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Margaret Fahrenholtz

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

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

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

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Interview #1: June 11, 2008
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Rigelhaupt: It's Wednesday, June 11, 2008. I'm in Concord, California, doing an oral history interview with Margaret Fahrenholtz. And to start, if I could just ask you your full name and the year you were born.

01-00:00:21

Fahrenholtz: My name is Margaret Eileen Fahrenholtz, and I was born in 1923, April 20.

Rigelhaupt: And where were you born?

01-00:00:32

Fahrenholtz: Great Falls, Montana.

Rigelhaupt: Did you live in Great Falls throughout your childhood?

01-00:00:40

Fahrenholtz: I did not live in Great Falls, I lived about twenty-five miles north of Great Falls, on a wheat farm.

Rigelhaupt: And what are some of your earliest memories of the house you lived in north of Great Falls?

01-00:00:55

Fahrenholtz: Well, it was a small house. My folks had homesteaded in Montana in 1917—'16 or '17. And it was just a little homestead shack. And my dad said he built a room on for each child. So it was just a little three room house. There was a living room and a kitchen and a little dining room and the bedroom, one bedroom. And I had two brothers. An older brother, he was seven years older than myself, and a younger brother was just a year older than I.

Rigelhaupt: So you were the youngest.

01-00:01:39

Fahrenholtz: I was the youngest. My mother and father worked very hard on that farm. It was a dry land farm. It was what they called a high plateau. It was about 3,000 foot up. It was higher than Great Falls. The Missouri River ran through Great Falls. I don't know whether you know anything about Montana.

Rigelhaupt: A little bit, but not a lot. When you say dry land farm, what do you mean?

01-00:02:16

Fahrenholtz: No irrigation. No irrigation. We were about twenty-five miles from Great Falls. Like I said, that was where the Missouri River was. And about ten miles north of us was a little river called the Teton, T-E-T-O-N. And there were very few trees, except along the river, because it's dry. They couldn't drill for wells because they said it was almost as far to go down to get water drilling for water as it was to go to the river and get water. So we carried water from

Great Falls for drinking and cooking, in a big tank. And of course, we had reservoirs. You know what a reservoir is. They build dams on the little coulees and caught the rain water for the stock, for the cattle. We always had a few cows and horses. My dad used horses for a while, until he finally got a tractor. But it was hard. We didn't realize we were poor. We always had enough to eat. And my grandmother lived with us for a good part of the time. So it was a little bit cozy in our little house, but we did very well. We were happy.

Rigelhaupt: Now, how did your parents make the decision to begin farming?

01-00:04:09

Fahrenholtz:

Well, my dad was born in Missouri and my mother was born in Indiana. And both families moved to Oklahoma about the same time, during what they called the land race. I don't know whether you know anything about that or not. But they took Oklahoma away from the Indians and opened it up for homesteading. So the families went then to Oklahoma. And my mom and dad, when they were first married—I can't remember the year. Anyway, they farmed there in Oklahoma for a couple years. They leased land from the Indians at that time. And then they decided Montana was a great land. And my grandfather and my uncle first went to Montana and decided that that was the place to go. So my folks moved there and they homesteaded there. Both of my uncles, my dad's brother and my mother's brother, had farms right close to us. So they worked together, the three farms. But the reason they went to Montana was, like I said, because they thought it was a great place. And my uncle, my mother's brother, wanted to raise cattle because he thought he was a cowboy. So he wanted to raise cattle. But my dad said no, that he was going to farm, raise wheat. So my mom and her mother went there on the train, after my dad and the men went up to Montana with the stock, the cattle they had. And they landed in Portage, Montana, which was just a little post office. And it was where the men portaged around the river to get around the Great Falls. So they got off the train there and Mom said—Of course, she was used to Oklahoma, where there were lots of trees and green hills and so forth. She said she never saw such a desolate place in her life. [laughs] But I guess she got over it, because she seemed to be happy. I don't remember her ever looking unhappy or being unhappy. So that was why they went to Montana. And my brothers and I went to a little one-room school that was on my dad's property. So all eight grades were in one room. And we had to take exams to get advance from the seventh to the eighth grade. And at eighth grade, we had to go to the County Seat, which was Fort Benton, to take examination before they would graduate us from the eighth grade. So then we went to Great Falls High School. Well, my brother went one year to Great Falls, and he boarded at a home there because in the winter time, you couldn't drive back and forth. It was just too far. The roads were poor dirt roads, some gravel. So it was impossible to drive all winter to Great Falls, to school. So then when I started school the next year, he and I—the folks rented a little apartment and we batched. We called it batching there, while we went to high school. So I

graduated then in 1941, in June. And then the war started, of course, in December. But my uncle, my dad's youngest brother, had been in the navy. And he had come down here to work at Mare Island. And his wife was not too well. And they had two little kids. The little girl was five, I think, and the little boy was two or three. And so when I graduated from high school, why, I came down here to go to school and to help her, because my uncle was called back to the Navy because he was in the Reserves. So that's how I got to Richmond.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I'll come back there in just a minute, but if I could go backwards a little bit. How did your parents meet?

01-00:09:50

Fahrenheitz: They went to school together in Oklahoma. The folks happened to settle close to each other, not too far from each other, so they went to school together all through grade school and—Well, they didn't go to high school. My mom went through the eighth grade, and then she went to what they called normal school for, I don't know, nine months or something like that, and then she taught school. My dad, meantime, had come to California to work in the sawmill. They were cutting the trees down here in California, and he came out here because there wasn't that much work in Oklahoma. So his uncle—My dad's folks died young. My grandfather was killed. A horse threw him and he landed in some rock and [it] killed him. And my grandmother died when my dad was in his teens. So his uncle, his mother's brother, came out here to California and said this was the place to earn some fast money. So he came out. And that's the way he made enough money to get married, I guess.

Rigelhaupt: Where was he working in the lumber industry?

01-00:11:26

Fahrenheitz: I'm not sure. Somewhere near Paradise, I think. Paradise, California. I'm not sure. I have pictures of him working there, but I don't know exactly where it was.

Rigelhaupt: Is this roughly the early teens?

01-00:11:43

Fahrenheitz: Yeah, it had to be in 1912 or '13, because I have letters that my mother wrote to him out here. And it was in 1912 or '13 that he worked out here.

Rigelhaupt: Did he ever talk to you about what it was like?

01-00:12:01

Fahrenheitz: Oh, yes. My dad was a storyteller. And he loved to tell stories about incidents that happened. And he was very good at telling stories.

Rigelhaupt: Are there any that are particularly memorable that—

01-00:12:20

Fahrenheitz: About the work out here?

Rigelhaupt: Yeah, or early California history.

01-00:12:24

Fahrenholtz: Not really. I don't remember anything about it. See, he and his brother and uncle all worked there. And like I said, I have pictures to show you of when they were working there. But I don't remember anything about the stories that he told.

Rigelhaupt: So staying early in your life—kindergarten age, somewhere around there—what was a typical day like for your parents?

01-00:13:07

Fahrenholtz: For my parents? My mom was frightened of horses and cattle. My dad loved horses, and he had a wonderful team of horses. Now, this is what they told me; of course, I wasn't around. And he would have to haul the wheat to Portage. It was where the elevator was. So he would start out early in the morning to drive the wagon of wheat to the elevator. And Mom had to hold the horses while he attached the hitch. And like I said, they were high spirited horses. And she was so frightened of those horses. But she did it anyway. [laughs] That was the way she could help my dad. But she thought that was—that was a very hard thing for her to do. I don't know how long it would take him to haul the wheat back to the elevator and then come back home. I don't know whether he was able to make two loads a day. I don't know. Portage was about seventeen miles from home. So it would take a while. Especially with no roads, if they were—And the wheat. The harvesting the wheat, that was another thing. All the farmers would get together and cut the wheat, and then they had to thresh it. And it would be a big threshing machine that they would just put in one place, and all the farmers would bring their wheat there and run it through this threshing machine. And then of course, eventually, they had combines, which cut the wheat and threshed it at the same time, which made it a lot easier.

Rigelhaupt: So how did the days change for your parents? In the sense that I imagine farming is very seasonal; and so I imagine during the harvest was very, very busy, but then maybe not as busy at other times of year. And I'm wondering if you could talk about how the seasons shaped your parents' life in these early years.

01-00:15:54

Fahrenholtz: Well, of course, during the harvest season, there were lots of men working. And my mom, of course, had to cook for everybody. And she raised a huge garden. My dad, of course, helped with the garden. But one funny thing that happened was he had a little machine, a little harrow, I think they called it, that had blades that would work the soil. And he would hitch my little pony up. She was half Morgan, if you know what kind of a horse that is. She was smaller than a regular horse, but not as small as a pony. So he would hitch the little pony up, and I had to lead her to get the weeds out of the garden. And she was such a stubborn little thing. And she would throw her feet so that one

foot would hit this line of whatever vegetable we were trying to get the weeds out of; and then the next—she would hit this and my dad would say, “Now, don’t let her step in the garden. Don’t let her step in the garden.” And of course—And then I never will forget, once—Of course, the ground was soft because we had worked—When we’d get to the end of the row, then I had to lead her around. And she would step on my foot every time, just to be ornery. When she got tired, she was something else. But she was a sweet little horse. We kids would get on her—bareback, of course—just as many as would be able to sit on her, from her mane back to her tail, and we would make her go. And if one of us fell off, she would stop. But we had a lot of fun with Star. She was a little black horse with a white star on her forehead. And my brother and I were always together. We were more like twins than we were separate children. But he would hitch Star up to our little red wagon, and then I would ride in the wagon and he would race the horse down the lane. I don’t know why we didn’t get killed, but we made it. And then we raised what they called bum lambs. There was a ranch not too far from us that raised sheep. And sometimes the ewes, if they’d had twins, wouldn’t be able to take care of both of them. So they would have to do away with one of the lambs. And if there was anybody that wanted them, they would give them to them. So over the years, we would raise lambs at different times, on the bottle. We always had two or three cows that we milked. I never milked. I never will forget my dad was sick one year. That was when Max was in high school and I was at home. And my dad became ill, so my mother and I had to milk the cow. And it took us about two hours to milk the cow. By the time we got the cow milked and out to the pasture, then it was time to start milking her again. But the harvest, like I said, was a terrible time. And interesting. It was fun because different people were there. Now, later, when I was older—I wasn’t in high school yet, but—we had what we call—What did they call them? [Narrator Comment: They were called “Custom Cutters.”] Anyway, the harvesters would start in Texas when the wheat started getting ripe in Texas, and they would work their way up to Canada. They were Canadian. They would work all the way up. Why can’t I say the word? But they would cut the wheat for the different farmers. And that was interesting and fun, because they were a good bunch of people.

01-00:21:04

Another thing that happened—You had asked me about funny stories that happened. My mother was an excellent cook. And of course, she cooked a lot for the harvesters. And she always made biscuits, hot bread. And this one man, he took the biscuit and wadded it up like that. He said it didn’t make any difference, it would be in his stomach that way anyway. And she was so angry. She says, “You’re not going to get any more of my biscuits, if that’s what you’re going to do with them.” Because she’d made them so nice, and they were so nice and fluffy, and then he just wadded it up. And she always kept the house so clean. And he dropped something, his knife or fork, one of the men, on the floor. And he picked it up and wiped it on his trousers. Well, they’d been working outside, so his trousers were much dirtier than the floor. Anyway, those were just funny things that I remember.

Rigelhaupt: About how many people would come through during the harvest and work on the land?

01-00:22:28

Fahrenheitz: Well, they had to have somebody on the tractor and somebody on the combine, and two or three driving truck. And then of course, probably there were another man or two that would be working to be sure the machines were working and taken care of.

Rigelhaupt: And you said you had uncles. Was it your father's siblings and father that also moved to Montana?

01-00:23:10

Fahrenheitz: It was my mother's brother and father, and my dad's brother.

Rigelhaupt: And how close were they to your house?

01-00:23:22

Fahrenheitz: Well, my dad's brother was about a mile, just south of us. And he lived in the house that my grandfather, my mother's father and mother lived in when they first came there. But he had lived in just a homestead shack for a while. But he lived about a mile south, as I say. And my mother's brother lived about maybe a mile-and-a-half southwest of us.

Rigelhaupt: And so did you have cousins about your age?

01-00:24:08

Fahrenheitz: Well, my dad's brother had a little girl that was just a year younger than I. And my mother's brother had a son that was a year or two younger, two years younger than my oldest brother, and a daughter that was the same age as my younger brother, a year older than myself.

Rigelhaupt: So you said in the winter it was very difficult, if not impossible, to travel to Great Falls. Sounds like it was the closest city?

01-00:24:47

Fahrenheitz: Well, that was where we did all our shopping and where we got our drinking water. My dad dug what they called a cistern. And that was where we put the water for the household use.

Rigelhaupt: And did you have to make a big run for supplies before the winter?

01-00:25:07

Fahrenheitz: Yes.

Rigelhaupt: Could you describe what that would entail?

01-00:25:16

Fahrenheitz: I really don't remember very much about it. I know that we only went to town maybe two or three times a year. And my mother would buy big sacks of flour

and sugar. And my dad would always give us a nickel that we could spend however we wanted. [laughs] My older cousin, my mother's brother's daughter, was Lenore. And she and I would go together to spend our nickel, whatever, in the dime store. And we had to, in the wintertime, when my— Well, it was the year that my brother was in high school and I was at home. We had to draw water out of the cistern for the cattle. And the cattle were up at my uncle's for—I don't know how come that they were up there. Maybe that's where they kept the hay or something, I don't know. Anyway, we had to draw water out of a cistern, and we put it in a big tank. It was about as big around as this room, I guess. And it's for the cattle to come and drink. And of course, it would freeze over at night, so we had to break the ice for the cattle to drink. And my dad got sick, and so I went up to water the cattle. And I was breaking the ice with a big pipe, trying to—and I got my finger caught between the tank and the pipe. So I still have the scar. But that was interesting, to draw the—Used a bucket to draw the water out, it wasn't a pump. Had to draw it with a bucket on a rope. And so that was fun.

Rigelhaupt: How did you stay in touch with your brother when he was in high school at Great Falls and your family was still on the farm?

01-00:27:44

Fahrenholtz: Write letters. 'Course, we saw him often as we could. Maybe every two weeks or something like that.

Rigelhaupt: And was that similar for you, when you were in high school in Great Falls?

01-00:28:04

Fahrenholtz: Well, he and I, like I said, we batched, we had an apartment. And the folks would come as often as they could. They were sure to get an apartment where there were people that they knew. And in one apartment we lived, it was upstairs. And the lady that owned the house was a teacher that had taught in the school just north of us. Mrs. Peterson and her son lived there. And they loved to play bridge, contract bridge. And so they insisted that Max and I learn to play bridge. So we played bridge with Mrs. Peterson and her son. So it was that kind of a thing. They knew that we were okay.

Rigelhaupt: And then you would still be home for the summers.

01-00:29:07

Fahrenholtz: And lots of times on the weekend, when the weather was so we could. There was a hill between Great Falls and our place that was the hardest place to go because it would be icy, and it was steep enough that it was difficult. Now, you wouldn't even notice that there was a hill there, but that was called Rattlesnake Hill. And there were always rattlesnakes there, but it was just the road that was difficult to travel.

Rigelhaupt: And were you traveling back and forth by horse or by car?

01-00:29:52

Fahrenheitz: Car.

Rigelhaupt: Car. Do you remember when—Did your family always have a car, that you can remember?

01-00:30:03

Fahrenheitz: No, they didn't *always* have a car, but—I have pictures of the old cars, some of the old cars. But I don't remember what they were.

Rigelhaupt: Was your family involved with any churches or religious organizations when you were growing up?

01-00:30:24

Fahrenheitz: I don't remember, but I do have a diploma from a cradle roll. There was no pastor or any preacher there. Maybe once in a while. I don't remember it at all. But I do have a little diploma to show that I was in cradle roll or something. But outside of that, we didn't go to church. Max and I, my younger brother and I, when we were in high school, we went to different churches, just to see what it was like. But we didn't join any churches. My dad was a Mason. And my brother was in the DeMolay, and I was in Rainbow Girls. But that wasn't church, that was an organization.

Rigelhaupt: I don't know much about Rainbow Girls. Could you tell me more about it?

01-00:31:32

Fahrenheitz: It's just the girls organization that belonged to the Masons.

Rigelhaupt: Now, you were pretty young when the Depression started. And I'm curious if you can recall how that had an affect on your family.

01-00:31:50

Fahrenheitz: It didn't bother—We were always happy. The only thing that I remember was that my uncle, my mother's brother, didn't have enough money to buy groceries, and my dad bought groceries for them. And also my mother's sister and her family. They hadn't lived close to us, but they came there. And at one time, the three families were living off of my dad and mother's—whatever they had. But my folks always raised a huge garden, and my mother canned—I don't know how she did all the work that she did. Because I can remember her first washing machine. It had a round tub, and it was copper. And I can remember running around and around that machine because it was so pretty and shiny. So she washed everything by hand on the washboard, hung the clothes out, raised a garden. 'Course, my dad helped with the garden, but he was busy working, trying to raise wheat and so forth, so he didn't have much time to help her any other way besides the garden. And we butchered the cattle. We didn't raise any pigs, but some of the farmers did. And we would share the meat. And my mother canned meat, canned all the vegetables. We always had plenty of food. I can't remember ever not.

Rigelhaupt: Well, it sounds as though your family was rather self-sufficient. And I'm curious if you saw differences—Was it probably about 1937, '38, you started high school?

01-00:34:15

Fahrenheitz: Well, I graduated in '41, so it would be—'40-41, '38 and '39. '36, I guess, would've been when I started, right?

Rigelhaupt: And so in Great Falls, did you see other people being more affected by the Depression in what I imagine was a small city?

01-00:34:52

Fahrenheitz: Yes. Now, we had good friends that lived north of us about five miles. And their oldest daughter and her husband lived in Great Falls. And he worked at the smelter. There was a copper smelter there. And he was laid off during that time, and he dealt cards in the bar. It was a job. And her sister washed dishes in a cafeteria. I can remember seeing her wash the dishes by hand, and she had blisters on her fingers from washing the glasses. I don't remember that we ever had a bad time. But there were people that were, during that time. I've forgotten that Helen—Helen was the neighbor's daughter—that her husband lost his job at the smelter. I don't know whether they closed it down or whether they just cut out a lot of the workers. And of course, like I said, both my uncles, my mother's brother and sisters, both of their families were out of work, evidently, because they lived off of my folks. I don't remember that my folks ever were upset about it, except that I can remember my dad—Charlie was my mother's brother. And he loved his sweets, and he loved the maraschino cherries. And when my dad was buying groceries for him, he had to have his maraschino cherries. So my dad said something about that. He didn't think that was quite necessary.

Rigelhaupt: Did you have a favorite subject in high school?

01-00:37:21

Fahrenheitz: I loved accounting. Bookkeeping and accounting. I was good in math. I had good grades. I didn't like public speaking. I took speech class one year because I felt I should learn how to talk. I was very bashful. And I got up to give my speech—each one of us had to give a speech at the beginning of the class—and I couldn't say anything. Couldn't. So I dropped out of that, I quit. But later, when I was a senior in high school, then I joined the drama class because I thought that was another way that I could get over my being so shy. And I did okay with that. I happened to be in *The Amazons*, *The Amazon Women*. There was a play about that, and I was the queen mother. But that was fun. And we did pretty well. Our class traveled all over Montana playing our queens show, whatever it was, *The Amazon Women*.

Rigelhaupt: Well, it sounds like already having lived on your own, in some respects, during high school, you were already very independent. In trying to think back

when you were in high school, did you have thoughts about what you were going to do after you graduated?

01-00:39:03

Fahrenheitz:

I had a chance for a scholarship. And I went to Washington, to the school up there. I can't think of the name of it. But it was a very well known school up in Washington State. And I traveled up there to and they paid my way for this scholarship. And there was a young man from another town in Montana that was looking for the same scholarship, for teaching. And so they said—it was between the two of us—that he would be more likely to go ahead and use that scholarship, that I'd probably get married. So they didn't give me the scholarship, they gave it to the boy. I didn't think that was fair. But when I was in high school, I worked for the accounting teacher, the bookkeeping teacher. I took care of the books for the credit union for the teachers. He had me do that in my spare time. So I enjoyed that.

Rigelhaupt:

So you graduate in—

01-00:40:35

Fahrenheitz:

1941.

Rigelhaupt:

Then what?

01-00:40:38

Fahrenheitz:

That's when I came to California.

Rigelhaupt:

Could you describe how you traveled to California?

01-00:40:47

Fahrenheitz:

My dad and I came on the bus. He came down with me, to get me settled with his brother and his wife. My uncle was acquainted with the Fahrenheitzes, was how I got in with them. [laughs] They were good friends. And my husband to be had gone to Heald's College and graduated in the accounting department there. And so we investigated; my dad and I looked into the Heald's College. So he signed me up at the Heald's College, and I started going to school there and traveling—That was in Oakland, down on 17th, San Pablo, something like that.

Rigelhaupt:

And where did you first live when you came to California?

01-00:41:48

Fahrenheitz:

447 30th Street, in Richmond. That was my uncle's house.

Rigelhaupt:

So this is before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

01-00:42:02

Fahrenheitz:

Right. It was in the summer of '41, and the war started in December.

Rigelhaupt:

Now, did you have a sense that the country was building towards war?

01-00:42:18

Fahrenholtz:

I didn't think anything about it. Of course, they were, because my uncle was called back. And my brother, my younger brother, had joined the army. He was in the air force, he was a radio man. He had joined the year before, when he got out of high school. He immediately signed up in the army, the air force. And he was sent to the Philippines. He came down here to California at the— Oh, I lose words. The air force training station was across the bay, over on the San Rafael side. What was the field? I can't say it.

Rigelhaupt:

Up by San Rafael? Was it Hamilton?

01-00:43:16

Fahrenholtz:

Hamilton Field. He was there. He trained there. And then they sent him to the Philippines. So he was in the Philippines in '41, when the war started. He was on Clark Field in the Philippines. And then he was in that death march. You know what I mean? The soldiers, the United States Army and the Filipinos fought all the way across Bataan. And then they were captured, and they made them march back across the Bataan Peninsula. And many of them that died, of course. Then he was sent to Japan. Of course, we didn't know about that. They didn't know what happened to a lot of them. And that's all that we knew, that he was on the—They didn't know. But he was sent to the coal—he worked in the coal mines in Japan during the war. He was there for three years. And of course, we always had a bad feeling about MacArthur because when he left the Philippines, when he pulled out of the Philippines, he said that those people were expendable; the army that was left there, they were expendable and that he would return—which he did. But those people were all gone. My older brother, meantime, joined the air force, also. He was a mechanic. He worked in Great Falls in the air field there, as a mechanic on the planes. And he signed up and was sent to England [phone rings] and helped repair the planes as they came back. So he was in England; my younger brother was in Japan.

Rigelhaupt:

So Pearl Harbor gets bombed December of '41; you're living in Richmond. What do you remember about how you heard about it and your initial reactions to hearing the news?

01-00:46:07

Fahrenholtz:

My in-laws to be, they had asked some soldiers that were stationed in Pittsburgh, for the Sunday dinner. And they had asked me to come over at that same time, for dinner. And we were at dinner when they announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor. So of course, they reported back to their base immediately, the two boys.

Rigelhaupt:

I'm trying to get a sense of how much people in the Bay Area felt that there might have been a sense of danger immediately after Pearl Harbor, in the months after.

01-00:47:04

Fahrenheitz: Oh, yes.

Rigelhaupt: In the sense, this is the next stop from Hawaii.

01-00:47:10

Fahrenheitz: Everyone was very frightened. Of course, looking back, it was a terrible thing that we did with the Japanese here. But the people at that time—It's hard to explain to anybody like yourself or my grandchildren, how the people felt. We were very frightened. There was danger, they felt. Submarines, Japanese submarines, the small submarines were found not far from here. And we felt that the Japanese here were signaling—which I'm sure there were some people that did, that were pro-Japanese and working for them. And so, like I said, it was a terrible thing we did; but at the time, it was a logical thing. Looking back on it, it was bad, but people were very concerned. And there were a lot of—Well, my sister-in-law, my husband's sister and her family were in the Hawaiian Islands when they struck there. And so they were, of course, very frightened because they saw how many people were killed there in the Hawaiian Island. And they came, she and her husband and two little children, came back here to Richmond then, in June. Is that right? Yeah, June, because my husband and I were married in May of '42, and they came just the next month afterwards, came up here. And he worked at the—The Ford plant had been changed over to war—I don't know what they were building, but they were building something for the war, the Ford plant there in Richmond. And he worked there, my brother-in-law. And then the purchasing agent for the yard, Yard Three—They were just starting to build Yard Three; Yard One and Two had evidently been working. I didn't realize that, but they had evidently been building ships there. But Yard Three just started, I guess, in January of '42. And the purchasing agent lived just across the street from my in-laws. So he asked if I wanted a job at the shipyard. And so at the end of my school—[chuckles] I quit school, went to work. And I think I was making fifty cents an hour, typing in the typing pool. There were sixty of us that were typing purchasing orders for the yard.

Rigelhaupt: I'm going to get to your job experiences in just one minute. You mentioned the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans. And I'm curious as to how you learned about it. Was there discussion? Did you read about it in the newspapers? Was it something in newsreels? What was it like to get that kind of information?

01-00:51:12

Fahrenheitz: There was a Japanese girl at school, in the Heald's School. I was very fond of her. She was a very nice girl. But I can remember—terrible—I told her that I couldn't be friends with her anymore. And then there was the florist that we had always dealt with, on San Pablo Avenue there. And they were sent to the internment camp. And they were good friends. But I don't remember—I'm sure that was all in the papers, though I don't—And on the radio. We were constantly listening to the radio.

Rigelhaupt: But it was a part of the war effort, and that was more or less the way it was going to go.

01-00:52:25

Fahrenheitz: Right.

Rigelhaupt: Well, speaking of war efforts, certainly looking back at magazines and reading about this era, there was an immediate sense of, buy Liberty Bonds, by War Bonds.

01-00:52:41

Fahrenheitz: Oh, yes, yes.

Rigelhaupt: I was wondering if you could talk about what it was like. Did your family have discussions about which bonds you were going to buy, how you were going to buy them? And the kinds of things that you did in the immediate beginnings of World War II to try and support the war effort.

01-00:53:00

Fahrenheitz: Well, as soon as I went to work, they asked if we wanted to sign up for War Bonds. And I signed up to buy bonds. I bought bonds for my brother, and when he came home I gave him the bonds. Yes, I bought bonds all during the war. It was just part of the salary. I mean, you bought bonds.

Rigelhaupt: Almost like a payroll deduction?

01-00:53:34

Fahrenheitz: It was a payroll deduction. And at the shipyards during the war, there were different entertainers, singers and so on, that would come and entertain the people, the workers at the yard, which was fun.

Rigelhaupt: Now, you came to Richmond just before the exponential growth in the city. Did you have a sense when you first got there that summer that it was already growing, people were moving here for the war industries? Or was it right after Pearl Harbor, people just started coming?

01-00:54:24

Fahrenheitz: Yes, Richmond was a very nice small town. It was very pleasant and a pretty town. But Kaiser, in order to get people to come, he had recruiters all over the country. Mostly in the south and the east. And as long as the person could walk and get on a train, it didn't matter whether they knew anything or were healthy or—They were sent out here to work. And lots of them couldn't work. There was no place for them to live. They lived in cars, and families and groups of people would live in a small apartment or anyplace they could find. And then, of course, they started building houses. There's one little area in Richmond that still has some of the housing that they didn't tear down. I don't know why they didn't tear that down, too, but they didn't. But they built so many houses and apartments. And it was fast. They were building in a hurry. You've been out to Yard Three. And all along that hill, the hills there going

out, they were covered with apartments. And just anyplace they could build, they built. And then after the war, they tore most of them down. But yes, people were living all over. Of course, some of the people that were living there in Richmond at the time had homes. Like the two men that I rode to work with. That was another thing, it was hard to get—You couldn't buy a car. They weren't making cars. So people rode together. And these two men that I rode with for most of the time that I worked there lived in El Sobrante. And they would come by and pick me up on Garvin or on Gaynor, where I lived.

Rigelhaupt: I'm just going to pause there because I have to change the tapes.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 06-11-2008.mp3

Rigelhaupt: Okay, I'm on tape number two with Margaret Fahrenholtz. And before we changed tapes, we were talking about all the people moving to Richmond. And certainly, one of the things I've read about is how many people took in borders, if you had an extra room in your house. Did your family have anyone who was renting any space in your house?

02-00:00:36

Fahrenholtz: Well, I was living with my mother-in-law at that time. And I mentioned the two soldiers that were at the house when the war started. Their wives came and lived at my mother-in-law's house, also. Their husbands were stationed close by at different times during the war, and whenever they were in this area, why, they lived with the folks. One of the women had a baby during that time, so there was a small baby. The other one, I don't think she had her baby until after they left, after the war was over.

Rigelhaupt: Now, you said that you had planned to continue at Heald College before being offered a position at Kaiser. How much longer would your schooling have gone, if you hadn't decided to accept the position at Kaiser?

02-00:01:50

Fahrenholtz: Couple of years, two years. But I just barely got started, really. I'd only gone a few months when I started working.

Rigelhaupt: Okay, so if you could talk about the beginning of your work at Kaiser—what position you were in, what kind of office, your job.

02-00:02:11

Fahrenholtz: Okay. Like I said, the purchasing agent lived across the street there, and so he had asked me if I wanted to come to work. And so I said sure. And with his position, he was in charge of the typing pool. There were sixty of us in this typing pool, typing up purchasing orders. And if you know what carbon paper is, we had I don't know how many copies of each purchasing order that we

had to type. And of course, you couldn't make mistakes, because if you made a mistake it was very hard to correct it because of all that carbon paper. So it wasn't the speed typing, it had to be accurate. I was good at that. I wasn't a speed typist, but I was accurate. So I started working in the typing pool. And at times, there was a lag in the work. And you either sat there and did nothing or you looked around to see if there was something else you could do. And I didn't like just to sit, so I could see that there was work to be done in the expediter's office, so I would ask if I could help. So soon I was working in the expediter's office instead of in the typing pool. And I was doing just general office work, answering the phone, filing and typing and that sort of thing. I don't remember how long I worked in his office, but for some time. And then they started what they called giving clearances, or denying clearances, for people to work. If a person wanted to quit work, they had to have a clearance in order to quit, because they would go to another yard and work there and then they would come back. So they decided that they couldn't have that, just transferring back and forth to the different yards or businesses. So I started working in the War Manpower office then. And that was interviewing people who wanted to quit and work someplace else. And it was very interesting, because there were lots of stories, lots of sad stories about the different people that were sick or didn't know what to do, or couldn't learn how to do the work. And of course, they were given clearances without any problem. And then there were people that just wanted to work at one of the other yards because their friend worked there or their girlfriend or somebody, or they felt that the work was easier, or they could get more advancement. And those clearances were denied. One person would interview them and write up a form, and then boss and two or three people would go over those and either they would agree or disagree with the interviewer. So it wasn't just one person deciding what was—And one instance was this man was—Of course, I was, what, twenty? Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. And he wanted a clearance and I denied him. I said, "You don't have a good enough reason to go to another job." And so he was very unhappy and he says, "Isn't there anybody here except this young chick that can tell me I can't have a clearance?" And one of the men was sitting at his desk behind me, and he says, "Yes, I can tell you you can't have a clearance." So then he was really unhappy. But as a general rule, it was fun. It was very interesting. I worked with two men. They were both pastors. One was a Baptist and the other one was a Presbyterian. And they were going to school during the day. I worked swing shift the whole time. And they went to school during the day and worked swing shift at night. They were good men and it was interesting and fun. They tried to make a good Christian out of me. [Narrator Comment: It was probably their influence that caused me to become active in a Christian church.]

Rigelhaupt: What were some of the memorable reasons that people had for—I mean, are there any that you can remember that people to you seeking a clearance?

02-00:07:53

Fahrenholtz:

Well, like I said, there were lots of health reasons, or mental reasons—they just couldn't do the work, and they were out here without anything, and what were they going to do? They couldn't earn any money to live on, and yet they had been shipped out here to work. And it was hard. There were a lot of people that it was difficult. And there wasn't much we could do for them. I don't know how some of those people survived, really. So that was not good. But as a general rule, it was interesting. They did get settled, a lot of them. And the ones that didn't get clearances and were unhappy about it, I don't know what they did. I guess they went back to work and worked as well as they could.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, when you say they didn't get a clearance, what if they just quit their job and just stopped showing up? What would the repercussions have been for them?

02-00:09:23

Fahrenholtz:

They couldn't get another job unless they had a clearance. None of the other war companies would hire them.

Rigelhaupt:

And these were good jobs.

02-00:09:38

Fahrenholtz:

Yes, they were making good money. Fifty cents an hour doesn't sound like much now, but that was good money for a typist. Of course, the people in the yards made a lot more than that. And I've got a couple of stubs that shows how much I earned. But it was good money. I paid off—My husband had a little house that he had purchased and was paying on before we were married. I was able to pay that off and start buying another house, put my money down on another house, while he was gone. [Narrator Comment: My husband was in the Army in New Guinea.]

Rigelhaupt:

In Richmond?

02-00:10:32

Fahrenholtz:

In Richmond. 2401 Gaynor Avenue. I bought this table and credenza, those chairs, on time while I was working there. The rest of the furniture's kind of gone, but that one set, I thought that was a pretty good—[Narrator Comment: I had never purchased anything before this by making payments on weekly or monthly basis. I was taught never to buy anything unless you had the cash to pay for it.]

Rigelhaupt:

Did you ever have any interest, or did you ever consider working in the yards? Like you said, they were getting paid a lot of money.

02-00:11:14

Fahrenholtz:

No, I didn't. I was happy working where I was. When we first went to work in the yards, it was the beginning of the yard. It was a mud hole. Really, it was just—there was no pavement or anything. And the women that worked in the

office were expected to wear skirts, shoes, stockings. Stockings were almost impossible to get. So I was a farm girl, and we dressed on the farm according to the weather. So I couldn't see wearing dresses and trying to walk through that mud to the office, or the building where we did our work. So I talked to the girls and I said, "Let's wear pants, and shoes that are decent to walk in." And so I talked them into one day we would all wear pants. Well, I was the only one that came in pants. So the office manager, the purchasing agent made me walk around to all the different offices and show off my pants suit. So after that, we wore pants. But it was difficult. Because the parking lot where we parked the cars was quite a distance from the building where we worked. Of course, the women that worked in the yards on the ships wore clothes suitable to work in, but we were expected to wear dresses. And I didn't think that was right.

Rigelhaupt: Okay, one of the things, in thinking about Rosie the Riveter and new opportunities for women, certainly in the shipyards and working in those types of positions during World War II, do you recall if women had new opportunities for work in the office environment that you were in? Were there positions that you were able to work in that might not have been open to you before World War II?

02-00:14:00

Fahrenholtz: No. Well, I suppose in the accounting department—My husband worked in the accounting department for a while. And I don't remember that there were other women in there, but the men were mostly in that office. But I never had any problems working. In the interviewer's position, there was one older woman, Maude Porter. She worked in the day shift. And I don't remember that there was another. There was Maude, and myself that worked swing shift, but I don't remember that there were any other women there in that office. Because the two men that worked with me on swing shift were older men. The one man, the Presbyterian, had grown children; the other one had little children. But they were both older men. As far as I was concerned, they were, because I was a young woman. But I had no problem.

Rigelhaupt: And you said you met your husband soon after you got to California. And when did you get married?

02-00:15:48

Fahrenholtz: May of '42. So about nine months after we met.

Rigelhaupt: And what was the courtship like? I imagine it was different than today. If you could say a few words about, I guess, what dating was like.

02-00:16:07

Fahrenholtz: The first date he took me on was an automobile show in San Francisco. I didn't know anything about cars, but he liked cars and so we went to see this show in San Francisco. His folks and he came to dinner at my aunt's and uncle's house shortly after I came there. And we were invited over there at

different times. Otherwise, we went to movies. That's about all the entertainment that I can remember that we went, because then the war started and there wasn't that much that you could do. But he didn't dance. And he didn't drink, so we didn't go to bars. He was a nice man. He was ten years older than I.

Rigelhaupt: Well, one of the things that came up during World War II was rationing. And I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about what that was like for your family, in the house you were living in. Let's say having shortages of butter or something like that.

02-00:17:46

Fahrenheitz: We had coupons for sugar and butter, and people traded coupons if they didn't need them. I can remember I bought canned hamburger. It was made of soybeans, and they were in little jars. And they were just a little cake of soybeans. It didn't taste bad. But the meat, there was always a shortage of meat. But we got by. It never affected me very much. But I can remember trading coupons.

Rigelhaupt: So you probably had one of the earliest forms of tofu.

02-00:18:50

Fahrenheitz: Yeah, I did. Yeah, it was funny because it was brown. It was coloring. But it didn't taste bad.

Rigelhaupt: And did the rationing or—

02-00:19:08

Fahrenheitz: Go ahead.

Rigelhaupt: So did the rationing or any of the shortages of necessities that took place during the war, did that have any effect on the wedding? Or were there things—

02-00:19:39

Fahrenheitz: We just drove up to Reno and got married. On May 11, in 1942. My in-laws went with us, and we went up to Reno. We were stopped on the pass because of snow. There was a convoy of soldiers coming across, and it was snowing. It was a real soft snow, and they had their campaign hats on, the caps with the flat tops. And there was snow on their caps about so high. But we had to stay overnight at the pass because we couldn't get across. So then the next day, we drove to Reno and were married there. It was a very simple wedding. We didn't spend thousands of dollars for a dress. I had had a nice suit.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember your office and Kaiser changing over the course of the war? Were there new policies? Were there more people? What kind of changes did you witness?

02-00:21:04

Fahrenheitz:

Well, of course, the typing pool was done away with after a time because there wasn't that necessity for that much purchasing. After the yard was built, then all that had to be purchased was whatever they used on the ship. So they didn't need that many typists. But then there was the accounting and the expediting, trying to keep the merchandise coming in that they needed. The expediter's office was not that large. It was just one or two people. I had a young woman working under me to do the filing. And the first girl that I got as a filing clerk didn't know her ABCs. So it was kind of difficult. I don't know what she did afterward, but she didn't work for us very long. I tried to teach her the ABCs, but it didn't work. But that was interesting to find out that she didn't know her—But there were lots of people like that, that were unable to do the work because they just didn't know; they weren't educated. Poor people. I don't know what happened to her.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you remember if there were ever any accidents in the shipyards or if some of the work was dangerous?

02-00:23:18

Fahrenheitz:

Oh, I'm sure it was. I don't remember any incidents. Undoubtedly, there were because it was difficult. They were learning, too. And a lot of the people were untrained, as far as the work on the shipyards, the shipwrights and the welders and so on. I'm sure there was dangerous work. And I'm sure that there were accidents, but I don't remember.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you remember any environmental hazards that, maybe in looking back, weren't considered—

02-00:24:03

Fahrenheitz:

Problems?

Rigelhaupt:

—dangerous, that today we might think it probably wasn't the safest way to store these chemicals? Did you ever—

02-00:24:11

Fahrenheitz:

Oh, I'm sure. I don't know.

Rigelhaupt:

But you never had experiences of strange smells or gases coming? Standard Oil was pretty close by. Anything from the refinery?

02-00:24:24

Fahrenheitz:

I don't remember anything.

Rigelhaupt:

What do you remember about some of the unionization campaigns that started at Kaiser, and the unions that represented a lot of the workers from the shipyards?

02-00:24:44

Fahrenheitz:

I don't remember anything about that at all. We weren't effected in the office.

Rigelhaupt: So the office staff wasn't affiliated with the union at that time.

02-00:24:55

Fahrenheitz: No. I don't think so. I don't remember anything about it.

Rigelhaupt: Were there any social activities you did with your colleagues at work? I think I've seen pictures. Kaiser had a baseball team, and I think they built a bowling alley. Were there any things you did along those lines?

02-00:25:20

Fahrenheitz: When we got married, they had a shower for me. I got a lamp from one of the ladies that worked there. We worked on the swing shift, so a lot of that stuff went on during the day and I wasn't involved in it. But after work lots of times, we would go to the movies. A few of us would go to the movies. They ran the movies all night long. And a lot of people who said they didn't have any place to stay, a lot of them stayed in the movies. They slept there. But different young women and myself would go to the movies. We walked all over town and we never were bothered.

Rigelhaupt: Well, speaking of movies—

02-00:26:21

Fahrenheitz: What movies, I don't remember.

Rigelhaupt: No, no, that's okay. I was actually going to ask more about the newsreels. And is that one of the ways you learned about the war?

02-00:26:30

Fahrenheitz: Oh, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: And if you could talk about other ways, from radio to newspapers, and what it was like learning about the war.

02-00:26:39

Fahrenheitz: Oh, we always had the radio and there was always, like you say, the newsreels in the movies. There was no television at that time, of course, but the radio was always news. There was a lot of news on the radio. And letters. My husband and I wrote back and forth all the time. 'Course, he couldn't say very much. He was in New Guinea most of the time. He was in the medical department; he worked in hospitals, setting up field hospitals.

Rigelhaupt: Well, you mentioned there was no television. And one of the things I'm curious about is if you could think of and try to describe what it was like learning about the war without television, in the sense to compare and contrast it maybe to what it was like learning about the Vietnam War or the current war, where images are brought into your living room on a daily basis. But during World War II, as you said, there was no television. So how was it different to learn about the war without television?

02-00:28:02

Fahrenheitz:

Well, you didn't see the horrors of the war, you heard about them. It is strange to me to hear about the people so upset about the war in Iraq, when 3,000, 4,000 soldiers have been killed. That happened daily. In one battle, there would be thousands of young men killed. The war there on the—I thought this morning about that. The nurses in the hospital there that were left on Corregedor. What happened to them? They just disappeared. And of course, the horrors that went on with the battle across Bataan and back again. There were so few of those men that survived, that were then taken prisoner and were in prison all during the war. See, my brother was taken prisoner there early in '42. Because they bombed in December of '41. And he was a prisoner then until the war was over in August, or when Japan was done, in August of '45. And the men that survived that were with him was such a small number. And of course, like I said, you didn't see—We didn't see him when he came now. Now you see the men that are hurt, they're wounded. We didn't see my brother until after they took him to the Philippines and they fed him up. My husband—it happened strange that—See, my husband and my brother didn't know each other at all. But my brother was taken to a hospital there in the Philippines. And my husband went to see him and introduced himself as his brother-in-law. But we didn't actually see him until a short time later, when he was sent here to Washington State, up there. Fort Lewis was where they brought him. So we didn't see how terrible he looked, how emaciated he was when they found him. But now you see. You see the men and how they're hurt. You see the battles. They were showing just last night, the Iraqis and the bombing and so forth. And it's horrible, it's terrible. But at that time, we didn't realize. You couldn't conceive of the men—especially on the day that they went into Europe. The men were going up on that shore time after time, time after time. They said the water was red with blood of the men that were killed. I don't have any idea how many were killed on that day. But you just didn't realize, a person couldn't conceive of what was going on. And like Paula mentioned about my mother raised chickens. And of course, we had to kill the chickens in order to fix them. My brother couldn't kill the chickens. I had to kill them. But for him to go through what he did—

Rigelhaupt:

So you said he came home from—

02-00:33:12

Fahrenheitz:

Japan.

Rigelhaupt:

—Japan and the Philippines and then to Fort Lewis. And did your family go up to Fort Lewis to see him?

02-00:33:18

Fahrenheitz:

Yes. We met him up there.

Rigelhaupt:

Could you describe what that was like?

02-00:33:23

Fahrenheitz:

Well, it was great. It was wonderful. My folks came. There was a young man that grew up with my older brother, that came with the folks. His name was Elton. Elton Good. He was a distant relative. And he went with them, and I had gone home. I'd left, quit the job here and went home, went up to Montana to be with the folks. And so we all drove them to Washington when he was coming. And I don't remember all of it, but we ate where the men ate, and we had creamed peas. And my mother and I got violently ill. But he seemed to be fine, my brother. He was thin, very thin, but he seemed to be fine. But he never was well. He had continuous sores on his legs that never healed. And he was just—He was a hard worker and he eventually had a cattle ranch in Montana. But he was never well. He was always in pain. [Narrator Comment: He never received any therapy or medical help after coming home.] But he had a good life. He had a nice wife and five youngsters, and they all [did well]—He died young. He was only—How old was he? Fifty-two, something like that.

Rigelhaupt:

So it was after the war had ended, the US Army is in Japan, he's released from—

02-00:36:01

Fahrenheitz:

The prison camp.

Rigelhaupt:

That he was in. How did your family get word? And how long after the army found him did you guys get word that—

02-00:36:09

Fahrenheitz:

They sent a telegram. It wasn't long. It was maybe a week after the bombing, when Japan gave up. But they sent a telegram to the folks, and then like I said, my husband met him, so he wrote, telephoned. In fact, I'm sure he telephoned, called from the Philippines, I think. But it was pretty fast.

Rigelhaupt:

Do you remember the explosion of Port Chicago?

02-00:37:00

Fahrenheitz:

I wasn't here. I had gone to Montana. I don't remember it. 'Course, I remember reading all about it and seeing pictures of it later. But I actually was not here, because I don't remember it. I had to have gone to Montana. I went up there every once in a while during—Well, whenever I got off a week or two, I'd go home. That was interesting, too because the trains were old. They put all the old trains back on the tracks. And the soldiers got first try [to get a seat] on the trains. And the girls that were traveling would grab a soldier, [laughs] and that was the only way we got on the train. But one time when I was going, I was sitting next to another, older lady. And the train was stopped because there was something on the tracks ahead and we couldn't—They were going to have to be there for a while and we were going to miss our train up in wherever we were changing trains in Washington to go to Montana. And so the soldiers all jumped off the train, and they were hitchhiking along the

road. So this lady and I sat there for a few minutes and said, “Well, if they can hitchhike, why can’t we?” So we got behind them, because we didn’t want to take their place. If they got a ride, we didn’t want to keep them from getting a ride, so we went clear to the end of the line. And this car passed all these soldiers that were hitchhiking and they stopped and picked us up. Said, “What’s going on?” We said, “Well, the train has stopped.” So they drove us on up to wherever we changed trains to go to Montana. But that was fun.

Rigelhaupt: What do you remember hearing about the use of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and how you learned about it?

02-00:39:32

Fahrenheitz: Well, I don’t remember how we learned about it; it was immediate, as soon as—The radio I had it, I’m sure. And of course, we thought it was great. And I still think it was great. I think that was the only thing to do. Because like I said, in one battle, there were thousands of soldiers killed. There were all those islands all over there, with Japanese on every island. And we were going to have to fight each island along the way to get to Japan. It would’ve been years, and it would’ve been bad. I know the people think it’s terrible that we bombed Japan; I don’t think so.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember if the reaction was unique or different because of the new weapons, these atomic bombs that were used?

02-00:40:39

Fahrenheitz: Well, sure. It was terrible. It was a terrible thing to use and to kill so many people, and the devastation was terrible. But like I said, it would’ve been worse, I think, if we hadn’t used it. I think it was the only thing to do.

Rigelhaupt: Well, it certainly sounds like there was a sense that—from your reaction, and probably thousands of others, that there was an ambiguous reaction; that perhaps this ended the war definitively, but there was a huge price to pay. I think there were about 100,000 people killed in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But I’m wondering if you’re able to think back to that time period, if there was a similar reaction to, say, the fire bombing of Tokyo. A wooden city, firebombs were used. It was, [from] my understanding, close to 100,000 people that also died in that campaign of firebombing in Tokyo. But was there a different reaction, in your recollection, because a new weapon had been used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, versus a more conventional bombing campaign in Tokyo?

02-00:42:19

Fahrenheitz: Well, the only thing that I can remember, or that my feeling was—The bombing, of course, like in Germany and in Japan, was going on all the time. There were lots of people killed. Okay. But there were our soldiers, too. There were airplane pilots that were killed. This was one shot. This was one time. And the crew, the airplane crew was not killed. There were no more pilots killed after that, with Japan. That was it. And it was the end, as far as Japan

was concerned. Now, I guess there were some islands where they found Japanese still fighting, years afterwards. Nobody was fighting them, but they thought they were still there. But I can't remember any problem. I don't remember anybody that was upset over the fact that the Japanese were bombed or that Japan was bombed. Because we knew how many soldiers were being killed everyday.

Rigelhaupt: And you had family members potentially in harm's way, one who was very much—

02-00:43:57

Fahrenheitz: In the way.

Rigelhaupt: —in harm's way.

02-00:43:58

Fahrenheitz: And my brother over in England saw the planes come back all the time. And not come back. And the different pilots and men on the planes that were injured and killed.

Rigelhaupt: How would you describe the scene when it's official, World War II is over? What was that like?

02-00:44:24

Fahrenheitz: Everybody was happy. [laughs] Nobody was upset, everybody was happy. It was great. And of course, with my husband and brothers coming home, that was—My mother was—of course, she was devastated when we didn't hear. They got a few cards, two or three cards during the war, where he had—His signature was on the cards, and they had checked off I'm well or whatever. But those cards could've been written any time. They sent them at different times, but they could've been written any time. My mother was built like I am, and she was a husky lady. She was so thin. [Narrator Comment: My mother lost so much weight because she was so upset about my brother being "Missing in Action" that she couldn't eat much of the time.] It was very hard not knowing. If they had known what was going on, it would've been easier.

Rigelhaupt: So your mother, was she still living in Montana when your brother returned home to Fort Lewis?

02-00:46:24

Fahrenheitz: Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: And you guys all met there.

02-00:46:26

Fahrenheitz: Right. She was very happy.

Rigelhaupt: And then how long after the war, before your husband came home?

02-00:46:41

Fahrenholtz: He came home in January of '46. He joined the service in January of '43 and came home in January of '46. He was in the Philippines, like I said, at the last. And he became ill. He got amoebic dysentery. So they wouldn't send him home until he was over that. So he didn't get home until January of '46.

Rigelhaupt: And did he spend any time on a base stateside before being discharged?

02-00:47:25

Fahrenholtz: No, I don't think so. I don't remember that he did. Before he went overseas, he was in Camp Gruber, Oklahoma, in training there. But after he went overseas, when he came home, I don't remember that he was—It seems like he was discharged almost immediately.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember learning about the holocaust and that part of World War II?

02-00:48:14

Fahrenholtz: Well, as they found these camps where they had killed those people, the Jewish people were killed—but that was towards the end of the war. They didn't find what was going on until really after the end of the war. But it came out, of course, then, what the Germans had done and the terrible things that had happened. And of course, I've read over the years, lots of books about the war and seen pictures of it, and have gone to different museums. There's one in Berkeley, I think, and I've gone through that. Terrible.

Rigelhaupt: But as the news was coming out, was it something—It may be hard to think back to exactly this time, but as the news was coming out, was it hard to believe that this had really happened? Did it take some time to settle in, what had actually taken place in Germany and Poland and Austria?

02-00:49:37

Fahrenholtz: Well, yes. It was hard to believe that people could be so horrible to other people. But knowing firsthand what had happened to my brother and what he had gone through, it was believable to know that—Although I don't understand how people could've done the things that they did. But it was evident that they did. There was plenty of evidence that was true. I don't see how people can say that it never happened, because it was so obvious, with what they found over and over again, and the people that were gone. And of course, they found where they buried the remains, some of it, and the different things that they had stolen, taken. I have read and seen so much of that. But it certainly is true, as far as I'm concerned. I can't see how anybody could doubt that it happened.

Rigelhaupt: My part of my asking was just—It is established historical fact. But trying to imagine what it was like actually learning about it, in some respects—

02-00:51:29

Fahrenholtz:

Well, you were horrified to think that people would do those things. But of course, my brother never talked about what happened. But his buddy that was with him told us a lot of stuff that happened. And since then, I have a book that my niece, my brother's daughter got. There was a man from Montana that was in the prison camp not far from where my brother was, in Japan. And he was an artist, this young man was, and he drew pictures of the different things that went on, and how they managed to survive and live, and what happened. And when my brother came home, he had to make a deposition—I guess because they were having war trials or something. And he had to make a deposition of some of the things that had happened to him. And he told—I have that letter, or the deposition that he had talked about, the different things that they had made him do and undergo. So it's bad. [Narrator Comment: The men who worked in the coal mines in Japan were beaten and starved. They were given a little rice each day. They were made to work whether or not they were sick. If they didn't work they were beaten or killed. They hunted rats for food. My older brother who was in England in the Air Force worked on the planes, the bombers. He told my mother that he had found part of a mouse in his cereal one morning. My younger brother heard him and said that he should have thanked the good Lord for the protein.]

Rigelhaupt:

So if you could describe how Richmond changed during the war and what it was like immediately after the war.

02-00:53:11

Fahrenholtz:

Well, there were lots of small businesses up and down MacDonald Avenue. It was a very nice town. And of course, it grew tremendously. And after the war, sometime after, a lot of those businesses then went broke. They didn't survive. So it changed a lot. And then we lived in Richmond until 1984. And a lot of the businesses were gone. And of course, in '46, when there was a lot of the—There was riots in Richmond. And a lot of the places were burned on lower MacDonald. Was it '46? It wasn't '46, it was '60, in the sixties when they had the riots.

Rigelhaupt:

Now, with all these people coming, undoubtedly, city services had to have been strained, from sewers to water and all of the things that people need. And there's an influx of close to 100,000 people in a matter of years. In thinking back along those lines, either from schools or city services, were there things that Richmond did well to help all those people coming in, and things that maybe didn't go so well?

02-00:55:23

Fahrenholtz:

I really don't remember a lot of problems. I was busy with raising my children. My first daughter was born in 1947. And then my second daughter was born in '49, and then my son was born in '51. Then the last one was born in '55. So I was busy taking care of my youngsters. I didn't work. My husband was an accountant, and he worked. So I don't remember that—We never had any problem with electricity or water or sewers or anything. We

lived at 2401 Garvin, and then we bought a house up 36th and Esmond, a larger house, and lived there until '84. But I don't remember that there was any problem. They built different places for the underprivileged. And a lot of places were torn down. I don't remember a lot of that stuff that was going on, because it was the other part of town, as far as I was concerned. Now, my son-in-law, my daughter's husband was raised in Richmond, and he lived in downtown Richmond. And the stories that he can tell about what went on during those years, and the problems that the people had with housing and so forth. But I don't remember any problems.

Rigelhaupt: Okay. Well, maybe to close, if I could ask you to sum up how you think your work experience during World War II impacted your life.

02-00:58:11

Fahrenholtz:

Oh, it was fun. It was interesting. And it kept me busy. Everybody that worked at the yards had somebody in the service. And all the young women that worked there, either their husbands or their brothers or somebody was in the service. And we all had our own stories, and we supported each other. It was good. It was a good life, and I had a good time in those years. But of course, with all the things that went on, it was an agonizing time, as well. But everybody was going through the same thing, so it wasn't that bad. Of course, we grew up fast. And when you think about what we did, what I did being nineteen, twenty, twenty-one during those years, and the ages of the people now and what they do, or don't do, it's different. We grew up in a hurry. Well, I think we were trained differently, too. My life at home and going to school was different than what kids nowadays—The schooling was different. We learned a lot more. I know I worked at the bank after my—I went to work before my husband died, but after he died, I continued working at Mechanic's Bank. And one time my boss was talking about going to this special class that they were—several months, the other girls wanted to go for this class. And the boss said, "Well, you wouldn't know as much after you got through as Margaret does now without ever going to school." Because I went to high school, and then I went a few months to Heald's, and that was it. But we learned a lot more, I think.

Rigelhaupt: I think that's a nice place to end. Thank you.

02-00:61:05

Fahrenholtz:

You're welcome.

[End of Interview]