:55

Coates: Oh absolutely. I have my card. I got from—it says—from America President Lines—it says, “Design Draftsman.” [laughs]

Redman: So with that, usually what I like to do is I like to conclude by asking a pretty simple, but I think it's a tough question, so I'm going to give you a minute to think if you want. Think about World War II in the course of your entire life. From the moment that Pearl Harbor happened, through all of these experiences that you had during the war, can you sort of tell me what the war means to you in now in retrospect, looking back on your life?

2-00:23:48

Coates: Well, obviously it changed my life completely. I don't know what I would've done. Maybe I would have managed to go to San Jose State to college. I would have had to do something and had no skills at that time. So obviously it shaped my life completely. I don't know.

Redman: With that I think you've done a great job today of summarizing these thoughts, and you've shared some really amazing essays. You're a beautiful writer. You're a wonderful writer.

2-00:24:28

Coates: My son Lawrence is a writer. His third book is just being published, and we're all excited. [Narrator addendum: My son Lawrence's first book is called *The Blossom Festival*, and it is a novel based on Santa Clara County before World War II. Every year hundreds of people from all over the Bay Area would come to Saratoga to view the trees in full bloom.

Redman: That's terrific. I'm not surprised, given the quality of these essays.

2-00:24:39

Coates: And my son Ken is an engineer. Programing.

Redman: And how about the third son?

2-00:24:48

Coates: The third son, Tom is in email marketing.

Redman: So, with that is there anything else that you would like to add?

2-00:25:00

Coates: No, this has been a very interesting experience. I have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking.

Redman: Well you did such a wonderful job. Well, thank you so much.

[End of Interview]