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Peggy Cook

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Robin Li
in 2012

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Peggy Cook

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Li: This is Robin Li, speaking with Peggy Cook, February 16, 2012, in Seattle, Washington, as part of the Rosie the Riveter National Park Service oral history project. This is interview one, tape one. Thanks for sitting down with me today. I'm looking forward to talking with you. Just for the purposes of the transcript record, could you tell me your full name and your date of birth?

01-00:00:37

Cook: Peggy A. Cook, Alice Cook, 12-21-24.

Li: Where were you born?

01-00:00:46

Cook: Kelso, Washington.

Li: Kelso, Washington.

01-00:00:49

Cook: Family home.

Li: I understand that you worked for the US Navy during the war, making nets, submarine nets. But before we get into the war years, I wanted to ask you a little bit about how you grew up and your family and where you're from. So could you tell me a little bit about your parents?

01-00:01:07

Cook: My grandparents, who raised me. I don't know too much about my parents. I think I grew up in an idyllic place, and I wish we still had them. I lived on a houseboat on a river; rafted logs, was around loggers all my life, learned to fish and swim, row across the river to hobo jungle, which we call drifters on the street now, but they were just men out of work, looking or someplace to find a job. That's where the railroad tracks were, and they'd drop off there and fish a while. Then Grandma would make them bread, and we'd row bread over to them. Because they were somebody else's sons, and Grandma had a son that was out there looking, too. Tough times.

Li: So these are men who are just traveling around, looking for work?

01-00:02:02

Cook: Absolutely. We didn't call them bums, like we see on the street now. They weren't; they were looking. Some of these guys on the streets are looking for work, too. I talk to all of them. They are someone's son. Like Grandma said, "That's someone's son."

Li: Yes.

01-00:02:20

Cook:

I'll tell you a little story. My daughter keeps telling me that I can't talk to everybody. I said, "Well, that's strange." She says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Honey, you were born; I didn't know you, but I talked to you every day." I said, "That's somebody else's son." I was sick here a few months ago and couldn't go out. I call them the boys on 45th Street here. I talk to them on the corner. They sell papers or they do this, or maybe they don't do anything. I talk to each one of them. I know them by name. My daughter came and says, "I don't know what you've done to me, but I've got to tell you this. I go up to our grocery store, and I see them on the corner there and there. I thought, 'Oh, if Mom was here, she would—'" She says, "And I don't know what happened. I walked up to the corner and talked to one, Billy, who you talk to all the time. He says, 'Where is your mother?' He says, 'What's the matter with her?'" She says, "I finally got it. You're supposed to talk to people." You see?

Li:

Yes.

01-00:03:30

Cook:

We all need a human touch. Sometimes the person that has a home and love around them needs it more than the person you're giving it to, and they don't realize it until it happens. A very basic philosophy.

Li:

So did you learn these things from your grandparents?

01-00:03:49

Cook:

From my grandparents, mm-hmm.

Li:

Can you tell me a little bit about them? Where they're from, where they were born, what work they did?

01-00:03:56

Cook:

Grandfather was a logger all of his life. Grandma was a suffragette. She believed in not just equality between men and women, but between people. She never said men and women. I never heard her say that. I heard her say, "Be kind to people. You never know how "hello" can change a person's life on a very dull day, a very tired day." Grandmother had a great fascination with words and books. We used to walk through snow, ice, rain—you name all these terrible things—and sunny days, too, to Chautauqua at the library, Carnegie Library, when it was built. Whatever I've learned in my love of books and people, and sometimes even what I like in myself, I learned by watching her and listening to her.

Li:

Had she been born in Kelso? Is that where she was raised?

01-00:04:56

Cook:

No, she was raised in Minnesota, and then they came across.

Li:

Okay. So they met in Minnesota, your grandparents?

01-00:05:02

Cook: No. They met when they grew up out here. They came with their parents, across from Minnesota.

Li: Oh, okay. So was your great-grandfather a logger?

01-00:05:12

Cook: Yes.

Li: Okay. So you were raised on a riverboat or a river house?

01-00:05:22

Cook: Well, it was an old river house. It sat on three logs, and they built kind of a house around it. I think I showed you a picture in there, of it. It had an old woodstove. Free wood. We snagged it out of the river, bark and all that stuff. Free fish. We could go fishing any time we wanted to. A lot of homemade bread and canned things that Grandma had. The county poorhouse—we used to have those for people; I guess I'd be considered poor now—up the road, and they had a big garden. We'd go up and do all of their gardening, and then they'd give us vegetables that Grandma would can. Then Uncle Ed and Grandma and myself would take fish up for them, that we had canned for them. So it was a community thing, without even being called a community or a project. It was people helping people to survive. Hard times, very—just hard times.

Li: Because the Depression was in full swing, by the time you were old enough to know what was going on.

01-00:06:32

Cook: Absolutely. Well, that's how my grandparents lost their house. They left everything; that's how we ended up on the houseboat.

Li: Wow.

01-00:06:40

Cook: Grandpa got, I think, twenty-five dollars a month, and Uncle Ed ten, and I got five dollars a month for rafting logs.

Li: Wow.

01-00:06:49

Cook: That's not a lot of money. But we had the light bulb. We didn't have a radio, but we had light, a light bulb to read by at night, which was a blessing for us. We loved to read. And we had the balladeers across the rivers, the boys who would drop off at night and build a fire—from the trains, you know?

Li: Yeah.

01-00:07:11

Cook:

They would sing. Like *My Old Kentucky Home* or something about that dear old mother of mine. It still gets my heart just—I was just a young girl, but they spoke to my heart. To go and stand beside them and see how grateful they were for bread. If Grandma ever came across the river with us, they all called her Mother—sad, unhappy, *strong* young men, looking for work.

Li:

Did you have any siblings?

01-00:07:53

Cook:

I have a brother. I had a brother and a sister, younger than me.

Li:

What were their names?

01-00:07:58

Cook:

Fred and Betty.

Li:

So did you go to school?

01-00:08:08

Cook:

Oh, yes.

Li:

Was there a school nearby?

01-00:08:10

Cook:

Yes.

Li:

Yes?

01-00:08:11

Cook:

Yes, we walked. We didn't have buses then; we walked to school. I think we were about a mile and a half from school, which isn't bad. Some kids walked much further than that.

Li:

How big was the school that you went to?

01-00:08:24

Cook:

Well, the whole high school was probably—that's the four grades—125, maybe.

Li:

Okay. Were most of them logging families?

01-00:08:37

Cook:

Logging or river crafters or fishermen. We were on the Cowlitz River, which emptied into the Columbia River. So that was the trade. Or they worked in the mills. Again, loading.

Li:

Right, right. You had mentioned earlier that your grandfather was part Native American?

01-00:08:57

Cook:

Well, he looks it, and everybody thinks so, but I haven't traced it. But if you just look at him and could've heard his speech pattern, you would've been totally sure of it.

Li:

Were there any Native American tribes around there, growing up?

01-00:09:13

Cook:

Yes. I had written some stories about growing up down there and sitting with—let me see—Johnny Nofoot, one of the little Indian boys. Went to school with us at the Catlin school. He would take me to the chiefs, and I'd sit and listen to their stories. Never quite got in, until one of the women said, "Sit. Sit. Sit," touching a log all the time. So I went and sat by her. I just learned to adore her: loving woman with few, few words. There used to be an old television show called something about touched by an angel. If you could say to her, "I hurt, I cry," she said nothing. She just looked at you. That was my "touched by an angel." This gentle, simple woman, who *really* ruled the whole clan. She really did. He thought he did, but not true.

Li:

So you grew up around a number of strong women.

01-00:10:34

Cook:

Very strong women, indeed. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Li:

I wanted to hear more about your experiences, your personal experiences of the Depression, besides from the men that you saw looking for work. So you would can food and you would garden in the community garden, you said? Get vegetables.

