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Norma Gray

Rosie the Riveter

World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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Norma Gray

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Interview 1: May 10, 2011

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Redman: My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today with Norma Gray, on May 10, 2011, in Berkeley, California. This is our first tape together, and today we'll be discussing Norma's early life and childhood, through the years that followed the Second World War. So Norma, I'd like to begin with just a very simple question. Would you be willing to tell me your full name?

01-00:00:27

Gray: Yes, my name is Norma Jeanne O'Connell Gray.

Redman: Would you spell both the Norma and the Gray for me?

01-00:00:37

Gray: Norma is N-O-R-M-A; Gray is G-R-A-Y.

Redman: So I understand that you were born in Iowa. Is that correct?

01-00:00:47

Gray: That's right.

Redman: So where in Iowa were you born?

01-00:00:51

Gray: In a place that you will never have heard of, Raymond, Iowa.

Redman: Raymond, Iowa. I like to consider myself an Iowa expert in some regard, but I've never heard of Raymond, Iowa.

01-00:00:59

Gray: People in Iowa have never heard of Raymond, so you're not unusual.

Redman: [laughs] Okay.

01-00:01:04

Gray: It's about seven miles from Waterloo, a city which everybody knows.

Redman: Sure. So now, you were there between the time of your birth—and then situate me in time a little bit—you moved to California when you were how old?

01-00:01:17

Gray: Eight years old. 1936.

Redman: So we're talking, at that time, when you were growing up and attending grammar school, that would've been during the midst of the Depression.

01-00:01:31

Gray: Exactly.

Redman: So can you tell me about what that might've been like, as a small school child? Were you aware that there was some sort of catastrophic economic event going on?

01-00:01:43

Gray: Never aware of it at all, because we lived in a small town, in a little farm, and so we always had food to eat. I went to a one-room schoolhouse, where there were eight grades and one teacher.

Redman: Do you recall about how many students would've been in that school?

01-00:02:05

Gray: Probably close to fifty, I would think.

Redman: Okay, so quite a number of students for a—

01-00:02:11

Gray: There was a full row for every grade. The great thing about it was that if you could read with second grade when you were only in first, you got to go over and read with second grade.

Redman: I see.

01-00:02:24

Gray: So that when I came to California, I was in fourth grade, although I'd only gone to school for two years.

Redman: Wow. That's interesting. So the educational system that you would've experienced in rural Iowa would've been quite different from what was going on in California during that time.

01-00:02:40

Gray: Well, actually, and I had to do work over in fourth and fifth grades here that I had already done. So somehow, the teaching got through. Whether I was a good student or whether the teacher, Mrs. Golinveaux—I remember her name—was exceptional—

Redman: How would you spell Golinveaux?

01-00:02:58

Gray: It's a French name. G-O-L-I-N-V-E-A-U-X.

Redman: So she might've been a particularly good teacher then, you think.

01-00:03:08

Gray: She must've been. In that large and varied a group, yes.

Redman: Sure. Do you have any siblings?

01-00:03:16

Gray: I do.

Redman: Okay. Were they older or younger?

01-00:03:18

Gray: No, I'm the oldest.

Redman: You're the oldest, okay.

01-00:03:20

Gray: I'm the oldest of four.

Redman: So I was just curious if maybe some of your siblings had been in the same one-room school for a period of time. But maybe they were a bit young?

01-00:03:32

Gray: I think my sister may have attended for a year, my next sister. The other sister was three years old, I believe, when we came to California.

Redman: Okay. So in some sense, my sort of impression is that people in certain rural communities would've been a little shielded from the Depression, in that there was always food on the table, clothes could be—

01-00:03:58

Gray: They weren't a problem. My mother sewed and that didn't seem to be a problem. But in 1936, they just kind of summarily announced that we were going to California. It was precisely because my dad could not find a job. So he borrowed \$100 from his brother, put his three little girls and what possessions he could put, in a Model T Ford and drove across the country—

Redman: Wow.

01-00:04:30

Gray: —and stopped in Berkeley, California. Their plan was San Francisco, but it cost twenty-five cents to go across the new Bay Bridge.

Redman: Is that right? So that's how far they could afford to come.

01-00:04:43

Gray: Well, twenty-five cents would buy, probably, hamburger and bread, so yes.

Redman: Okay. So it was a significant amount.

01-00:04:50

Gray: Well, it was not significant, but enough that you didn't want to waste it.

Redman: I see. So they stopped in Berkeley. Actually, one of the things I was going to ask is precisely about the bridges. My understanding is that both the Golden Gate and the Bay Bridge were constructed between '33 and '38.

01-00:05:16

Gray: Right.

Redman: So the Bay Bridge would've been a fairly new—

01-00:05:20

Gray: *Very* new. Probably just opened, yes, in '36. Then I forget the exact year, but the Golden Gate Bridge one or two years after.

Redman: Sure. They would still have been working on the decks or something like that, finishing it in '36.

01-00:05:35

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: Tell me, though, I imagine as an eight-year-old girl, seeing the Golden Gate Bridge as it was in its final stages of construction, and the Bay Bridge, would've been quite some sight. Do you recall seeing—

01-00:05:52

Gray: I don't recall any of it. The only thing I recall about the Bay Bridge is that the approach to the Bay Bridge was along the tidal flats. The tidal flats, of course, we didn't have the sewage disposal system; the tidal flats really stunk. [laughs] That's one of my memories. The Golden Gate Bridge, I don't even recall much about that.

Redman: Until a little later on, sure.

01-00:06:19

Gray: Yes, until I was older.

Redman: A lot has been written about Iowa between the Great Depression and the Second World War. One of the things that some historians sort of go back and forth [on] is the degree to which people in the Midwest may have had sentiments of isolationism before Pearl Harbor. So during, I know, World War I, a lot of Germans living in places like Iowa or Minnesota or Wisconsin had some sympathies for wanting to at least stay out of Europe. Then a similar sort of thing was happening early on in the buildup to the Second World War, in places like Iowa. Were you aware of there being Germans and Scandinavians or anything along that line?

01-00:07:05

Gray: Well, my grandmother was second generation German. But it wasn't a factor. My grandfather was second generation Irish. They met in Iowa and married, and we never clung to either one of the nationalities, for some reason.

Redman: I see. How about religion? Were your parents religious?

01-00:07:25

Gray: We were all Catholics. Very Catholic, yeah.

Redman:

I see. Okay. Okay. You were sort of identifying with that community in Iowa. Is that something that carried over, then, when you arrived in—

01-00:07:41

Gray: Oh, definitely. That was our first place that we picked out, was the church that we would go to. We lived across the street from the church and the parish house in Iowa, and our job as little girls was to take the fresh milk from the cow over to the parish house every morning.

Redman:

I see. So that's something that you specifically recall, is that relationship—

01-00:08:04

Gray: Oh, definitely. Oh, yes, yes.

Redman:

—to the church.

01-00:08:06

Gray: I made my first communion there, yes. Our pastor was German, and he started the prayers in English and always finished them in German. So we knew the German ending to all the prayers when we were little kids.

Redman:

Was that just something that was—

01-00:08:23

Gray: He just did it, and everybody just sort of came to attention.

Redman:

Sort of went along with it.

01-00:08:28

Gray: Yeah. [laughs]

Redman:

That's so funny. Especially if you're bilingual and it's—

01-00:08:34

Gray: Well, and one of the interesting things that's happened since, the schoolhouse has become the city hall of my town. So they took over the school. The church burned down, so they built a building where they have a Catholic school on the lower floor, the church on the upper floor, all the elementary school children in the town go to the Catholic school.

Redman:

Really? Yeah, okay. Okay. So now, the word dustbowl is used quite a bit to describe the agricultural or natural disasters that struck the prairie in the 1930s. But I imagine at eight years old, you may not have real recollections of driving across the America West.

01-00:09:22

Gray: Oh, I do.

Redman: Oh, you do. Okay.

01-00:09:23

Gray: Yes, prairie dogs. That was my favorite thing, was seeing the prairie dogs. But I don't have recollection of dustbowl type things. Coming across the prairies was interesting, but what I remember, is, the prairie dogs.

Redman: Sure. So let's continue along those [lines]. Those little early memories are fascinating. What were some of your early impressions of California? Did they differ from what you sort of expected when your parents told you, we're moving to California?

01-00:09:54

Gray: Well, when my parents told me we were moving to California, I looked at the pictures in my geography book and I saw these great, high mountains. I was wondering how we were going to go across those big mountains in our little car. But came to find out how you do that: roads.

Redman: Right, yeah.

01-00:10:15

Gray: I distinctly remember seeing— Oh, what's the lake by Lake Tahoe? Donner.

Redman: Sure, yeah.

01-00:10:23

Gray: Donner Lake. It was so blue and so beautiful. That's an image that I will always recall. Was California different? Yes. Yeah, because it was an urban setting, first of all, and we really weren't used to that. Some wonderful woman took in my family, with no money, nothing, three little girls, and let us have an apartment in her apartment house on Channing Way and Shattuck Avenue. So actually, we were street children for several years before we moved. So living on the street was a whole different thing to us. We had one little store in our town, and here we just had the run of all of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley.

Redman: Okay. By street children, you mean you were allowed to run around?

01-00:11:15

Gray: Well, I mean we knew all the people. Mr. Roush in the candy shop used to let us help him do chocolates. There was a service station on our corner, and Frank, who owned the service station, let us measure the gasoline in the tanks. So we were known by all the people who ran the stores and things.

Redman: Certainly.

01-00:11:36

Gray: We had a good time, yeah. It wasn't too bad. I remember soaping Hink's windows at Halloween time. That was fun, because they had huge windows. [they laugh]

Redman: Okay. So having a good time.

01-00:11:48

Gray: Yes.

Redman: Yeah, yeah. So school was a little bit of an adjustment, but then the city itself was also, being in an urban environment—

01-00:11:54

Gray: Well, just being in an urban environment was totally new to us, yes.

Redman: Okay. Were you interacting with different types of people sort of right away?

01-00:12:05

Gray: I don't remember that too much. My parents sent me to the Catholic school, which was St. Joseph's at that time. Because the tuition was fifty cents a month, they decided that with two or three girls, they probably couldn't afford that, so I went to the public schools from sixth grade one. I went to Catholic school for fifth grade.

Redman: Okay. Then how was that transitioning, then, into the public school?

01-00:12:33

Gray: It didn't really seem to—

Redman: It didn't really phase you?

01-00:12:26

Gray: —bother [us]. No, because we had some wonderful teachers in the public school, that I can still remember their names. Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Parlier, at Washington School.

Redman: Okay. Okay. What were some of the subjects that you were learning about, that you enjoyed? Do you have any particular subjects in school, maybe the late elementary school years? Were you inclined to math or science or history or—

01-00:13:01

Gray: Music.

Redman: Music.

01-00:13:03

Gray: [laughs] My mother was very musical; my sister became an opera singer; so yes, music kind of was our thing, yes.

Redman: I see. For the entire family.

01-00:13:13

Gray: Yes.

Redman: It was an activity that you shared.

01-00:13:14

Gray: Oh, yeah. Except my dad; he was the audience.

Redman: [laughs] So he might sit—

01-00:13:22

Gray: Lie on the floor.

Redman: Oh, really?

01-00:13:23

Gray: Half asleep, yes, and listen. [laughs] And go to many, many, yes, recitals and that kind of thing.

Redman: So both of your parents, then, seemed very dedicated to you as children.

01-00:13:34

Gray: Well, I think that's one of the reasons that we didn't really feel— We knew we were poor. This was something that we knew. We recognized when we came to California, that we were poor. We hadn't recognized that in Iowa, as children.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:13:51

Gray: Now we recognized it, because we were with a whole different group of people, so we did know that we were poor.

Redman: In some sense, I can imagine being in a larger urban setting, where there are suddenly all of these hierarchies that become obvious, in terms of clothing and—

01-00:14:07

Gray: Oh, yes. That was a big thing. Yes, our shoes didn't quite match up to our peers' shoes. We noticed that. As I say, for the first time, we really noticed those things.

Redman: One of the things that I've found is that a number of people who were in California had specific attitudes, in particular about the people from Arkansas and Oklahoma that came during the war years. But the migration started much earlier, out to California, in instances like yours. I'm curious if there were attitudes about Iowa.

01-00:14:46

Gray: Not about Iowa, but about Okies. That was the word we heard, was Okies, for the people from Oklahoma, where things were much worse than in Iowa. And the Iowa people settled in the Long Beach area. My other grandparents, the {Simpsons?}, settled in Southern California. We came to Northern California,

for which I'm eternally grateful. [they laugh] But the great Iowa group was down in Long Beach, California.

Redman: I see. Okay. Okay. So were you ever called an Okie or an Arkie, may I ask?

01-00:15:22

Gray: No. No.

Redman: So it's interesting to me— Go ahead.

01-00:15:26

Gray: Well, I was going to say Berkeley was already, in 1936, a very integrated city. It's one of the great—what—privileges that my kids have had growing up, that they grew up with every kind of people. That was just taken for granted here. If you use the word diversity in St. Joseph's Parish, they don't even listen to you because what does that mean? This is how we are.

Redman: Sure. It's harder to identify with.

01-00:15:57

Gray: I doubt that I had ever seen a black person in Iowa.

Redman: Sure. Sure.

01-00:16:02

Gray: It didn't seem to really mean too much. At least when we were kids.

Redman: One of the reasons why I ask is because my sort of understanding, too of the Ku Klux Klan was that in places like Iowa, Wisconsin or Minnesota, it was never about African Americans, because there were so very few.

01-00:16:24

Gray: There weren't any, right.

Redman: But instead, it might've been an anti-Irish or an anti-Catholic sentiment.

01-00:16:30

Gray: I never heard of the Ku Klux Klan until much later.

Redman: Okay, years later.

01-00:16:25

Gray: Yeah, till I was much older.

Redman: So let's see. So I'm curious what the other students in Berkeley may have been like and if you made a number of friends early on, then. Let's say when you get to the public school, did you make a number of friends?

01-00:16:53

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: What were they like?

01-00:16:55

Gray: In fact, I still have those friends I made in Washington School, yes.

Redman: Okay, yeah. That's fantastic.

01-00:17:02

Gray: Yes, and Willard Junior High. Yes.

Redman: Okay. It's probably a large part of the reason why you're still here, I would imagine.

01-00:17:09

Gray: Well, no, my husband was a native Berkeleyan and we liked Berkeley. Well, this is getting beyond what you want, but when we married and were looking for housing after the war, housing was absolutely— There wasn't any. When it came time to buy a house, we looked for about five years, before we found this house. They had built the first tract of housing out in Walnut Creek, and it was manageable for our salary, but we had no car and we had three kids. So you needed two cars, because my husband's business was here. So luckily, we did not move to Walnut Creek; we stayed in Berkeley .

Redman: Stayed in Berkeley.

01-00:17:54

Gray: It's our community, our church, our schools, everything.

Redman: Fantastic. All right, that's something we can return to, absolutely. Let's talk about housing, but let's actually go back to your sort of elementary school years. Your parents' house, then, when they came to the Bay Area, can you talk a little bit about what your housing arrangement was like? You mentioned that someone had taken in this—

01-00:18:25

Gray: This wonderful woman, who had moved from Piedmont because of the Depression. They had a house in Piedmont, and I don't know whether they lost that house, but they owned the apartment house on Channing Way and Shattuck Ave and they were living there at the time. She invited our family in, and I think within a month, my mom was managing the apartment house; my dad had found a job. We lived there, I think, until I was probably in eighth or ninth grade, and then moved to a house. It was an apartment. There were, I believe, six apartments, maybe, in there. We made lots of friends in the apartments.

Redman: Within the apartment.

01-00:19:12

Gray: Yeah, friends that we still know.

Redman: Were those families, many of them, from California? Or were others, like you, that had come from elsewhere?

01-00:19:25

Gray: Some were from California, some had come from elsewhere. We had a wonderful arrangement that whoever had money at the end of the month made a big pot of soup or a big pot of beans, and everybody shared. Yes, there was a lot of cooperation during those early years. One of the men in there, in the apartment house, worked for a grocery down in Oakland, which was— It was called Swan's Market, and it was a bunch of little kiosks. Everybody had their own little stall. So he worked in one of those, so he always was supplying food.

Redman: Okay, different kinds of things.

01-00:20:05

Gray: Oh, yeah. As I say, there was much cooperation between people at that stage, in the thirties.

Redman: Sure. It sounds like it's due, in large part, because it was challenging economic times for everyone.

01-00:20:21

Gray: Oh, yes. Definitely.

Redman: There was a need and a desire to cooperate.

01-00:20:34

Gray: Definitely. Yes.

Redman: Okay. Okay.

01-00:20:27

Gray: I should mention, too that my mother was a very talented musician. That gave her entrée to a lot of people she probably would not have met otherwise.

Redman: Interesting. How so? So through performances?

01-00:20:38

Gray: Well, through the church, she met many. The woman who took us in at the apartment house had been a professional singer, and she recognized my mother's talent. Also my sister's, later, and subsidized her lessons for many years. So just by a talent. My dad, he was an accountant. He had been an accountant; that's where he met my mother in Iowa, when they were working for— What's the umbrella insurance company?

Redman: Oh, gosh, I can picture it in my—

01-00:21:14

Gray: Yeah. Well, whatever that was.

Redman: The red umbrella, yeah.

01-00:21:16

Gray: Yeah, the red umbrella. That's where they met. She was a secretary and he was an accountant. I believe he was nine or ten years older than she. But he found a job right away. He also became a machinist, and he was a very fine machinist, and worked at the Hall-Scott company for the rest of his life, till he retired.

Redman: I see. Can we talk a little bit about music at the church in Berkeley? It sounds like your siblings and your mother were very active in the church and musically. Can you talk about how maybe you might've been involved in music at the Catholic church in Berkeley?

01-00:21:58

Gray: How I was?

Redman: Yeah.

01-00:22:00

Gray: Well, my mother joined the choir. We had an adult choir. She also was a pianist, and so accompanying. But through that, she met many very, very fine people who stayed— One of the people she met became our adopted aunt, through two generations. Took care of us. Two people that she met, in fact, became two adopted aunts who helped us when we were little girls, helped our children when they arrived, yeah.

Redman: So there was a real sense of community that—

01-00:22:31

Gray: Oh, oh, *very* much.

Redman: Can you help me figure out, was there a relationship, do you think, a special relationship to music and those sorts of friendships?

01-00:22:45

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: How so?

01-00:22:47

Gray: My friendship with my husband. [laughs]

Redman: Oh, really? Okay.

01-00:22:51

Gray: Well, that's a story for the war years. But no. I didn't join the choir until I was about sixteen, and my sister didn't join the choir. My mother was the choir person. So we were busy at school and we sang at school and appeared in shows and things like that.

Redman: Okay. What sorts of instruments would've been common in your household to play?

01-00:23:15

Gray: Well, I played the violin. My littlest sister played the cello, and my other sister was a singer. She did the piano, too, but she was primarily a singer.

Redman: Primarily a singer. So an extremely musical family.

01-00:23:28

Gray: My brother, who came along after we came to California, he played the trumpet a little, but he's not a real musician. [Redman laughs] He played hockey.

Redman: Okay. Yeah, so he had a few different interests.

01-00:23:41

Gray: [laughs] Right.

Redman: It must've become clear for you at some point, that you would attend college, and then eventually, this decision to attend the University of California, Berkeley. Did your parents always encourage their daughter to go to college? Or was this a decision that you came to on your own? You're shaking your head no.

01-00:24:07

Gray: No, college was not even thought about in our situation. Although my father had a good job. My mother didn't work for many, many years. But when you got out of high school, you were expected to get a job. Many of my classmates when to work for the City of Berkeley and other things. I had a girlfriend living around the corner from us, who was going to Cal. I hadn't even thought about going to Cal. I hadn't thought about what I was going to do. I was sixteen. I graduated very early. So it got to be August and I thought, well, that might be fun; I could do that. Because my girlfriend was going to go. So you go and get your transcript from high school, walk up to the university on a day they appoint, go to the table that has your initial on it, pay your \$27.50, get your class schedule and go to school.

Redman: Is that right?

01-00:25:05

Gray: That's how you went to school at Cal, yes. A little different, yes.

Redman: A little bit of a different process.

01-00:25:11

Gray: Yeah, a little bit different. \$27.50 were your student fees for the semester. Living in Berkeley, in Northern California, you didn't pay any tuition at all.

Tuition was free. This'll kill people. [they laugh] You got to go to all the football games except the big game; you had to pay ten dollars to go to that.

Redman: [laughs] So that just came with the fees.

01-00:25:35

Gray: Yeah. So I didn't make any big decision; I just decided to go to school. I worked during school. I worked for the forestry library, I worked in San Francisco, in Transamerica. That was where I came to working on campus for the Manhattan Project, in my last year there.

Redman: Okay. Let me just jot a note. What year, do you recall, when you first registered for classes?

01-00:26:09

Gray: Well, it had to be in August, and I got out in {??}, so it would be August '44.

Redman: August of '44.

01-00:26:16

Gray: August of '44.

Redman: Okay. So let's step back then a moment and talk about the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked. What do you recall about that?

01-00:26:29

Gray: I remember the announcement on the radio. I was in Berkeley High at the time, probably tenth grade. Yeah, it was the first year in Berkeley High. What they did was gather the whole student body. Now, people don't believe this and say, well, that can't be true now, because I don't think they would ever do it now. But the whole student body gathered on a grass area in front of the main building, and they actually played over the loud speaker, the congress voting on the war.

Redman: Is that right?

01-00:27:07

Gray: Mrs. Rankin [Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin] voted no, at the end. I just remember that so clearly, because we were all assembled.

Redman: Everyone listening to those—

01-00:27:18

Gray: Yeah, everyone.

Redman: —votes coming in. Interesting. Okay.

01-00:27:23

Gray: Well, I guess the school thought it was important that we would hear that, yes.

Redman: Sure. So this would've been on December 8, then, the next day.

01-00:27:29

Gray: Well, whatever day was the—

Redman: Yeah, the vote. December 8. Yeah, yeah. So that must've been a pretty significant moment, seeing all of these other students standing around and listening together.

01-00:27:43

Gray: Right. Well, I don't think we really got the impact of what was going on. Okay, we're going to go to war. What does that mean? It didn't too much to us. If you had people in Hawaii, it probably did; but here, we felt very safe. Then there was the whole thing about the Japanese being taken away—

Redman: Let's talk about that.

01-00:28:11

Gray: —which was painful.

Redman: Did you have any Japanese acquaintances by this point?

01-00:28:15

Gray: Oh, at school, schoolmates.

Redman: Okay, schoolmates. Sure.

01-00:28:17

Gray: I didn't notice too much that they were leaving, but my husband's family lived next to a very prominent Japanese dentist, and he and his family were taken away. I know that that made a very deep impact on many, many people, that that happened.

Redman: Now, at the time, there was some awareness of this taking place, that the Japanese were being taken away; but did you have complicated feelings about that at all at the time? Or did you think it was—

01-00:28:52

Gray: Not at the time, no. I can see now in my later years, how silly that was. It was panic. Like countries always do, they panic and take steps that they probably never should do. Yeah.

Redman: So there was some fear there that—

01-00:29:09

Gray: I'm sure that that's what it was done; it was done out of fear that there were agents here.

Redman: A lot of people—you, for instance—had more or less— Only in your life where you had been aware or conscious, FDR had been your president.

01-00:29:27

Gray: That's right. Exactly.

Redman:

So his making this decision— A lot of people, I know, would've supported the president, and especially at a time of war—

01-00:29:39

Gray: Probably, yes.

Redman:

—may not have thought very critically about that decision.

01-00:29:44

Gray: I don't think we thought critically about it at all; I think we just did it, yes.

Redman:

Sure, sure. Okay. So some of the seniors at Berkeley High would've been eligible, certainly, to enlist or be drafted. I presume that many of them enlisted right after graduation. Is that correct?

01-00:30:06

Gray: Well, as freshmen, we weren't too aware of that because the boys in our class weren't. But as we got older, yes.

Redman:

It became clear that many {inaudible}.

01-00:30:16

Gray: One of our classmates was killed in the war.

Redman:

So now tell me a little bit about your graduation, then. Did you sort of think that you were going to do— It seems like there was maybe this periodic moment where you weren't certain what you were going to do next, and then your girlfriend said that she was registering at Cal, and so you sort of went. What did you sign up for? Do you remember what type of classes you would've registered for?

01-00:30:50

Gray: Yeah. I took Spanish, history, public speaking, English, and finally ended up in the drama department.

Redman:

I see. Okay.

01-00:31:04

Gray: That's where I ended up. But just took the normal courses. I wasn't planning any special career or anything, [laughs] when I went to college. I was only there two and a half years before I left, so— No. I knew I had to get a job, and I did work all the time that I was going to college. But it was just expected that you would get a job and start working. As I say, many of my college mates went to work immediately for one of the stores downtown or the Berkeley City Hall. They tell about that.

Redman: Okay. I'm actually going to jump to a question that I'd initially put closer to the end. I'd like to ask, in 1944—so about when you were in college—there was a major explosion that took place at a place called Port Chicago. Apparently, it was loud and strong enough that it shook houses and shattered some windows in Berkeley.

01-00:32:04

Gray: We lived on McGee and Channing Way. We were sitting at the dinner table and the house shook, yeah. You could hear the explosion from here, and feel it from here.

Redman: Okay. I know some earthquakes, it suddenly feels like you're on a surfboard accidentally, or a skateboard, and others are more like a violent shaking. Do you recall?

01-00:32:28

Gray: This was a boom. Just a boom. I remember the windows shaking, but not breaking.

Redman: What did that make you think at the time?

01-00:32:41

Gray: Well, we wondered what had happened. I don't think we ran out and were scared that somebody was bombing us, because we hadn't heard sirens or anything. We had sirens here all the time and they would go off, and we had a block warden for our blackouts. He was a tiger. {inaudible} one point of light, he was knocking on your door.

Redman: On your door, telling you to—

01-00:33:05

Gray: Oh, yes. We took those things very seriously. And we had rationing of certain items.

Redman: The explosion on that day, then, sort of one of the interesting things to me is that you can't just run and turn on CNN or MSNBC.

01-00:33:23

Gray: Oh, yes. Well, you went to turn on the radio. Oh, yes, you did go—

Redman: Then were there radio reports on that event right away, do you recall?

01-00:33:30

Gray: I don't remember that. But I remember then hearing that it was an explosion of an ammunition dump, I believe, yeah, afterward. I remember hearing what it was afterward, but I don't remember exactly getting panicky or anything when theater explosion happened. I remember it.

Redman: Okay, interesting. Great, yeah. I wanted to make sure to ask about that event. So the next question that I'd like to ask, I'd like to ask a number of questions about what other students were like at Cal. I'm curious how the faculty reacted, in some sense, to the war. Did it seem to you like they were just sort of carrying on with their classes in a routine way? Or would they address any events that had happened in the war? I'm thinking of for instance, there was a big battle at Midway, and the next day the newspapers headlines would've been about that. Would your professors have spoken about that at all, or was it, let's focus on drama and music?

01-00:34:42

Gray: No, I don't remember any talk about the war in the classrooms. I really don't. I think that's come much later. I think Vietnam probably started that whole process. But in our— no. We knew what was happening, but it wasn't so immediate and so vital right then. It was happening far away.

Redman: Okay. It was a pretty distant thing.

01-00:35:10

Gray: It was, yes.

Redman: Sure. Hawaii, there's a lot of ocean.

01-00:35:13

Gray: Yeah. Oh, yes!

Redman: But on the other hand, I know there were fears periodically about submarines off of the West Coast.

01-00:35:21

Gray: Oh, periodically, yeah, but—

Redman: Periodically, but you weren't too effected by that.

01-00:35:25

Gray: No. No, I can't remember that we really took that very seriously.

Redman: Okay. Now, I've heard a lot in these interviews about rationing; but one of the things that I haven't heard much about is what rationing would've been like for a student at Cal during the war, how it may have been. Was it any different, or was it more or less the same?

01-00:35:49

Gray: No, I was living at home, so it didn't bother me at all.

Redman: I see. Okay.

01-00:35:52

Gray: No. No, I lived at home, so it wasn't— Yeah.

Redman: Okay. So was it your mother in the household, that would take care of the rationing?

01-00:36:01

Gray: Yes.

Redman: Do you recall any of the details of how that would work? She would get the rationing books?

01-00:36:07

Gray: You got ration books, and then when you went to buy certain items, you had to give a ration stamp. When you ran out of stamps, then you didn't get the item anymore. I believe they sent out ration books on a frequent basis— maybe monthly, maybe six weekly, maybe more than that. I don't remember exactly when, but I know they were renewed. Yes. Yeah.

Redman: Okay. Now, my understanding, when you look in these ration books, at least the ones I've seen, there are these blue little coupons—

01-00:36:35

Gray: That's right, blue little stamps.

Redman: —inside, on these stamps, are things like— I sort of, in my mind's eye, had imagined them as there would be some eggs and milk or a steak or things like that.

01-00:36:50

Gray: [laughs] Oh, you would want a picture?

Redman: Yeah.

01-00:36:54

Gray: Interesting.

Redman: But instead, there are pictures of a tank or an American flag or something like that.

01-00:37:00

Gray: No, we were very patriotic.

Redman: Right, yeah. So my sort of question then, that I haven't yet figured this out, is how you could look at a ration book that has pictures of stamps or tanks or American flags and say, okay, these are how many meat rations we have left or these are how many— The closest thing I've gotten to an answer is that people would just sort of hand over their booklet to a butcher and they would tell you maybe how much you could get.

01-00:37:26

Gray: It didn't say what it was for on there?

Redman: I haven't figured out what those corresponded to. Do you know?

01-00:37:33

Gray: I don't, because I don't remember— I remember the blue stamps, but I don't remember whether they— They must have identified some things because there were tires, there were gasoline, there were big items. There were shoes. So you had to have your stamps identified somehow, because some things, of course, you would get more of than others.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:37:57

Gray: So I don't remember that, because I didn't take care of that.

Redman: Now, do you remember rationing as it related to nylon stockings or pantyhose or things like that?

01-00:38:11

Gray: Well, nylon stockings, you couldn't even find.

Redman: You couldn't find nylon stockings.

01-00:38:15

Gray: You couldn't even find nylon stockings, yeah.

Redman: Okay. So instead, you'd have to replace them with—?

01-00:38:19

Gray: I don't know *what* we did. That wasn't a worry to me. [laughs] I was sixteen or seventeen; maybe it should've been a worry, but it doesn't seem to have been a worry to me at the time. But I know there were no nylon stockings; you just couldn't get them.

Redman: Okay. I know everybody's experience with rationing seems to be different. Did you have trouble getting by, as far as anything? Or did it always seem like you had enough?

01-00:38:47

Gray: It always seemed like we had enough, yeah. I think butter was one of the things that was rationed. So they were putting out oleo, margarine. But you had a little coloring— [laughs]

Redman: Packet.

01-00:39:03

Gray: —packet, and you had to color your own butter, and then you could put it in these little things, like kids would make cubes out of it. [laughs] {It was like butter?}.

Redman: So now, I've asked people what it tasted like, and the only answer that I've gotten so far is that it didn't taste like butter.

01-00:39:22

Gray: It didn't taste like much. It tasted like probably what it tastes like today.

Redman: Okay, like margarine, okay.

01-00:39:27

Gray: Yeah. It had flavor, but not like butter. No, no. In fact, now they make one that's better than butter, actually.

Redman: Okay. So now I would like to ask another question related to students. Not everyone can really comment on this, but I'd like to know about how the male and female students at UC Berkeley would've interacted at the time. Was there any outright sexism in the classroom? Or were women on a fairly equal footing to their male counterparts at that time?

01-00:40:09

Gray: Well, being a person who has never, never felt that, I really can't answer too well.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:40:19

Gray: Yeah, I just have never felt any of that anywhere.

Redman: I see. Okay. How about in terms of courtship and dating on campus? What would have been some of the ways in which young men and women on the campus in the forties would've dated? Would you say dating culture was different then than maybe it is now?

01-00:40:48

Gray: I don't know because I didn't date very much. But most of it was the fraternities and sororities, I know. They were the big factor in any dating that went on, and parties and that kind of thing.

Redman: Okay. So fraternities and sororities would host different parties.

01-00:41:06

Gray: Yeah, yeah. They were very good. I remember our Spanish teacher wanted to have a special party for our Spanish classes, and one of the girls offered her sorority house and that's where we had it. They were very open to doing things like that. Some of my friends were sorority girls. I was not a sorority girl; didn't want to join one. They were very open, very good.

Redman: Excellent. Okay, interesting.

01-00:41:38

Gray: Yeah. They were probably the primary place for dating on campus. Unless you met somebody in your class. Yeah, yeah.

Redman:

Okay. The next sort of things might've been removed from what a lot of students would've participated in, but certainly your family may have talked about either of these things, or community members. I'm curious about both victory gardens and war bonds.

01-00:42:11

Gray: War bonds, not so much. I remember buying; people did buy war bonds, and just kept them, because they would be good someday. But victory gardens, my dad always had a garden.

Redman:

Is that right?

01-00:42:24

Gray: Victory gardens, people did make victory gardens. I think it's a thing to keep you happy, more than being very successful at keeping you in food. Or keeping {inaudible} groups in food.

Redman:

So that was more, you think, a technique of—

01-00:42:44

Gray: Oh, I'm sure. It was some kind of a ploy or a technique to keep you happy.

Redman:

Interesting.

01-00:42:50

Gray: Or keep you involved. Keep you involved.

Redman:

And feel like you're contributing.

01-00:42:55

Gray: Yes, and feel like you're doing something, right.

Redman:

Interesting. Do you think that's a pretty unique thing, or were there other sorts of activities? I know people were encouraged to do things like donate blood and there were other sorts of drives. Do you think many of these were sort of orchestrated to make people feel as though they were—

01-00:43:12

Gray: Oh, I think. The war bond thing was, of course, to get money. My dad worked for Hall-Scott, who made engines for ships. So he was *very* involved. This is one of the things they did. Companies that produced a very good product got an E for excellence; kind of an award and a flag or a pennant that went along. I remember he was so proud that his company got one.

Redman:

Okay. I see.

01-00:43:46

Gray: So there were things that, yes, people were doing.

Redman:

Sure. So now, Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond and San Francisco changed a lot during the war years.

01-00:43:58

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman:

During an influx of a massive number of migrants coming into the city or the area. Can you speak about what that may have been like, to live through that transition? All of these new people coming in from all over.

01-00:44:16

Gray: No. [laughs]

Redman:

No. Okay.

01-00:44:18

Gray: Well, I really didn't notice that a lot, no. That didn't impact my life in any way that I can remember. No.

Redman:

Were you aware that the shipyards at Kaiser—

01-00:44:32

Gray: Oh, definitely. Because we heard about that all the time. That workshop our big war effort, actually, workshop the shipyards.

Redman:

So that was sort of the main thing that people were thinking about, as far as an industry that was going on in the area.

01-00:44:48

Gray: And we had the army base and we had the navy base right close by. So those were the big places that we thought about as part of the war effort.

Redman:

Were there a lot of men in uniform in that area, do you recall?

01-00:45:01

Gray: Oh, yes, yes. Yes. I was a little too young to be involved with much of that, but St. Joseph's participated greatly in a USO that was up on Grove Street, a few blocks from the church, and the girls were always going there. The older girls would go there, yes.

Redman:

Okay. So the older girls, I understand, often from the sororities from Berkeley, would come and dance with the soldiers.

01-00:45:26

Gray: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. We would have dances. We had dances at St. Joseph's, yes, were the sailors, the soldiers would come. It was just part of the thing that you did.

Redman: Sure. Sure. Now, periodically, you would sing with your sisters at some of these events, is that correct?

01-00:45:42

Gray: Oh, my sister and I had sung together all our lives, actually, so we found a little— Well, I don't know how we were contacted, in fact, but we joined a little USO group that did— Oh, the guy was a fire eater and did all kinds of things, and we had other acts. Then my sister and I sang, and we did USO shows all around this area. We were like sixteen or fourteen or something, but we were cute, so—

Redman: Right. [laughs]

01-00:46:18

Gray: And we could actually sing, so— Yeah. We had a good time doing that, but we didn't think too much about that; that was just fun for us.

Redman: I see. Okay. So it wasn't necessarily thought of as a contribution, so much as it was a fun activity.

01-00:46:32

Gray: No, just it was a fun activity for us. One of my granddaughters interviewed me once about how it was to be a teenager during the war. I said, "We had a lot of fun." Her teacher at school wouldn't believe that.

Redman: Really? That's something I do actually believe.

01-00:46:49

Gray: Yes!

Redman: That's something that a lot of people have said to me, this idea that there was a war going on, and I think people were aware of that.

01-00:46:59

Gray: Oh, very much aware it. Oh, yes.

Redman: But at the same time, people were moving to new places, experiencing new things.

01-00:47:06

Gray: That's right, doing things. And there were a lot of new things to do.

Redman: How about in terms of music? I'm curious because in San Francisco and Oakland, there would've been quite a music scene, in terms of jazz or things like that.

01-00:47:25

Gray: Swing was the big thing at that time, and we had many, many, many groups, big orchestras who had singers, and that was the whole genre of the time, yeah.

Redman: Many of them would perform all over the Bay Area.

01-00:47:40

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: Ranging from Richmond, they would perform for the shipyard workers; to Oakland and Berkeley and San Francisco.

01-00:47:46

Gray: Oh! Well, as I say, we had the naval base and the army base, we had Oak Knoll Hospital, where the veterans who were wounded would come. We had a lot of places around here where they needed entertainment, yes. I know our church choir when to Oak Knoll to sing.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

01-00:48:03

Gray: Oh, yeah.

Redman: And those sorts of experiences were fun for you.

01-00:48:08

Gray: Well, yes. It was an experience and it was fun.

Redman: Was it due in part to the fact that it was different and out of the norm, in some sense, or just being young?

01-00:48:21

Gray: It was part of the thing that we did all the time. If we weren't singing for the soldiers, we would've been singing for somebody else. No, no kidding. It was just part of our whole makeup and our whole nature, and we just did it and enjoyed.

Redman: Okay. I like that. I have another question that's a community-related question that might be a bit far afield. I'm curious about how students in particular, but other people in the Berkeley area, may have gotten around campus, as far as transportation. This is a very simple question. Were bicycles a common sight in that era, do you recall?

01-00:48:59

Gray: I don't recall as many bikes in that era as I recall bikes today.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:49:05

Gray: Well, yeah, it's become a big thing today. People walked. There was a good public transportation system; you're using it yourself.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:49:15

Gray: We had streetcars and we did a lot of our traveling on streetcars; we had buses; we had trains that ran to San Francisco; we had Red trains that went up and down from Oakland to Berkeley. So there was a lot of that kind of thing, and walking. One of the very vivid memories that I have is walking to the University of California for an eight o'clock class, during daylight savings time, with the moon and the stars coming out. Yes.

Redman: Sure. Okay. Okay. So a lot of walking.

01-00:49:56

Gray: A lot of walking, yes. Berkeley is a walking city. You can walk in Berkeley.

Redman: Right. You'll get strong calves if you—

01-00:50:05

Gray: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Redman: —walk up some of the hills, but it's definitely a walkable city.

01-00:50:09

Gray: Yes. But it was not a bicycle culture, like it is now.

Redman: I see, okay. How about ferries?

01-00:50:16

Gray: The ferries didn't last very long after the bridges came in. I remember definitely going to San Francisco on a ferry. We had a ferry {mole?}, they called it—or whatever they called it, a ferry dock—in Berkeley at the time, and you could go from Berkeley over to Treasure Island. Treasure Island got a lot of ferry traffic in 1939, when the World's Fair was there.

Redman: Sure. Can you talk about the World's Fair a little bit? Did you happen to go to the fairgrounds in '39?

01-00:50:51

Gray: Oh, loved it! That was *real* fun. They had a food pavilion, where they gave out free— What do this stuff now? Frozen custard ice cream cones. So [laughs] that was always our first place. But no, I loved it. We had wonderful shows. They had a big cavalcade of the West and Billy Rose brought the aqua show here and oh, it was really— It was *very* exciting for a young person.

Redman: Do you remember seeing anything along the lines of anthropology at the fair or art? I imagine a young person may not have been particularly interested in this, but things like touring exhibits from the Smithsonian or anything along those lines?

01-00:51:39
Gray: No, I don't remember seeing any of those. I just remember the big things. I have a son who's a newspaper editor, who was very involved in historical work about the fair. The fair was just like going to Disneyland is today, only a little different. But it was great.

Redman: I can imagine all the lights and sounds and the people.

01-00:52:05
Gray: Oh, it was wonderful. [As] I say, it was just like going to Disneyland and having a really good time. Yes. And beautiful, beautiful shows they did. My dad liked Sally Rand. [they laugh] They even had Sally Rand.

Redman: Okay. Yeah. So a big deal. A big deal.

01-00:52:25
Gray: Well, it was. I belonged to a little orchestra and we actually went there and played.

Redman: I see, okay. So there was an involvement there.

01-00:52:35
Gray: Yeah, very much, yes.

Redman: So you would've been to the fairgrounds on multiple—

01-00:52:39
Gray: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Whenever we had enough money to go, we did.

Redman: I can imagine. Okay, so let's see. We've gotten to a number of the UC questions. You took a couple of years of classes at UC, and then eventually, did you leave school to work for the forestry library?

01-00:53:05
Gray: I left school to marry a man called John Gray is why—

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

01-00:53:10
Gray: —I left school.

Redman: So can you tell me how you met him?

01-00:53:13
Gray: Yeah.

Redman: What's that story?

01-00:53:16

Gray:

Well, the story was that he came back from the South Pacific. He was in the South Pacific; they were getting ready to invade Japan. Luckily, they dropped the atom bomb—which I was working on at the time, but I didn't even know—so they all got to come home. Well, he came to Washington, the state of Washington, up the Columbia River. I forget what ship he came home on; the Enterprise, I think. Then they sent them on the one that's in Oakland now.

Redman:

The Red Oak Victory?

01-00:53:53

Gray:

No, no, the other ship that's there.

Redman:

Oh, sorry, that's in Richmond. I know what you're talking about.

01-00:53:59

Gray:

The aircraft carrier that's sitting there now that you can visit, because we went to visit it last Father's Day. He came through the Golden Gate on that thing.

Redman:

Is that right?

01-00:54:07

Gray:

I took some pictures he had taken of coming through, which the people were very happy to get. On Christmas Day of 1945? Yes, it would've been Christmas Day, 1945. He came to St. Joseph's Church. I was directing the girls choir at the time, and all the men started coming back. So I met him on Christmas Day and that's the end of the story. [laughs]

Redman:

There we go. Okay. All right.

01-00:54:36

Gray:

Yeah. Then the young men started coming back. Of course, I think there were seven weddings out of— We didn't have eHarmony or anything like that, we had the church choir. [Redman laughs] As the young men came back, then they re-formed the choir that they had had, and the girls were kind of displaced, but that was alright.

Redman:

Sure. Okay.

01-00:54:57

Gray:

But that was how I met him, yes.

Redman:

I'll have some questions about the end of the war and then the life that the two of you established together. But then in the final two years of your time at Cal— [phone rings]

01-00:55:14

Gray:

Just leave that.

Redman: Oh, okay. The last two years of your time at Cal, you were working for the Manhattan Project.

01-00:55:22

Gray: No, I worked there for only one year.

Redman: You worked there for one year.

01-00:55:24

Gray: I had only worked for them one year, maybe less than one year, yeah.

Redman: So '44, '45, about?

01-00:55:29

Gray: It would've been, yeah.

Redman: Okay. So can you tell me how you ended up finding this job?

01-00:55:36

Gray: Because on campus, they have jobs for you. So I went and applied and that was the job I got.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:55:44

Gray: Yeah. That was it.

Redman: Now, you had to go through some security checks.

01-00:55:48

Gray: Well, I know the FBI came to our home and to the neighbors, and I was fingerprinted, and I got a Social Security number.

Redman: Oh, is that right?

01-00:55:58

Gray: Yep. My Social Security is lower than my husband's.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

01-00:56:04

Gray: Because that didn't happen until you were working, and he had not been really doing work before he went in the service.

Redman: Okay. I see. So was that sort of a scary experience? Or was that an exciting experience?

01-00:56:24

Gray: We had no idea what was going on. We just knew something was going on. The cyclotron had been built in Berkeley, the cyclotron building.

Redman: So you were aware of the cyclotron.

01-00:56:38

Gray: We were aware of the cyclotron, very definitely. We knew that they were trying to smash atoms there. That was the whole thing, they were smashing atoms.

Redman: Okay. Say, I'm going to have to pause.

Begin Audiofile 2 05-10-2011.mp3

Redman: All right. My name is Sam Redman and I'm back. This is our second tape of two tapes today with Norma Gray, on May 10, 2011, in Berkeley, California. When we left off, we were talking about how Norma found work on the University of California campus that eventually turned out to be part of the Manhattan Project. In the interim, between tapes, we were actually talking a little bit more and we were reflecting a little bit more on, I would say, American culture during the war versus sort of today, being in two wars. In sort of a similar sense, we were in wars on two fronts; today we're in two different wars. Sort of the awareness or lack of awareness of certain things happening and the instantaneous nature of our media today. The Port Chicago disaster, for instance, it'd be twenty-four news today.

02-00:01:09

Gray: Oh, yes. Twenty-four hours for a week, probably.

Redman: Yeah, certainly. So how do you think that changes ideas and feelings and sentiments towards events like the war? In some sense, do you think people were shielded a little bit from the gore or the violence of war?

02-00:01:29

Gray: We probably were; but today, we're so overwhelmed with gore and violence that it becomes a problem for us. It's just something that you begin to accept, which is maybe good, maybe not good.

Redman: Right. So to a certain degree, the violence still doesn't register to us, but it's because we're over-exposed rather than being maybe under-exposed.

02-00:01:54

Gray: Right. Under-exposed. Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay. I'd like to ask you another question related to museums, which is something I'm personally interested in. My understanding is that in about 1943 or 1944, people started to have a little more money in their pocket, they were maybe working in defense industries, and some people started spending their money on going to museums. Certainly not everyone, but my attendance increased during that time. So I'm just curious, in terms of awareness of the world, as far as the natural world or the globe, you're reading suddenly about

the Philippines and Japan and you're reading about Australia or you're reading about the countries in Europe. Did the war sort of stimulate, do you think, an interest in the world as a place, politically and environmentally and geographically?

02-00:02:59

Gray: Well, I notice something very similar today. You practically know the names of all those Arab countries you never knew anything about in your whole life. I suppose that the same thing happened during the war. Young men had been to all these places, so when they came back, they had an idea of what these were. I suppose yes, that you would. But I see it as if you're bombarded with this news every day about other countries, of course, you're going to get to know where they are, who they are, just like today.

Redman: Sure.

02-00:03:40

Gray: [As] I say, a few years ago, I bet nobody could've named the Arab countries.

Redman: Right.

02-00:03:43

Gray: Now everybody can name them. That's just what happens. Of course, you have more awareness, and maybe those who are adventurous want to go and see what that's all about, yes.

Redman: And other people just want to learn about Burma, perhaps.

02-00:03:57

Gray: Right. Right.

Redman: Okay. Interesting. So let's talk about, then, what your job became on campus.

02-00:04:05

Gray: Well, my job was great. I had what was called an A pass, which meant I could go into any of those buildings any time. I was a messenger girl. What they did was send me, with blueprints and plans locked in a huge, red, locked tube—

Redman: Quite large.

02-00:04:28

Gray: Oh, very large, yeah. It was quite large.

Redman: Several feet.

02-00:04:31

Gray: Yes. So that was my job, to take those either to the cyclotron or over to where I think I met Mr. Phillips. Who's the man for the science library? Edward—

Redman: Teller? No.

02-00:04:52

Gray: No, not Teller, Oppenheimer.

Redman: Oppenheimer.

02-00:04:56

Gray: But the one that the— Lawrence.

Redman: Lawrence.

02-00:05:02

Gray: Lawrence Hall of Science is named after— There was one other fellow, and I've forgotten his name. But they were four other men who were very vitally involved in what was going on, and I met them. I think three or four of them died of radiation poisoning, because—

Redman: Oh, is that right?

02-00:05:16

Gray: —they really didn't know what was happening. So my job was to transport plans, in locked cases, to the cyclotron, to wherever they told me.

Redman: Okay. Now, did you wear any sort of uniform doing this work?

02-00:05:30

Gray: No. No.

Redman: Okay. So it would've been plain clothes.

02-00:05:33

Gray: Yeah, it was certainly plain clothes. I remember I walked down from the cyclotron one day and I was called into the office and berated. Didn't I know that there might be Russian spies hiding behind the trees? That didn't register with me in the beginning, but Russian—they used the word Russian—

Redman: Interesting.

02-00:05:55

Gray: Come to know that probably they were trying to get all the information, as well as other people.

Redman: Sure. Did that surprise you at the time, thinking, well, the Russians are—

02-00:06:04

Gray: Yes. Yeah, the Russians were are allies; what are you talk— Yes, it did surprise me. I didn't even think about it until later.

Redman: Fascinating.

02-00:06:11
Gray: At the moment, I was shocked because I was being disciplined for daring to walk instead of take the transportation that I should have.

Redman: Okay. So they wanted you to take the bus or to—

02-00:06:27
Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: I see. As opposed to walk.

02-00:06:30
Gray: Well, there were buses that shuttled. There were shuttles that went between places.

Redman: Oh, I see. So it wasn't like a public—

02-00:06:36
Gray: Oh, it wasn't a public bus. Oh, no, no.

Redman: Okay. But you had chosen to walk to get the exercise?

02-00:06:40
Gray: [laughs] Yeah. Well, it was fun to walk.

Redman: Yeah. Okay. Well, it is.

02-00:06:47
Gray: Then one of the other things that I really remember is at the same time they were building the bomb, there were people experimenting with nuclear medicine, in one of the brown-shingled buildings. It's still there on the campus. Often, I had to take messages there. At the time, they were experimenting with children who had fatal cancer. My contention to anybody who gets upset about the atom bomb is that nuclear medicine has probably saved a hundred-thousand times more lives than the atom bomb ever killed.

Redman: Interesting.

02-00:07:25
Gray: So it shows you that in war, there are many things going on.

Redman: Can you tell me, was that sort of the extent to which you were familiar with medical projects on campus?

02-00:07:39
Gray: Yeah, that was it.

Redman: Okay. Now, as far as meeting some of these famous scientists, can you recall how sort of those interactions may have happened, either accidentally or intentionally?

02-00:07:52
Gray: Oh, no, I was just taking messages to their offices. Yes. But there wouldn't have been much interaction, but I did get to go and meet them because I had to deliver something.

Redman: Sure. Now, I know especially following the dropping of the atomic bomb, but maybe even a little at the time, these scientists were quite famous figures and they were something that you would've read about in the newspapers.

02-00:08:18
Gray: Right, exactly.

Redman: Absolutely, then afterwards, they became—

02-00:08:21
Gray: Yeah, afterward.

Redman: —real celebrities.

02-00:08:23
Gray: More afterward than during, yes.

Redman: Their work was extremely top secret.

02-00:08:28
Gray: Well, the project was very secret. We didn't know what we were working on.

Redman: Did you have any sort of inkling about what it was?

02-00:08:34
Gray: No.

Redman: Nothing whatsoever.

02-00:08:36
Gray: Had no idea, no.

Redman: Okay. Did you contemplate ever, or did you sort of fantasize about what—

02-00:08:45
Gray: No.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:08:46
Gray: No, and I can remember later on, I was typing these reports and the reports would be more blacked out stuff than stuff you had to type. They were so censored. I can still remember that.

Redman: So okay, tell me about that. So this was another part of your responsibilities, was to type out reports.

02-00:09:05
Gray: Well, later on, when I was no longer a messenger girl, I was doing typing of these reports. I'm the world's worst typist, by the way.

Redman: Okay, but you had the security clearance.

02-00:09:16
Gray: Oh, yes. But you didn't get to read it. I don't know why they had us doing it. We were making facsimiles of things. They called them faxes at the time?

Redman: Facsimiles, yeah, or copies.

02-00:09:32
Gray: Exactly. That was what we had for copying.

Redman: Would you type them, then, on multiple sheets of paper or onion leaf, the really thin paper that could then be duplicated?

02-00:09:41
Gray: Whatever they were using. Whatever they were using for the facsimile machines or the fax machines at the time.

Redman: Sure.

02-00:09:48
Gray: Yeah. Oh, that was very avant-garde, of course.

Redman: Okay, yeah. Yeah. [they laugh]

02-00:09:55
Gray: I pulled— Yes, old stuff.

Redman: Yeah, I printed this this morning, yeah.

02-00:09:59
Gray: This is a little aside, but one of my nephews is an opera singer, and he came here to sing a role in *Doctor Atomic*. [laughs] I asked him if they would have a role for a messenger girl. But they didn't.

Redman: They didn't. Okay.

02-00:10:16
Gray: No.

Redman: So tell me then, when the bombs were actually dropped, did you have any sort of awareness? Okay.

02-00:10:26

Gray: No, none.

Redman: When did you come to be aware that you were working for the Manhattan Project?

02-00:10:32

Gray: Whoop! When? It was years later, I'm sure. Just as this information began to develop and come out, and then you realize, oh, yeah, that was the name of the thing I was working on. Yeah. But I'm sure it was several years after the war before I realized what it was that I had been working on.

Redman: Interesting. So it wasn't something that when you learned of the dropping of the bombs, that there was some sort of light bulb that went off that, hey, I've been connected with this project in some way.

02-00:11:08

Gray: No. No, It was later, much later.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

02-00:11:12

Gray: Yeah, much later. They were very secretive. [laughs]

Redman: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more, then, about the security procedures, beyond fingerprinting and— If you were to walk into the building at the cyclotron, do you recall what sorts of—

02-00:11:27

Gray: I had my pass that I wore. It was like a thing around your neck, with an A on it.

Redman: I see.

02-00:11:33

Gray: No, there was no stopping.

Redman: That was that.

02-00:11:35

Gray: No, stopping, yeah. There was no stopping you or wandering you or anything else like that.

Redman: Right, yeah, exactly . Okay, so it's not even like going through airport security nowadays.

02-00:11:43

Gray: Oh, no! No. No, you had a badge. You had to have your badge, yes.

Redman: Okay. Did the badge have a picture on it, do you recall?

02-00:11:51
Gray: I don't recall.

Redman: Okay. Just out of curiosity.

02-00:11:54
Gray: No, I don't recall if it did or not. Just had a big A on it.

Redman: Okay. Now, you would always carry things in those tubes, in the locked tubes? Or were there other times that—

02-00:12:07
Gray: Now, did I? I can't even remember if I took stuff other— Maybe if you were going to the medical group, you might have been just carrying something, yeah.

Redman: Okay. Okay.

02-00:12:17
Gray: But the tube is very— that's something that you would remember carrying.

Redman: Remember, sure. And it was red, it was a giant red [laughter].

02-00:12:25
Gray: Red, yes. [they laugh] So it would be identified.

Redman: Right, exactly. This is not intended to go to the Soviets. Okay. So you felt at the time like the dropping of the atomic weapons were necessary. Then certainly, when your husband came back, realizing how close he had come to being in line for the invasion of Japan.

02-00:12:53
Gray: Well, another thing that happened—and this was years and years later—we went to Japan.

Redman: Do you recall about when this was or what decade?

02-00:13:05
Gray: It was in 1987, something— about twenty years ago. We went down to Hiroshima, of course. We wanted to see it. There, we saw a monument that was made for the children of Hiroshima. Now, you're thinking it's because all these children were killed. No. There were children killed, but this was a monument because virtually, there were no men left in Japan to work, and they had brought in twelve-year-olds to work in Hiroshima. Of course, they were all killed. So they have a special monument to these children. So that, I think again, convinced me that probably, the atom bomb was the best thing that could happen because if there had been an invasion in Japan and they had no men— They were exhausted.

Redman: It would have been devastating, you think.

02-00:14:13

Gray: Oh, it would've been devastating to them and also devastating to us, yeah, to have made the invasion. And they were preparing for the invasion.

Redman: So that's something that you certainly have reflected on—

02-00:14:29

Gray: Oh, yes.

Redman: —but it's a feeling that you've maintained, you think.

02-00:14:32

Gray: Well, I think it just gave me more reason to think that it was more reasonable to do it. And the other was that this was thirty-five years after they dropped the bomb. Hiroshima was a totally rebuilt, lived-in, going city; whereas there had been all these dire predictions of nothing could be done. It was like Tokyo.

Redman: Okay, yeah. It's a busy place.

02-00:14:56

Gray: And it was thirty-five years later, yes. Yeah. So those things have made me think that maybe it wasn't the worst idea, the worst thing that could've happened.

Redman: Sure. Sure. So I'd like to ask, at the end of the war, in particular VE Day and VJ Day, do you remember what you felt at those times? Was it a mix of emotions at all? Were you happy the war was over?

02-00:15:21

Gray: VE Day, we were happy. Well, because I think we had seen those horrible pictures of the camps, and I think that probably, that was most in our mind. Because the war was still going on for us. We still had a war that wasn't finished.

Redman: So you were thinking, in some sense, about the concentration camps of the Holocaust and—

02-00:15:44

Gray: Yes. Oh, yes.

Redman: —what an atrocity that had been.

02-00:15:47

Gray: Yeah. One of my uncles went into one of those and he would never talk about it. Later on, we did visit Dachau. I can recall there, thinking, if people were doing this at random, you just had a random bunch of people and you put them in the gas chamber— There was a page in a book for every single person that went through. I was horrified by that more than anything else.

Redman: So the organization, really.

02-00:16:19

Gray: Oh! Oh! I couldn't believe that people would do that kind of thing.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

02-00:16:26

Gray: But anyway, the feeling was more how wonderful it was that that was not going on anymore. Then VE Day, I was actually working in San Francisco—

Redman: Okay, or VJ Day.

02-00:16:38

Gray: VJ Day.

Redman: Oh, okay. Wow.

02-00:16:39

Gray: VJ Day, we were working in San Francisco. Of course, we were young girls. So our boss came in and said, [laughs] "I think all you girls better get out of here and go home." So we did. I remember being sent home, probably about noontime—

Redman: I see. Okay.

02-00:16:55

Gray: —on VJ Day. He was right, because the whole city just erupted.

Redman: Yeah, yeah. It was a little chaotic, yeah.

02-00:17:03

Gray: Yes, very much so.

Redman: I can imagine it would be a little rowdy in the city of San Francisco.

02-00:17:07

Gray: Well, but he was very nice, because we were seventeen- and eighteen-year-old girls.

Redman: Yeah. Yeah. It was a positive happy day, but you better go home.

02-00:17:16

Gray: But get out of the city. [they laugh]

Redman: Yeah. Okay. Okay. So I'd like to ask something before I forget, that is an event that takes place in 1946, and a lot, a lot of people have forgotten about it. There was a three-day-long strike called the Oakland general strike that shut down the city for about three days. Do you recall that event? There was a group of unions that had a big strike in Oakland in '46. Okay.

02-00:17:43
Gray: In Oakland?

Redman: Yeah. It seems like a lot of people have forgotten.

02-00:17:46
Gray: No, I don't remember. I don't even remember it. Probably, closing down Oakland seemed like a good idea. [they laugh]

Redman: Okay. So similarly, I'd like to ask about a city that my guess is that a nice young girl like yourself, during the war, would've had no familiarity with. But my understanding was that El Cerrito was a bit more like Las Vegas—

02-00:18:10
Gray: *Really?*

Redman: —than it is now.

02-00:18:13
Gray: El Cerrito?

Redman: El Cerrito, of all places. Okay, but that comes as a surprise.

02-00:18:17
Gray: That comes as a total surprise, yeah.

Redman: Interesting. Okay. All right. So yeah, sort of the last question I'd really like to ask about the war is sort of, if you could reflect on the war, and in Berkeley in particular, how do you think the war may have shaped Berkeley in any particular way? It seems, in some sense, kind of like it was isolated from a lot of the war; but in another sense, it might've been influenced by the war.

02-00:18:48
Gray: Well, I don't know. You asked about the immigrant thing, and people feel like a bunch of black people came into Berkeley at that time. But in 1936, when we arrived here. St. Joseph's already had a black community. So it wasn't—

Redman: It wasn't quite a shock.

02-00:19:10
Gray: The fact that there were different people coming in was really no shock to Berkeley at all. Berkeley didn't really change all that much.

Redman: Okay. So now, Richmond changed a lot, it seems like.

02-00:19:25
Gray: Richmond changed a lot, because it was a very small place that all of a sudden became a big place.

Redman: Okay.

- 02-00:19:35
Gray: Maybe they weren't quite as settled a community, so that more bad things could happen there than would happen here.
- Redman: Okay. Okay.
- 02-00:19:43
Gray: Yeah. Of course, at that time, we had *the* premier police force of the whole United States in Berkeley.
- Redman: Is that right?
- 02-00:19:49
Gray: Oh, yeah. Yeah. So we've always been a kind of, I don't know, a contained community.
- Redman: So one of the things, then, I'd like to ask about is immediately after the war, a lot of people came back to California, of course. But then many students who had been at Berkeley resumed their studies, people who had gone off to war.
- 02-00:20:15
Gray: Sure.
- Redman: I'm curious. It seems like that would've been a time where a lot of new students would've come to campus, in '46, '47, '48; but it also seems, in some sense, like a quite idyllic time, in that people were relieved to be done with the war and moving on with their life. Was that your case?
- 02-00:20:35
Gray: Probably no. I didn't go back to school ever. That was one of my fears in life, was ever having to go back to school.
- Redman: Okay, so you were ready to be done.
- 02-00:20:43
Gray: [laughs] So I was done. And my husband never went back. He and his brothers started a business, rather than go back to school. So we weren't involved in what was going on—
- Redman: On campus.
- 02-00:20:56
Gray: —on the campus. But I feel that it was probably a more mature group and probably a more settled group. Now, after the war, housing was a pre-mi-um. We didn't marry until May of '47, and two weeks before we got married, we didn't have a place to live.
- Redman: Okay. A little bit of a panic there at the end?

02-00:21:20

Gray: There was *nothing*, to begin with.

Redman:

Nothing to be had. Okay.

02-00:21:26

Gray: Talking about the people coming back from[sic] campus, they would come back and then they would marry, and they would move into housing. We had made some friends and tried, through then, when they had found some, to find some. But it was a real problem after the war.

Redman:

It seems likely to me that most soldiers coming back from the war wouldn't want to move into a fraternity house, that they—

02-00:21:55

Gray: Exactly. They're a little bit more mature, they've done things. Yes, yes.

Redman:

Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Interesting. So with that, I'd like to sort of ask you, to then conclude, if you can reflect on— We've talked about a lot of subjects today. We've talked about a lot. Everything from farm life in Iowa to bicycles in Berkeley—gosh, I'm looking at this list—Port Chicago, a lot in there. But you mentioned that the war was actually a fun and exciting time, in some sense, for you and a lot of other young people at that time. Can you sort of reflect on the place of the war in your life?

02-00:22:40

Gray: The place of the war in my life. Well, my father didn't have to go to war; he was too old and had too many children, so he didn't have to go. So the war didn't really impact our lives that much. It just, I think, opened up new venues that we wouldn't have thought of even trying to be in before. Especially my sister and I singing. We would sing for school, we would sing for nice wedding groups and things like that; but here was a whole new venue that opened up. