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Jeffrey Dickemann
[formerly Mildred Dickemann]

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
David Dunham
in 2011

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Jeffrey Dickemann

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 1944

A Unit of the Farm Cadet Victory Corps Off to Aid Harvest at Germantown



Waiting for their train to go upstate yesterday at Grand Central Terminal, left to right, Mildred and Margaret Dickeman, students at Packer Collegiate Institute; Beatrice Levin, an employee of Bell Laboratories; Ruth Marks, an assistant buyer at James McCreery and Company, and Edith Morgan, a student at Jamaica High School

Herald Tribune—Rice

Mildred and Margaret Dickemmann [far left]



Patches from the Women's Land Army

Table of Contents—Jeffrey Dickemann

Interview 1: June 16, 2011

Tape 1 1

Family background — Growing up [as a girl] during the Depression in New York City — Father as engineer and trouble shooter and trainer of Navy Seabees, including evacuation from Pearl Harbor in November 1941 — Recollections of school in Hawaii — Racism against Japanese in Hawaii before the war — Reaction from new home in Salt Lake City to attack on Pearl Harbor — Memory of traveling the country and the parochialism of Americans — Parents' separation and living with mother in New York City — Listening to radio and appreciation of music — Earlier girls school experience in Salt Lake, particularly chorus and feelings about the teacher — Exposure to plays and films in New York — Recalling movies and newsreels during the war — Patriotism

Tape 2 18

First job at American Express and exposure to pacifists during the war — Memories of exposure to discrimination against blacks — Memories of Japanese culture and of disparagement of servants in Hawaii at an earlier age — Inability to discuss sexual orientation with teacher in Salt Lake City — Falling in love while in high school with junior college coed and parents' refusal to permit contact — Working on a farm in Germantown with the Women's Land Army — Dating experiences and relating to sexuality — Long days and hard work on the farm — Discussions of and exposure to homosexuality, feelings about girls at the farm

Tape 3 35

Marketing and processing tomatoes, pears and strawberries — Haying — Working with animals — Raising prize collies — Women's fashion during the war years — Remembering the end of the war — Victory gardens — Rationing — Going to the University of Michigan, the advent of returning soldiers going to college, and relationships — Observing military activities during the war from across the East River

Interview 2: October 27, 2011

Tape 4 50

Pesticides and working conditions on the previously discussed farm — Goat ice cream and goat cheese — First smoking experience — Double-dating with fifteen year old boys — Interesting people and culture in New York City — Paul Robeson and progressivism — Reasons for not joining the military—Fantasies of masculine roles — Interest in psychic research and Berkeley clairvoyance anecdote — Memories of restaurants

Working the night shift for American Express — Teaching at Merritt College in Oakland in the sixties and a developing interest in civil rights — Forming an interracial student club with future members of The Black Panthers Huey Newton and Bobby Seale — New faculty position at Kansas and volunteering to promote civil rights in the South with CORE — Voter registration and marching in Louisiana in 1965 — Pushing for diversity and student improvements at the University of Kansas — Native American education experiences in Oklahoma in the late sixties

See also from the Gay Bears Oral History Project: *Coming to Cal, 1950* : oral history transcript / Mildred Dickemann; an interview conducted by William Benemann in 1996. The University Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1997. CU-484.1 no.1

Interview 1: June 16, 2011
Begin Tape 1

Dunham: I'm here today on behalf of the Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front project, our collaboration with the National Park Service, and I'm here with Jeffrey Dickemann, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology from Sonoma State University. We're here to focus on the World War II home front experience, but also want to cover some other topics along the way, before and after. To get started today, can you just tell me your full name and when and where you were born?

01-00:00:34

Dickemann: Jeffrey Martin Dickemann, and I was born in Seattle, Washington, in 1929. October 12, 1929.

Dunham: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background, parents, grandparents even, ethnicity, primary vocation?

01-00:00:52

Dickemann: Oh, my! Gee.

Dunham: That's a lot there.

01-00:00:56

Dickemann: My father was a first-generation born American of German parentage, who grew up in Yorkville, which you know what Yorkville is? It was the non-Jewish German ghetto in—I'm trying to think—upper Manhattan, around 93rd Street and so on. So he grew up there in the tenements, a poor boy. Lucky for him, Cooper Union gave scholarships to poor boys—I think only boys—and of course, only white. And he got degrees in engineering. In the early twenties, there was some kind of initial little depression in the twenties, because he was lined up to go into forestry. He had a job, and the place closed and collapsed. So he took a competitive examination to go into the Navy as a civil engineer, and that was what he did for his career. So he served both before and during World War II, in the Navy.

My mother was from a Mormon family in Utah. She happened to be in New York during those years around World War I and that's how she met my father. She worked as a commercial artist in New York. Well, in Salt Lake and then later in New York. So she has a big family and I'm still in contact with a lot of relatives, although I certainly am not a Mormon. In fact, I think she and all of her siblings all abandoned the church; but some of the younger ones have gone back to it, which is kind of interesting. Have re-Mormonized themselves. But not me. We were really raised areligious. My father, of course, was baptized as a Lutheran, as a German, but we were completely areligious, and still are.

Dunham: Did you know any of your grandparents?

01-00:03:41

Dickemann:

Yes, I knew my grandmother on my mother's side. But of course, she was in Salt Lake, and we were only there visiting, so I met her as a visitor. Once I met my grandfather on that side. My father's mother was living in the Bronx when we were living in New York, so I saw her a few times. We didn't really get along very well. She was a very difficult woman. Then she died in the forties, around that time. So I had no close relationships with any of my grandparents. And his father had long since died; I think he died around the time of the First World War.

Dunham:

Well, thanks for telling me a little about your family's background. I'm sure we'll touch on it more as we go. You mentioned a kind of early depression in the twenties, and how it affected your father's career trajectory. Did the Great Depression affect your family in any significant ways?

01-00:05:06

Dickemann:

We were very lucky—that is, now that we're talking about myself and my family—because in those days—it's interesting this is no longer true—but in those days, many, many businesses and organizations gave discounts to military families. Often you'd go along, you'd see a sign in a store saying discounts to the military. Grocery stores, department stores, anything like that. Even educational facilities. So although we were in public schools many places, and sometimes in base schools, military base schools, when we were in New York, we were sent to a private girls' school in Brooklyn. We could not have gotten in there without a discount. So that means, of course, that we didn't really suffer.

There were some things that I can think of that reflected the Depression. For instance, you will meet this with many people, that lamb chops were always appearing on the dinner table. Lamb was the cheapest meat. Some people I've talked to, well, that's practically all they ate. Well, we didn't have that problem; but because my mother was careful, we ate a lot of lamb. I really can't think of anything else that really impacted us. I did not understand the Depression until I got to graduate school. I didn't understand what other people had gone through. Now, that's partly because things were not being explained to me, I'm sure. My sister and I, very clearly, were fascinated by seeing people living in piano crates on the side of the road. Or—I don't know what they're for—those huge, big concrete tubes that must be for sewage or something, I don't know. But you'd see them along the side of the road; they were a very nice size for a person.

Then we would see people riding the rails. Because in those days, the railroad companies didn't have all that security standing around with their guns, keeping people away. It was just understood that bums would get into the cars, and there'd be an open door and you could see them sitting inside, riding along. That, to us, was very romantic. Shows you how lacking in comprehension we were. It was very romantic and, in fact, gave us fantasies

about running away. Now, finally, when I got to be in graduate school, here in Berkeley—I was living in I-House [International House]—I got to talking to people from all kinds of backgrounds and experiences, and they began to tell me what they lived through. One of my friends—Jerry Gold was his name—his father had actually sold apples on the street, like out of the textbook. His sister was very ill. She had tuberculosis. They didn't know anything about how to treat tuberculosis, and they had this notion that she needed to get white bread. Of course, that meant they had to save their few pennies from other things, to buy white bread to feed this tubercular girl. She recovered; God knows how. But certainly, not due to the white bread. So that was just an awakening for me, and I realized how protected the military was. Most of the time, we'd go to the PX [post exchange] and buy our groceries there. Lots of other things were for sale on the base, or we had this discount system. So we were very favored.

Dunham: I know you moved around a lot, based on your father in the Navy. What was his role?

01-00:09:42

Dickemann: Civil engineers, as you understand, are not marine engineers. They're concerned with maintaining the bases on the land, and all the facilities that that requires, like pumping stations and electric facilities and so on, and then of course, building facilities. So he started out as just this public works officer. But he soon got a reputation for being—what's the word I'm searching for?—the person who cleaned up other people's—a trouble shooter, is what I'm trying to think. Cleaned up other people's messes. So he began to get sent around to do just that.

One of his most interesting and, it turned out, important roles was in Pearl Harbor. This was before World War II. They had been trying to build a floating dry dock. Apparently, the gentleman who had been there before him didn't quite know what he was doing, because he completed this dry dock and they towed it out into the bay, Pearl Harbor, and it sank. [laughs] So my father was given this job. I didn't really understand all this then either, but I remember—he would work day and night. It was obviously a lot of pressure on him, for reasons we can talk about in a minute. I would go down sometimes at night with him, where he was carrying out these experiments with concrete slabs and putting them in the water and seeing how they behaved. Then he'd try another mixture, another collection of ingredients, and try that. There were always big divers in those old suits that you now see in the movies, right? With the big helmet, with all the protective metal and the big boots full of lead, that get you down there. So yeah, they were walking around and of course, you could see how many of them had missing fingers, because it was a standard disability because they had all these pipes. They weren't free; they had all these pipes bringing their air and so forth. So they had these links of line and they would get their hands and feet caught in that line. That was very high risk.

Anyway, so I saw all that. I didn't really understand what was going on. But anyway, to complete that story, he then more or less completed that. That dry dock that he built was, when he finished it, the largest one in the world. I learned later that the Germans had later built one that was larger. But it was very important, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, because it was used to repair the ships that were repairable, from the Pearl Harbor attack. But anyway, that's what he did. Then much later, he was a base commander in Rhode Island, at a base that was preparing Seabees. You know what Seabees are?

Okay. To go overseas, in this case, because it was on the East Coast, to go to Europe, for the European campaign. Seabees were an invention of the Navy at that time, by his commanding officer in the civil engineer corps, Admiral Ben Morrell. Invented Seabees and also invented the Quonset hut. Seabees were a response of the Navy, to the fact that they couldn't be always calling in Army or Marines to build things. I'm talking now in forward bases. For instance, you need a runway for your planes to land on. Who's going to build it? You need a water tank. Who's going to build it? So the idea was now to train Navy personnel in those construction roles. That was new. They got their name Seabee because it stands for Construction Battalion. But they turned that in, then, to a bee—bzzz—that was floating around the sea, S-E-A, right? So they became the Seabees. I should've worn my Seabee thing. [laughs] He has this gun, his machine gun in one hand. You know how many hands bees have. So he has a hammer in another hand and a wrench in another hand and so on, so he's doing both fighting and constructing. That's the Seabees. Throe motto was "We Build, We Fight." So my father was in charge of preparing men to do that kind of work, before they were sent overseas to the European campaigns.

Dunham: When you went to Hawaii, was your father brought in specifically to work on that dry dock problem? Or was he already—?.

01-00:15:33

Dickemann: Yeah, to clean up that mess, yes.

Dunham: And you mentioned the tremendous pressure he was under.

01-00:15:39

Dickemann: Well, I guess we get into opinion here, although [laughs] it's not opinion to me. If you read closely about the Pearl Harbor business, you know that there are many people who believe, and I think rightly, that Roosevelt brought the US fleet into Pearl Harbor to tempt the Japanese. Roosevelt was desperate to get into World War II, and not because he liked it, but because he knew that if the US didn't intervene in some way, England would've been run over by the Nazis. I don't mean they were bombed, of course, but they would've been occupied; there isn't any doubt about that. They didn't have the resources to defend themselves. Of course, Roosevelt tried very hard to get laws passed that allowed us to get into the war. But nobody wanted to get into the war; it

was a very anti-war mood. He finally got Lend-Lease through, in which we could, through these kinds of cumbersome arrangements, send goods to England.

But it's clear now—and I'll tell you one little story, but I've read quite a bit about this—that people in the know in Honolulu knew that there was going to be an attack. Particularly the people who were in charge of the shortwave communication between Pearl Harbor and Washington. Unfortunately, all this had to be covered up. The Commanding General and the Commanding Admiral on Pearl Harbor, or on Oahu at that time, were both court-martialed. They didn't do anything wrong. They weren't in the know. And they weren't, definitely, put in the know because how can you say, I'm planning for us to be attacked? So the admirals' descendants are still trying to get his court-martial removed. This was the source of the Navy's hatred of Roosevelt.

Dunham: What were they court-martialed for?

01-00:17:59

Dickemann: For being in charge and letting Pearl Harbor happen. Right? Now, what this comes down to personally, my father had been sent on a secret mission—which again, shows you how we were preparing to get into the war—a secret mission to the Middle East, conjointly with the British. It was the Maxwell Mission. They were looking all over the Middle East, and even down to South Africa, checking out bases and locations for future establishments and so on and so on. This is, of course, all before the North African campaign happened.

Dunham: This was about what year? About what date?

01-00:18:45

Dickemann: Well, I would say he left in early 1941, something like that. Yes, because he went then, before he got to the Near East—I don't know why he went this way, but he did—he went all through South Asia. This group was just one jump ahead of the Japanese, who were moving into South Asia. Singapore, for instance. So they were just ahead of that. Then they went all through what later became Israel, Palestine and Eritrea, and they went to South Africa and met Jan Smuts and so forth.

Dunham: This was all inspecting for potential bases?

01-00:19:41

Dickemann: Yes, and looking at existing facilities and so on. Yes, it was planning for whatever might happen in this war that everybody knew was coming. It's interesting, you see that it was joint, with the understanding that somehow, we were going to end up jointly fighting the war.

Dunham: With the British.

01-00:20:02

Dickemann: With the British. Yeah. Okay. So my mother and sister and I were living in Honolulu, and we left Honolulu on November 7, 1941. Why did we leave? Because all of the military dependents were being evacuated. We were evacuated before Pearl Harbor. We were on a Navy troop ship that was just full of women and children, military dependents, to San Francisco. Now, what do you need more, to explain to you that all this was anticipated, a month before Pearl Harbor? So that's how we got to San Francisco. Then of course, the war broke out. Well, we got to San Francisco. Of course, my father was still overseas, so my mother went to Salt Lake, where she had relatives, and she bought a little house in Salt Lake, and that's where we lived during that first year of the war, before my father came back.

Dunham: Well, certainly not the first time in American history that an attack was provoked.

01-00:21:20

Dickemann: [laughs] No. Or the last. Or the last.

Dunham: Yes. Very interesting. Well, I'm curious about your time in Hawaii, though, because how old were you when you went to Hawaii? Was it before high school?

01-00:21:35

Dickemann: Eleven.

Dunham: And were you on a military base then?

01-00:21:40

Dickemann: No. We were living in town, in Honolulu. But of course my father was commuting to Pearl Harbor. He used to take us there.

Dunham: What was the school and community like? Do you remember?

01-00:21:55

Dickemann: Well, again, that was a private school. I hadn't thought of that, but that's another private school that we went to, Punahou, the one that [Barack] Obama went to. Punahou, of course, had a long, distinguished record, because it was founded by members of the Hawaiian royalty, who then married into the incoming over takers of the wealthy plantation owners, who had given up missionizing, in favor of plantations. It wasn't really posh, but it was well-run and well-organized. I have to say, it was, in my experience, a very good school. Very good.

Dunham: What was the racial makeup?

01-00:22:51

Dickemann: It was almost all white. There were a few Japanese students. I can't remember; there might've been some other mixed, like Portuguese or

whatever, but it was largely white. Many of the students in my class were clearly still related to the New England hierarchy, and you knew they were going to go back to Harvard. They maintained—this is interesting—. But of course, many of those people left because the—after Pearl Harbor, Hawaii underwent a very great change—in my view, for the better—because the Japanese, who of course, had been an underclass there—they were the servant class and one of the laboring classes—they came to the fore, and a whole lot of whites left and went to California, naturally. So the Japanese were able to play a much more important role in the society's economy and social life and so on. Which, by the way, you see reflected, if you've ever looked at *Hawaii Five-O*.

Dunham: I'm not that familiar with that. How is that presented?

01-00:24:30

Dickemann: Well, it's just that he would go out for his—oh, God, what is that bowl of noodles called?

Dunham: Saimin?

01-00:24:42

Dickemann: Yes.

Dunham: My wife is Japanese, family from Hawaii.

01-00:24:46

Dickemann: Oh, okay. He was Anglo, this lead player in *Hawaii Five-O*, but he would have to go out for his bowl of Saimin every day. I don't know, that doesn't sound quite right. But anyway, it's the same deal. There are people of other races in the show, too, so you could see that this transformation had occurred. It really was quite dramatic. Because I've been back quite a few times, and it's—I won't say there's no racism there, but there sure is a hell of a lot less than there used to be. It was pretty awful. I don't know if I'm getting off the track here; you tell me if I'm rambling.

As you realize now, I was a pretty naïve kid, with all this Navy protection. But I remember the family going to a restaurant one night. It was down in Honolulu, downtown. It wasn't a really prestigious restaurant, but it was nice. I think maybe it was a seafood restaurant. A white man walked in with an Asian woman, and it was just like ice had been poured over that whole place. It was just a chill went over the whole thing. Even I could see what was happening. There was this, you don't mix. You don't mix. Incredible.

Dunham: Yeah. I am forgetting, but there's a famous rape case, well, I believe, of a white woman, by a native Hawaiian [the Massie Affair, 1931].

01-00:26:36

Dickemann: Oh, I couldn't remember that. There's this dumbbell sociologist named somebody, Romano, who kept writing books about how great Hawaii was because there wasn't any racism there. It just blows your mind. Yeah. But yeah, it's changed. The Hawaiians, of course, I didn't even talk about them; but you see, they also have come up to some visibility now. I was on the bus the last time I was there, that wonderful Honolulu bus. There were two men—they weren't old; they were thirties, forties—talking Hawaiian to each other. And not pidgin, pure Hawaiian. I almost fainted.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. Interesting. Well, since you had left—well, been evacuated from—Hawaii a month before Pearl Harbor, although I assume you didn't have all these insights at the time.

01-00:27:43

Dickemann: I think we had a suspicion. We knew something was going on. I think most people in the Navy did.

Dunham: What was your reaction after Pearl Harbor had been attacked? Do you recall?

01-00:28:01

Dickemann: I don't recall being shocked or surprised. We were, of course, in Salt Lake by that time. I'm afraid the only thing I remember is a terribly selfish memory. My mother had promised that she was going to buy my sister and myself bicycles. Right after Pearl Harbor—maybe we had even put in an order and they were slow getting them or they had run out temporarily or something—but then right after Pearl Harbor, bicycles were—I don't know what the word is. They were all commissioned, and they couldn't sell them to civilians anymore, so we never got our bicycle. [laughs] This is terrible. That's what I associate with Pearl Harbor.

Dunham: Well, what was it like, just in general, moving around so much? Were there any other areas—?

01-00:28:56

Dickemann: Well, I think that there were two things. I've been thinking a lot about this lately, because I'm kind of tempted to write memoirs. It's what happens when you get to be my age. But on the one hand, the US was a very different place then, and people did not move around as much as they do now. The result was that many people, no matter they were living in a town or city or what part of the country they were living in, really had very parochial notions about the world. Or maybe no notions about the world. So we would get these reactions. Oh, you're from Hawaii! At that time, we wore our hair in braids. I think maybe they're in that picture, too. I remember somebody in Salt Lake saying, "Oh, does everybody wear braids in Hawaii?" They had absolutely no exposure. Of course, they didn't travel. And of course, this country was much poorer, so fewer people could afford to travel. But it was just a kind of undeveloped, uncultured country. Except for the big cities, of course. San

Francisco and New York. Well, maybe Boston. So that was one impression that we had.

We realized even that, that traveling all over the country—I have to say, my father liked to travel, and he was a very curious man. So when we traveled we saw things, and he would take us places. So we realized that we were getting an education that other Americans never had. For instance, we drove from San Diego to Virginia. It was a Chevrolet. That's all he ever bought. We went all through the South, because he wanted to see the South. So we saw all of these parts of the US, including the incredible racism going on in front of your eyes in the South and so on.

Dunham: I know you became quite an activist around race; did what you observed in those travels inspire that?

01-00:31:36

Dickemann: I think it happened later. I'm sure that in some way—how did you know all that? How did you know that?

Dunham: Oh, well, some of that's in your Gay Bears interview.

01-00:31:49

Dickemann: Oh. Oh, okay. I forgot.

Dunham: Then, also I've done a little bit of other research. You've certainly had a very interesting life. I would encourage you to write memoirs. I know you've written a lot of—

01-00:32:01

Dickemann: Okay. Well, anyway, I think that was later. But you see, the other thing that I now have discovered is that although that was a tremendous education, in terms of the average American, we never lived in big cities until finally, during the war, we got to New York. So looking back on that, I realized that in some ways, I was also parochial, because there's just a tremendous difference between, say, San Diego in 1930 and New York City. It's just another world. And it is the world. It's not just the US anymore, when you're living in New York; it's the world. You're in contact with the world. So in that way, the Navy and our travel was also kind of enclosed and limited.

Dunham: Well, let's talk about that. When and why did you come to New York and what was that?

01-00:33:16

Dickemann: Well, we came to New York. We had been stationed in Rhode Island, where, I told you, my father was training these people for overseas. He then was sent, part of the time, to Washington. I can't tell you what he was doing, but it was something important with the war. These were all steps upward in his career. My mother, he took her down there, but she wasn't happy there, and their

marriage was having problems. Well, I don't want to get sidetracked into that. I can't really speak entirely clearly about what their problem was. But anyway, well, she was thinking of a divorce, and she wanted to see if she could support herself. Now, as I told you, she'd lived in New York before, as a commercial artist. So she decided that she would move—it happened, to Brooklyn—with us, with the two kids, and she would see how she could do on her own. I'm afraid it wasn't well enough to give her any confidence about getting a divorce, because she ended up training little girls to do block screenings for Hallmark cards. Hardly what she'd anticipated.

Dunham: What kind of work had she done? Or was it before?

01-00:34:57

Dickemann: Well, she did commercial art. She started out in Salt Lake, doing commercial art. They call it design now, but that's just one of those cover terms we all have to use all the time now, to disguise what we're really doing, like sanitary worker, right? So she had accounts. You know what that means? That means that so-and-so milk company wanted her to do their ads, and that was her account. Maybe they'd even suggest, "Oh, we've got this slightly different product; think of another ad and so on and so on." So those were her accounts. Some of them she took to New York, and then she got other accounts in New York. She was appreciated for her ability to draw children. You would find it very twenties now. But they liked her children, and so she tended to be always working on products like soap and milk and baby food and stuff like that, for children. But in New York, she was working with a commercial art agency. She told me they were paid so poorly that the girls who were all working there would just pray that on a coming weekend, one of the boys would ask them out, because then they'd get a square dinner. So it must've been pretty tough.

Dunham: It was all female employees?

01-00:36:44

Dickemann: Well, no, I'm sure it wasn't, but she just happened to tell me this.

Dunham: But I wonder if there were men who were paid better.

01-00:36:52

Dickemann: Yeah, I don't know. See, I didn't have the intelligence to ask those questions. I don't even know if she would know. But it's true, also that one of these—there were two men who ran this company, Mr. Pettee and Mr. Mark, decorative designers. I have this all down someplace. One of them proposed to her. I don't know how to describe this. I don't want to say she was a flirt, but she knew how to be coy with men; let me put it that way. You can see this in the photographs. I have a photograph of her with these two men. She was seriously considering it. But he was Jewish, and he took her out to meet his family. I think they lived out on Long Island. It was just too Jewish for this little girl from North Ogden, Utah. She just felt totally out of place and didn't

think that she could fit in. So she didn't marry him. Then, as I say, later she married my father, who wasn't Jewish, but he had a nasty mother.

You asked me why we ended up in New York, and that's why we ended up in New York. Of course, that didn't work out for her, and so she went back to my father. She never really separated. He would come and visit us all the time. Then later, he got sent to the Pacific, to Guam, where Admiral Nimitz' headquarters were. I don't know what he did there, but my guess is that he was involved in preparations for the Bikini atomic tests. He wasn't there during the tests, I know that, but I think he was probably constructing stuff in preparation for that.

Dunham: Did you go to Guam at all?

01-00:39:12

Dickemann: No. No, it was top secret, no visitors. No, by then, you see, we were going to college, my sister and I.

Dunham: What year did you come to New York? Were you in high school yet?

01-00:39:26

Dickemann: Yes, that was the private girls school that we went—I was already just starting high school, in Rhode Island, and my sister must've been in high school. So then my last two and a half years, I spent at this girls school in Brooklyn. Packer Collegiate Institute.

Dunham: You talked about being in more small towns, that you were a little more worldly because you had traveled a lot more, but what was it like, then, coming to New York?

01-00:40:00

Dickemann: You have to remember that I was an adolescent. Going to a big city as an adolescent is just a revelation. Of course, we were living in Brooklyn, but we were on Brooklyn Heights. I think we were on the third floor of this apartment, brownstone. This brownstone had fire escapes all along the back of it, which overlooked the East River. Oh! So this fire escape was where I spent a lot of time. I just fell in love with New York. It was so exciting and so beautiful. Then there were all these other excitements. The radio. There were two incredible radio stations, WQXR and WNYC. One of them was a music station that played all kinds of good music. Also at that time, folk music was just starting in the US.

Dunham: What other styles of music did you enjoy, that was playing?

01-00:41:20

Dickemann: Oh, there was lots of classical, and that was where I really got interested in music for the first time and bought my first LPs.

Dunham: Do you remember the first record you bought?

01-00:41:34

Dickemann: I remember in a group, what they were. Well, I should say my father, [chuckles] for some odd reason, had taken a course in music appreciation, in Hawaii. I don't know how he found the time to do that. But anyway, so I inherited his records from that. They were a wide selection of classical stuff. But anyway, there's some that I like there. But then myself, I got Bach's suites, his Italian suites. Oh, Schubert's *Die Winterreise*, I guess it was, one of his song cycles. No, *Die Schöne Mullerin*. Then I got Shostakovich's fifth. It's interesting, see? Now, I must've heard those on the radio; I wouldn't have heard them anyplace else. My family was amusical, totally. That's one of the deepest regrets I have about my childhood, is the lack of musical training I got. I think that it's a crime not to educate children, to some degree, about music or expose them, whatever word you want to use.

Dunham: So your father's music appreciation course was an effort—

01-00:42:58

Dickemann: [laughs] No, he just gave me the records.

Dunham: Oh. Well, that's great.

01-00:43:01

Dickemann: He used to play the mandolin, when he was a young man. But see, he never picked that up. I don't know what it was with him. My mother later admitted to me, many years later—she wasn't explaining why she didn't like music, but it sure did explain it—she had had to take piano lessons as a child. For some reason, she was just terrified. Every time she had to go to the teacher, she was just tormented and terrified. I'm sure that's why she just had absolutely no interest in music.

Dunham: Did you ever play an instrument?

01-00:43:44

Dickemann: See, at the same time, I wanted a flute and they would not—oh, God, you're really getting everything here. They made us have piano lessons, too. Isn't it interesting? Well, they asked us if we wanted to make notes with our little fingers, and my sister said yes, and I didn't say anything. I wasn't interested. But of course, you know how parents are; if there are two of them, they both have to do it. So we had these piano lessons. Now, it's very well-known now—I don't know how well known it was then; or maybe we had crummy teachers—that young children, you know how their memories are, they just pick everything up like that. So we'd go to the teacher, she'd say, "Okay, here's your little piece that you're going to study for this week. Practice it. Okay? We'll go over it once now and then you go home and improve." I'd take it home, and I'd play it once, and it'd all be memorized. Of course, with all the mistakes that I was making the first time, in it, right? I'd look at the

music in the book, but I wasn't really seeing it; I was just playing my memory. Then I'd go back a week later and still be playing this thing exactly the way I played it a week before. Well, so I wasn't exactly learning anything.

This went on for years and years and years. Finally, we ended up in Salt Lake, at the time I told you, and there was the teacher who knew what was happening. She had me start playing things that—they were supposed to be so odd that I couldn't memorize them. It wasn't *quite* true. But Bartok. Little Bartoks. I've met other people since, who were exposed to these little Bartok tunes. Something happened to me, and I suddenly realized what it was all about, and I was really interested, for the first time. I had just *hated it*, hated it, hated it, and here I was. At that point, my parents said, "We've wasted too much money on you. No more piano for you," and that was the end of that. Parents. *Pfft*. Somebody said, "Parents are the last people who should be raising children."

Dunham: Now, had your sister continued all along and stopped at the same time?

01-00:46:29

Dickemann: She did continue for quite a while. She had lessons when we were in Rhode Island, and then she kept playing.

Dunham: Your sister's name and her age?

01-00:46:42

Dickemann: Margaret. Margaret. She's two years older than I. She became very good. Now, unfortunately, she went off; she got married and went off and left the piano at home, and they let it sit there and never gave it to her. This family is crazy about giving and sharing. But anyway. Then she went to Costa Rica, and I'd say, "Don't you want a piano?" She said, "No, it would just rot here." So she hasn't played for years and years, which is, I think, a great pity because she really was quite good.

Dunham: Did you ever take up the flute?

01-00:47:22

Dickemann: Well, when I was in New York, they wouldn't buy me a flute, so I went and bought a recorder. That's another thing that in New York, that was where recorders started in this country, the big excitement about recorders for the first time. So I bought a recorder and some music, and I was kind of teaching myself. Then later—I can't remember exactly where or when it was—they agreed to buy me a flute, and I did take a few flute lessons. I didn't really persevere, I'm sorry to say, because I do like music and I go to concerts all the time. But I don't really play an instrument, which is a terrible mistake. Yeah.

Dunham: Well, you mentioned the sort of lack of it. Certainly, I think it's more tragic right now in our country, the lack of music and schools and with young

people. It's really getting pushed out altogether. It's really, I think, understanding how the whole brain even works, how powerful music can be.

01-00:48:29

Dickemann: Exactly. Well, and you've seen the kids. I keep thinking about what is it about music? I don't even know if you ever look at the *Express*. Well, you start looking at the number of pages that are devoted to this that, and the whole thing is half music. Of course, it's not the kind of music I'm going to go to, but never mind; it's doing something for people. It is so important to those young people, that music. What is it? I've never seen anybody explain that to me. Of course, as we know, every society in the world has music. So it must be really important for human beings. Why, I don't know.

Dunham: Well, speaking of that, you mentioned you discovered these two radio stations. Did you see any live music at that time? Was it available to you?

01-00:49:23

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Even in the school we went to. Yes. Of course, that was another thing about New York. I have to back up, because I left out something else about my musical history, if you really want all this. When I was Salt Lake—that, by the way, was a very good school, too, in lots of ways. They even had a sex education course. Isn't that amazing? Maybe even Mormons have declined in some way.

Dunham: What was the nature of the sex education course?

01-00:50:06

Dickemann: Well, it was about how there's something that happens when the sperm and the egg get together. It was perfectly clear. I remember that there was one girl in our class who didn't get it. I think we were kind of hard on her, and she went to bathroom crying. Funny things you remember. But the teacher was a woman. Now, you're going to ask me if it was sex segregated, the class, and I can't remember. I can't remember if there were boys in there, too.

Dunham: Was there a moral component to it, or was it strictly—?

01-00:50:42

Dickemann: If there was, it sure passed over my head. [they laugh] Then the woman who was teaching it, who was a young woman and very nice, an attractive young woman, she got married right after that. She came back, and we all knew she'd gotten married. You know how kids are about that. We knew something had happened, [laughs] sort of. It was pretty liberal, for Mormons. But what I wanted to tell you was that in that school, there's a teacher. I still remember her name, Miss Morse. She loved hats. She would come in with a different hat on all the time. Oh, we loved her. She taught singing. She was so good that she—choral singing, of course. I don't know if you know that the Mormons are so famous for choral singing, but they are. They have the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Well, that's just the top of a whole phenomenon in Utah of

support for choral singing. So she got us to be so good that we were on the radio and we used to go around a Christmas, caroling and visiting hospitals and places like that. I loved it. I loved it. I continued to sing, and so when I went to Brooklyn, to Packer—by the way, this is an irrelevant footnote, but Katha Pollitt also went to Packer. Do you know Katha Pollitt?

Dunham: I don't recognize the name, no.

01-00:52:22

Dickemann: She is a commentator who writes for *The Nation* magazine. A political commentator. But she came here once, and somehow it sneaked out. I asked her about it. She said, oh, she hated Packer. But anyway, Packer was a kind of nondenominational Christian school or something. There wasn't anything Christian in it, except that we had chapel every morning. For chapel, we had a hymnal and we sang, and then somebody played Bach. Oh, there again, you see, I was exposed to Bach on the organ for the first time. I'd never heard anything like it. At first, I just thought it was awful. What the—? Eww. But if you sit through that for a year, it begins to penetrate. That's how I discovered Bach. So but anyway, I joined the choir at Packer, and I sang in the choir during the whole time I was there, and I loved it. There was a wonderful music teacher there, too. Elizabeth Wright.

Dunham: Well, what else about New York was different and eye opening for you? Was there racial diversity, more than you'd seen? Just other cultural diversity?

01-00:53:51

Dickemann: Maybe I won't have to write my memoirs. [they laugh] Well, it was big, and there's a whole lot going on. I don't remember really focusing on the ethnic variety, although it was certainly there and very apparent, and I certainly saw it. But I don't think I put a label on that. Well, culture. Now, my father was very good about taking us to plays when he came to visit. I guess plays were something he liked. He would never have taken us to a concert. I don't remember ever going to a concert. But we did go to plays. We saw Paul Robeson in *Othello*. When I went, that was Paul Robeson in *Othello*; but if I tell somebody now, who's thirty years younger than I, Paul Robeson?

Dunham: That's an iconic performance.

01-00:55:11

Dickemann: Yeah. I don't know, a lot of plays.

Dunham: Were there any other?

01-00:55:21

Dickemann: There were—you won't believe this—two movie houses in Manhattan that showed nothing but French films. Two of them.

Dunham: Wow.

01-00:55:32

Dickemann: My sister and I went to those. Another thing. Through my father—I don't know what the connection was, but some big movie mogul, who was running one of these—in those days, the movies and the movie houses were all run together. Later, the government forced them to separate.

Dunham: I don't know how separate they are today, but yeah.

01-00:55:56

Dickemann: Yeah. Well, no, I'm talking about the—yeah. Maybe you know something I don't know.

Dunham: No, about the distribution and the—

01-00:56:07

Dickemann: Yeah, yeah, the houses that show the films are supposed not to have any direct-business thing—

Dunham: Yeah. Well, I just mean it's come back around a little bit, not completely.

01-00:56:19

Dickemann: Okay, okay, I'll watch out for it. Anyway, he gave my father this big packet of chits for free entry to his particular—I think it was Loews—movie house chain. So my sister and I just went crazy. We saw all those World War II movies. Oh, my. Then these chits didn't get us into the French houses, but we went to both of those French film movie houses. We saw [Jean] Cocteau's earliest, earliest film and lots and lots of other things.

Dunham: Did you know French?

01-00:57:01

Dickemann: We had wonderful French in Packer. Yes, a very good teacher. Miss Buyington or Buffington. We both took it, and we both loved French. I think my sister ended up having more than I did because she went a little further in college. I had one semester at college. But yeah, that was, I guess, the first language that we both semi-mastered, I guess you could say.

Dunham: Do you remember the newsreels and such movies? Did they have those?

01-00:57:31

Dickemann: Oh, yes, yes. All the World War II, the newsreels, yes.

Dunham: What was your perspective on that and of other folks? Was there a strong feeling of patriotism?

01-00:57:42

Dickemann: Oh. I was a patriot. I don't know when that began, but very early. Maybe in the womb. I was a crazy patriot. Well, now, I don't want to say that. I'm still a patriot. I have a flag out front. One of my neighbors, who's a contractor who's

worked for me too, came by and said, “Why are you flying that flag?” Because he knows what my political affiliations are. I said, “I’m flying it to show people like you that a left radical can also be a patriot.” Hadn’t thought of that. Anyway, they used to tease me because when I was a little kid and the *Star-Spangled Banner* would come on the radio, I’d stand up. It was just on. Nobody else stood up; it was on the radio. But I would stand up until it was finished. So I don’t know how this came about.

Dunham: Your sister wasn’t that way?

01-00:58:46

Dickemann: *No*, not at all. Didn’t give a damn. But I know something had to do with my feeling of allegiance to my father; that I was generalizing from him, to his service. When we were Quantico, Virginia, which is much earlier, sometimes he would be delegated to go out—this was a Marine Corps base—to go out to where the central flag was on the base, and they had to lower it every night. Apparently, some officer had to be there. So they would always send some officer out there to be there while the flag was lowered and, I don’t know, was it *Taps* or whatever it was, was played on the bugle. He’d ask me if I wanted to go. Oh, I just thought that was the most wonderful thing, to be able to go and stand there with him while the flag was lowered. Yeah. Yeah, I still have that kind of sentiment. I don’t like what’s happened to the Navy, but I have that loyalty to the Navy that I still remember, I guess you could say. I don’t like all those nuclear submarines and all that stuff.

Dunham: Well, aside from your sister, were your other schoolmates and friends, community members—you were definitely ultra-patriotic. Did you feel others were equally, or not enough?

01-01:00:14

Dickemann: Oh, in a general sense, everybody I knew was—no, that’s not true. Everybody I had regular association with, with one exception I’ll tell you about, was supporting the war. But I don’t remember any flag waving. In fact, while I was in high school at Packer, we used to have these—I don’t know what they were called, but some public discussions in the classroom, or maybe it was for more than one class, but we’d all circle around and argue about something. Somehow, the military came up. As you know, it was a conscription military at that time. I guess there was talk about whether that was a good idea or not. I was the only one who defended it. Now, here again, you asked this other question that’s lurking. I defended it because I saw that it was exposing people of different backgrounds to each other. And it did. If you read the fiction that came out of that war, that was written by members of the services, they always are creating a group of guys, one of whom is Italian and one of whom is Jewish and one of whom is—of course, there weren’t blacks yet, right? Because the services hadn’t been integrated yet. But there was that level of ethnic—appreciation is the right word. That period in our society was a very

progressive period. Of course, Roosevelt was in power. But it was very progressive, in terms of ideas that had to do with justice—

Begin Tape 2

Dunham: —with Jeffrey Dickemann, on June 16, 2011. You were just talking about sort of the progressivism of the period, under Roosevelt and your defense of the draft, when you were a lone defender.

02-00:00:17

Dickemann: Right. Because of course, Packer, with the exception of military kids, was populated by young women who were not from very wealthy families, but from certainly, the upper middle class, and maybe the lower upper class. They were the kind of women who ended up marrying people in finance or low-level administrators or diplomats, that kind of thing. So they had the views of their class, and I was a bit of a rabble rouser. I also was a rabble rouser in other ways that we haven't even started to talk about, which is my gender code violations. But I was going to tell you about one person whom I met, who was not supporting the war. While we were living in New York and I was going to Packer, I got a job in—now, I can't tell you exactly which summer this was. Maybe it was the summer after I graduated and I was getting ready to go to college. Probably, it was.

Dunham: What year would that have been?

02-00:01:52

Dickemann: Well, I graduated in '46. So I got a job in Manhattan, at American Express. The lowliest job they had there at American Express was cancelling checks. I don't know where these checks came from. They didn't look like our ordinary checks, and some of them came from other places in the world. But we had these big machines, and you could put several of them in this machine and bring this thing down with your foot, and it punched. There must've been about five or six of us, with these big machines, and we were kind of out in a room that looked over New York. It had the big glass windows.

So we were kind of off from the central hubbub that was going on in all the other central offices, by ourselves. Most of these kids, of course, had no hope of going to college, but I did. But of course, there are lots of kids who wanted to go to college and used to lie, like me, and say, oh, no, we're not going to college, because otherwise, they wouldn't waste their time giving us a job. So I had lied to get this job. Well, the Italian guy loved to sing opera. This is just like out of some movie or something. I can't remember the others, except there's one girl. She was a—oh, God, I've got to get this right—Jehovah's Witness. Jehovah's Witnesses opposed the war. They oppose wars, period. I didn't know anything about them before, except it happened that right next to us in Brooklyn, was their headquarters. Big building. So I asked her, and she explained to me what they believed. It was very respectful in both directions.

There wasn't any attempt to proselytize or anything like that. But of course, she explained to me that they had this pacifist—of course, they were very badly treated during World War II. They were always being arrested and abused.

Dunham: Did you have any awareness of that at the time?

02-00:04:38

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I knew that was going on.

Dunham: Because they lived—

02-00:04:41

Dickemann: Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. I don't know, I guess it filtered down to us because we were living next door to this building.

Dunham: Did you know why they were treated—?

02-00:04:51

Dickemann: That they were pacifists. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. Yeah. We had a neighbor downstairs from us. He was a commercial photographer, but he'd lived there a long time, and we got friendly with him. They were a couple, David and Ruth Eisendrath. She was a painter. He would always explain a lot of stuff to us. For instance, we learned from him that we were living in the apartment that Richard Wright had lived in when he wrote *Black Boy*. You see, all these little things are coming at you that you didn't even know existed. Of course, then I had to go and read *Black Boy*, right? I don't want to put this all on that particular incident, but those were the kinds of things that woke me up about racism. I went, at that time—I was still in high school—I got ahold of *American Dilemma*, by Gunnar Myrdal. That book was the first book—he was a Swede—to really talk about the racist nature of US society. Nobody had ever written a book like that before. It was really very path-breaking. So I got that book and I read it.

Lots of little things coming into you. I remember—I think it was E.B. White—anyway, someone like that—who wrote commentary and essays and so on, about life. Which is, again, something that was all new to me. He remarked how he had lived in an apartment—maybe it was in Brooklyn, maybe it was in Manhattan—and he had a black servant. He used to send his servant out to buy the *Sunday Times* every Sunday. One time he was looking out the window, and his servant was coming back, and this drunken woman kind of wanted to accost him or pick a fight with him or something. E.B. White was watching this whole thing going on, from the window. So when his servant came back with the paper, he said, “How did you know how to handle that?” The servant said, “I've been practicing to be black for a long time.” Well, see, I read that when I was in New York. All of this stuff was new to me. I never thought about it. Well, we were exposed to black people because we lived in Mississippi, too. We lived in Gulfport, Mississippi. Well, Pass

Christian, Mississippi. So there were black people around us. We never had a black maid. But we saw how poor they were. So it filtered in. But I think really, the fact that that environment in New York hit me when I was an adolescent—and it hit my sister, too; she was very appalled at racism—really made a difference. The timing and the nature of the openness—like Paul Robeson being on the stage and things like that—were what really defined me as somebody who really cared about that issue.

Dunham: Did any of your high school teachers feed into that all, or speak to that?

02-00:08:46

Dickemann: Boy, I sure don't remember. There were, of course, no blacks in the high school, either. This was a private girls school.

Dunham: Back on the Jehovah's Witnesses, what types of things did happen to them during the war?

02-00:09:05

Dickemann: I guess you'd call it—well, what I remember—they were hassled. Any excuse or opportunity to arrest them. Of course, they were breaking the law. That is, the young men were, because they were supposed to register and appear for conscription, and they didn't. So whenever there were young men that they could nab, they'd do that. But I don't really remember anything more vicious than that. But everybody talked down about them. People said they were malingering and just trying to avoid their duty and blah-blah-blah.

Dunham: Did you observe that around German Americans, Italian Americans? Or did you know any Japanese?

02-00:10:01

Dickemann: Well, when we were in Hawaii, we had a Japanese maid. Hawaii was, again, interesting because the Japanese were very visible. It's just how the whites talked about them that was so awful. There was a very clear Japantown at that time—it's long gone—in Honolulu. We used to go there because they had these wonderful stores. Oh, they smelled like incense and silk. They had all kinds of wonderful little Japanese toys, and they had kimonos and things. So we used to go there. We had this Japanese maid, Dorothy Igarashi, and she was a young girl. Down the street from us—it shows you how it was so mixed—first of all, there was a farm, where they raised pigs. It smelled terrible. But then you'd just go beyond that and, oh, there was a little, teeny Japanese store. Then there was a movie theater, and they showed Japanese movies. Here we are, the Japanese, of course, are already long at war, because they invaded Manchuria and so on and so on, and China. So there were these Japanese war films being shown. [laughs] Isn't life incredible? She would take us, the two of us, to these movies. Of course, we would drive her nuts because we were always saying, "What's he saying? What's he saying?" But they had wonderful Japanese cartoons before them, which I've never seen since and

can't find anything out about them. So there was all this Japanese stuff going on.

Dunham: So you were intrigued by all of that.

02-00:12:00

Dickemann: Well, yeah. Sure. Yes. I don't know. Yeah, it was [intriguing]. A lot of the people that went into the Navy—of course, I'm really only speaking of the civil engineer corps here, but I'm sure it's no different in all the other corps—they got a chance to go to China. They'd buy these Chinese chests made out of camphor and so forth, and fill their houses with them. And Philippine chairs that were those woven chairs with those big, huge backs. You know what I mean? The kind of chair that Huey Newton is sitting in, in his—

Dunham: Oh, sure.

02-00:12:51

Dickemann: Those chairs were made in the Philippines, in a prison in the Philippines. Anyway. So, oh, the Navy always had to have lots of those chairs. These people would show off this stuff. It gave them cachet, that they were world travelers, that they'd collected all this Chinese stuff.

Dunham: Was that true for your father, as well?

02-00:13:15

Dickemann: No. No. My mother had a few little pieces, but no. No, we didn't. Show offs. But anyway, there was that kind of romantic stuff. Anyway, this little young girl who was our maid and partly our cook, I don't know how it came up, but I remember she said, "War is the worst thing." I was too dumb to ask her, what do you mean or why are you saying that or what's your experience? She may have had relatives over there, I don't know. She was a very sweet young woman. But the Navy, when they all got together for dinner, one of the subjects—I don't care where you were in the world and who your servant was, whether it was Japanese or black or Arabic or whoever—there would be this period when you'd have to talk about the servants and how awful they were and how funny they were. There were all kinds of servant jokes. Oh!

Dunham: Was this within earshot of the servants, or when they were not there?

02-00:14:31

Dickemann: Oh, no, they weren't there. Well, maybe they were in the kitchen with the door open. People were careless; they didn't give a damn. But no, I don't remember them standing there. But that was just, yeah, pretty disgusting.

Dunham: Well, I guess back to New York and sort of the high school, we're getting close to talking about when you went into the Women's Land Army. But before we talk about that, I guess I just wanted to ask again, about the culture

there or what was the social or even dating scene like when you were in high school?

02-00:15:10

Dickemann: I didn't date. [laughs]

Dunham: Okay. Were others dating?

02-00:15:15

Dickemann: I don't think they were very much. They were kind of on the edge of dating. I didn't really see any dating, no.

Dunham: Your sister, who was two years older?

02-00:15:27

Dickemann: Yeah. No. She wasn't very happy at Packer. She was kind of shy in those days, and she didn't have much fun there. Which was true on the farm, too. I was having a ball. Aside from the courses. I had very few teachers I liked there. The music teacher was wonderful. My homeroom teacher was absolutely wonderful, and very, very good to me. Who else?

Dunham: What was wonderful about them?

02-00:16:11

Dickemann: She was very supportive and I felt that I could talk to her. I'm talking about my homeroom teacher, Mrs. Katherine Clingen. One day, I asked if I could come talk to her. I wanted to talk to her about my apparent sexual orientation, sexual preference, because I was having crushes all over the place, and then I fell in love for the first time. For some reason, she had to cancel the talk because she had something else that came up. Then I got cold feet. Later, I learned she knew exactly what I was wanting to talk to her about. But we just missed the moment, so it never really happened. I don't want you to think that she approved; but in some way, she was very supportive of me, just the same. She thought I was being kind of retardedly childish, with crushes. I don't think she really understood that the first time you fall in love is not the same as a crush, and that's what had happened to me. But anyway. She was a wonderful teacher, too. She taught English, taught our English lit course. But she was also our homeroom teacher, so she knew us all pretty well. She appreciated my liberal views, that were at odds with those of many of the other people.

Dunham: So the time that the appointment had to be cancelled, it wasn't that she was trying to avoid—

02-00:18:12

Dickemann: Oh, no. Oh, no, not at all. She had something else that she couldn't avoid, that came up. She wanted to reschedule it, but for me, I lost my courage.

Dunham: The crushes and the first love, were they classmates?

02-00:18:33

Dickemann: This school, which was a high school, had two years of junior college attached to it. It had much the flavor of a finishing school. It's changed now because it's become—what am I trying to say? Both sexes now. A long time ago, they started letting boys in. So it's entirely different now. But it really kind of was like a finishing school. I remember many of the teachers were—I always think of them in big, long, black dresses, almost like nuns. Most of them were quite severe, especially to me. They didn't approve of me.

Dunham: In what ways did that—?

02-00:19:28

Dickemann: Well, there was a long hallway. There was a kind of a basement area, and it led down to the gym room and so on and so on. I don't know where I was going, but I was walking along this long basement hall one day, and I was whistling. Because I whistled a lot in those days. This teacher, in her long, black dress, somehow appeared. She said, "Whistling girls and cackling hens always come to some bad ends." She was serious. You don't whistle; it's not right for women to whistle. Now, I learned. Oh, yeah, the French teacher was nice, but I didn't really have much to do with her, except in class. Then I had a Latin teacher and she was nice. Those teachers were nice, but I didn't have any real interactions with them.

The music teacher, of course, led us in the choir. Oh, yeah. We used to put on a Gilbert and Sullivan every year. So I was in one of those and I tried out for another one and so on. She was very supportive of me and lots of other kids. Of course, I learned much, much later, after she died, that she was a lesbian, but very much in the closet. She had this story that went around—I don't know if she started it—about her, which was a classic story in those days. Oh, she'd been in love with this man and he was killed in the war. See, that was the cover story that was used over and over, for lesbians. It had nothing to do with the truth. She had a partner and had this apartment all her life. Oh, I don't even know who she was or where she lived or anything. But Miss Wright was wonderful to me, and to everybody. Everybody loved her.

Dunham: In was it *Pirates of Penzance* or in the other musicals, was it in—

02-00:21:43

Dickemann: I was in *Pirates of Penzance* and—

Dunham: In a traditionally feminine role?

02-00:21:47

Dickemann: Oh, no! Somebody had to play the boys, right? [laughs]

Dunham: Of course. Silly me.

02-00:21:55

Dickemann: No, is that *Pirates of Penzance*, there's a Major Murgatroid, and he stands at the edge of the stage and whips out his sword, and everybody thought I was going to cut off their noses. Oh, yeah, and I wanted to be Bunthorne [sic Bunthorpe], in—what's that one, which is a takeoff on Oscar Wilde?
[*Patience*]

Dunham: A takeoff on Oscar Wilde, not an Oscar Wilde piece?

02-00:22:25

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He walks down with his pansy in his hand and he—ach, it's so long ago I can't remember. Anyway, I wanted to be Bunthorne. Bunthorne is this Oscar Wilde-y person, who's in love with the female lead; and the female lead was being played by this woman—see, I didn't finish my sentence there—whom I had fallen in love with, so of course, I wanted to play for her. The person they chose for Bunthorne wasn't very good, and later, Miss Wright said, "Oh, I wish we'd chosen you instead." Well, the woman I fell in love with was in this two-year junior college, which is attached onto it. So she was actually four years older than I. I knew several of the girls who were in that junior college. They were a little more educated, by two years, and a little more interesting to associate with. So I had friends there, that I did things with after class. Or a lot of them lived over in Manhattan, and I would go and meet them. You've probably read that whole story in my other interview, about how they separated me from her.

Dunham: I don't remember the detail of that.

02-00:23:48

Dickemann: Oh, yeah. My parents found out. My mother read my diary. She was dusting. She said it just fell open. So she not only found out about the woman, but—Doris had told me some of her past. Well, she'd been involved with a man. Christ, she was in college. But you know how things were in those days. So my mother discovered I was—I don't know if involved is the right word, but anyway, interested in this young woman who'd had this sexual relationship. Horrors, horrors. So she had a big conference with my father, and they decided that they would forbid me from seeing her anymore. The truth is, my mother had very ambivalent feelings. This isn't a psychologizing of my mother, but she was very ambivalent about her own sexuality. So Doris and I continued to write each other. My mother knew what was going on. I would just go and get the mail every day, right? So we had this heavy mail correspondence. Well, we were both going off to college in different directions. I continued to see Doris, but she got involved with other people and so on and so on.

Dunham: But it was a reciprocated love?

02-00:25:41

Dickemann:

Well, yes. Yes, I think that it was. But I also think that Doris found that very hard to admit to. But she was very broken up when she learned—I went over there; she lived in Manhattan—to see her and tell her I couldn't see her anymore, and she was very upset. She took one of her favorite records that she had always played, Grieg's *Solveig's Song*. She sang, and she had serious intentions as a singer; it didn't quite work out. But so she took this record and broke it over her knee. That was her expression of her distress. But I don't know. Doris was a complicated person. It's possible you could say she could be in love with more than one person at the same time, I don't know. But I was nuts. But that was after the farm.

Dunham:

Okay. But at the end, towards the end of high school.

02-00:26:45

Dickemann:

That was the end of high school, yeah. Yeah.

Dunham:

Okay. Well, maybe we should talk about the farm, then. How did you and your sister become farmworkers?

02-00:26:56

Dickemann:

I can't remember how the announcement went out or how it reached us. I have no memory of that. I really should ask my sister. She'd probably remember, but I don't. But you know, of course, why. Because all the able-bodied men had been conscripted. I have no idea why they chose Germantown to send us to. What's interesting in that photograph already is that you can see the kinds of people that responded. Of course, we might've been a little younger than most. Well, maybe that's not true. There were others my age. But it went all the way up through college girls. And too, you notice one of these women in the photograph was a buyer. I never hear about buyers anymore. I don't know whether they changed the label or they don't do that anymore or what. But New York was full of buyers, especially in the garment industry, which of course, was central to New York at that time. A lot of buyers. And models. Not necessarily on the runway, for showing off the latest fashions, but showing off clothes for a commercial manufacturer, that kind of thing. But I'm sure there are all kinds of other women who were career women. That's what it looked like to me. They were career women of some sort. I mean these buyers, right? Now, maybe they would get married later; I don't know what happened to them. But there was a serious commitment to a career. You know, I'm a buyer. They weren't just low-level secretaries. Well, maybe some of them were, but a lot of them weren't; they were women who had important, responsible jobs in Manhattan. Now, why they all came, I don't know. As I told you over the phone, I think it's obvious—I *know* it was obvious—that some of them were lesbians. But I wouldn't say that was true of everybody.

Dunham:

So you think that may have been a factor in why some of them joined the Women's Land Army?

02-00:29:42

Dickemann: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah, because, as I said to you on the phone, there was a heavy proportion of lesbians there.

Dunham: So what was the social or dating scene like there?

02-00:29:56

Dickemann: Oh! [laughs] My sister would tell you more than I can. I remember there were some guys hanging around, wanting to date; but they weren't prominent in my memory. I only remember once, there was a fair that we went to, someplace out in the country there. Typical country fair. They brought in the whirligigs, and then they had a little shooting range and stuff like that, and places where you throw balls at things. Somehow or another, I and somebody else—I've blanked who it was—we had dates with these two guys. These guys took us walking, to this cemetery. I'm sure they thought that was a nice, quiet place where they could make something happen. All I got out of that was some slobbery kisses. It was not of any interest to me. [laughs] It was disgusting. Well, I didn't like boys, and boys are pretty awful at that age, anyway. But I didn't know whether my sister might've had more experiences along that line.

Dunham: For you, had you agreed to the date just to be polite? To go with the flow?

02-00:31:26

Dickemann: There was tremendous pressure. Now, I didn't feel that tremendous pressure so much there, because as I said, I didn't even see very many boys. I saw boys while I was working, but I didn't see boys hanging around our digs, where we were living. I don't remember them. Maybe they were there and I just didn't remember them. Because I wasn't so focused on that. The point at which I began to feel the pressure was when I was in college. Then the pressure was terrible.

Dunham: To date men.

02-00:32:07

Dickemann: To date, yeah. You had to have a boyfriend. This was when I was—

Dunham: Which college?

02-00:32:14

Dickemann: Well, first, I went to the University of Utah, because I couldn't get into Michigan right away. We had, or our parents had, decided to send both of us to the University of Michigan. Because of the war—well, you see, it was the end of the war. All of these GIs are coming back. You know about the GI Bill, which it's disgusting that we don't have a decent one anymore. But anyway, Michigan decided they had to make room for these GIs, so what can we do to make room for them? I think this is really funny. Shameful, but funny. Out-of-state women. We'll say we can't accept any out-of-state women.

Dunham: Zero?

02-00:33:10

Dickemann: There's something else operating there. Michigan had something else that we don't have, and should. They had a firm commitment to take anybody from a Michigan high school. Anybody. It doesn't matter if they were dumbest student on the earth; they had the right to be admitted. Now, of course, this was very expensive, because you're dealing with a lot of people who are going to drop out. In fact, our notebooks had little stickers on them that said, "Drop now and avoid the rush." Right? Well, no school does that anymore, makes that total commitment to all the high schools in the state.

Dunham: The California system used to be a lot closer; it's getting farther and farther.

02-00:33:59

Dickemann: Well, yeah; it wasn't ever 100 percent.

Dunham: I think for a JC, at least, I think it was in principal, but not for—

02-00:34:05

Dickemann: Oh. Oh. Oh, well, maybe so, but not UC and not the state colleges.

Dunham: But it's getting farther from that every day.

02-00:34:14

Dickemann: Yeah. No. See, that's why they said out-of-state. They couldn't exclude Michiganders legally. But then they decided women, right? So I couldn't get in that year. I had to wait a year before I could get in. So what are we going to do with this child, right? So they decided to send me to Utah, because there, my relatives could look after me. See, they were already worried about me. I was going down the wrong path.

Dunham: Principally, your gender—

02-00:34:54

Dickemann: Well, I'd fallen in love with this woman, right? This worry continued. Later—I'm just kind of leaping up here a little bit—when I was ready to go to graduate school, I wanted to go to Columbia, because there were people there I wanted to study under. No way. No way. Because that was in evil Manhattan, and Doris was probably there, anyway. Even if she wasn't, it was still evil New York, and I would certainly get in trouble.

Dunham: Who's deciding this?

02-00:35:33

Dickemann: My parents. So off I go to California, where I managed to get in plenty of trouble anyway. [laughs] See, they didn't know about San Francisco. They hadn't heard about the Barbary Coast. But that's why I went to Berkeley instead of Columbia. Yes.

Dunham: Did you have, within your family, any relatives that you came across who were sympathetic?

02-00:36:05

Dickemann: No. No.

Dunham: Was it something you spoke directly about?

02-00:36:15

Dickemann: You see, I would try, like trying to talk to this teacher about it. At that same period, when I was in high school, I had a wonderful teacher in Hawaii, in Punahou, and I wrote her a letter. She had been very supportive of me, especially. She thought I was very bright and blah-blah-blah, and I memorized poems and—well, I don't want to get distracted, because she was an interesting person. But anyway, she used to teach at the Anna Head School, before she went out to Punahou. You know what Anna Head School is. Anyway, but that's beside the point. But I wrote her a letter, and I told her that I'm going through this—I find I'm attracted to women. I don't know what I said, but anyway, that was the message. She never answered. Never answered. So by then, I knew very well I was running against the tide. Well, I knew that anyway. I had a funny way of dressing. I wore combat boots to school.

Dunham: Was this throughout your adolescence? I know there's a wonderful quote from your Gay Bears oral history. I think you were between five and seven, where you say, "It was in San Diego that I really had to accept the fact that I wasn't turning into a boy."

02-00:37:37

Dickemann: Yeah.

Dunham: That reminds me of a lot of women or girls I've known, both straight and queer, who I think had that sort of feeling at some point.

02-00:37:50

Dickemann: Yes, but you see, the difference with me is that I wanted to be a boy. Well, I don't know; maybe you know other women who ended up straight. This could be a long and involved conversation. Maybe I told this to Bill Benneman, I don't remember. But at that same young period, in San Diego, some friend of my mother's had asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" You remember this one? I said, "I want to be an Indian."

Dunham: That's right.

02-00:38:25

Dickemann: She said, "Oh, you can't be an Indian." Of course, when I was thinking of the Indian, I was thinking of braves; a squaw never occurred to me. She said, "No, you can't be an Indian." I said, "Well, then I'll be a cowboy." So it was very

clear to me that I was supposed to be a boy and something was wrong. Anyway.

Dunham: So as far as your dress, did you dress more boy-like from an early age?

02-00:38:54

Dickemann: Oh, yes. And I was encouraged to. That's the other funny thing, is my parents didn't realize, I think, how they were feeding into my dreams. I had chaps and a cap pistol and a belt, and a lasso that I never could make work. Ralston Purina had these advertisements on their box, for a Tom Mix—Tom Mix was originally a border patrolman; we always forget this now—and then he went into the movies. But he was a cowboy. I guess he was some sort of a trickster on horses, too. So he started this Tom Mix organization that you joined through buying Ralston Purina Cream of Wheat. I joined, and I still have a little photograph he sent me, of himself. It says, "To my"—it was called his Straight Shooters—"To my Straight Shooter, Pinky. Tom Mix." I still have it. Oh, my, I was delighted with that. I'm getting close to being a cowboy myself. I was, I don't know, six years old, something like that.

But in Packer, of course, I had to wear a skirt. But then I wore one of these military belts. I had a pocket knife that had all those gadgets on it, punches and saws and things. So I used to wear that dangling from my web belt. Yeah. Then my father had given me some castoff—those roughout boots that were worn during the Second World War, by the military. I wore those. I was weird. I was very weird. But my classmates, as far as I was aware, they never held it against me. Maybe they just thought I was retarded, I'd grow out of it. I don't know what they thought.

Dunham: But they didn't pick on you or mock you?

02-00:41:41

Dickemann: Never. Never. No.

Dunham: After your mother had read your diary, other than forbidding you from seeing Doris, did she try to—?

02-00:41:55

Dickemann: Well, I had another problem. You see, these junior college girls, they had a separate area in the building. If you were a high school girl, you had to go stand at the doorway of their room and wait for someone to invite you in; you couldn't just walk in. But they also stayed there much later. We were supposed to leave the building when our classes were over, unless we had some special gym practice or something. But I would go and hang out and I wouldn't come home. Well, I'd come home, but I would be a couple hours later. My mother got very upset about that and she decided to punish me. She was going to come and pick me up. You can imagine how embarrassing that was. That was just awful. So she'd come and pick me up and take me home. I don't know how long that lasted, but of course, she soon discovered that it

was as embarrassing for her as it was for me. What is this *mother* doing here? No other mothers are around? So she gave that up after a while. But yeah, she was disturbed by my—

Dunham: But didn't ever try to say, you can't wear this or that or—

02-00:43:38

Dickemann: Never. Never. Isn't that interesting? You see, they'd supplied me with all these accoutrements, way back when I was five years old. They had mixed feelings. I'm sure she wanted a boy; I'm sure my father wanted a boy. So I was the nearest thing they had to it, and so they just were terribly confused about how to handle this. Yeah.

Dunham: Well, back at the farm—

02-00:44:11

Dickemann: Back at the ranch, right.

Dunham: —what kind of work were you doing?

02-00:44:14

Dickemann: Okay. Now, the first thing that is, to me, very interesting about this is you look at that and you see how agriculture has changed in this country, because these were all small farms and they were mostly serving Manhattan. But they were small farms, and they tended to have some specialties. Now, I don't know how they contracted for us, but they did. I began to wonder just recently, whether the people who were putting us up got paid. You would think they might have.

Dunham: Were you staying in homes or in a dormitory?

02-00:44:57

Dickemann: No. The people who were putting us up had a big farmhouse on one side of the road. There was a kind of main road in this little, dinky town. That was where they fed us, and we then helped wash the dishes in the evening. Across the road, they had a big barn, and they had remodeled it so that there was a floor and a half of bunk beds. So that was our living quarters. So they were supporting us. Again, I can't tell you what we paid. I don't know, I'll have to ask my sister. I don't know if we paid or what. But we were paid to do the work, by the farmer.

Dunham: Do you remember what you got paid?

02-00:45:49

Dickemann: No. No. It would've been a big, massive production now, but these were all separate little farms. My sister left halfway through. There was a kind of break there; a lot of people left and some stayed, and I stayed.

Dunham: Did she leave because she didn't—?

02-00:46:16

Dickemann: Well, she wasn't really having any fun. I was having a ball.

Dunham: Both work and social?

02-00:46:24

Dickemann: Both work and social. Not drooling boys, either. [they laugh] So we started with strawberries—that was the first crop of the season—and we went all the way through, or I and others went all the way through to apples, and that was the last crop in the season. As I say, these were individual different farms. Well, I somehow teamed up with another girl. Her name was Tuey Hansen, T-U-E-Y Hansen. She was from Teaneck, New Jersey. Norwegian background, as you might guess. Now, I don't know how Tuey and I hit it off. She was not educated at all. I guess that was the source of occasional friction between us; but other than that, we got along fine. I think part of it was that we both liked to do the work and do it well. The result was that by the time we'd been there a while, the farmers started asking for us, Tuey and Millie, I guess. I don't know what I was called. So we would be especially appreciated, because we worked hard. We didn't goof off. A lot of these girls had never done anything like this before. I was in heaven being on a farm.

Dunham: Were they long days, in terms of working?

02-00:48:05

Dickemann: Till five o'clock, something like that. Okay, now, that raises another question, about the conditions that we worked under. They were not the conditions you hear about now. How could they be? Because we were American citizens and they wouldn't dare treat us like that. However, I have to say the bathroom facilities weren't much different. Because we were eating a big breakfast, full of starches. We were well fed, except cheaply fed. But we had fried potatoes and I don't know what all, for breakfast, and oatmeal if you wanted it, and blah-blah-blah. Then you're working and comes time that you have to go to the bathroom. We just went out in the fields, like everybody else. We were lucky if we could find the right kind of leaves to wipe ourselves with. Yeah. So that wasn't so nice. I wasn't bothered by it, but it's interesting that's still not very good.

Dunham: The women, did some of them have a particularly hard time with that?

02-00:49:26

Dickemann: I don't remember. I don't remember any of that.

Dunham: You mentioned citizens and there were decent conditions, except for that. Were there any immigrant or POW or internee workers at all?

02-00:49:39

Dickemann: No. I heard rumors that there were Jamaicans working someplace in New York state. I don't know what their status was, but that's the only thing I ever heard about any non-whites. In fact, our group was all white. There were some

people there of very recent arrival. I remember there was one girl there from, oh, I don't know, Lithuania or someplace. She struck everybody because when she was up in the trees picking pears or apples and she found a bird's nest; she'd just eat the eggs. Crack them open and eat them raw. Well, that was quite something to us. She was a strange girl anyway. She kind of misbehaved and they sent her home. But everybody else was just New Yorkers. Just New Yorkers.

Dunham: Do you remember what kind of misbehaving would've gotten her sent home?

02-00:50:50

Dickemann: It was hushed up. But it's clear that she had some sort of lesbian leanings or hopes or something, and she'd gotten in some kind of a fight. It was hushed up and—see, I was defined as one of the younger ones there because you had all these other older women, women in their twenties and thirties. So they held a meeting—I'm sure this is in my other account, but anyway—they held a meeting in a field, where they thought that would be private, to discuss this girl and what had happened to her. There was a young girl there—she was older than I; college, I'm sure—who tried to explain what homosexuality was. I'm sure she was reciting her college textbook. But that's all right; it was a good textbook. She said, "There's nothing wrong with it; it's just another way of being." I had never heard anything like that. Oh, I snuck in and hung around the edges, because I wanted to hear. See, I wasn't supposed to be there.

Dunham: Oh, you weren't invited to this meeting?

02-00:52:04

Dickemann: No, no, these were all the mature gang. But I snuck around and got on the outer edge, so I could hear all this. So I heard that. It was very important for me to hear that.

Dunham: Was that the first time you'd heard homosexuality discussed in that kind of context?

02-00:52:24

Dickemann: I used to say that, but I realize now that can't be true. I was living in New York when Mayor [Fiorello] LaGuardia was the mayor. LaGuardia was a *big* homophobe. I've now discovered he was a liberal mayor, in some ways, but I'm afraid that that passed me by at the time. He used to be always going on about male ballet dancers. They bugged the hell out of him. He was sure they were all swish, right? I heard him on the radio all the time, so I must've known that word. But those are the only other sources that I can think of.

Dunham: He didn't turn out to be a big closet case after that— [they laugh]

02-00:53:13

Dickemann:

Not that I know of. Not that I know of. So anyway, where are we going? Well, anyway, that was that strange girl. Finally, they sent her home. For some reason, I found myself in the role of saying goodbye to her and standing there on the railroad tracks—because we were served by a railroad that ran up the Hudson River—waiting for her train to come, and say goodbye to her. I don't know how all that happened, and I don't know what she did. I know she got in a big fight. She had a big temper, that was clear.

Dunham:

So while there were many lesbian relationships that did go on, it's just that something went wrong with hers and she was—

02-00:54:01

Dickemann:

Or maybe nothing happened. Well, I don't know about lesbian relationships, except—again, I was a very blind person when I was young. I really didn't see a lot that was going on around me, especially in this area. But we had two friends, my sister and I, who I think must've been college girls, very nice college girls. Ethel Idells and Vera something. They were from Manhattan. They were political liberals, maybe even more than that, and very much concerned with politics. They were probably a couple, but I didn't realize that then. They were very supportive to both of us, and we saw them once or twice after we came back to New York. I'm sorry we didn't maintain our relationship with them, but they were more intelligent. But I think they probably were a couple.

Other than that, did I not tell Bill Benemann about this? The people who were running this outfit would appoint somebody to supervise the [chuckles] wild bedrooms there, right? In fact, at one point, they appointed me to supervise this upstairs half room. Nothing was going on except short sheeting and that kind of stuff. But toward the end, they appointed this woman—I think her name was Sandy—to supervise the downstairs. She had her bed right in the middle. She started inviting people to spend the night with her, if you can imagine. I guess she figured nobody's going to report her, I don't know. So one night, she invited me. I was only too happy to join her, except I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to make love as a woman, to a woman. I don't know whether she didn't know either or she, like so many women, just thought if she just lay there something would happen. Seems to be a problem with women.

So I got in bed with her and I thought this was great, but nothing happened. Finally, in the morning, she said, "You're no good," and, "Go away." I wanted to come back. No, she didn't want me anymore. Well, after this summer was over, I got a letter from her. She was a little Latin teacher from New Jersey. Pathetically lonely, right? She wanted to see me. I didn't want to see her. You probably want to ask me, "What about other people? How'd they make out?" I haven't a clue whether— [laughs]

Dunham: You had just referred to your suspicions that a lot of them had those leanings of—and maybe even chose to come for that purpose, in part, so I—

02-00:57:40

Dickemann: Well, yes, because they knew it was going to be a group of women. I'm sure. I'm sure. I remember there was one woman who was a buyer. She was older. She could've been in her thirties. A very attractive, lean, butchy-looking woman. She was suffering from some sort of heartache. She would just sit around and be depressed. Oh, I wanted to cheer her up so badly. But I didn't know how. I tried to talk to her once, but who was I, this little high school kid? So I didn't really make any hay with her. But I was very impressed by her.

Then there was another girl that wasn't even part of this gang. She lived in Germantown, on a big old property. It had one of those swinging couches in the front. Oh, and it had an old car in it that's broken down, but you could get in it and make it move back and forth. But I don't think it even had any wheels on it. Then it had a hayloft. I should remember her name. I'm sure I've got her name someplace. Anyway, I guess she just came to visit all these other women. You know what was going on. So I kind of got friendly with her, and I would walk over to her house. Oh, she liked to read poetry. She was a lonely single girl. So I would go over there and read poetry with her, and then we'd go up into the barn. Oh, it was a wonderful setup; but again, I didn't really know how to take advantage of it. We used to kiss goodbye; that was about all. But if I'd been a little more experienced. She was a nice girl.

Dunham: Well, what other types of things did you do? Were there organized activities, socially, after work?

02-00:59:49

Dickemann: No. No.

Dunham: Just meals and—

02-00:59:52

Dickemann: People were *tired*. Tuey Hansen had the minimal notion of Swedish massage. So when we came home, we would massage each other. I remember just halfway through massaging her, just falling asleep on top of her, because it was active, active work. I've never felt so healthy in my life. But no, I don't even remember what the hell we did in the evening.

Dunham: Tuey, your partner, was not a romantic interest, you were just—?

02-01:00:27

Dickemann: Oh, no. No, no. She was just a buddy. Yeah, she was just a buddy. Yeah.

Dunham: And the period, it was over a summer?

02-01:00:37

Dickemann: It was a whole summer for me, yes. My sister left partway through, but I stayed the whole summer, from strawberries to apples.

Dunham: Were others staying year-round, beyond the summer?

02-01:00:49

Dickemann: This was only harvest work. It was full during this period. I think some people came and left and came, and new people came and so forth.

Dunham: But you don't have a sense of the money, if the people who came from New York, who seemed to be professionals, if it might've been that they needed the work, and/or it was better money or anything like that; you think it was more for the experience?

02-01:01:16

Dickemann: It's a good question. Why would these buyers—? Of course, your first question is did people work all summer or not? Maybe they had their summers off in those days. We didn't have the same kind of long hours then as we do now. I don't know. That's a very good question, and I can't really answer it. I didn't know all these questions in those days. I was socially very unaware, when I was young. Very unaware.

Dunham: Well, this looks like the end of tape two, so I'm going to stop.

Begin Tape 3

Dunham: It's June 16, 2011, and this is tape three with Jeffrey Dickemann. So we were just finishing up talking about your summer with the Women's Land Army.

03-00:00:19

Dickemann: Well, there's some more things to tell about agriculture, which I learned. As I told you, Tuey and I ended up being a team. There was a farmer who raised tomatoes, who hired us by request. He grew these huge, big monsters that I'm sure were used in canning. He was supplying the New York market. So we used to pick I don't know how many bushels and then load them on the back of his truck, which was parked nearby. It was relatively heavy work. One day, we had been, in the morning, filling the bushel baskets and putting them on the truck. Oh, I guess we hadn't put them on the truck, because he was in the truck. We had just piled them there, waiting for them to be picked up. He came back and he says, "Well, you can dump all those tomatoes on the side of the road." I said, "*What?*" The bottom had fallen out of the market, in New York. They had no value. Just like that. Well, I didn't know anything about agriculture, but I was learning. He wanted to pay us. No, we refused. We refused. Now, I think maybe he ended up giving us a little bit, but we didn't want any money. That was another way in which Tuey and I understood the same things together. So we didn't want any money. But he wanted to pay us,

even though he was just out that whole crop. So that was another thing I learned.

You see, these are random, but anyway, agriculture. There were young boys left, who were still working on these farms. One thing that impressed me was that they were always swearing. They could not finish a sentence without saying “damn” three times. My sister has even much more negative memories of these boys; she just found them terrible hicks. Well, of course, I was learning things from them. I learned how to swear.

I remember them being around mostly during the pear period. The pear trees were full-sized. You don’t even see full-size pear trees anymore. They’re *huge*. You get all the way up in one of those and you could see all the way up and down the Hudson River. That was beautiful. But there’s a fruit ladder. I bet they don’t use these anymore, either. A fruit ladder is made so it’s the normal width at the bottom, but then it goes up and it tapers, tiny, tiny, until finally, at the top—God, I don’t know how many feet they were—there’s really just only space for one foot to go in there. The reason that they taper like that is that you have to set that ladder in between the limbs. Hopefully, without breaking anything, right? So you need to be able to kind of put it in all these little—and you have to be able to carry it vertical. I learned how to do that, and I was very proud of myself because that’s not easy. They’re heavy. Even though they look skinny, they’re heavy, and you have to navigate this thing.

Dunham: You climbed to the top of those, as well?

03-00:04:42

Dickemann: Oh, yeah, then you climb. My sister had some story about these boys teasing them and threatening them, when they were up in the top of the trees. I don’t remember any of that. I would just go up there and I’d make up songs and sing.

Dunham: What was the training like when you started? Was there much training, or it was just kind of hands on?

03-00:05:04

Dickemann: No, there wasn’t any. I just indicated I wanted to do that. Maybe somebody made me some suggestions, but no, there was no—oh, and the strawberries, here’s another insight on farming. We had a boss there, who was a man, mature, but he looked like he should’ve been in the service. He was nasty. Crab. We later learned that he had a very difficult ulcer, and that was why he wasn’t in the service. That probably was also why he was so nasty all the time. But anyway, we had to have two boxes, those little strawberry boxes. You go down the row, and whenever there is a big, luscious-looking berry, you put that in your separate box, and then you put all the others in. Finally, when you’d fill this box, you put those luscious-looking ones on top. They’re

called toppers, and they were, of course, to deceive the buyer. Then you could turn that one in and start all over.

So we're learning about the food industry. The other thing about strawberries is that in the east, where you have snow in the winter, they cover the strawberry plants with hay during winter, to keep them from freezing. So then in the spring, they take this hay and they pull it off of the plants and put it between the rows. So you have this between-the-row collection of wet hay. Now, I don't know why it is, but there, back east, we picked those things by sitting on our butts. Wet butts. Out here in California, they do it as stoop labor, standing over. I don't know what the difference is, but anyway, that's how we did it. So we'd go down these rows on our wet butts. I did not like picking strawberries. Then this guy would get mad at us about our toppers or we put this berry in the wrong basket or something, I don't know. But obviously, I was learning these little tricks.

The other thing, which is now so different. In those days, the only pesticide was nicotine. Everybody knew it was bad for you. I heard these guys, these young guys, joking about it, in the way people joke about something that isn't nice. They knew it was poison. But they just pretended to be tough. But that was the only pesticide, because of course, all of those pesticides were invented, or came into being, after World War II. The basic chemistry for all that stuff was military chemistry. A lot of it was German. So nicotine was it, in those days.

Dunham: How was it—?

03-00:08:28

Dickemann: Sprayed. Sprayed on.

Dunham: On all the crops that you worked on?

03-00:08:33

Dickemann: Well, I don't remember it being on strawberries, but it was certainly used on the apples and the pears. Yeah.

Dunham: It wasn't part of the work you did, though?

03-00:08:44

Dickemann: No. No, we didn't spray it. No, but it had been sprayed on all these things. Yeah.

Dunham: What kinds of injuries were there? Can you recall?

03-00:08:57

Dickemann: I don't remember any injuries. No.

Dunham: I know you maintain an interest in farming and growing. Was this where it was born, or did you have that prior?

03-00:09:11

Dickemann: Oh, it was much earlier than that. Much earlier. When I was a little child, I had a book called *Grindstone Farm*. It was a very interesting book because it was meant for children and it was about farm labor. But it was also about all of the implements that were used, various kinds of harrows and so on. Now I can't really remember, but I think they were to be hitched up to a tractor. But I don't know, maybe they could've been hitched up to horses, too. As I say, that would've been before World War II, that I saw that book. It was to try to educate you about the fact that farming was hard and responsible. That's why it was called *Grindstone Farm*. But it was also to educate you about all the different kinds of tools and what they were used for, these various machines. Yeah. I loved that book.

Dunham: Had you had the opportunity to use any of those tools? Or did you get to during the summers?

03-00:10:24

Dickemann: No. That summer, toward the end of the summer, some guys asked for Tuey and myself to do some haying. That's the hardest work I've ever done in my life. Well, I don't have very strong shoulders, and I certainly didn't then. I never developed my shoulders. Pitching hay, it's up work. I got a lousy one here now [touching shoulder]. But we had to pitch hay into a—I don't know if it was a truck or what it was, that was collecting all this hay. I just was no good at that at all. Tuey was much better than I. But then the farmer had me making little hay mows because when you cut it, it's just in rows, lying there. So what they need to do is to get it all in a pile, and then the truck comes along and puts that pile in, and then the next pile. It's more efficient. So I was making the piles. I was so proud; the farmer came back and praised the way I was doing the piles. I remember that every time I go out and make my compost heap. [laughs] Because I did it the right way. There's a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it. So anyway, we did that one day, we did haying, and I learned about that.

Dunham: This was in between your junior and senior year of high school?

03-00:12:12

Dickemann: Yes. Yes, yes, because my senior year, I went with a friend, to her mother's farm in New Paltz. Didn't I ever tell you about that? Well, anyway, I don't know if this is in my other account or not. There was a girl in Packer—I think she was a year ahead of me—who raised collies. Now, she had some desire to raise them and show them, but Alice wasn't serious enough about the showing to ever make any dent in the dog world, right? But she knew all the people who were in the dog world. Her father was—her last name was Atherton, Alice Atherton. Atherton was a big advertising company in Manhattan. I got to know him; he was very nice to me. But her parents had separated and her

mother had moved up into the country. I don't know what the hell she did with herself. She raised chickens in cages and she had a cow. So she collected the milk, but I don't know what this woman was doing up there. Like nothing. But she obviously was not the type for New York City and not the type for a filthy rich advertising executive. She just would not fit in Manhattan, so it's understandable that she escaped.

Well, that's where Alice had her dogs. She raised these collies. This was during the war. Alice had this routine that she developed with her favorite dog. Her favorite dog was named Promise. She would get me to play Japanese soldier. I would wrap my arm up in a blanket and so on, and maybe I had a little Japanese cap or something. Then Promise would be sicked on me. Promise would just turn, as dogs can, into a rage and attack. Then Alice would say—I don't know what she said, but "It's all right, Prommie," and Prommie would get off me, and then we'd kiss. It was very dramatic. Well, she got this permission from the local movie theater to put this little show on before the movie. [laughs] God knows what the movie was. So we would do that. Oh, it was terribly impressive. People went, *Ahh!* And once, Promise almost didn't come out of her rage mode, right? Yeah, there was a moment there where I was really worried, but she did.

Dunham: So this was a regular engagement?

03-00:15:39

Dickemann: Well, I don't know how many times we did it. We did it more than once, but I don't know, two or three times.

Dunham: This was in the small-town theater.

03-00:15:46

Dickemann: Oh! New Paltz was a small town, yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. We used to take the cow—or we did take the cow in once—to be bred, down the country road. I rode the cow. I think nobody'd ever done that before, but I rode the cow, on her back. Cows have pretty wide bellies. I kept her going by pulling her tail, like—everybody thought that was pretty weird, looking out their windows at us. But anyway, that's what I did that summer.

Dunham: So you did a variety of farm work and—?

03-00:16:27

Dickemann: Well, I changed the papers under the chickens, and I took the cow to the pasture. The cow developed a relationship with me. There was a little, tiny forest of fir trees on the way to the pasture, which was on the other side of the road. The cow, instead of going straight, would go to through these fir trees, to try to brush me off. I'm sure part of it was a game. She knew she was going to end up in the pasture anyway, but she'd try to brush me off. I finally figured out that there was one way I could control her, and that's just to give her a big whomp, right between her horns. Then she'd behave. I really did like her.

Then I had to feed these baby puppies, the collie puppies. But what ended up out of this was that Alice knew all of the show dog people. So when Westminster came, at Madison Square Garden, the old Madison Square Garden in Manhattan, Alice and I went there. There was a couple, the Brownings, who were raising show collies near her, whom she knew, and so we went down there and helped them handle their collies. They were International Champions. Having seen their kennels, I saw what was really involved. Oh, my God, those dogs were not treated well at all. But it happened that that year there was a strike of the boats that were bringing coal into New York. Westminster's during the winter. All of Manhattan was heated by coal in those days. Well, all of New York. So Westminster decided that instead of going two days, they'd go one day, but go late into the night. So these poor dogs were very overworked, very nervous. To be with all those other dogs, ugh.