01-00:11:00

Cook:

Well, it was an old-folks home, is what it was. They had a lot of land, and they gardened there. We would help them bring their crops in, and then they'd give us crops. And we would trade what we had bountied, whether it was a deer we had shot or something like that. We'd barter back and forth, for food.

Li:

So did your grandparents teach you to hunt and fish?

01-00:11:25

Cook:

I think I only used our .22 once, and that was because rats were coming up from the riverbank towards the house. I shot one, after Grandpa died. Grandma wouldn't shoot anything. I went out and shot two or three of them, and then they were gone. But I'm not much into gun stuff. And it was just an old .22, single-bolt.

Li:

So I'm really curious to hear about the work that you did on the river with the logs, the logging.

01-00:11:57

Cook:

Well, the logs were brought in by truck.

Li: Were they coming from the peninsula?

01-00:12:05

Cook: No, no, no, no, no. The woods up in Coweemen, I think it was called, and high into the hills. They'd bring them down by trucks. You see logging trucks today. Well, they would bring those down, and they would come to the bank of the river where we were down below, where the rafts were. Then we'd get off the raft, because you didn't want to get flipped in the river, and they would dump those down into this pond. Each logging camp had their own stamp on the end of the log, and you would have three or four log rafts there. You'd have to sort those and put them in the right place and then dog them off. Dogging off means taking a chain and a spike and drive it in there so they couldn't float back up when the tide—. Because the tide came up from the Columbia River, and they'd float them all out again. You would have to dog all those off, into the different places.

Li: So were you sorting logs?

01-00:13:11

Cook: Yes, we were sorting logs. Grandfather died on the logs they dumped in. I had gone to the bank where they were dumping them. He hadn't finished, and a log hit the boom stick that he was on, flipped him in the river, and he died of pneumonia. We didn't have a lot of things we have today now, like penicillin and all of that stuff.

Li: It sounds like really dangerous work.

01-00:13:30

Cook: It *is* dangerous work. Yes.

Li: Were you scared when you first started?

01-00:13:43

Cook: Never was. Never was. Never was. I just never was.

Li: So would you stand out on the logs?

01-00:13:53

Cook: We'd stand below. They were dumping them, and then we would stand below that, two boom sticks down, so we wouldn't have a log hit us. But Grandpa hadn't quite gotten down that far, so that's what happened to him.

Li: Wow. And then you move your way down—

01-00:14:10

Cook: Yes.

Li: —as they dump more logs in?

01-00:14:12

Cook: Yes.

Li: Just walking across the floating logs?

01-00:14:16

Cook: Yes, one boom stick at a time.

Li: Then what would you use to sort the logs?

01-00:14:20

Cook: Well, you'd have a pike pole. It's about eighteen feet long and it has a hook on the end of it. You'd see the log coming that you wanted, and you'd jab it and pull it over to where you want. Then if they got all tangled when they dumped in the river, like matchsticks falling apart, you'd have to go in with a peavey. How do I explain a peavey? It's kind of like a vice thing, in reverse. The hook hangs down, flopping. Then you jab the big hook into it and then knock the other one, hit it, and then you can roll it back and forth, which way you want it to go, and undo that matchstick thing. A lot of logs broke when they went in. You had to get rid of those.

Li: Right, right. So how old were you when you started doing this work?

01-00:15:13

Cook: Right about fifteen.

Li: Fifteen. Were there other girls on the river?

01-00:15:17

Cook: No.

Li: No? Was it just you and your grandfather, then, working together, or were there other men?

01-00:15:22

Cook: And Uncle Ed, who was two years older than me, my mother's youngest brother. My dearest friend. He's been gone a long time, but he's still my dearest friend.

Li: So was it fun being on the river?

01-00:15:34

Cook: *Absolutely!* Fun, exciting. I love loggers, anyway. They're decent, kind human beings. So rough and tough and all of that stuff; yet if they saw a bird—one fellow, I think of all the time. His name was Ralph. If they saw a bird that was hurt or caught in the pitch that's on the logs and couldn't get out, they'd spend hours loosening it, so they wouldn't break a leg or a wing. Then they'd call somebody else over. "You know how to do it better." Gentle, calloused hands

being so caring about nature. They really were. Anyway, the ones I worked with were.

Li: Yes. So people were kind to you.

01-00:16:25

Cook: Absolutely. Yes. That's why it came as such a shock when I went to work with a group of men and found out that I really wasn't wanted there. Why not? I'm doing the work.

Li: Yes. So you said you were making five dollars a day doing that?

01-00:16:42

Cook: Pardon?

Li: How much were you making, doing the logging?

01-00:16:33

Cook: A month.

Li: Five dollars a month.

01-00:16:45

Cook: I got five dollars a month.

Li: Okay.

01-00:16:47

Cook: Sometimes, if they were what they called spin logs, small in diameter—. Which are very hard to walk and position at the same time because you have the current going with you, too.

Li: Is that why they're called spin logs?

01-00:17:03

Cook: Yes. It just depended.

Li: So you'd make more money for those?

01-00:17:09

Cook: Grandpa got twenty-five; Uncle Eddie got, I think, twenty or fifteen; and I know I got five dollars a month. That doesn't mean I worked every day, then.

Li: Right, because you were going to school.

01-00:17:18

Cook: Yes, I was going to school maybe four hours, or two hours at night or two hours in the morning, depending on the tide.

Li: Did you work for yourselves or did you work for the logging company?

01-00:17:28

Cook: We worked for the Long-Bell Logging Company.

Li: Long-Bell Logging? Okay.

01-00:17:35

Cook: And we got the house free to live in. So that was part of our wages.

Li: Was your family religious at all? Did you attend church? Or was that important?

01-00:17:46

Cook: I did; I don't think Grandma did.

Li: Okay. What church did you attend?

01-00:17:52

Cook: Salvation Army.

Li: Was that near your school? Was that in town, close by?

01-00:17:56

Cook: Yes, that was across the river.

Li: Why did you attend?

01-00:18:03

Cook: Well, I wanted to play in the school band, and I couldn't afford an instrument. See how avarice I am? I kept seeing these kids playing in front of taverns and stuff, and they all had instruments. I said, "How'd you get your instrument?" "Well, we joined the church." Said, "Oh." So I started going and sitting there. I never joined anything, to my knowledge, except one day—remember, they used to have bonnets with big bows on the side?

Li: Yes.

01-00:18:34

Cook: They said, "Here, you want a bonnet?" I said, "Well, I don't want a bonnet." They said, "Well, yeah, if you're going to be in the band—" I hadn't even mentioned it, but somebody had, I'm sure. "You've got to wear a bonnet." So okay. So they gave me a trumpet, and they taught me how to play. Next thing I knew, I was standing in front of taverns and walking into taverns with a tambourine. Let me tell you an experience I had, though. We were playing one day. Do you remember the Andrews Sisters at all?

Li: Yes.

01-00:19:07

Cook: This is in West Kelso, which is supposed to be the little Chicago of the West. It really was. It was *wild*.

Li: West Kelso was the Chicago of the West?

01-00:19:15

Cook:

Yes, that's right. The captain—I can't even remember her name; it's not important at this point—she said, "Here, take the tambourine. They're not coming out; go in." So I went in. I came out, and they said, "Well, you didn't get very much." I said, "No." And Laverne came out of the tavern, she says, "How'd you do, kids? How'd you do, kids?" I said, "We didn't get very much." She says, "Give me that." She went in and came back out, and it was just full. She says, "There." I thought, hey, that's pretty good. We used to go out to a place called Riderwood, which was an old-folks home about thirty miles from Kelso. We'd go out and take them food and all of the—that's the spirit of the Salvation Army. Do those kinds of things, outreach, visit jails and hospitals. What an education all of that was for a young girl. We didn't have television. We didn't have all this stuff. We couldn't afford the paper. Come on!

Li: What did you learn from those experiences, from the people that you met?

01-00:20:27

Cook:

Well, in the first place, I didn't know I was learning. I'll use Grandma's old phrase. "Wherever you are, just be." So I was just being. Sopping it up. I just feel good about life. There's hard times, there's tough times. But they're joyful times. When I say joyful times, I mean not ha-ha-ha, but with contentment, who you are. I haven't reached that yet. If we reach that, we've done okay. We've done okay. If you don't walk on other people to get to where you think you ought to be, you're okay.

Li: So even seeing old people suffering or these men in prison— Was it upsetting? Was it scary?

01-00:21:27

Cook:

No. Grandmother always said, "You could be there." Makes you think, as a young kid. Because life was being lived, raw, just frugal, horrible, and then there was a joyful moment. This old houseboat, we had a fence around it, so kids couldn't fall in the river at night. In fact, I wrote a story about it. We had nothing. I mean really, except what we could grovel for, really. And sometimes you did grovel for it. We were sitting out one evening. Grandpa said, "Be quiet." Then, from across the river, came these young men, singing *Silent Night*. It's the most memorable Christmas I've ever spent in my life. Uncle Ed, Grandpa, Grandma and me sitting, listening, holding hands. Grandma called them the three wise men. They're singing to us. Those are the stories that I grew up with. Raw life, true life. I suppose they'd call it true grit today, in the modern-day vernacular.

Well, we did it all the time, but the next morning, when we rowed our bread across for them, they put us on a log and said, "We sang to our mothers last night. Do you think they heard?" These are young men, looking for a job,

tender-hearted, lonely, sad. We told them how we sat across the river and listened to them. Those are gifts you don't buy. Those are gifts, when you're down and out, you don't expect. But you create them every day, and don't even know it. I'll be eighty-eight this year, and I still live with those. On a starlit night, if I walk down to Green Lake here, I can hear the young voices sing. It makes life easier. Makes it worthwhile.

Li: What an amazing childhood!

01-00:24:21

Cook: They were all over this country then. We had time to be human beings.

Li: Did life feel slow?

01-00:25:32

Cook: For me, at that time?

Li: Yes.

01-00:24:36

Cook: No, it was busy.

Li: It was busy, yes.

01-00:24:37

Cook: It was busy. Taking care of yourself, taking care of others, going to chautauquas, listening to a band play. Listening to people who thought they could sing, and sang the loudest, and you just *loved* them because they had a joy. They weren't perfect; none of us were. None of us are. But if you walk with joy, you can't cause sorrowness to anybody. It just doesn't happen.

Li: So what was your vision for your future? What were your plans? Who did you think you would be—?

01-00:25:20

Cook: Amelia Earhart. I've never flown, but I was just always stunned at what women could do. Really stunned. Right now I can't think of her name, but she was my favorite actress. She played with the other favorite actor I can't think of.

Li: What were some of the movies that you remember?

01-00:25:47

Cook: Yes. Think. Way back. Gee, isn't that funny?

Li: No names are coming to me right now. I feel like I can see faces, but—

01-00:26:03

Cook: Not Barbara Stanwyck, but that era. Katharine Hepburn.

Li: Oh, yes.

01-00:26:11

Cook: I always wanted to be Katharine Hepburn. I'd try to walk like her, and Uncle Ed would say, "Well, you'd do better if you took your cork boots off." There was a lot of laughter.

Li: Yeah?

01-00:26:27

Cook: Yeah.

Li: So would you go see movies? Was there a movie theater in town?

01-00:25:30

Cook: Yes, there was one in Kelso and one out in Longview. Those are twin cities, down there on the Cowlitz. I think I saw Roy Rogers when he was there. Somebody else, I don't know. Whatever. Well, that was a lot of money. It cost a nickel. You'd have to sell pickles all day to get a nickel. That first nickel went to the church, Salvation Army. Think about it.

Li: So you had to make two nickels.

01-00:27:02

Cook: Now, Eddie I had it figured right. He'd stand on one side of the river, where the bridge was; I'd stand on the other. Eddie'd say, "Did you give my little sister any? I don't want it." He'd speak to them.. He looked so woeful. They'd go back and give me something. See? Charlatans is what we were. Then we'd go to the movies.

Li: So you had dreams of an adventurous life.

01-00:27:27

Cook: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Li: So what year did you graduate from high school?

01-00:27:32

Cook: I didn't graduate.

Li: Okay. What happened?

01-00:27:35

Cook: Well, Grandpa died. I stayed on the houseboat alone. Eddie had already gone, gotten married. I stayed on the houseboat—the war had broken out—alone, until that school year was out, and then was coming into—what did you ask me?

Li: Oh, about high school, what year you graduated, and you said—

01-00:27:59

Cook:

Oh, I didn't graduate. I came to Quilcene. On the way to Quilcene, I was in Seattle, waiting for a ferry, and a sailor walked by and said, "Hello, darlin'. Do your eyes bother you?" We were married three weeks later. So that was it. No school. He came to my home and met my grandmother. Said, "That's the boy you're going to marry."

Li:

Who was he?

01-00:28:26

Cook:

He was a young fellow from Alabama. I didn't know who he was. Some fellow on the street. See, I'm a pickup. I love telling—my daughter says, "Don't tell that." I said, "Get out of here!"

Li:

So you must've had a good feeling about him.

01-00:28:40

Cook:

I did. He looked you directly in the eye. Oh!

Li:

Yes. So when your grandfather died, were you supporting your grandmother then?

01-00:28:54

Cook:

No, she moved up to Quilcene with her daughter, who lived there. Of course, when I moved up there and then my husband went overseas, that's when I began working. My grandmother, my aunt, my sister and myself all worked at this plant, doing different things at the plant, at Indian Island.

Li:

Indian Island?

01-00:29:20

Cook:

Across the bay from Port Townsend.

Li:

Okay. Can you tell me about Pearl Harbor, where you were and what you remember of hearing about the bombing?

01-00:29:32

Cook:

I was alone on the houseboat, because Grandpa had died. I heard bells begin ringing. I went out, and some loudspeaker from someplace said Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Well, I didn't know; what's Pearl—so we all went to the city center, and they told us the news there. So that's how I heard that, by myself.

Li:

You said that you guys didn't have a newspaper, but had you heard about the Japanese invasion of China or any of the war going on in Asia, prior to Pearl Harbor?

01-00:30:09

Cook: I probably did, but I took no account of it. I can't imagine that I didn't, I'm so nosy. But no, I loved the written word and new things. Busy trying to catch a fish to eat or—really, because I was alone when that happened. Grandma had gone, Uncle Ed was gone, and Grandpa had died.

Li: So you were living alone.

01-00:30:39

Cook: Yes.

Li: Were there any Japanese in Kelso?

01-00:30:46

Cook: One of my best friends was a Japanese gal. They all disappeared. Sad, isn't it? Jackie was her name, Jacquelin. Later on, she joined the Women's Army Corps. Came from the camps and joined.

Li: Wow.

01-00:31:07

Cook: Good for you, Jackie. Spent most of my childhood in the Catlin School, raised with little Indian boys and girls. What we learned about good citizenship and—what do you call it?—oh, how to fix broken arms and all of this stuff, and how to track animals and stuff, was from the Indian chief.

Li: Oh, wow.

01-00:31:37

Cook: Chief Wannasee. He and my Uncle Bill stoked the old coal-wood thing down in the basement of our school, to keep it warm. Then he would spend time on the playground with us, the chief would, and tell us Indian stories. I loved them. When I wasn't working, I was down at the Indian cabin.

Li: Wow.

01-00:32:02

Cook: I loved these people.

Li: So was Jackie Japanese or Indian, you said? You said Jackie was Japanese? Or was she—?

01-00:32:10

Cook: No, she's Indian.

Li: She was Indian, okay. Were there any Japanese working on the logs or on the river?

01-00:32:17

Cook: Oh, no. No.

Li: No? No.

01-00:32:21

Cook: I think there was two families—forgive me, I can't remember their names—that lived just below the fish hatchery. But I don't remember them, really.

Li: Do you remember them leaving for the camps or when they—?

01-00:32:25

Cook: I know they were sent out. We heard about it. Just kids talking, but what did we know? It's not like there was news bulletins all around, like there is now. Very frankly, I was busy trying to survive.

Li: Yes. What was your husband's name?

01-00:32:56

Cook: Grady.

Li: How do you spell that?

01-00:32:58

Cook: G-R-A-D-Y.

Li: His last name?

01-00:33:01

Cook: Cook.

Li: Cook.

01-00:33:05

Cook: Grady C. Cook.

Li: He was from Alabama?

01-00:33:08

Cook: Mm-hmm.

Li: What branch of the military was he in?

01-00:33:12

Cook: He was in the Navy. He was a quartermaster. Then after the war, he became a fireman on Indian Island, where I had worked making these grommets, and later on became the fire chief. And we lived on the island, in the chief's house, lived there until he retired.

Li: Okay, so I want to hear about the work that you did making the grommets for the nets. So how did you hear about the job?

01-00:33:44

Cook:

I think from my aunt, Aunt Gladys and Grandma. My mother lived on the island for a while. My grandmother ran the laundry. I'm not quite sure what others did. But my mother was in the cookhouse, and then I worked on the grommets.

Li:

Okay. Okay.

01-00:34:07

Cook:

Some of that is a little fuzzy in my head, but there's nothing written that I can go back and find.

Li:

You met your husband in Seattle. Did you get married in Seattle?

01-00:34:15

Cook:

No, we got married in Quilcene.

Li:

In Quilcene.

01-00:34:18

Cook:

Q-U-I-L-C-E-N-E.

Li:

Then how soon after that did he leave?

01-00:34:34

Cook:

Four months, maybe.

Li:

Okay. What year was that? Sorry.

01-00:34:39

Cook:

Gee, thanks a lot.

Li:

The year you got married.

01-00:34:42

Cook:

Yeah, I'm supposed to remember that.

Li:

I know!

01-00:34:44

Cook:

Oh, geez. Geez, maybe I'm not married.

Li:

Do you know how old you were?

01-00:34:50

Cook:

Seventeen.

Li:

Seventeen. So if you were born in '24, 1941? Does that sound right?

01-00:34:57

Cook:

Well, '42, I think we were married, because our baby was born in '43.

Li: Okay.

01-00:35:03

Cook: Yes, 1942.

Li: Was he going to the Pacific?

01-00:35:07

Cook: Yes, he went to the Pacific. He was on a mine sweeper out of Bremerton, Washington.

Li: When did you start working at the net factory?

01-00:35:29

Cook: I'm trying to think.

Li: Was your husband still here when you started working there?

01-00:35:43

Cook: No.

Li: He'd left already.

01-00:35:44

Cook: He'd left already. Then I moved on the island, with my grandmother and my aunt.

Li: When he left.

01-00:35:48

Cook: Yes.

Li: Okay. So was it a factory owned by the Navy?

01-00:36:00

Cook: Yes. Well, Indian Island is an annex of Bangor. Stored torpedoes and depth charges and things like that, and that's where they changed all—I have pictures there, if you want any of them.

Li: Yes, I want to look at those after. How did you get the job?

01-00:36:23

Cook: Just ran and said I'd go to work. I didn't have to take a test or anything. How strong? You think you can do this all day long? Yes, I can do this all day long.

Li: Because a lot of the Rosies have said that they signed up for work at the wartime factories out of a feeling patriotism and wanting to be part of the war effort. Then other women have said, we just needed money and it was a good job. Were both of those factors true for you? Or what was your main motivator?

01-00:36:53

Cook: Well, money wasn't, because I was living with my aunt and my grandmother, on the island itself. It was just, there had to be more than just watching the baby while my husband was gone. Do you know what I mean?

Li: Yes.

01-00:37:09

Cook: What am I doing to help? Forgetting that I was probably doing a lot, because I was raising a son alone. But that's kind of how it was. I don't know.

Li: How big was your son when you went to work?

01-00:37:28

Cook: Four months, maybe.

Li: Okay. What's his name?

01-00:37:33

Cook: Terry Lee Cook.

Li: Terry.

01-00:37:37

Cook: Yeah, he just retired from—my daughter's going to retire in a week. I don't know what happened to these kids; they all became old. I'm not kidding. My oldest son is older than I am.

Li: It happens. It's a state of mind. What's his birthday? When was he born?

01-00:37:57

Cook: Sure. May 5, 1972.

Li: 1942?

01-00:38:04

Cook: 1943.

Li: Yeah, okay.

01-00:38:06

Cook: Boy, that one hit, that'd be a headline for you, dear.

Li: So did you apply for a specific job?

01-00:38:14

Cook: No.

Li: You just went in and said, "I want to work," and they assigned you—

01-00:38:18

Cook:

Yes. You know, I think Commander Turner said, “Well, what have you done before?” I said, “Rafted logs.” He said, “*What?*” So I kind of told him what that was. He says, “Oh, I think you can handle it. Go on.” Then he’s the one, when we were doing a thing, all these women in a row, twisting that stuff together, the steel stuff—they’d call you off the line, and you hated to hear your name called, because you knew something was wrong. He’s the one that, “Cook, off the line.” Then he said, “Don’t worry. Don’t worry. He’s coming in on the next boat. You’ve got the day off. Go get dolled up and have a good time!” And *everybody* cheered. We were a community then. We really cared about the other people there and what was happening. So I had a whole day off.

Li:

Your husband was on leave?

01-00:39:19

Cook:

Yes. Well, he’d been gone sixteen, seventeen months at sea. Your old man, that’s what they used to call them. Your old man is coming in on the next thing. Go get dolled up. Have a good time. Be back to work the next day.

Li:

So the work that you were doing, can you tell me what it was exactly that you were doing? What was this movement? What was that?

01-00:39:46

Cook:

Well, have you ever done any tenting?

Li:

Mm-hmm.

01-00:39:51

Cook:

Crocheting? Things like that?

Li:

Yes.

01-00:39:53

Cook:

Well, that was that, except crocheting is like this; this was pieces of steel about as big around as your thumb, twenty feet long, and you had two of them. You begin winding these together, and there’s a big roller up above that; as you’re winding them together, it’s getting longer and longer. And the sailors up above are winding that up as you all roll together. I had one gal that would work next to me, who lost an eye because one of them slipped off the wrench down there, and the thing flipped it. In fact, I talked to her a few days ago. Flipped her eye right out.

Li:

Oh, my God.

01-00:40:31

Cook:

She was out of work four months, and went right back to work.

Li:

So it was dangerous.

01-00:40:37

Cook: You bet. A lot of women hadn't had heavy work like I had. Washing by hand, but it wasn't heavy. Women's work is all. Didn't do anything hard. You kidding? Women work twice as hard as men, put out twice as much. I'm sorry. I mean in their homes now.

Li: Yes.

01-00:41:00

Cook: So they're stronger. Who do you think got us across the prairie? I do sound like a feminist, don't I? I'm not, though.

Li: No shame in feminism. So was it all women, who were doing this kind of work?

01-00:41:15

Cook: It was all women down below. Up above was sailors and marines, who would take these and roll it as you twisted a straight row across, to keep them straight.

Let me tell you a little story about it. My daughter took me out to the retirement home for sailors and marines. I can't remember the name of it. On the coast, though. We were sitting there looking around, and standing behind us was somebody from Detroit or someplace. This guy was talking. He was a sailor, we find out. We were listening. He said, "This is close to where I was during World War II." He says, "We were on Indian Island." He said, "Our job was to roll a big thing up, while some girls down below were doing all this—" I turned around and I said, "I was one of the girls down below." He said, "*You're kidding!*" His wife was just stunned. She said, "How could this happen?" So we talked and talked together. She says, "He's always talked about how strong those women were down below, and you're just a little old lady." I said, "I beg your pardon?" My daughter went into hysterics. You just never know. He says he's talked about this all the time and we don't have pictures. I said, "None of us have pictures of the inside of that." We have pictures of the outside of the building, but we don't have those.

Li: Yes. So what were most of the women who were on the line? Were they young like you?

01-00:42:55

Cook: Yes, they were young, and many of them had men overseas, whether it was brothers or sons.

Li: Who was your supervisor? Was it another woman who did that kind of work?

01-00:43:08

Cook: Well, my personal supervisor was my Aunt Gladys. "Do it right or you'll get me in trouble, because I said you could do this." But no, they were Navy or Marines, because it's a Marine base, really. I think it was Navy.

Li: What was the work environment like between men and women there?

01-00:43:33

Cook: I never noticed anything. Of course, we women were not doing jobs men could have done. The men that were left here couldn't have—they were 4-F. They couldn't have done those jobs.

Li: Right. Because they were so physical.

01-00:43:51

Cook: Yes, so somebody had to do them. We didn't want to take the sailors to do them; they had to go on duty watch. So we applied and we got them.

Li: Yes. So nobody felt like you were taking their job?

01-00:44:04

Cook: Absolutely not. I don't think that was true. I think that was not a true thing that happened. There might've been some people who were disgruntled; but they're the same guys that are disgruntled now if a woman takes a man's job.

Li: Right.

01-00:44:22

Cook: There's always somebody disgruntled about something. Even me. I just get fed up. Usually with myself.

Li: Now, do you think it helped that the men who were working at the factory were in the military? In terms of they were sort of similar age, similar—. It sounds like you guys, the women who were working there, were married to men just like them.

01-00:44:50

Cook: That's right. Yes. That's true. Well, that doesn't mean to say there weren't romances that happened. They did. Life is life, for goodness sakes. Really.

Li: Was there socializing between the men and the women who were—?

01-00:45:08

Cook: Well, in town, there was, yes. Yes, there. I think at that time, there probably were seven taverns in Port Townsend. The biggest of which was Port Townsend Tavern. It's still there; it's an antique place now. Everybody ought to go there. It's got the greatest beer bar you ever saw in your life. But yes.

Li: Where would you eat lunch?

01-00:45:32

Cook: Well, the women had their lunchroom to themselves, up above, off the floor, away from all the craziness.

Li: Yes. What was a usual shift like? How long did it last?

01-00:45:42

Cook: Eight hours.

Li: Eight hours.

01-00:45:44

Cook: But we didn't have a bridge that went from Port Townsend then, to Indian Island, where we worked, so we went on an open barge every day. And the same way, getting back home.

Li: Was it a daytime shift?

01-00:45:57

Cook: No, this went around the clock.

Li: Okay. What shift did you usually work?

01-00:46:03

Cook: Well, it's not usual. Every third week, you change. Yes. Did it that way.

Li: What did you do for childcare? Who took care of the baby?

01-00:46:15

Cook: I cannot remember her name, and I should be ashamed of that, but I just cannot remember it. It was usually some woman that had children of their own, and they weren't working, so they would take yours. Without those women—I wrote about that once—without those women, we couldn't have done our jobs. There is no way, because there were no care-safe houses.

Li: So would she take in kids from a couple of women who were working on the line?

01-00:46:37

Cook: Yes, yes.

Li: Sort of an informal daycare.

01-00:46:41

Cook: That's right.

Li: Do you remember how much it cost for you to pay her to watch the baby?

01-00:46:47

Cook: Mine, in particular, wouldn't take a weekly stipend. It was below her. That's what she told us. She was an older woman. She said, "As long as I can hold them on my knee and they don't fight me back, you don't owe me anything." I said, "But how do you ever get paid?" She said, "I don't need pay. I've got a son over there. You're paying for him by doing what you do."

Li: Wow.

01-00:47:21

Cook: People were different then. It was all-out war. There's no should we or shouldn't we; people just did it. There's not to say that there's not some that took advantage. Some people did. But you always knew your child was safe, and that's important—for a man or a woman. That's important. You bet.

Li: Yes. That's amazing.

01-00:47:47

Cook: It is amazing.

Li: So what did these things become, these—

01-00:47:56

Cook: They became giant nets that went across—you're talking about the nets?

Li: Yes.

01-00:48:02

Cook: That went across the rivers, the bays. Anything that could be used as a place for torpedoes to come in, you would put these across from—oh, I've forgotten the name of the place in Alaska. But anyway, from Alaska clear down to the Baja Peninsula, through all the rivers and all—

Li: So like where the mouth of the Columbia meets the Pacific, they put a huge net.

01-00:48:29

Cook: Yes, and you had net tenders—and there's pictures in there for you—that pulled them apart so our ships could come in and get fixed, or just loaded up with more depth charges and stuff, whatever they needed. So that went on. That's what they were used for. Then after the war, they didn't know what to do with them all. So somebody got together, some ecologist someplace, and we use them now—because they were just rusting in piles, here and there. We've been losing our coastline for years. So now we've sunk them deep into the rocks, all on our coastline; they're now lined with crustaceans. Isn't that great?

Li: So they become little homes for new sea life?

01-00:49:20

Cook: Yes. Like oysters and clams and mussels and all the other little funny things that slither around down there. So that they're serving an ecological purpose for us now. That's great.

Li: Would you and the other women talk about what the nets were going to be used for? Did you feel a sense of pride about protecting—?

01-00:49:44

Cook:

Oh, yes. You bet. You bet. Because most of the women who worked on those lines, their husbands were overseas, or had been. Some of them died. In fact, as you go down the S Curve, the entrance to Port Townsend—it's a hill that goes down, winds down into Port Townsend, it sits in front of you—to your right, you will see those sheds—they are still there—where we did all that work. In fact, I think they probably still do some of that work, but not making the nets. They have sonar and all that now. But Steel, I think his name was, was one of our men that was killed out there, and there's a beautiful, beautiful memorial for him, as you are on—and you can pull off and read about him.

Li:

Oh, wow.

01-00:50:40

Cook:

It was one of our mothers that worked with us.

Li:

Wow. And how long did you do that work?

01-00:50:50

Cook:

I have no idea. I don't remember when I quit. It's when he came home and was transferred to Port Angeles. We had to move, so we moved up there, so I no longer worked. Got pregnant again. That kind of stuff.

Li:

How old was your son, maybe? Do you remember how old he was when you—just a little baby?

01-00:51:15

Cook:

Got a picture of him and his dad the day he came home. Probably thirteen months, eleven months, something like that. That part is really fuzzy; I don't know.

Li:

Yes. It's a long time ago. How much money did you make? What were your wages, doing that work?

01-00:51:39

Cook:

I want to say \$1.79 an hour. But that's fuzzy, too.

Li:

But that's a lot, compared to what you were making log rolling.

01-00:51:49

Cook:

Log rolling, and then I picked brush, too. Like Huckleberry brush and fern. We'd sell it to florists.

Li:

What would you sell to florists for?

01-00:52:06

Cook:

For floral arrays and stuff. You meant money or what?

Li:

Oh, yes. Yeah. So you did that before the war?

01-00:52:14

Cook: Did that before the war.

Li: Would you just pick that wild and then sell to florists?

01-00:52:18

Cook: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Li: Was that something you did after your grandfather died?

01-00:52:24

Cook: Mm-hmm. Well, we kind of did that, too. Anything you could do to make money.

Li: And what was that called?

01-00:52:34

Cook: I didn't know I could make money selling my body, or I'd have done that. Would you please cut that out?

Li: Yeah, totally.

01-00:52:44

Cook: This is really free-floating, isn't it?

Li: I'm sure your grandchildren won't mind hearing that.

01-00:52:50

Cook: My daughter'll say, "Oh, my God!"

Li: But this was your first job where you were indoors all day?

01-00:52:57

Cook: Yes. Absolutely. Which was a new experience for me.

Li: Did that make the job more difficult?

01-00:53:06

Cook: I think the thing that made it difficult for me was the women. I was raised in the woods, with men. I never got used to women with lipstick all the time. How's my hair look, and all of this. What am I going to wear? What the hell is this? I'm still not used to it. I admire them. I wish I could pull it off. I don't own a dress. I don't want a dress!

Li: Was it hard to make friends, then, with these women?

01-00:53:45

Cook: No, they just called me a tomboy. It's okay with me. No. No, I just didn't know. Half their jokes that they laughed at, I didn't know what the hell they were talking about.

- Li: So you had some culture shock.
- 01-00:53:58
Cook: Yes, “What’s this?”
- Li: Yes. So you mentioned that you were reading a lot. What kind of things were you reading, what kind of books?
- 01-00:54:09
Cook: Oh, my.
- Li: Did you have a favorite author or a favorite kind of book?
- 01-00:54:15
Cook: Pearl Buck.
- Li: Oh, yes?
- 01-00:54:17
Cook: Yes, I’m crazy about all of that. And—oh, what’s the guy? Wit and Wisdom. What’s his name? You know who I’m talking about. Mark Twain.
- Li: Yes.
- 01-00:54:30
Cook: Yes. I grew up with Mark Twain.
- Li: Well, you grew up *like* Mark Twain.
- 01-00:54:36
Cook: I know. My grandmother loved Mark Twain. She loved his books. That’s one thing. We never could buy a book, but we spent a lot of time at our library and chautauquas. People coming to talk, from different countries. Somehow, we’d get there.
- Li: You said you remembered when—it was a Carnegie library? Paid for by the Carnegie Foundation?
- 01-00:54:56
Cook: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- Li: You remember when it opened, you said?
- 01-00:54:59
Cook: No, that’s where I first got introduced to books.
- Li: To books. Oh, okay.
- 01-00:55:03
Cook: Yes. I said that wrong.

Li: But that was where you would go?

01-00:55:07

Cook: That's where we—yes.

Li: I'm just going to change tapes.

[Begin Audiofile 2 02-16-2012.mp3]

Li: This is Robin Li, speaking with Peggy Cook, February 16, 2012, in Seattle, Washington, as part of the Rosie the Riveter National Park Service Oral History Project. This is interview one, tape two. Just when we took a break, you pulled out this picture, and I'm just going to put it on the screen. Can you tell me who this is?

02-00:00:24

Cook: That's my husband; my oldest son, who's now sixty-eight; and myself, the day my husband came home from overseas.

Li: Where had he been serving?

02-00:00:37

Cook: In the Aleutians, on the submarine chaser.

Li: Wow. And was this the first time he'd seen his son?

02-00:00:46

Cook: No, my son was born in Navy Hospital, Bremerton. Navy yard, and my husband left—he was going on his ship that night, and they brought him up to see his son. Then he left for overseas.

Li: Oh, my goodness. So he saw him the night he was born, and then he shipped out.

02-00:01:06

Cook: Yes. Then he shipped out the next morning. So that was quite a surprise. Look at how he grew!

Li: How old was your husband? Was he the same age as you?

02-00:01:17

Cook: He's two years older than I am.

Li: Two years older, okay. Can you tell me a little bit what it was like to be a military wife during World War II?

02-00:01:35

Cook: I know it sounds strange, but I didn't ever think about being a military wife. I think I just thought about a wife, if I did that. I have no idea.

Li: Yes. You were living in military housing—

02-00:01:51

Cook: Yes.

Li: —with your mom and your aunt, because they were working on this—

02-00:01:54

Cook: On the island itself, yes.

Li: Right. Then when he came back—

02-00:02:00

Cook: We lived in Port Angeles.

Li: In Port Angeles?

02-00:02:02

Cook: He was stationed out at Ediz Hook, on his minesweeper.

Li: What year was it that he came back?

02-00:02:12

Cook: '43, I think.

Li: So were you living in military housing then?

02-00:02:24

Cook: No. 8th Street apartments, and it was all filled with military people. One-room apartments, a bathroom down the hall, laundry down the hall for all of us. I can only remember one fellow's name, because it was so different. Dalton Houston Ralston. I think he was from Texas. I just loved them both, him and his wife. And we all had babies, a year and a half, two years old, three years old.

Li: Right. And you said that you were pregnant again?

02-00:02:57

Cook: Yes, right away.

Li: Right away?

02-00:03:00

Cook: I had five pregnancies and lost two of the babies. But what is, is.

Li: So was this your daughter, then, when you were pregnant right after when your husband came back?

02-00:03:17

Cook: Yes.

Li: What's her name?

02-00:03:19

Cook: Kerry. K-E-R-R-Y.

Li: What year was she born?

02-00:03:24

Cook: I knew you'd do this to me. I can't—

Li: '44? Does that sound right?

02-00:03:29

Cook: I got them all on these.

Li: Okay. So do you remember when the war came to an end? Do you remember the bombing of Hiroshima?

02-00:03:45

Cook: Geez. We were stationed at Ediz Hook, and we began to hear—I think one person in that apartment had a radio. And forget television. Forget that. We began hearing whistles going off from Ediz Hook, and we knew something had happened. Then all of a sudden, screaming out in the streets. "The war is over." That's where we were, in Port Angeles. All the men and all the marines from Ediz Hook rushed to all their little apartments, because they weren't going to have to go out again.

Li: And your husband was there at the time?

02-00:04:34

Cook: Mm-hmm.

Li: Yes. So what did the end of the war mean for your family? Did your husband know he was going to leave the military?

02-00:04:42

Cook: Oh, yes. He wasn't going to stay in, yes. Then we moved to Port Townsend.

Li: Were you working when you were at Ediz Hook?

02-00:04:53

Cook: No, no. We all had little babies then.

Li: When you moved to Port Townsend, why Port Townsend?

02-00:05:08

Cook: Well, I had started school in Quilcene. This is before we got married. That was the big town for us then, Port Townsend, where they had about 2500 people; it was a big town. We just kind of liked Port Townsend. It was across the bay from where I worked during World War II; and he was familiar with

it, too because his ship came in to get supplies and all of this stuff, so we were kind of familiar with that size town.

Li: You said he was working at the fire department?

02-00:05:40

Cook: Mm-hmm.

Li: Did you work then again, when your kids were small? Did you go back to work at all?

02-00:06:49

Cook: Oh, not for wages, no, but I did work at a grocery store for a while, picked brush for a while. I have too much energy for anybody. But then we got this house on the GI Bill for \$45 down, \$45 a month. Incredible. Had an acre and a half. We had two cows, two goats, two sheep, 200 chickens.

Li: Was your husband from a farming background?

02-00:06:25

Cook: No. Was a miner in Alabama, out of Birmingham. And something else; I can't remember what we had. Oh, a Shetland pony, which I hated.

Li: Really?

02-00:06:40

Cook: I heard something—I was raising my brother then; I took care of my sister, too, but—[makes stomping sounds] around the house. Grady came in, he says, "What is that?" The Shetland pony had gotten loose; it was running around the house. And I was pregnant. So we're out there trying to catch this. It takes off across the field after me, and I see a tree in front of me. Here's this woman, pregnant. I grab the tree and I can't hang on. I'm hanging down like this and my tummy's there. I said, "Kill the horse! Kill the horse!" [laughs] We got rid of the Shetland pony the next day. I didn't know I could climb a tree that quick. That's being country, honey. Nothing ever happened on that farm when my husband was home. He was fire chief and had to be gone three days a week. Like the banker for Port Townsend. His dog got in our chicken coop and killed 161 white leghorns. I'm saying, "What do I do now?" Banker came up, says, "Well, I guess I'll have to shoot the dog," and he shot the dog. He says, "What'll we do with all these feathers?" I said, "I don't know; it's your problem." So he hired the clerks at the bank to come and help me clean. That's crazy. It sounds like Ma and Pa Kettle, doesn't it?

Li: Right. But this is just outside Port Townsend?

02-00:08:24

Cook: Yes.

Li: And you've got your babies and—

02-00:08:26

Cook: No, it's inside the city.

Li: Oh, really?

02-00:08:29

Cook: Yes. Yes, it is. Two blocks from the hospital. Great God!" So it was kind of fun.

Li: Yes. So your husband became fire chief then. So how long were you in Port Townsend for?

02-00:08:58

Cook: Till he decided he wanted a younger woman, I think. Yes. But we didn't get divorced. He died on the night I was supposed to go to court and contest. Because he had told me that I couldn't have any of the retirement, and I said, "That's not fair. I'll fight you in court." So my best friend and another friend said, "Well, you can't stay alone tonight. Let's go camping." So we went camping. We drove back to my house. My husband lived in Longview then. Don't record this.

Li: Okay.

02-00:09:33

Cook: I'm sorry.

Li: So your husband retired from being a police chief, and then after he left, you got your own house. Where was your own house? Where was this house?

02-00:09:43

Cook: Right in the middle of Port— Right by the Catholic church, right up by the high school, yeah.

Li: You said that someone helped you get that house. Who was that?

02-00:09:50

Cook: He was the realtor in Port Townsend, Jack Carroll.

Li: Jack Carroll? Okay. So he helped you get a house.

02-00:09:56

Cook: Yes. And he says, "I know what Grady's done, and he's not going to do it to you. This is in my name. Whatever happens, this is in my name; you're paying rent."

Li: Oh. Because you still had one child at home at that point that you were raising.

02-00:10:11

Cook: Yeah. That's right.

Li: And where were your other kids, at this point?

02-00:10:15

Cook: Well, my oldest boy was in Longview. He's a retired policeman now. Undercover, that type of thing. But that's what he did during World War II, he was undercover for overseas, and I can't talk about that, so leave that off, too. I'm sorry.

Li: That's all right. Yeah, yeah, yeah .

02-00:10:36

Cook: I'm blabbing here. But Terry's—which son are we talking about?

Li: Yeah, so Terry, and then your daughter. Was she married at that point? No.

02-00:10:51

Cook: Oh, yeah. There's five years between each of my children. Yeah.

Li: When did you go back to work?

02-00:11:04

Cook: I think I always worked at something, a grocery store or cutting brush or—I've just never been inactive. Sometimes I just worked and didn't take the pay for it. It's like, two blocks from us is the Catholic hospital, okay? They do their own cooking, they do everything. The cook used to come and walk—he was a man; his name was Cottrel—up past our house. I walked out to get the mail one day, which was out by the road, and he was coming by and I said, "Hello, how are you?" He introduced himself and he said, "Aren't you afraid to talk to me?" I said, "Why?" Then I looked at him, I said, "Because you're black?" He said, "Yes." He says, "Nobody talks to me." He says, "I work here six days a week, then I go home with my family in Seattle." I said, "You're kidding!" He says, "No, they don't want me in town. So don't tell me it's only down South." Came the time when my husband was doing all this stuff, and we put the house up for sale. Mr. Cottrel came by and says, "Can I buy the house?" I said, "I don't know, can you do the financing?" He says, "Yeah." The mayor came and told me I couldn't do it. The mayor happened to be the fellow that worked for the grocery store where I had worked. I said, "What do you mean, I can't sell it?" He says, "He's black." I said, "What's that—?" He says, "City council. You can't do it." I said, "You watch me!" And I sold it to him. My husband said, "Peggy, I'm from the South." I said, "This is why we aren't living there. I went down there and saw it and I said no. And I *am* selling it to him." I think I'm a rebel.

Li: I was going to ask you that, if you had talked to your husband about living in Alabama. Did you go visit?

02-00:13:21

Cook: Oh, yes, we went and visited. I told him, "Oh, yeah. You've got to come home to my mother." I said, "I'm not living in the South." "Why?" I said, "Take a

look at it. Listen to what you hear. Your brother is a grand wizard of the Birmingham Ku Klux Klan.” I said, “He came—.” I used to have it on tape—in his living room. It just makes me shake. He said, “This is who I am.” I said, “I’m not living in the South. I’m telling you that right away. No, no. My kids aren’t going to be raised here.” We almost broke up then. The last time, his uncle threw me off their front thing, when I said—I’ll tell you what happened. Out in the back in a big field, their field, there was a black man and a plow and some old monkey of a horse. It’s just pouring. Doing this. They got a well out in front, so I put some water and take some water out. You’d think I crucified Christ. “What the hell are you doing? We don’t talk to them!” I said, “*What?* He needs water.” By this time, there’s this meeting of all the boys and their wives, on the front porch. One of the boys threw me off the porch. “We don’t talk to them here.” I looked at my husband and I said, “I’ll tell you what right now. I’m taking our kids and putting them in the car. I’m going home. We are not coming back. I won’t raise my kids here.” I said, “It’s up to you.” I got in the car, and the kids got in the car. I looked around and he said, “Wait for me,” and he jumped in the car. That’s how we left Alabama. I said, “No way in hell. I’ll do anything you say, but we’re not raising our kids there.”

Li: Wow.

02-00:15:40

Cook: So when he told me I couldn’t sell to a black man, I just thought, who the hell? I’m sorry. But come on!

Li: Yes. Right.

02-00:15:52

Cook: But we treated the Japanese the same way. We still treat people that way. I don’t think it’ll ever go away. It might take different forms that aren’t so blatant, but it’s there.

Li: Yes. So this is how you raised your kids, then, with these values.

02-00:16:16

Cook: That’s right. Absolutely. Absolutely. Without saying a word. Through your actions; they’re bigger than your words. I hug everybody. Not because I’m generous. It’s because I need hugs. I’m selfish! I like the feel of giving somebody a hug, don’t you?

Li: Yes.

02-00:16:42

Cook: Yes. Sometimes it’s hard, because some people are kind of bristly. They just need hugs.

Li: So much change in America, between 1930 and 1950, when you were—. How important for you were your experiences during the war, working in these wartime factories?

02-00:17:23

Cook: When I look back, how important was it?

Li: Yes.

02-00:17:25

Cook: I think it totally changed my outlook on life.

Li: Really?

02-00:17:28

Cook: It enlarged the village I grew up in. It made me know how valuable that village was. It allowed me to expand and have the two come together. I don't think I ever met anybody that didn't allow me to ask a question and try to enlarge me. There are no dumb questions; there are only dumb answers. That's just the way it is. I have a thing on my wall here; I'd like you to look at it sometime. It kind of says what I think. Of course, I'm not that clever, but I'm not dumb enough that I don't know what that means. You don't have to know the intricacies of self or relationships. We only have to accept that they exist.

Li: Yes. Is there anything from this time period that I haven't asked about that you want to share?

02-00:18:53

Cook: Now, we're just talking about wartime here?

Li: Yeah. Or as a woman working.

02-00:19:10

Cook: Let's see. Now I'm trying to think of all the women I've known. One of them, she's gone now, but she's still my dear friend, Gwen. Did you ever see *Green Fried Tomatoes* [sic]?

Li: Yes.

02-00:19:43

Cook: Okay. Well, I'm the beekeeper. What a lady. She's from Texas. In fact, I just sang her happy birthday on the phone. She always lets me know that she's two years older than I am, so listen. She went to college. Her both parents were college teachers in Texas. I didn't even finish high school. So she was going to educate me. We were going to read every book in the Port Townsend library. Okay. So we start this, and I don't know anything. Finally, one day she says, "Look at it this way, Peggy. I learned everything there was to know about being a woman. You learned everything to know about being a man."

We're going to make it together." And we did. We read every book in the Port Townsend library.

Li: How did you meet?

02-00:20:50

Cook: Some kind of a meeting, sewing. Can you imagine me in a sewing circle? I said, "I'm not doing this." I think I met her in a grocery store. It wasn't auspicious or anything. She said, "You think you're dumb, don't you?" I said, "No." "Just because you didn't go to high school doesn't mean you're dumb. Let's prove it." She says, "We'll just go read every book." I said, "I'm not reading every book." She says, "Yes, you are." So we started doing it. Then pretty soon we started playing cards together. This and that. I just adore this woman.

Li: How old were you when you met?

02-00:21:40

Cook: Twenty-four.

Li: And you've been friends all this time?

02-00:21:43

Cook: Oh, yes. Like I say, I just sang her happy birthday. She's just great. She's got this kind of humor. She decided not only were we going to get cultured, we were going to sign up for these fancy things that come to little towns, where you go see a concert or you go see this. Well, there were two German boys, twins, who played—what do you call those big pianos?

Li: Oh.

02-00:22:16

Cook: Concert pianos.

Li: Yes, the grand piano.

02-00:22:18

Cook: Yes, so we got these tickets and we went to it. We're sitting there, we're feeling so cultured. Especially me; I don't know anything. We're watching. They're good. But we're watching and she says, [she whispers] "Peggy." I said, "What is it?" She says, "You do know, anybody could do that if they just practiced." I began to laugh. They asked us to leave.

Li: Oh, no.

02-00:22:49

Cook: She said, "So much for a concert." I just love her. I just love her. I phoned her for her birthday last week. She says, "You haven't bought a piano yet, have you?" You can't buy an old friendship. I just adore her. We camped together.

Well, she was the next-door neighbor. She had four kids, I had three. So we grew up together.

Li: So you've been friends sixty-four years?

02-00:23:22

Cook: That's right. My dearest friend. Dearest friend.

Li: How did she end up in Texas? What's she doing there?

02-00:23:28

Cook: Hmm?

Li: So you said she lives in Texas now?

02-00:23:30

Cook: No, no. Her parents. That's where she grew up, in Texas with these educated people. I said, "Well, gee, I never finished high school." "Oh, we'll do something about that." She's a little-bitty thing. She's just great. You can't buy a friendship like that. So when I phoned her, she says, "Well, I thought you were going to forget me." I said, "That'll be the day." She says, "You remember now, you're the beekeeper." You can't buy that kind of a friendship. You don't even have to talk sometimes; it's just there.

Li: When someone knows you that well. Yes, priceless.

02-00:24:18

Cook: It is. You are making them now.

Li: Yes. I wanted to ask you, because you said that you mentor women who are working in trade, can you tell me a little bit about that, what you do?

02-00:24:35

Cook: Well, that kind of came by accident. The Women in Trades acknowledge the Rosie the Riveters, and they sponsor us each year, with these calendars. Most of us help other young women who are wanting to go into trades, or just need an older person to talk to sometimes. So I talk to junior colleges and high schools. Sometimes I go to grade schools, which I really enjoy doing. Wherever they want someone to speak about years gone by. So I kind of gear myself to whatever milieu they throw me in. Surprise, surprise, some of them ask me back. I'm not the only one; a lot of the women do. A lot of the women in the trades do that.

Li: So some of these women who are entering sort of traditionally male jobs. Do you feel like they're dealing with the same difficulties?

02-00:25:37

Cook: Absolutely. So are the men. It's difficult for the men, too. And I never let them forget that, never let the women forget that. That's difficult. You bet.

Li: Yes. But you yourself, you didn't experience sexism during the war, at that job?

02-00:25:56

Cook: No. Glad to have us.

Li: But after the war, it was a different story?

02-00:26:02

Cook: Well, we were still in the milieu of women stayed home. This was an aberration. We're out there doing things.

Li: So that was harder.

02-00:26:15

Cook: Mm-hmm. It was harder to go back to that. It really was. A lot of women didn't go back to that.

Li: Do you think some women wanted to but didn't?

02-00:26:24

Cook: Yes. Some of us didn't know what to do with our, quote, "new-found freedom." You're raised a certain way; your grandmother, we always did it this way. Well, okay. It's hard to change.

Li: Yes. Do you feel like things are easier for women in the workforce now than they were, say, twenty years ago?

02-00:26:55

Cook: Absolutely. Yeah. Absolutely. You hear less and less blatant harassment. There may be that, but it's not quite as—the physicality of it doesn't come in anymore, I'll tell you that right now. First time that happens, that guy is usually gone.

Li: Right. Right.

02-00:27:16

Cook: Yes. Or fined a whole lot.

Li: Right. Whereas before, that used to happen and—

02-00:27:21

Cook: Who cares?

Li: Yes. Well, thank you so much for talking to me today and for sharing all your wisdom and experiences. It's been such a pleasure.

02-00:27:33

Cook: I gain much more from you. I don't know who taught you how to listen.

Li: Thank you.

02-00:27:42

Cook: Do you know how they did it? How it comes across? You listen with the idea of prodding, and people don't even know it. It's called being had and not knowing it.

Li: Well, it only happens with interesting people, so you only have yourself to blame. Thank you.

02-00:28:03

Cook: Anything that you might want a copy of or anything, you let me know.

Li: Okay. I want to take a look at some of the things that you pulled out, because there are some images here of—

02-00:28:16

Cook: Oh, here. Get that out of your way.

Li: [audiofile stops, re-starts] —about this picture?

02-00:28:21

Cook: This one?

Li: Yeah.

02-00:28:25

Cook: On the logs here, you mean?

Li: Yeah.

02-00:28:27

Cook: Oh. Well, I didn't even know it was being taken, until it came out in the Kelso-Longview paper.

Li: Yes?

02-00:28:33

Cook: Yes. I was so shocked. *Longview Daily News*.

Li: How old were you in that picture?

02-00:28:41

Cook: Fifteen, I think. Maybe sixteen. I think it says in there. Sixteen, I think. Just turned sixteen or something.

Li: Wow. This is the August 9, 1941.

02-00:28:55

Cook: Okay.

Li: And then what's this picture here?

02-00:29:01

Cook: That, I was a journeyman painter there, and they wouldn't give me paintbrush, but they told me I had to paint all these for the Seattle Housing Authority, and they'd give me a job. So that was my first journeyman painter thing.

Li: What year was that, do you remember? Give or take.

02-00:29:17

Cook: Gosh, I don't remember .

Li: But was it 1960s?

02-00:29:23

Cook: I don't know.

Li: So this was the big city of Port Townsend?

02-00:29:28

Cook: Yeah, that was it. That was it. Sitting on these logs, is what it was. You want me to take it out?

Li: No, that's all right. So that's your grandmother and your grandfather.

02-00:29:38

Cook: My grandfather and my little brother. Fancy camera you got there, kid.

Li: The picture that was used in the newspaper.

02-00:29:59

Cook: This has been my best friend all of my life. Just adored him.

Li: That's your uncle Eddie?

02-00:30:07

Cook: Mm-hmm.

Li: You guys worked on the logs together?

02-00:30:09

Cook: Yes. He was two years older than me. Just like sister and brother.

Li: Can you tell me, when was this picture taken?

02-00:30:20

Cook: I sent that picture to my husband in 1942. And that's how they open them up, with the tenders and stuff.

Li: Okay. So what you were constructing were the nets that went—

02-00:30:40

Cook: Was these nets.

Li: These are the net torpedo buildings in Port Townsend.

02-00:30:48

Cook: Mm-hm, where they made the nets. That's how we used to go back and forth. You had to back on, so you could drive off. Pretty primitive, huh? That's what they are. They store all these things still, over there on Indian Island. Not the same ones.

Li: Right.

02-00:31:15

Cook: They're covered over with trees and stuff, so you couldn't see them from the air. How do you like these up-to-date ships we had there? Goes back a ways, doesn't it?

Li: Yeah.

02-00:31:26

Cook: Tell me when you want me to turn.

Li: You can turn, yeah. So are these your photographs?

02-00:31:31

Cook: Oh, I went over and talked to Billie Foss, Secretary of Archives, who's in charge of the island, what they can send out, and she got all this together for me, from the island itself.

Li: What's this article about?

02-00:31:54

Cook: I don't even know who wrote it. Well, it says what I've done in my life, I think.

Li: Oh, yeah.

02-00:32:04

Cook: I burnt my feet on a painting job and was off for several months. Went crazy. So I took up organic gardening and I did that, and they came down and took pictures. Then I was giving lessons on it in my backyard, stumbling around like this.

Li: You painted the Kingdome?

02-00:32:27

Cook: Mm-hmm.

Li: And you said you were already a grandmother, by that point?

02-00:32:21

Cook:

Yes. There you are.