So the people who owned these dogs, I guess they wanted to skedaddle or something. They got Alice and myself to show their dogs. This is not a very high-ranking kind of demonstration, but they do show them in pairs or teams and they're supposed to match and be pretty. So that's what we were showing. It was very late at night by now, because this thing had gone on all this long, long day. We were underage. You're supposed to have a license to be able to show; we didn't have that, but they got us in somehow. So we showed these things. Well, the dog I had, Champion Orangeman of Tokelon, he had been being shown all day, and he had just had it. He was very nervous and very restless. Damned if, when I was holding him, he didn't pull out of his leash and run. Of course, we're in the center, and all around there's all the audience, right? He goes dashing to the audience. Do you know who was standing right there, where he ended up? My mother. My mother had gotten worried because it was so late. Where was I? Why wasn't I home? So she'd come to Westminster—she would never have gone otherwise—and happened to be standing right there. [laughs] Well, anyway. I have a photograph of Alice and myself, and these doggy dogs, these international champion doggy dogs.

Dunham: Did you have to train specifically for that?

03-00:21:12

Dickemann: No. No. Of course, Alice had seen it a million times. But I don't remember there was any fancy training, no. We just had to keep them in line, kind of.

Dunham: Okay. So that was the—

03-00:21:29

Dickemann: That was my last summer.

Dunham: And Alice was not a romantic interest?

03-00:21:33

Dickemann: Oh, no. No, but Alice understood my interest. No, I was mooning, I guess. Yeah, by then, I was mooning for Doris.

Dunham: Well, so your senior year is '45?

03-00:21:55

Dickemann: No, '45-46. Yeah, fall of '45 and spring of '46. Then I graduated. Oh, what happened to my year? There are three summers there, aren't there?

Dunham: But when did you first go the Women's Land Army?

03-00:22:20

Dickemann: Well, I don't know, what does it say? Say '46?

Dunham: Oh, June of '44.

03-00:22:27

Dickemann: Forty-four, okay, '44. Then summer of '45 was with Alice, and then the summer of '46, after I had graduated, I worked in Manhattan at—

Dunham: The American Express office.

03-00:22:46

Dickemann: —American Express, right.

Dunham: Well, I'm curious. Back, I guess, both to the farm work and just New York in general, kind of back during the war years, so you had always dressed boyish, if you will, I guess. Did you notice any fashion changes going on during the war years? Was there any wartime work around at all in the New York area, such that women—or was it changing at all for women, for other reasons, during that time? Or were you just doing your own thing and not necessarily noticing that?

03-00:23:20

Dickemann: Women were very stereotypic in their dress during all those years. It's exactly what you see in any photograph. Yeah.

Dunham: Because of the wartime work here in Richmond and some areas, there's talk of women dressing more in those clothes and feeling a little more privileged to wear them elsewhere. Then there is also talk about—

03-00:23:48

Dickemann: That's interesting. I wasn't aware of that. See, I don't remember seeing women in Manhattan wearing pants. In fact, there was a law in New York. It was a below-the-waist law. You couldn't wear men's clothes below the waist.

Dunham: Wow.

03-00:24:15

Dickemann: I think that law was still in effect.

Dunham: When did you become aware of that law?

03-00:24:22

Dickemann: Oh, I read about it. I read about it. There's a book—

Dunham: When you were a kid?

03-00:24:26

Dickemann: No, no. No, no. Much more recently. Recently.

Dunham: So it never impacted you, this?

03-00:24:31

Dickemann: Mm-hmm. Maybe that law didn't exist anymore, but it certainly existed, say in the thirties. But I remember seeing young women in pants in Manhattan, but I think they were like delivery people; they were in the dress that they would wear at work.

Dunham: What about on the farm? What was the attire there?

03-00:25:01

Dickemann: Oh, it was jeans. Yeah, sure. Jeans. Yeah.

Dunham: What do you remember about the end of the war? Do you remember learning about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and what your response—

03-00:25:19

Dickemann: Oh, yeah. Well, we read—what was his name? This article about Hiroshima that appeared in the *New Yorker*. John Hersey, was that who it was?

Dunham: He wrote the book *Hiroshima*. Did it appear in the *New Yorker*?

03-00:25:37

Dickemann: Well, it appeared first in the *New Yorker*. Now, it made a big splash, because it was the first time Americans got really real descriptions of what it was like. I think that's who it was. But there's another thing about being cosmopolitan here. My mother fell in love with New York when she was there as a young woman. The fallout of that is that she started a subscription to the *New Yorker*, and she never stopped it, all her life. Now, it's very hard for me to understand what the hell she got out of that magazine, because my mother was totally apolitical, and she wasn't cultured. She didn't read literature. As I told you, she had no interest in music. So I don't know what the hell—but my sister and I were exposed to it from the get-go. I think my sister started reading it long before I did. But I started reading it when we were in Davisville. I was about thirteen, something like that. I remember that I had this theory that if you read some topic long enough, even though you never had any introduction to it or

no training or anything, eventually, you'd be able to figure out what was going on. This is really crazy, but it's true. I chose to read the racing column in the *New Yorker*. I didn't know anything about racing or horses or racetracks or any of that, but I just kept reading and reading, and sure enough, eventually, I could follow everything that was being discussed. Which, if you think about it, makes perfectly good sense. But anyway, although I think I didn't really read the *New Yorker* seriously until later, by the time I was in New York, I did read it. Again, I think that was a cosmopolotizing influence on me. Very much so. Yeah.

Dunham: But do you remember where you were, just when the end of war—?

03-00:28:08

Dickemann: Yeah, we were in New York. My sister and I went to that big hullabaloo, when all of the servicemen came, and big march.

Dunham: What was that like?

03-00:28:26

Dickemann: Mass hysteria. Mass hysteria, yeah. They always show that picture of that sailor grabbing that girl and kissing her, but it was more kind of mass hysteria than that. Yeah. I also remember we were very carefully cautioned only just to take enough subway money to get home, because they knew that the pickpockets would be having a heyday. Yeah. Yeah, we went to that.

Dunham: I meant to ask, too about gardening. I guess since you were in New York City, were there any Victory gardens that you or your sister were working on?

03-00:29:11

Dickemann: Oh. Oh, well, that's a good one. Well, when we were in Rhode Island, which is before we came to New York, my father—I guess it was the thing for the base commander to do, so he had to put in a big Victory garden. He would not have done that otherwise. But we had a *big* plot across the street, and my father, as in everything he did, had to measure everything out very carefully, with strings and stakes and everything. I never do that. Yeah, we had a big old garden there.

Dunham: Did you work on it?

03-00:29:55

Dickemann: I don't remember working on it very much. But I do remember somehow that we were trading vegetables with the other officers' families, who were all kind of living near us. There's some vague thing about, yeah, exchanging vegetables. I don't know who did all that work. I'm sure it wasn't my father; he was much too busy to really do—maybe he ordered the sailors to do that. I'd hate to think that that was so. He wouldn't do that.

Dunham: Do you remember much about rationing?

03-00:30:44

Dickemann:

Oh, yes. When we were in New York, meat was rationed. My mother didn't know—she was a good standard cook, but she didn't know anything about nutrition. She didn't know how to supply protein without meat, right? Combining beans and things. So I'm sure this is an exaggeration, but I remember us eating Chef Boyardee spaghetti over and over and over again. It wasn't that I disliked it, but I know that I was at the age where I should've been going through my growth spurt, and I know that I wasn't getting enough protein. I was hungry, and I had a sugar craving. A sugar craving is usually really a craving for something else. I'm sure that I wanted some protein.

The other thing I did, which may be related to my cravings, my father told me that I could have a beer every night. I don't know why he got so generous. See, he wasn't around; he was just visiting from time to time. But I sure did enjoy that beer. Again, I think I probably had some lust for, I don't know, alcohol, as a replacement for meat. Well, somehow, when he wasn't around, that one beer increased to two beers. He came home and found out that I was having two beers. Oh, boy, did he blow up. He called me all these German swear words that I'd never heard him use before in my life. I don't know if he took me off of beer completely or just reduced me to one again, but he was very, very angry and upset. I guess he thought I was going to become a drunk. Yeah. There was a sign in the subways, for a wine company. It said, "Wine does things to wartime meals." [laughs] It was all right, but it wasn't the kind of eating that we were used to.

Sometimes Mother would take us out to a little local restaurant. I don't know if that was any better, but I guess we always thought it was going to be. It was just kind of barren. Yeah. I don't remember any other rationing except meat. Also, we used to save all our bacon fat and put it in a little can. What the hell they did with it, I don't know, but they collected it for the war. Yeah.

Dunham:

Well, so after your senior year, you worked at American Express for the summer and then went to Utah for a year of college, before going to Michigan. You talked, it's interesting, about the GI Bill and how out-of-state women were excluded. I came across a letter to the editor you wrote, I guess in response to—well, I guess back in '97—but referring to a politically quiet University of Michigan climate at the end of World War II. Do you remember what you wrote in response to that, disagreeing with that sharply?

03-00:34:47

Dickemann:

Yeah. Where'd you read this?

Dunham:

I guess it was an article. I guess it had to do with a University of Michigan newsletter or something, by Deborah Gilbert. Let's see. It was online. I think it might've been that.

03-00:35:06

Dickemann:

Online? No kidding.

Dunham: Well, at this point, it is; it probably wasn't at the time.

03-00:35:11

Dickemann: Geez!

Dunham: But I was talking about sort of the force that veterans were on campus—

03-00:35:17

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, I can only repeat what I said. I would say, oh, gosh, several things. One is they demanded serious teaching. They were not interested in playing around. Now, I was in what they called L & S, Letters & Science, which was the liberal arts branch. They had all these special programs, medicine and law and so on and so forth, so I didn't know anything about those. Well, I suspect they were the same. The other thing that was striking was that Michigan had to allow married students. Amazing. No married students were ever allowed in any of our universities before that. You weren't going to be a serious student if you were married. Interesting. Well, of course, that just broke down because a lot of the GIs were married. Then they had to supply married students quarters. That was all new, coming from the Second World War. So that. Then there's another thing. I doubt if I put that in this letter, but the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement.

Dunham: Yeah, you definitely spoke to that.

03-00:36:36

Dickemann: I did.

Dunham: And spoke to the founding of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] and had friends who went to Detroit.

03-00:36:50

Dickemann: What did I say about the founding of CORE? I wonder if I got that right.

Dunham: Well, you mention it. Was it founded in Detroit, in '48?

03-00:36:59

Dickemann: No, no, it wasn't. See, I just heard recently, it was founded in Chicago, in 1942. 1942. I'm trying to think who it was that founded it. Who was the leader of CORE? Farmer, James Farmer was one of the founders in Chicago. Yeah, I just heard that on the radio the other day. But it's true that my friends were involved in this Detroit effort. They kept inviting me and I never went. I'm sorry I didn't. They were trying to desegregate lunch counters, just like, what, twenty years later in the South or fifteen years later in the South. Yes.

Dunham: Were some of those friends former GIs?

03-00:37:59

Dickemann: Not that I remember, no. They were that kind of other group, like the two girls that were on the farm that I mentioned; they were progressives. They were

very much involved in the Wallace campaign. No, in fact, that ones that I remember was a couple, a young man and young woman. They were not GIs in any way. Yeah.

Dunham: Now, I know you mentioned that there was intense pressure for dating, for straight dating—

03-00:38:36

Dickemann: Oh, boy, yeah.

Dunham: —there, especially. Had you come to find any community outside of that, among progressives who knew you and you could be out with at all?

03-00:38:48

Dickemann: At Michigan? I don't want to forget anything, but the only place where I—I don't know how to explain this, because I didn't—as I said, I was very blind when I was young. I think part of my blindness was an avoidance, an attempt not to deal with something that I felt I couldn't deal with. There was a professor. Herbert Barrows was his name. He was a very well-respected English teacher. Of course, I didn't realize it immediately, but he didn't even have his PhD yet. He was just working on it. But he was teaching an introductory English lit course that I took. Wonderful teacher. When I would go by myself to the movies at night, I'd see him coming out of the movies by himself at night. Right? We'd exchange ideas about what movies were good and bad to see. Well, I must've initiated this. I was trying to write poetry. I still thought, at that time, that I might be able to do that. I took my poetry to show him. I don't know where I got the nerve to do that.

But he then started inviting me to go to the Women's League. Women's League, in Michigan, was where everybody went to have coffee. You couldn't go to the Men's League, because the Men's League didn't allow women to walk up the front steps. You had to go to the side. They even did this with Leopold Stokowski and his wife, made them go through the side entrance. Oh! Well, that doesn't exist anymore. So everybody went to the Women's League to have coffee. So Dr. Barrows—well, I called him Doctor—Mr. Barrows and I would go to the Women's League, and he'd buy me a little cup of ice cream, and I'd show him my lousy poetry, and he'd critique it. We'd talk about other things, and he'd suggest other things for me to read. I don't know how long it took me to realize that the guy was gay, and he saw who I was. I didn't even think about whether it showed or not. Of course, you didn't wear pants on campus, either, so it wasn't really my dress. I went through a period of combing your hair between courses and all of that shit, and putting on lipstick. But he knew I was gay. Of course, then I heard rumors about him, because my sister was in the English Department, and she heard these rumors that he was gay. It was the only sign that anybody saw me. Of course, I never discussed it with him. I was too dumb to realize what was going on. I didn't have any support in Michigan.

How do you find these things online?

Dunham: Well, I guess I had just searched a little bit.

03-00:42:46

Dickemann: Well, did you just look under my name?

Dunham: Yeah, I guess under Mildred.

03-00:42:50

Dickemann: Under Mildred.

Dunham: Yeah, in that case.

03-00:42:52

Dickemann: Yeah. I found myself under Jeffrey, but what I don't understand about these online things is I don't know how they get there. I'd love to know how you can correct them.

Dunham: That's a good question. It depends if it's been copied. If there's a source, I think you could potentially—we could talk about this more after, too—but if you find the owner of the site—. But if it's just print material that's been digitized, then it may be that it's likely that nobody's ever going to correct it. But you can always try contacting the sort of publisher of that site, if you will. Ideally, if nothing else, they would kind of allow messages about them.

03-00:43:42

Dickemann: How do you find out who's the publisher of the site?

Dunham: Well, I can send this one to you.

03-00:43:47

Dickemann: Well, no, because what I'm worried about my other one. I found Jeffrey. In the first place, there's a misspelling in a citation of a review I wrote. But then toward the end of it, it just gets crazy. If there's a sentence that has Jeffrey in it and the next sentence has Dickemann in it, it's in there. It has nothing to do with me. It's just awful. Well, I discovered I have a whole lot of relatives I didn't know about, because there a whole lot of Dickemanns start turning up at the end of this thing. But it's really bizarre. Bizarre.

Dunham: Yeah. Yeah, you have to look at each one to see, but sometimes it's hard to find, who's the publisher or owner. But each site should have some type of information about this. Because you come to it searching it, and then sometimes to get to the main sites, sometimes it's hard to sort of back out. They don't have very good navigation, if you will.

03-00:44:58

Dickemann: Well, I'll have to try the Mildred. I haven't tried the Mildred yet.

Dunham: There are a number of other things. We've kind of gotten through the war years, I think. There are some things that, because we have other research interests around that and are just of interest in your life, I think, around CORE and organizations before that, which you're involved in, and also around Native Americans. I don't know if we're a little short on time; I don't know if you'd be up for doing another session.

03-00:45:27

Dickemann: Oh, I'd be delighted to do another session.

Dunham: Well, maybe given the car and all, and that the Bancroft closes before long, maybe we should call it a day. Maybe I'll just ask, is there anything else in particular—and we can revisit this, too, but about the war years—that we didn't cover today that's significant, that you might like to share with us, your experience or observation during that time.

03-00:45:02

Dickemann: I was very caught up in the war. I'm sure that's partly because my father was a military man. When we were in New York, as I told you, I could watch the East River from our balcony. I had some binoculars, and I used to watch these destroyers coming up the East River. I'd copy down all the flags, signal flags that they were flying, which obviously meant something important. I never could figure out what they meant. Probably, they were all in code. Although once, I figured out that this destroyer was saying that they had explosives on it. That was as big a discovery as I made from reading all the—before that both my sister and I had tried to learn the semaphore thing. I don't know, I think I never quite mastered it, but we used to do that.

When we were in Rhode Island, at Davisville, as I told you, the Seabees were going overseas, to Europe. They would have—I'm sure you've seen pictures of this—women and children would all come out and serve them hot coffee and all of that, as they embarked. And, oh, yeah, a little sewing kit was handed out to them. I still have mine; it's in shreds now. But anyway. I don't know what else, besides this sewing kit. Must've been the last thing they wanted at that moment. My sister remembers one of the guys was crying. I didn't notice that. Isn't that interesting? She noticed that, and I didn't notice that. Because I just thought it was thrilling. So it's just part of my mention of my being kind of unobservant as a child. But we would go down there and see these guys off.

Then, more pleasant, they would have demonstrations of what they had learned. So they would have, at night, a competition to see how fast they could erect a steel tank, a water tank. So the families would all go down there and sit and watch, and they would see whether they could break the record or whatever. That was very impressive.

When we were up there, we were across the bay from the naval air station. The naval air station was training pilots, both British and US pilots. There

were a lot of British up there being trained and whatnot. This air station, which was on a kind of strip of land, they had built an ammunition dump right at the end of the runway. One day, a poor British pilot, something went wrong, and he just went right into that ammo thing. Well, it just went sky high, of course. I was at home. Our home faced the bay. We had big picture windows on the bay. I was at home, my mother was at home. My sister, lucky girl, was at school, and school was several miles down the road, in Kingston. It blew the windows out of our front room. Well, many, many, many years later, when I came up here and got hooked into Kaiser, it was discovered that I had hearing loss. I wasn't even aware of it then. I'm very aware of it now, but it's because it's gotten worse. But the technician, from where it was in the height or the sound—and in both ears—she said, “That's from an explosion.” I didn't know, but that's what it was from, I'm sure. Yeah.

Dunham: Had you heard of the Port Chicago explosion?

03-00:51:13

Dickemann: Well, after I came out here. Yeah, after I came out here. Yeah.

Dunham: Do you know if there were any others killed, besides the pilot?

03-00:51:23

Dickemann: No. Yeah, it wasn't that big. No. As far as I understand, it was just that pilot.

Dunham: But near enough to blow out your windows, yeah.

03-00:51:30

Dickemann: Yeah. War stories.

Interview 2: 10-27-2011

Begin Tape 4

Dunham: This is David Dunham with Jeffrey Dickemann on October 27, 2011. This is our second interview, and this begins tape four of our interview. I think when we talked about getting together again, you said there were a couple of things you wanted to clarify from your first interview, so let's start with that.

04-00:00:27

Dickemann: Good, good. Well, I felt I wanted to make a point about each of these experiences, the farm experience and the New York experience, and I guess I got distracted. So I want to go back to the farm and talk a little bit about our working conditions. Just to recap, you remember I mentioned that the only pesticide they were using was nicotine. Actually, I forgot Bordeaux mixture, which was also very popular in those days. Don't ask me what it was composed of, but it was also a very powerful pesticide. But those two were the primary pesticides used all over the states at that time. So that is a great change from today, obviously. Whatever their downsides were, they can't possibly compare with what we're doing to the population today.

04-00:01:39

The other thing's about our living conditions. I did ask my sister what we paid, because we were paying room and board. And she didn't remember, but she told me that she wasn't able, with her picking or harvesting, to pay the whole cost of her room and board, and that that was one reason she went home halfway through the summer and our mother had to help bail her out. I don't remember any of that, and I don't remember having any trouble paying, so I don't know how to resolve that. But in any case, we were paying room and board. As for the meals, I remember breakfast and dinner being quite satisfactory, but we all joked about the lunches that they made for us. We got potato salad sandwiches, I remember that. And we got spaghetti sandwiches. So it was clear that this outfit, this family, was making money off of us.

Dunham: Now, is that who served the breakfasts and dinners, as well?

04-00:02:57

Dickemann: Yes, we ate in the farmhouse, breakfast and dinner, and then we helped wash the dishes and clean up. I remember the breakfast as being very generous and varied and good. But anyway, I don't know. But it was certainly sufficient. Of course, I've already described the barn that we were living in. It was extremely well built and warm and clean. It was a dormitory, but still it was a very satisfactory living condition. I mention all that because it is such a change from today's farmworker situation. I don't know if you know this, but sometime after World War II—I can't give you the date—there was government legislation creating a guest-worker program in this country.

Dunham: The Bracero Program.

04-00:04:17

Dickemann: That program required that housing be provided, and I don't know what other perquisites were required under that program. In fact, you may remember seeing that movie of the farmworkers, during the war, or during the Depression. The Steinbeck novel.

Dunham: *The Grapes of Wrath?*

04-00:04:55

Dickemann: *Grapes of Wrath*. And they lived in very simple, but wood-frame houses. Well, see now, what happened was that corporate agriculture did not want to pay for those perquisites, the housing, et cetera, et cetera. That is why we now have this large number of illegal immigrants in this country, because they prefer to bring in the illegal immigrants rather than pay the cost of the guest-worker program. So it's hardly used at all anymore. I don't know if you follow all this, but nowadays, we have people living in culverts, living in culverts. And we have people living under trees, in the open air. Nothing, nothing. You may have remembered the young woman who died for lack of water, the pregnant young woman in the fields, who died—I don't know, what was this, six months ago?—because she had no access to water while she was picking in the Central Valley, in 110-degree temperature, she's pregnant. Well, we were never in a condition when we didn't have access to water. So I want to emphasize the degradation of our farmworker situation, as compared to what I knew and what I saw.

And there's another aspect to it. As I mentioned, all of these farms were serving New York City, all right? Those farms, they were small. So small that one man and a crew of volunteers could do all the summer work. Some of them were bigger than others, of course, but they were what is called truck farms. Are you familiar with that expression?

Dunham: No, explain it to us.

04-00:07:03

Dickemann: I didn't think so, because that expression has died out. A truck farm was, in those days, a normal-sized farm, which was dealt with by trucks, which picked up the produce and took it into the city, whatever city. I told you the case of the tomato grower who had to dump all his tomatoes.

Dunham: Right.

04-00:07:31

Dickemann: Yeah. That was New York City. So truck farms, of course, still exist, but there are many fewer now, because they have all been bought out and scooped up by these huge combines of corporate agriculture. So that also is a reflection of the changes in the way that agriculture works and the way that they use workers, hired workers.

Dunham: Right. Including the tremendous issue of the patenting of seeds and then seed contamination and—

04-00:08:04

Dickemann: Sure, sure.

Dunham: —farmers unwittingly getting the seeds into their crops.

04-00:08:08

Dickemann: That's all made possible by the size of the ventures. So food, water, housing—all of those things were supplied.

Dunham: Have you ever talked with other folks who were in the Women's Land Army in other locations, and compared experiences?

04-00:08:33

Dickemann: I've never met anybody.

Dunham: Okay, just curious if you had.

04-00:08:36

Dickemann: Never met anybody else, no. I don't know about other locations, either. That's a very interesting question, what the—it was supposed to be national, but I don't know what the distribution of—

Dunham: Yeah, well, there are some books on it and I've done some research, but not extensively. But yeah, I was just curious if you'd ever come across other experiences.

04-00:08:56

Dickemann: That talked about the Women's Land Army? Really?

Dunham: Mm-hm.

04-00:09:00

Dickemann: Oh. It never occurred to me to even look in the library. Well, that's interesting. Anyway. Of course, this corporatization means long-range trucking of food, too, rather than this close-to-market service, which meant fresher food, less need for refrigerated trucks, and less need for all of those things they do to preserve food, like spraying fruits with wax and all the other things they do to food to make it less like food. So I wanted to make that point. Yeah, I think that was the point I wanted to make. Now, I don't know, there are other stories. What's that?

Dunham: I'm just shifting the mic to improve it a little. We're doing fine. Yeah, we got all that.

04-00:10:14

Dickemann: Okay. But I mean, the rest about being on the farm is just memories, and I don't know that they're really relevant to the war. Oh, I should say—

Dunham: Well, it might be. Go ahead.

04-00:10:32

Dickemann: One other thing was that the farmers were very grateful that we were there. We used to, on the weekends, go up to the nearest larger town up the Hudson. I think it was called Hudson. I meant to look that up and I forgot. But anyway, it's the next one up the Hudson from Germantown. We'd go there and maybe go to a movie or something. Saturday, we'd do that. We also always had a banana split, ice cream sundae. But the farmers, when they saw us on the road, they would always stop and pick us up. They were delighted to give us drives, because we were their lifeblood. Without us, they would've all tanked. Of course, there were no other people to employ. So that's all. Oh, speaking of truck farms—I don't know if you garden—there's a variety of collards called VATES, V-A-T-E-S. It's probably the most widely-planted commercial collards in the country. VATES stands for Virginia Agriculture and Truck Experiment Station.

Dunham: Oh, really?

04-00:12:04

Dickemann: VATES, yes. So there's that truck word again. It was obviously developed long, long ago, when most farms were truck farms.

Dunham: Well, you mentioned that you'd jotted down some memories. Would you care to share some of those?

04-00:12:22

Dickemann: Well, if you want. I don't know what they're relevant to. There was a fellow next door, at the farm next door. I don't know what he did for a living, except he raised goats. They saw us as a money maker, and they started selling us goat ice cream in the evening, every now and then. It's perfectly good. It sounds strange, but goat milk is perfectly good. But he was a brute. He liked to kill things, really. He was a sadist. He had a little baby billy goat that was playing around the female, and he came and just chopped its head off, because he enjoyed that. He had a son who was maybe seven or something, taking after him, torturing the cats. It was quite terrible. It was terrible. Nasty man. But he had a Percheron horse. Why, I don't know. Maybe long ago, he'd use it to pull something. But basically, it was just sitting in the yard. So my friend Tuey and I, we went over there all the time, made friends with this horse. And this horse was so glad to have attention, and extremely affectionate. And we rode it, but we also would wash it off and just play with it. Lovely animal. They're big, Percherons. But it was a lovely animal, so we played with it.

04-00:14:12

Then I don't know if I talked about the Italian who grew green beans, and my sister says he grew currants, too. I can't remember that. He was a Sicilian and he had an accordion, which he didn't play very well. But he always played the same song over and over again. It was some old Sicilian thing that obviously

made him homesick. He would invite us into his house, all of those who were picking the green beans that day, at lunch. His house was a big, beautiful wood-frame house, but it didn't have a stitch of anything in it, nothing on the walls. I guess there were some benches that we sat on. Maybe there was a table, but I don't even remember that. It was bare. Then he would offer us cheese. Well, this goat cheese was not what you'd call a success. [they laugh]

Dunham: Not as good as the ice cream?

04-00:15:22

Dickemann: It was rubbery, beyond belief. I don't remember that it stank, but it was rubbery beyond belief. Anybody who ate it was only doing so out of politeness. Then he'd play this accordion for us. He obviously was pretty lonely, and all by himself.

04-00:15:44

Then the only other thing I remember is that Tuey and I decided to learn how to smoke. We got a package of Wings, which was the cheapest tobacco on the market, in those days. I don't know if they're still on the market; maybe not. They were until fairly recently. Terrible stuff. We went up in the farmhouse, to the second floor, which was kind of vacant and where nobody could see us, and tried to smoke these things. Of course, you know what happens the first time, you're overcome with coughing. So we didn't really learn.

Dunham: Okay, so you didn't master smoking that summer?

04-00:16:34

Dickemann: No. No, I—

Dunham: You tried and failed?

04-00:16:37

Dickemann: I mastered smoking when I was a freshman in college. But we tried. So that's all, I think.

Dunham: You mentioned—it's interesting—a couple of the males. Now, I don't even know how much older they were or anything. I know we talked about some of the female-female relations. Was there much dating, also maybe between some of the women and men in the town?

04-00:17:04

Dickemann: I don't remember any of it. I don't remember any dating. Now, there was a wedding during this summer, but that was a wedding of a girl who was a local girl. Some of us were kind of involved in that; we'd gotten to know some of these locals. But that was local. Then during the summer, there was a fair. It was down the street, someplace, I don't know where. Down the road, I should say. It was a kind of typical fair, for those days. It had something to throw things at, and I guess there was a whirly-gig machine; I can't remember. But I do remember that somehow, Tuey and I got fixed up with two guys, who

were, I guess, our age, which—fifteen-year-old boys. They took us walking away from the fair, to the cemetery, which they knew where it was, and they thought would be a good place to make out, I guess. All I remember of that is some sloppy kisses and that's the end of that. [laughs] Neither one of us were impressed. They could've been local boys; I don't know who they were. There wasn't any other dating that I knew about. But I might not have been paying attention to it.

Dunham: Sure.

04-00:18:54

Dickemann: A lot of the women were older. I was one of the youngest ones there. Those older women from New York City, who were buyers and so on, what would they be doing dating anybody up there? It's just utterly out of their ken or interest. So I don't think there was much.

Dunham: Would most of them, being such city folks and professional, did they seem to enjoy the experience or feel like they were doing their patriotic duty, doing it, or what was it like?

04-00:19:34

Dickemann: I don't know. Because I didn't ever really get to talk to any of them. I looked at them with admiration and—I don't know what's the right word. I looked up to them, as very sophisticated women who wouldn't have given me the time of day. Who was I, at fifteen? This little fifteen butch, right? I remember only one of them very well, because she was suffering from a breakup and she would sit on the bench. I don't know if she was really crying, but she was in a deep depression a lot of the time. I wanted to go over and comfort her. What I could do at fifteen, in comforting [laughs] this mature woman—. So I never approached her. But she made a big impression on me, as somebody who was suffering, and a very attractive and sophisticated woman. That's the only one that I remember as an individual. The people that I made friends with, I've already told you about, that couple of college girls and so on.

Dunham: And Tuey, most of all, yeah. Was Tuey? your age, or a little older?

04-00:21:05

Dickemann: No, she was my age. I think exactly fifteen. I think so, yeah.

Dunham: So then you also wanted to clarify some things about your teenage experience in New York?

04-00:21:20

Dickemann: Yeah. New York, I don't know, maybe I've said most of it. But I think that New York really was two things. One was: New York for me, which I've already said, was that a young person who knew a great deal about the US but nothing about big cities, nothing about sophisticated life—that's not the right word—cosmopolitan life. Even though we had lived in cities like San Diego.

But I guess San Diego was a small city when I was there. And it certainly wasn't sophisticated. New York had this attraction, to my mother, that I've already mentioned, because she had been there before, as a young woman. Although she was not sophisticated, by any means. But something about the glamour of the big city made a big impression her. But when my sister and I landed there, it was kind of like eating candy. There were so many things there that we could never possibly have found in any other place—Salt Lake or San Diego or whatever, or Honolulu—that we didn't even know existed.

Now, one thing I forgot to mention was that we happened to be in New York during those four years when Balanchine had come from Europe and before he started the New York City Ballet. He was working for the Ballet Russe in New York. My sister and I had never *seen* ballet. We knew it existed, I guess, but I'm sure we'd never seen it. Well, we just went constantly to see Ballet Russes, during those great days of Alexandra Danilova and others, and Balanchine doing all of the directing and choreography. I mentioned the fact that there were two French film theaters in Manhattan. These things were just unheard of. There were artists and writers living in our neighborhood. We used to look out of our windows in Brooklyn—this is Brooklyn Heights—and see Sigrid Undset walking her dog up and down the street. I don't know if you know who she is. Sigrid Undset was a Norwegian novelist. She wrote a long trilogy about a woman named Kristin Lavransdatter. That's her most famous writing.

Dunham: Now, were you reading these at the time?

04-00:24:51

Dickemann: No. My sister might've been. I didn't do so until much later.

Dunham: But you knew of her notoriety.

04-00:24:57

Dickemann: Oh, we knew about her, yes. And then did I tell you that we were living in the apartment where Wright had written *Black Boy*? [Narrator addendum: A detailed listing in an edition of Wright's *Pagan Spain* indicates that he lived in Brooklyn Heights but not in our apartment.]

Dunham: Yeah, you did mention that.

04-00:25:09

Dickemann: Okay. So that. There are other people—

Dunham: But you knew at the time?

04-00:25:14

Dickemann: Oh, I was told by the people who were downstairs. There was a photographer and his wife, who was a painter, just below us. They were very nice to me. He wanted to help me learn photography, and I never could combine it with my

school. He wanted to take me on jobs, and I would be his helper, holding the lights. But I couldn't go without cutting school, so I never really—. But aside from that, they were very supportive and they told us that Richard Wright had lived in the apartment we were in. There were other artists, whose names I've now forgotten, who were living on Brooklyn Heights. [Narrator addendum: Sculptor William Zorach is an example.] So that kind of being in the milieu was totally new to us.

04-00:26:10

Then there were publications. Now, we got the *Herald Tribune* every morning. I don't think I'd ever really looked at a newspaper before. And partly, we're talking about my age. I'm coming of age and waking up, but I'm waking up in this place which is just drowning in new world exposure, let's put it that way. Norman Cousins put out a little magazine that I subscribed to, and I can't remember the name of it now. It was a social-commentary magazine. I don't even know how I discovered it, but anyway, I did subscribe to it and read that for a long time. I mentioned the two radio stations. Now, again, that's incredible, even today. One of them was WNYC. It was a city radio station. A city radio station. The mayor was on WNYC, from time to time, talking about the city, Mayor LaGuardia. There was a woman named Dorothy Kilgallen, who had a breakfast program that we often listened to. She was a commentator who was considered quite effective then. I don't know what we'd think now.

Dunham: Was it a very eclectic program?

04-00:27:48

Dickemann: Oh, it was news and commentary.

Dunham: Local news?

04-00:27:53

Dickemann: Yes, local and national and commentary about things that were going on. I don't know. But she had the breakfast program on the city station. The other station represented something else that was happening at that time, and I do want to kind of get into things that were happening. WQXR was a music station, and they played a lot of classical music, which was something I was also beginning to be interested in. But they also played folk music. Now, this was the period when folk music began to exist, if I can say it that way, in the US, as a valid interest. Now, of course, there had been people in the thirties and forties who'd—well, we're in the forties, but in the thirties—

Dunham: Remind us what year you arrived in New York and what year you're really talking about, finding all these things.

04-00:28:55

Dickemann: Oh, gosh. Well, gosh.

Dunham: Or about. We may have covered it before, but—

04-00:29:00

Dickemann: Well, let's see. '41, '42. Let's see. I graduated from high school in '46. Spring of '46. Yeah, because then I went through my first year of college in the fall of '46. So it ended in '46 and it began—I don't know—three and a half years. Three or three and a half years was our period.

Dunham: So just after the start of the war.

04-00:29:45

Dickemann: Oh, no, the war had started in '41.

Dunham: Right, okay. So '43.

04-00:29:49

Dickemann: Excuse me. The war had started in 1938. [laughs]

Dunham: I'm sorry. Certainly, certainly.

04-00:29:56

Dickemann: But we entered the war—I don't know why we all say "we." The US entered the war in '41. We had been in Salt Lake and then in Pass Christian, Mississippi, and then in Rhode Island. And it was from Rhode Island that we went to New York.

Dunham: But you were in all those places within two years. You arrived in New York—

04-00:30:24

Dickemann: '41, '42, '43. Yeah. In about three years, yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: Okay. Well, I'm sorry; I didn't mean to interrupt your story.

04-00:30:37

Dickemann: No, that's all right.

Dunham: Just wanted to make sure we were reminded of what year we were in.

04-00:30:39

Dickemann: Right, right, yeah. So we're talking about that period, '43 to '46, yeah. But the folk music phenomenon was part of something that was much larger. And I was really only exposed to it, as we've just said, in this brief period of time. The interest in folk grew out of the progressive turn in the US. We think maybe of college students running off south and collecting banjo music. But there's the background to that, to the fact that college students would even think of doing that. And that was this whole progressive movement, which turned to *the people* as valid human beings who did valid things. And of course, that was all the New Deal. The New Deal was—I don't know how you separate these things—a manifestation of it, or it was a manifestation of the New Deal, however you decide your cause and effect. So we even heard, in

our school, which was a presumptive Christian school that had chapel every morning, we had John Jacob Niles come in there and give a concert of folk music. Maybe that would happen today, but the context is entirely different, because that was new. WQXR played people who became famous singing folk music that they had picked up from around the world. In the jazz scene, it would be called covers, right? Again, I wish I could remember their names. Theo Bikel and Oscar Brand were two.

Dunham: Sure. Well, were these musicians mostly grown up local in New York, or had many of them come to New York? I understand they took music from all over the world, but do you have a sense of that? I'm just curious.

04-00:32:57

Dickemann: [chuckles] I have no idea. That's a wonderful question, but I don't know. I suspect they came from Podunk, Iowa. So many people came to New York to find their way. So that music. Now, I think I mentioned Paul Robeson. I think I mentioned the fact that we saw him in *Othello*. But Paul Robeson did something else that I forgot to mention, which is part of this whole progressive scene. He made a recording with another guy, whose name I have forgotten, called *Ballad for Americans*. You can still find it floating around. I had a copy of it; I played it constantly. Of course, what it was was a celebration of Americans. But very much, the emphasis was on *the people*. And it talks about truck drivers and miners and people like that. Whole lists of those good working people. Right? This is an expression of a very serious political moment in our history, which of course, is long, long gone. So that *Ballad for Americans* was an expression of this progressive moment.

Dunham: And very much of the people of working class, but without mentioning race explicitly, it sounds like.

04-00:34:49

Dickemann: Oh, that's a good question.

Dunham: Well, you can go back and listen, but—

04-00:34:58

Dickemann: I think it did not. This is maybe over-interpreting, but Robeson spent the first half of his public life being very much a spokesman for American progressives. He later turned off, because he felt, precisely as you've asked, that racism was being shoved under the carpet, and he became disaffected. So I don't know. A wonderful question. Wonderful question. But it manifested this moment of progressive interest. I know that that had a big influence on me, because how else would I have ever heard about any of this stuff in Honolulu or San Diego or any of those other places? It just was sweeping over you, all of these ways of looking at reality that you'd never even thought about before. I'd been introduced to wildflowers by my mother and we'd driven all over the country looking at rabbits in the desert; but Paul Robeson singing *Ballad for Americans*? It was just, wow, there is a world out there and

it's about people and people's positions in life. I didn't understand anything about socialism or the New Deal or any of that; but I had all these influences coming at me. I know that they were very, very important in framing me.

Dunham: Do you think that many others of your age—I know you were mature for your age, but even within New York—that many others were taking all this all in as much? Or that it was more for the college and older that was really—

04-00:37:23

Dickemann: [laughs] It's a wonderful question, again; but the only people I have to compare it to are the girls in my school in Brooklyn, Packer Collegiate Institute. You can tell by the title that it had the flavor of a finishing school. Of course, I was always considered a little rebellious in that school, partly because of my gender disconformities. But I remember that one day there was a discussion, formal discussion, about should we have an army which is a volunteer army, or should we have a draft? Sound familiar? I argued that we should have a draft. I was the only one.

Dunham: Wow.

04-00:38:30

Dickemann: Well, because these girls all came from upper-middleclass families, and they, repeating their parents, of course—they were not sophisticated about this issue or anything else—they didn't want to have to associate with the hoi polloi, and that's what'd happened in World War II. Again, what we're talking about is the continuation of this progressive mode into World War II. If you look at the books and films that were made about the World War, or written about the World War right afterwards, you find over and over and over again, the author or filmmaker is talking about a group of guys, and one is a Jew and one is an Irish Catholic, and one is of German descent. It's just so classic. They are saying, this is an important aspect of our culture, of our country. Right? Not anymore. That issue's been decided. We'll never have a draft again. Unless these kids that are occupying change things.

Dunham: There are a number of us who still agree with you that it would be the only way and that we'd really take stock of whether or not we should be going into war and all of that.

04-00:40:14

Dickemann: People learn so much about other people, just by being in the barracks together. Well, and fighting and dying together, too.

Dunham: Well, this—I'm just going to interrupt again for a second—brings me to a question I had kind of wanted to ask. Maybe it came up in our past interview. And I know you were a little young, also. But did you have a desire, a strong desire to be in the military?

04-00:40:42

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. [chuckles] Well, I want to say this. I understood—wrongly, I'm sorry to say—that the only thing women did in World War II in the military was type. [laughs] Be secretaries, that kind of stuff. And I didn't want to do that. Of course, I would've chosen the Navy, without question; but I couldn't stand that awful uniform they had for ladies, [Dunham laughs] and that silly little hat they invented. It doesn't look so bad to me now, but then it looked awful, obviously, because I wanted to be in blue jeans or in men's uniform. [laughs] So that's really why I never did. I was thinking of that even after the war was over; I still had that kind of fantasy that I might do that. Later, much later, when I saw a film about gays and lesbians in the military, I discovered there were women doing airplane repair, all kinds of stuff. I don't know how they got into those positions.

Dunham: And flying, too, yeah?

04-00:42:27

Dickemann: No. Oh, no, no. No flying. Oh, flying didn't start until, I think, the first Gulf War. Women flying was very, very late. You know why. It's the most prestigious thing you can do. That's why you get to bend your hat that way. That's super-masculine, right? So no, women flying was very, very late. But they were on the ground, and they were in their togs and their work overalls, repairing planes and doing all kinds of other stuff like that. I don't know how they found those roles. But I could've maybe found a niche that I would've enjoyed.

Dunham: Well, related to that, were you aware of other non-military but defense work that women were doing? The whole Rosie the Riveter campaign?

04-00:43:35

Dickemann: I really don't remember thinking about it. I really don't. I didn't learn about it, I think until—now it looks very recently, from what we're talking about—when I came out here and I got involved with a woman who had done war work in Chicago, and her sister also had done war work in Chicago. Then I learned about it.

Dunham: What kind of work did they do in Chicago?

04-00:44:06

Dickemann: I don't remember. It was factory line work, and that's all I know. It was assembly-line work. I don't know.

Dunham: So both those realizations of that, the civilian defense work and that there were some opportunities for women in the military beyond secretary, came after the war and after—

04-00:44:32

Dickemann: Yes. Yes, after, much after the war. So I abandoned my fantasy of going into the Navy. Yeah.

Dunham: Did you ever have a fantasy, still, of being able to go in as a male, as a man?

04-00:44:53

Dickemann: It was out of the question. You have to undress.

Dunham: Yeah, sure.

04-00:44:58

Dickemann: So it was out of the question.

Dunham: Did you not, then, in a realistic way—but did you just kind of play at that, I guess, if you will?

04-00:45:08

Dickemann: You mean when I was younger, or after my transition?

Dunham: When you were younger.

04-00:45:12

Dickemann: Oh, when I was younger, I dreamed about being a sailor. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I just thought sailors were the cat's meow. I used to draw pictures of them and fantasize about totally unreal notions about world war, right? About people being on a tropical island and watching the planes come in and—*pfft*. Then destroyers. I loved destroyers. I just thought they were *the* best ship of them all, because they were so graceful and agile and brave and beautiful. [chuckles] So yeah. I wrote a poem about destroyers, in New York. Maybe I told you, I used to stand on a fire escape and watch the ships coming up the East River. Most of them were destroyers. I don't know why, but they seemed to be mostly destroyers, coming up the East River to the Brooklyn Naval Yard. [Narrator's addendum: In speaking of fantasies of masculine roles, I should add that there was also the Boy Scouts.]

Dunham: Is that when you wrote your poem?

04-00:46:28

Dickemann: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: Do you remember it?

04-00:46:33

Dickemann: You're not going to get me. [they laugh] Terrible. Terrible, sentimental stuff, by somebody who had no real understanding of what war was really like.

Dunham: But an adolescent perspective of the war, during that time.

04-00:46:51

Dickemann: Yes, yes, that's what it was. Dramatic and—of course, that's what gets young men to enlist, isn't it? Right? That fantasy land. Well, now, just let me see what else I've forgotten. Oh, yeah. Well, the museums. I don't know if I mentioned the museums. We went to the museums all the time there. The

Museum of Modern Art, the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum. We went to those.

Dunham: Now, was this father or mother encouraging? On your own? Other mentors?

04-00:47:29

Dickemann: The father wasn't there. He was only there for visits, right? I think that the museums were mostly my sister and I alone. I'm pretty sure that mostly, the— Well, I don't know. Maybe sometimes with my mother. With my mother, I used to go to the art galleries. My sister didn't do that. But my mother, being a painter, she was interested in what was happening in the art scene, and she always subscribed to a couple of art magazines. Of course, she was subscribing to *The New Yorker*, too; I don't know if I talked about that. The *New Yorker* was always in our house. But I would go to the galleries with her and look at all the stuff that was on display for sale, whoever was being shown there. So I got a, I don't know, kind of good superficial education in art. She had followed modern art from the beginnings of its appearance in the US.

04-00:48:53

Then another thing, which seems quite different, but also reflects an interest of mine, is a couple of my friends in school—they were older, junior-college girls—and I somehow discovered the Society for Psychical Research. They had an office in Manhattan, downtown in some scrubby little place, and we went down and explored it. The Society for Psychical Research was founded in England. I don't know if you're familiar with this, but there was a period, more in the twenties, in England, when everybody was interested in psychic phenomena and clairvoyance and moving tables and all that stuff. People have proposed that that was a response, partly, to the tremendous losses in the First World War, and so many people had relatives who had died in the war and wanted to make contact with them.

Dunham: As a coping mechanism.

04-00:50:14

Dickemann: A lot of very famous English people got involved with that. Do you know that play *Blithe Spirit*? Well, that's whatshisname, that fun—

Dunham: Noel Coward?

04-00:50:28

Dickemann: Noel Coward's representation of people he knew who were into that psychic business. [Narrator addendum: *Blithe Spirit* was modeled after Radclyffe Hall, author of *The Well of Loneliness* and an acquaintance of Cowards, who became very involved in psychic activities later in life.] So of course, we were very young, and we just were curious and didn't really know whether to believe in all of this clairvoyant stuff or not. So we went down there. They had publications. I think I had a book at that time, about all this stuff. I don't want to entirely ridicule [laughs] this stuff, because I had one experience in

my life, which absolutely convinced me of telepathy. But I just realized that I'm being a little trivial about this. I've always been curious and interested in non-Western religions and forms of enlightenment.

Dunham: All right. So you were open to it, but you had a healthy skepticism, it sounds like.

04-00:51:36

Dickemann: [laughs] Yeah. Well, I think the Society for Psychical Research is kind of on the edge.

Dunham: Okay. [laughs]

04-00:51:45

Dickemann: But there it was, in New York. Where else in the universe of America would it have had such an office? No place. It was an oddity that New York could support, let's put it that way.

Dunham: Did you want to share your experience with telepathy?

04-00:52:16

Dickemann: I don't mind, but it's much later.

Dunham: Okay, well, I'm just curious, since you—

04-00:52:22

Dickemann: I'd be delighted to because it happened right here in Berkeley.

Dunham: Oh, sure. Do tell.

04-00:52:29

Dickemann: You're familiar with the Berkeley co-ops. At the very end of their [chuckles] tragic demise, they opened a book store. It was on—I don't know if I'm pointing in the right direction—University and Shattuck. On University and Shattuck, and it was on the northeast corner. There was a big building there. Later, there was a See's Candy in there. It's gone now, too. Then there was a Mexican restaurant. But it was a huge building. They opened this bookstore, and it was run by a little round, chubby Jewish woman, whose name I can't remember. But this is all in my diary, I have to say, so if we ever need to dig it up. I had discovered—and this really requires that you kind of throw yourself back in history—I had discovered *Howards End*, by Forster. At that time, that book was utterly unknown. All that people knew about Forster was the one about India, *Passage to India*. That was assigned in all the college courses and everything; everybody knew *Passage*, but nobody knew *anything* about *Howards End*. This is long before the movie was made. But I had discovered it and I wanted another copy to give to somebody. I went in there and I said, "Where's Forster?" Well, it's way on the back wall. This was a long ways into the back of the store. So I went back there and I looked and looked and there was no *Howards End*. I came back and, to this lady—there were two clerks

standing there, a young man and a young woman. I looked at her and she looked at me. She says to me, “We’re out of *Howards End*.” I said, “How did you know that was what I wanted?” She said, “I read it on your forehead.” I looked at these two clerks, and they said, “She does that all the time.”

Dunham: Wow.

04-00:55:04

Dickemann: Now, I don’t know how to contradict that. I don’t know how to dismiss it. It happened. That’s what she said. I ran home and wrote it down in my diary, because I couldn’t believe it. And nobody’s explained it to this day, and anybody who you ask about clairvoyance will say it’s crap. But it wasn’t crap. It happened. So that’s my story.

Dunham: Why will anyone you ask about it say it was crap? You mean people who believe in clairvoyance would say it was crap? Or you mean people who don’t believe?

04-00:55:38

Dickemann: Oh, no, people who don’t. But most people don’t. Most people don’t. No, people who believe, that is clairvoyance, of a kind; there are many kinds. Yeah. Okay. I’m looking down here and I see *Porgy and Bess*. We went to musicals. Mother loved musicals. She liked *Showboat*. But you see, there was *Porgy and Bess* and there was Gershwin, and Gershwin was trying to take jazz and move it into the American mainstream. He didn’t succeed, because all he did was make himself famous for what he produced; but he didn’t create a new form of music, except his own creations. But there was *Porgy and Bess*, a black musical, first black musical. And blues was coming on. As Tin Pan Alley was the white music, you might say, and at the same time, blues was getting appreciated for the first time. All of this stuff was—. Then there was the city, walking in the city, and the Central Park and Greenwich Village and the beaches. We used to go to the beaches all the time.

Dunham: Now, since you came out to California, you’ve never lived back in New York? Or did you ever have the desire to move back there again?

04-00:57:24

Dickemann: To move back? No. I visited it and I love to visit, and I’d like to visit it again; but I’m pretty schizophrenic about the country and the city. I love New York, but if I had a chance to move, I wouldn’t move to New York, I’d move to the country. That has become more and more important to me. Especially since I left Berkeley, where I had a very large garden, and now I don’t have much. It’s not much of a city, I’m sorry to say. Getting better, but not fast enough to suit me. [laughs] There is that strain of me that is a frustrated farmer.

Dunham: Are you able to have a garden, some garden now?’

04-00:58:33

Dickemann: Oh, yeah. Well, I don't have any right now, but yes. All this time that I've been in Richmond, I have about five raised beds and grew a hell of a lot of my vegetables. Yeah. Saved a lot of money doing that.

Dunham: Good. Well, any last thoughts about New York? Then I have maybe some questions for later. We'll switch the tape.

04-00:59:06

Dickemann: Oh, God. [pause] Restaurants. I don't think we talked about restaurants.

Dunham: No, I don't think so.

04-00:59:22

Dickemann: Well, one could exaggerate that, because my father, I think it was mostly, was always taking us out. I don't mean this in any expensive or impressive way. But the first restaurant I remember going to is when I was a little, little kid, five, six years old, we used to go to a Chinese restaurant. Outside of San Diego. It was up on La Jolla someplace, on the cliffs. Then we went to a Chinese restaurant in Honolulu, a famous one that we used to go to, Wo Fat's. So of course, in New York, there were others, right? There was a famous German restaurant downtown called Luchow's, my father took us to. Then there was the Russian Tea Room. The Russian Tea Room always advertised itself as just left of Carnegie Hall. Just left of Carnegie Hall, yeah. And we went there. I remember having a delicious meal there. Then on the other hand, there was a Horn and Hardart's, which was a place where you got a real quick—do you know about that?

Dunham: That name, I don't recognize.

04-01:00:50

Dickemann: Horn and Hardart's. You walk in there and there's a whole bank of little glass-covered cubbyholes, and each cubbyhole has some food in it. You open it up and you take it out. Of course, it's immediately replaced by somebody back in there. Like if you want some pie or some oatmeal or whatever, it's all in these little cubbyholes. That was Horn and Hardart's. It was an early attempt to rationalize food service, I guess. I guess there were tables there to sit in. We didn't really patronize the place, but it was famous, and you went. Then when I was working—did I tell you about working at American Express?

Dunham: I'm not sure. I'm trying to remember. But on the restaurants, the main thing is the tremendous diversity, ethnic diversity?

04-01:01:51

Dickemann: Yes.

Dunham: Now, were the restaurants also open? Was it a twenty-four-hour town, like we think of it now? Were restaurants open extremely late?

04-01:02:00

Dickemann: Oh, sure. Sure. Well, I was going to say that when I was working at American Express, they would often ask me if I wanted to stay after hours and work, I don't know if you'd call it—the evening shift, let's call it that. Of course, I often wanted to. Not only the—

Begin Tape 5

Dunham: This is interview two, tape number five, with Jeffrey Dickemann, on October 27, 2011. We're going to pick back up. Jeffrey was working—or Mildred then—at American Express. You were saying that they asked you to stay for the night shift. This was after working a full day shift?

05-00:00:24

Dickemann: Yeah. It was my last summer, because the next-to-last summer was when I was on the farm. The last summer, I got this job. We all lied. Did I talk about it?

Dunham: Now I do remember. Because you were going to go to school.

05-00:00:43

Dickemann: Okay. Yeah. When I say lie, then you remember.

Dunham: Right. [Dickemann laughs] Well, it was because of your integrity that it was hard for you, right?

05-00:00:53

Dickemann: No, we're not going to college. I haven't a clue about college. We lied to get our jobs. But some of the people working there didn't have to lie; they definitely weren't going to college. But anyway, they'd ask me to stay, because I was a reliable worker, if I wanted to. So then I'd call my mother and say, "I'm staying for another," whatever it was, three hours. So then I would go and eat dinner. This is another little New York place that was unique. The place was called Chock Full o' Nuts. They had all these things made with nuts, like nut sandwiches—whatever, walnut or whatever you choose, sandwiches—and they had some kind of soup with nuts in and so on. I loved that place. I always went back there. I had always some kind of nuts and cream cheese sandwich; I can't remember. Then I would be out on the street at sunset, and look up. I don't really remember what street American Express was on, but they all go straight up the peninsula. You could stand there and look straight up and watch the sunset because, in fact, New York isn't like that; it isn't north and south, it's like that. You could watch the sunset, down these streets. It was so dramatic. So that was just another end of the restaurant scene.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. By the way, there was no overtime for working the night shift, right?

05-00:02:43

Dickemann: No. No, we were just getting some kind of flat rate, but I don't remember what it was.

Dunham: I had a few other questions from post-war stuff that I thought we'd check in on, just because you've had such a rich history. I know you've written extensively and you have your diary, but I don't know that you've been interviewed so much. You've talked a lot about your Cal years in the area, in your Gay Bears interview with Bill Benemann. But I was wondering about after Cal. I guess first, you went to teach at Lake Merritt? Was that where you went directly after Cal?

05-00:03:23

Dickemann: Not Lake Merritt, Merritt College.

Dunham: Excuse me, Merritt College. Excuse me.

05-00:03:37

Dickemann: Well, yeah. But when I first went there, Oakland Junior College, it was called first. Of course, that was too demeaning, so then they changed it to Oakland City College.

Dunham: Oh, I see.

05-00:03:43

Dickemann: It became Merritt, actually, after I left, when it all moved up into the hills. Because when I was teaching, it was down on Grove Street. They moved it up to the hills to get away from all those black students. Well, this was after the Black Panthers, that were founded there, you know? That's where they were founded.

Dunham: That's part of what I wanted to ask you.

05-00:04:09

Dickemann: So the Peralta College administration, who were a bunch of racist ninnies, they moved it up there. At that time, there were no buses going up and downhill in Oakland. They all went this way, north-south. They all went north-south. So any students had to find some other way to get up, other than the buses. However, the buses were not stupid, and they immediately put some buses in, [laughs] and Merritt College now is just as black as any other school in Oakland. But yeah, when I was there, it was mostly Oakland City College.

Dunham: And what year did you go there, and what were you teaching?

05-00:04:58

Dickemann: 1960 to '64. Then I went to Kansas, and then I came back and I got a job there again, for one year. But they wouldn't take me on permanently. I should thank them for that, I guess, because the teaching load was terrible. But yeah, I was

trying to get my foot back in the door. Actually, I interviewed with a whole lot of other junior colleges in the area, too. But I finally ended up at Sonoma State.

Dunham: When you were at Oakland City College then, is that when you began to become more interested in civil rights and race issues?

05-00:05:47

Dickemann: Yes. [Narrator addendum: I had read Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* in New York.]

Dunham: Did you meet Bobby Seale and Huey Newton there?

05-00:05:52

Dickemann: There are certain moments in your life when you have a prepared line that actually doesn't tell the truth at all, but people think it does, and it's just a wonderful line. Huey Newton was a student of mine. Now, the truth is, I cannot remember him as a student at all. I can't remember what class he was in, I can't remember what he looked like as a student, or what he did or what he said or *anything*. I knew him in two other ways, very well; but I can't remember him as my student. But he was my student, so I can just floor people by saying, Huey Newton was a student of mine, even though it makes absolutely no difference and is totally irrelevant.

Dunham: What were the two other ways you knew him?

05-00:06:47

Dickemann: I was teaching anthropology, cultural anthropology. I don't know how to say this, but anthropology is, in spite of some silly claims about its history, a non-discriminating field. Students always know this. So the minute you're teaching whatever you're teaching—whether it's human biology or prehistory or whatever—it's very clear that there's a kind of encompassing attitude toward the human race. So students tend to be attracted to anthropology, as a progressive field. I went even further than that, because in cultural anthropology, you usually choose one book, which is a study of a group, an ethnography; but it doesn't have to be that formal, but it's some sort of study of an individual group. I chose, at one point—Jomo Kenyatta had written a book called *Facing Mount Kenya*. It was autobiography, but also lots about his society. Well, the black students were just taken with that. They went out [laughs] and went down the street, to a little store that made t-shirts, and they had, not a t-shirt, but sweatshirts made, with Jomo Kenyatta's face on it. And damn it, they all sold out and I didn't ever get one. [Dunham laughs] They should've given me one. But anyway, that was just an expression of their excitement, that they existed.

Well, then a funny thing happened. One day I'm in my office, and here comes this little troupe, a little band of white kids. I don't know, maybe five. They say to me, "We want to start an interracial club." You have to kind of put

yourself back in time here. Although there were laws, the racial discrimination, even in Berkeley, was very open and intense. So they wanted—. “Okay. That’s interesting, yeah.” “Would you be our faculty advisor?” “Sure.” Not more than a week later, in comes this little group of black students, maybe five of them. They say to me, “We want to start an interracial club.” They didn’t even know about the white kids. It was just total coincidence. I said, “Sure.” So we started an interracial club. We did things like we had an interracial dance. First ever. Right? Some of the faculty who’d been there since the year one, because it used to be a business school, they were—.

But then at this time, there was something else happening in the US, in the South, which we didn’t really keep very good tabs on, initially. But those kids, black kids, who were being active in the South, wanted to recruit other students. And they would come to our interracial club and give a speech about “join the movement, come south.” Okay? We did other things. We had Herbert Aptheker come and talk. He had written a book called *The New Negro*, in which he showed how every generation, white people in the US thought that Negroes were changing and so on and so on. It was an important book at the time. He was a communist. So that also got everybody excited. I think that Huey was quite involved in inviting him, as I remember.

Well, Huey and Bobby Seale both came to this interracial club and sat there and participated for a while. Then they decided it was too funky. It wasn’t radical enough. And that’s when they left and founded the Black Panther Party.

Dunham: There was another group in between, wasn’t there? Let’s see if I wrote it down. Or maybe it was a reference to the interracial club. But there was Afro American or something other that I’d read, that also wasn’t radical enough, before. But maybe that was the same time. Not ringing any bells, that.

05-00:12:20

Dickemann: You’re not speaking about this later period, when the—

Dunham: From what I had read, it was directly before the Black Panthers, so it should’ve been in that same timeframe. But anyway, I don’t think it’s—

05-00:12:37

Dickemann: I don’t know. I don’t know. Gee, let me know.

Dunham: [chuckles] Okay. If I come across it, I’ll let you know. I also told you I was going to send you some of those links that I had, I realized too, when we spoke last.

05-00:12:53

Dickemann: Yeah. Well, anyway, so the interracial club was where that recruiting went on, and the students would always be saying to me, Dr. Dickemann, when are you

going down? I just said, “I don’t know.” Because I was too scared. I was scared. We were hearing about what was happening. I was too scared.

Then when I went to Kansas, I found myself with two other faculty members, who started a branch of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], and we started doing local stuff in the town of Lawrence, around racial issues. We also organized the Vietnam sit-in for the University of Kansas. Then CORE sent down—I don’t know down, over from someplace—a trainer named Mike Lesser, and he trained us in nonviolent techniques and got ten of us to volunteer to go to the South. The other two faculty did not participate. I was the only faculty member; but the rest were students.

Dunham: So this is in ’64? ’65?

05-00:14:22

Dickemann: ’65. ’65. Summer—spring, excuse me. Spring of ’65, we went to Bogalusa. Then I went back in the summer of ’65, to Baton Rouge, where the CORE office was.

Dunham: So what were those experiences like?

05-00:14:46

Dickemann: How many more hours do I have? [laughs]

Dunham: Well, I’ve read a little bit, but I at least want to hear how you became a member of the Deacons for Defense. Is that right?

05-00:14:55

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Oh, where did you read all that?

Dunham: Where did I come across that? I’m not sure. I’ll send you some links.

05-00:15:07

Dickemann: Golly! Yes—

Dunham: But that sounds like quite a story.

05-00:15:11

Dickemann: —send me some links.

Dunham: Will do.

05-00:15:15

Dickemann: Well, it is long, so I’ll try and make it short—even though it was only one week, which is just incredible. But there had been one CORE worker in Bogalusa, a young man who was very brave and *very* persecuted. There was one point when he was in his car and they were beating on his car, trying to get in there to beat him up. I think he did get beat up once. But it was clear more troops were needed. So part of our ten-person group went to Monroe,

because there had been a church that had burned down there, and they were helping to rebuild the church. And the rest of us went to Bogalusa to—

Dunham: Sorry to interrupt. Was your group all Caucasian or was it mixed?

05-00:16:10

Dickemann: No, no. Jesus, was there only one black woman? I only remember one black woman with our group. Her name was Pamela. I got quite close to her, and I can't remember her last name. She later came out here and went to San Francisco State, and was very active in the San Francisco State rebellion. Then I heard she married an Irishman. [they laugh] This is all the information I have about her. She was a wonderful girl. She was from the North. But anyway, so I don't know.

Dunham: That's fine. I just was curious.

05-00:17:01

Dickemann: Yeah, yeah. It's a good question.

Dunham: But the ten of you went down.

05-00:17:03

Dickemann: Anyway, so we were located in black people's homes around the town, and there were Negro quarters, which of course were remnants of the old slave quarters. But they were still Negro quarters, and if you were an ordinary white person you got out of there by nightfall because you wouldn't have been safe after dark. Unless you were somebody's friend, which didn't happen. But anyway, so we were located in various places around and I was—well, first they put me in a home where a woman and her teenage son were living. She was so scared. They took me out of there; she just couldn't deal with it. She was just scared to death. So then they put me in the home of Mary and Mirt Elzey, wonderful couple. That town was owned by Crown Zellerbach at that time. It was, and still is, a town where paper is manufactured. That is one of the most chemically disgusting, stinking, lousy processes you can imagine. There was a river running through the town and it was just totally polluted and stank.

Dunham: Were there a lot of health impacts for humans as well, I would guess?

05-00:18:30

Dickemann: Well, I don't know. I didn't do a survey, but one can guess. Now it's some other paper company; Crown Zellerbach has sold it. But they ended that. Okay. So Mert had a night shift at Crown Zellerbach, and Mary was a maid; she worked for a dentist in town, a white dentist. They were wonderful people. I didn't really get to know Mert, but I got to know Mary very well. Well, how do I say? During the day, we met in what was the Negro labor hall. That was where we were fed and we'd group and decide what we'd do today, get our assignment. And then we'd get spruced up by some incredible gospel singing.

There was one young woman in town, who had the most marvelous gospel voice. But we all sang. Very important.

Then we'd go out, and mostly what we were doing was canvassing people because we were there to do voter registration. The Voting Rights Act had just passed. We'd go up and down these streets, with the asphalt sticking to your shoes because it was so hot, and knock on doors and say, "Are you going to reddish and come to our"—reddish was the local colloquial for "register; this was a new word to many of these folks. Again, the Negro union hall, that we would meet people there. There would be days when we'd just all sit there and help people fill out the registration forms and practice what they were going to say, so that they would be allowed to vote.

Dunham: What types of things did they have to say? You couldn't just submit your card?

05-00:20:33

Dickemann: Well, they had to know where they were from. We were even getting people from Mississippi, which is just across the river. And they had to know what county they were in. It's not something an ordinary illiterate person pays much attention to, what county. And how do I spell it? I had one woman I remember vividly. She was from Mississippi. I never could find out how to spell her county. I don't know what happened to her. Maybe she never could vote. We didn't have any encyclopedias of counties; I didn't know how to look it up.

Dunham: So if you brought your registration card but you couldn't pass the oral test, they just were denied.

05-00:21:19

Dickemann: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. So we were doing that. It got a little dicey. Sometimes there'd be some white people in a car who'd come racing down one of these little roads and try to scare you. But then it got dicier. There were about three other workers who were living in houses near mine. So we needed to go home together at night, and others going other places. Well, I had this Volkswagen van, so it became my duty to ferry these folks home, when they were near my house. We had to go down a main street in Bogalusa. Every time we went down there, there was a guy on a flatbed truck, holding a big iron rod. He'd hold it and threaten to bash in our Volkswagen bus. Now, that was an overt threat. But what I didn't know, and what the Deacons all knew, was that we were being followed because they wanted to know where these houses were that we were living in, so they could attack them, right?

So I'm driving. On my right—these Volkswagens have kind of a bench seat—two members of the Deacons riding shotgun, literally speaking, with shotguns. We get through town and there's a kind of little wooded area and the road turns into a dirt road, and I'm supposed to drive without my lights, as fast as I

can go. You really can drive when your knees are knocking. [laughs] I can guarantee you that you really can drive. I was terrified. But I did it, night after night, just as fast as I could go. So they never did find our houses.

I don't know how much more I should go on. Then people started appearing with Molotov cocktails and waving them at us. Finally, it got so scary. I guess this is what happened next. Oh, yes, you asked me about being—what's the word?

Dunham: Well, did you become armed at some point?

05-00:24:24

Dickemann: Yes, yes. What's the word?

Dunham: Deputized, as a deacon?

05-00:24:26

Dickemann: Deputized, thank you. Yes. That was already when we were walking, canvassing people. Yes, they gave me a gun. I was wearing—I don't know if you remember what dirndl skirts where.

Dunham: No, I saw description and I didn't know.

05-00:24:45

Dickemann: [laughs] They're just really, really full. Really full. They're supposed to be some Eastern European or something.

Dunham: Like a square-dancing skirt? I don't know. Anyway, go ahead.

05-00:24:57

Dickemann: I don't know what that's like.

Dunham: A full skirt, okay.

05-00:24:59

Dickemann: They're just really full. And they had pockets. My mother had made me several of them. So I could put that in a pocket and you wouldn't see it, because there's too much fullness there. So yes, I was carrying this gun. Never used it.

So then they decided they needed to do something to distract these Klansmen, we'll call them, although they weren't necessarily all members of the Klan; they were just all cooperating racists. They'd do something to distract them. So what they did was they borrowed my Volkswagen bus because everybody knew who was in the Volkswagen bus; it was the CORE workers, right? Then they quickly shuffled us home on the floor of a car. They snuck us out of the labor hall, and we snuck in there after dark, and then they drove us home that way. Then they took the van and they drove it up to the home of the labor leader, the Negro labor leader, Robert Hicks. [Narrator addendum: Lance Hill,

then-professor of history at Tulane, wrote *The Deacons for Defense, Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), in which he inaccurately describes this incident. He did not respond to my letter offering a correction.]

There was a shootout there. Now, I don't really know what happened with the shootout. There are all kinds of statements and rumors, and I can't be for sure. All I know is that somebody broke the back out of my car, the back window, I believe with a brick. I don't think it was shot out. In fact, Hicks' wife and I spent hours looking all over their front lawn, for bullets or casings or something that would indicate what had happened. We never found anything; but they said there had been shooting into—we then heard from black nurses who worked at the hospital, that there was a white man who was killed. I don't know.

Dunham: By gunfire?

05-00:27:27

Dickemann: Yeah. During this shootout. Who knows? I don't know. But anyway, that was done to try to detract these Klansmen from our houses, where we were living. Then it was decided this was all too hot, and we needed to go to the next stage and have a march. So they put on a march. Most of the people marching, of course, were young black kids, because that's where the population was. They marched. I was not marching in that one because I was delegated to handle the telephone. So I sat in the house of this labor leader, by the phone. Except that his wife liked to talk on the phone. [laughs] I couldn't get her off the phone. Please leave the phone open. Well, no, she had to talk to all her friends about what was going on. So I wasn't very useful.

Dunham: You were there to answer the phone, in case of an urgent problem.

05-00:28:43

Dickemann: Yeah, of course. So I guess nobody called me anyway. But that's what I did the first march. All right. They got set upon by all kinds of thugs, and beaten. Nobody was killed, but it wasn't nice.

Dunham: While marching in the march?

05-00:29:06

Dickemann: Yeah. Yeah. So they, in effect, were routed. Then they decided, well, you can't stop there and be defeated; we have to do something else, so we're going to have to try again. So they set up another march. Only this time, they called James Farmer, who was the founder and director of CORE, to come down and march. By this time, the mayor of the town was getting a little worried, because this was messing up his reputation as mayor of the town. It wasn't nice. Anyway, it is '65; a lot of terrible things have happened. But the government is beginning to—Robert Kennedy, who did a total turnaround, had come to the point of realizing that he had to defend the rights of black

people. He was Attorney General. So Farmer came down and led another march. That one, I did march in. I have a picture of that, too, with Pam. Pam and I marched together. That one was peaceful. Boy, I'll tell you, it was scary, because there's Farmer, Pam and I were right behind him, and there are these not-very-tall buildings in this small town. Maybe two stories, and all these people on the roofs of these buildings, watching. You just think, it takes one potshot. Of course, they would aim for James Farmer; but they didn't, thank God. It was probably very stupid of me, but I made some joke to Pamela and Mr. Farmer, as we were marching, about what an honorable bullet it would be, if it hit me. He looked around and he laughed. He understood. But he was a nice guy. But that was peaceful. Then after that, the mayor declared something that I don't remember clearly, to kind of cool things. Later I got a letter from Mary and Mirt Elzey, telling me about all the things the Klan had done after we left. So I'm sure there were lots of ups and downs after we left. But I'm sure also that it was a little better.

Dunham: Was there media at both marches? Not the second one, even, when Farmer came down?

05-00:32:06

Dickemann: The only media that I am aware of was that they all got a picture of the back of my blown-out bus, and it was on TV all over the goddamned South. I was so worried because, as I say, I went back to Baton Rouge. Of course, I had it repaired as quick as possible, but still, they could recognize that damn bus. I was just sure somebody would recognize it. Nobody ever did.

Dunham: Was that being associated with the man who was killed, maybe?

05-00:32:41

Dickemann: Yeah, well, whatever. It was part of the civil rights movement.

Dunham: Oh, just even that. But what about if a man did die, a white man did die relative to that? You're not sure if that was part of the story. Because it seems it would make it a whole lot—

05-00:32:57

Dickemann: Riskier. Riskier, yeah. Well, that's what they said. That's what the nurses said, or so I was told. This is all hearsay, though Professor Lance Hill concurs in his book in the nurses' report of one white death. Anyway, I was scared about the back of my bus being on TV all over Louisiana, but nothing happened.

Dunham: So Baton Rouge was after that?

05-00:33:19

Dickemann: Yeah. After that, I came back to the University of Kansas. We all came back, because spring break was over. We all came back. The students at Kansas University, having learned what was going on, decided that they would have a sit-in. So they called a sit-in, and I happened to have a very big class at that

hour and so I told the class, "I'm sorry, I have to dismiss class and join the sit-in." I guess I tried to explain to them why. So I did. Then when I went home that night, I wrote the President of the University, and I explained to him why I had to do this. He wrote me the nicest letter back. I still have it. He recognized my imperatives. Incredible. It wouldn't have happened here. Wouldn't have happened here. No. No. He was a great president, actually. But anyway, so there was a sit-in.

Dunham: Had he been sympathetic in other ways, to the Civil Rights movement?

05-00:34:44

Dickemann: Not that anybody'd ever heard.

Dunham: And subsequent to that?

05-00:34:47

Dickemann: Nobody was discussing that on campus.

Dunham: Was he subsequent, or an ally, beyond recognition in a letter?

05-00:34:55

Dickemann: He set up a process, which had people on two sides. One, the students. The students had two advisors, and I don't need to tell you I became one of them. Then somebody representing the administration. I know they had a faculty advisor, too. I can't remember quite who all those people were. Of course, I didn't know them; but I remember their faculty advisor. We were to put our heads together and see what needed to be changed. Of course, that meant that we on the student side had to ferret out all of the cases of discrimination that we could identify on this campus. Now, I won't go through them all, because there were lots. I'm talking about management and administration; I'm not talking about some individual person said this. That wasn't the level we were working on. We were reforming the institution, to get racist practices out of the institution.

Dunham: So when you say management, administration, you mean only employees? Or also with students?

05-00:36:20

Dickemann: As students and employees and administration, the whole schmeer.

Dunham: What was the approximate diversity of the student population, and was there any diversity in the faculty?

05-00:36:33

Dickemann: There was almost no diversity in the faculty. I think there might've been one black faculty member. I don't have a figure for the students, but there was significant numbers, and there was both a black sorority and a black fraternity on campus. Actually, it was primarily the black fraternity who organized all this. But I don't know what the numbers were. Well, anyway, so let me try to

give you that outline. So we went through all of these aspects, like hiring, advertising for jobs, advertising for jobs for students, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. There was no resistance to making these changes. That is maybe the answer to your question about the President. But of course, he didn't meddle in this thing; he just set it up. As far as I know, as far as we knew, he just stayed out of it and let it happen.

So we made all these changes, and finally we got to the school of education. Of course, we're getting rumors from all of the students who are interested in this issue. We were let to know that when they placed students—and of course, most of their placements would be in Kansas City, Kansas, because that was where there were a lot of schools; they were placing by race. Well, they said, "No, we never do that. Here is our form, and here is how it's filled out, and there's nothing on it that shows what race the student is. So how can it be that we're placing by race? It doesn't happen." We didn't know how to get beyond that because of course we knew it was happening.

One night, one of the students got a phone call from somebody in Kansas City. He said, "Look on the upper right-hand corner, for a little mark. We did, and we found it. We said, "Brother, you ain't telling the truth." So they had to reform that, too. So we really reorganized the school, in terms of that problem. But of course, we had the sororities and fraternities left, and we couldn't do a thing with them. We tried. We tried.

Dunham: What was the issue there?

05-00:39:35

Dickemann: Racial discrimination. I don't know what happens here, but if you're black you can't get into a white fraternity.

Dunham: Okay. That's what I just wasn't clear. I thought maybe, because you'd said there were the black fraternity and sorority—

05-00:39:52

Dickemann: Yeah, there were.

Dunham: —so I didn't know if there was an issue of them not having access to whatever. But you're just saying, but allowing for integrated sororities and fraternities.

05-00:39:59

Dickemann: Right, right. Right. Well, we corresponded with the headquarters and all, but they are imperturbable. They are filthy rich, and they represent the upper class. So we just couldn't make any headway with them, and that was where the whole reformation stopped.

Dunham: Was there discussion of trying to bar those fraternities and sororities? Or did it never get to that?

05-00:40:34

Dickemann:

I don't remember. I imagine somebody suggested that, but I don't really remember that. Yeah. Then I went back to Baton Rouge. CORE had opened an office there. Well, I don't know what I was doing there. I mean I was doing several things. I kind of turned into a jack-of-all-works. I put up an intercom system there, so that the director, Ronnie Moore, could talk to us over the intercom. Then the other thing I did was I ferried people around Louisiana, to places where CORE workers were needed. I was really scared again, because I'm driving in my old van again. So I got an old straw hat [laughs] and put it on, because I thought it would, and it did, make them think I was just an old cracker, right? Do you know that word, cracker?

Dunham:

Sure.

05-00:42:00

Dickemann:

Driving up and down the roads. One night I had a van full of volunteers, and we had instructions—way out on some highway someplace, there was a place that was going to put them up, and then they were going to do some kind of action, I don't know what. Their instructions were so vague and the place was so badly marked that we were not sure that that was the place we were supposed to stop, and we just didn't know what to do. Because if it was the wrong place—right? Finally, after conferring and looking and conferring and looking, we all just turned around and came home, because we didn't dare get out of that bus, if it was the wrong place. So that's what I remember.

Dunham:

Now, was your gender identity and sexuality another—was it an issue at all, during your time in the South, in Louisiana? Another level of fear? Or was it something that was more hidden, in that—

05-00:43:22

Dickemann:

No, it wasn't another level of fear. I remember in Baton Rouge, I was always in blue jeans, which really wasn't unusual during the work day. But then we would go to a wonderful soul food restaurant at night sometimes, and I'd still be in blue jeans. I remember one of the guys getting down on me for not putting a skirt on. That's all. That's all. There were guys who tried to hit up on you, naturally. [chuckles] The first night I moved into, there was—what did they call it?—a freedom house. A freedom house was a house where all the volunteers shacked up. So the first night I moved into this freedom house, two young black kids came to see me. Now, now that you mention it, they did something interesting. They wanted to share with me, something by James Baldwin. And what did this fellow have in his hands but—damn it, what's the name of that novel by Baldwin, about homosexual love? *Giovanni's Room*.

Anyway, that was the one he wanted—I don't think that really meant anything; I think that that was just what he had. But the point is that after they had offered me this book, and I said, well, I'd read it already, then she went away. And then he tried to hit me up and spend the night with me. But other than that—that's just standard stuff. That's just standard stuff. You know,

volunteer MDs who supported the Civil Rights Movement reported that the two most prevalent diseases were ulcers and gonorrhea.

Dunham: There was nothing exceptional about being in that environment. It was just the same, pretty much.

05-00:45:32

Dickemann: Yeah.

Dunham: So were you in Baton Rouge for most of the summer?

05-00:45:38

Dickemann: About half of the summer. I had received a grant to go to Berkeley and work on some materials, from my—I don't know what. I guess they were from Oklahoma or something. I don't know, I may've got that—I forget what the grant was for. But anyway, so I stayed half the summer, and then I figured I'd better hurry up and go back to Berkeley and do something. I rented a little room on Walnut Street. But I much would've preferred to stay in Baton Rouge, but I was feeling guilty about this grant money that had been given. They were getting sick of volunteers—that is to say, white volunteers—by then.

Our leader in Baton Rouge was a really wonderful guy named Ronnie Moore, who'd been in the action for a long time. He had an eye that wandered, because he'd been hit over the head. He could make it wander and scare you with it. But he was a fine man. I got to know a lot about what the whole scene was, from him. They just felt, finally, that they were giving educational tours to a lot of white kids. Now, that had a very good effect on our country, because how else would've these kids ever learned, or their parents learned, about what was really going on? But it's just intolerable to be there and having these waves of ignorant, naïve whites—even hippiedom was beginning to start—come down there and maybe do a little good, but you feel that your primary purpose is just some kind of weird education. That was really one of the things that brought CORE to an end. Of course, as you know, then it was succeeded by more black-oriented activist organizations. The Stokely Carmichael period came. So CORE then decided to chuck all its white members, and we were chucked out.

Dunham: What was that literally like then?

05-00:48:42

Dickemann: Oh, nothing. I guess I had a card, but they didn't say, send your card in. I just read about it on the news or something. Because we didn't pay a membership fee and we didn't get paid and there weren't any records, that I know of. I don't think there were any records of so-and-so people from Kansas joined or—

Dunham: Okay. This is after you had left Kansas?

05-00:49:15

Dickemann: Yes. Well, it was after Baton Rouge. See, my last years at Kansas weren't even spent in Kansas; they were spent in Oklahoma.

Dunham: Doing the research on the Indian schools?

05-00:49:41

Dickemann: That's right. That was '66, '67. So someplace in there. I don't know, you'd have to look up in civil rights books, when CORE chucked—and of course, CORE died, in effect. Someplace in there, '66, '67.

Dunham: Okay. Well, I'm interested—I know you've probably written more about it, but—with the Indian education project, I guess just briefly, maybe, in Oklahoma. What was it like at that time? Was it a mix of tribes and languages? What was the educational approach there then?

05-00:50:26

Dickemann: No. The people who hired me were a couple, Murray and Rosalie Wax, one an anthropologist and one a sociologist, at Kansas. They had previously studied Indian education on the Pine Ridge Reservation, where the education was supplied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It happens that Oklahoma has no reservations. People are always surprised to hear this, because it has such a large Indian population. But there are no reservations there, and so the Indians attend public school. So they wanted to see what it was like with the public schools serving the Indian population, as opposed to the Bureau's schools. So they hired me, because we all were progressive in our views.

We went down to their headquarters down there, in Tahlequah, which is the former capitol of the Cherokee Nation, when it was a nation. The population we were looking at were Cherokees. He set up this sequence, which is kind of right out of the sociology books, in which we had a very rural situation and a small-town situation and an urban situation. He recruited a couple of young anthropologists to go to Tulsa for the urban situation, and I was allowed to choose the rural one, because I like rurality, and they stayed in the small town, Tahlequah, he and his wife. That's another whole story. I don't mind telling it, but it's a long one because that also got all tangled up with—how can I say this?—fears and discrimination and persecution of the Indians, which of course, had been going on for years. But we just scared the hell out of them, because what were we doing looking around at *our* Indians.

Dunham: You're saying the white administrators were scared?

05-00:53:22

Dickemann: The white administrators. Of course, there are many levels and aspects, but the state did get involved, because the state, they had a kind of state security office, which followed me, tailed me, tailed my Cherokee assistant Lucille Proctor, threatened her. Finally, it became clear that the schoolteacher who had rented my house to me, Harold Wade, was coming into my house and

looking around. I never went anyplace without all of my field notes in a briefcase with me, ever, because I knew that's what he wanted to read. The schoolteachers, Harold and Freda Wade, were very welcoming to me when I came; but when it became clear that I was making contact with Cherokees who were not just the local ass lickens of the white school, they got very nervous, and eventually, very, very hostile to me. In fact, at one point, they threatened to kick me out of the house. Of course, the Cherokees said, "Don't worry, we'll put you up in our meeting house." So there are lots of ways to tell this story, and there are lots of ways I could've done that field work differently. But the truth is that I felt that what I needed to understand, in terms of what was happening in the schools, was what was happening in the community. I know other people would've kept their nose clean and just looked at the schools. Maybe they would've found out something useful. If you want to tell it differently, you could say I was sucked into the environment, because I felt strongly what I saw. It certainly wasn't like Louisiana, but it certainly wasn't good. So eventually, I was kicked out of that rural location and they sent somebody else in.

Dunham: How so? Who made that decision?

05-00:55:59

Dickemann: Well, I'm skipping the fact that all of this got so tense that the—we had a grant, a government grant from the US government. I can't even tell you how they all found out about all these goings on. But they did a site visit. Now, nobody does site visits for anthropological research, ever. But they did. They hired some well-known sociologist, and he came down and reviewed all our notes and stuff, stuff, stuff. Then the locals had a big meeting with the schoolteacher there and a whole lot of other people there. And the schoolteacher, who was really just playing the game to get ahead—he was a very obvious manipulator; he accused me of killing a cow. It was quite crazy. But at that point, the directors of this project removed me from that location. [laughs] They then decided they'd had enough and they wanted to go back to Kansas. So having decided that I had wrecked the whole thing, they appointed me as the principal investigator to continue, and I moved into Tahlequah—where they had been, in the town—and continued the project. Actually, it was fizzling, but I was taking over from them.

Dunham: You didn't advocate for that, that just—

05-00:57:58

Dickemann: No. No.

Dunham: —came about because they were quitting.

05-00:58:01

Dickemann: No. So it was kind of crazy. There's lots more to tell about it, but yeah, I got kicked out and replaced at the same time.

Dunham: Well, we're almost near the end of this tape. There was at least one other significant thing I told you we'd talk about, which is sort of a follow-up to your Gay Bears story. Maybe it's worth, if you're up to it—we've talked about the photos you might bring—scheduling one more session. Would you be up for that?

05-00:58:34

Dickemann: Sure. Now, tell me what you want to talk about.

Dunham: Sure. Well, why don't we go ahead and wrap up today, unless there's anything else you want to add, particularly, today.

05-00:58:46

Dickemann: I can't think of anything.

See also from the Gay Bears Oral History Project: *Coming to Cal, 1950* : oral history transcript / Mildred Dickemann; an interview conducted by William Benemann in 1996. The University Archives, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1997. CU-484.1 no.1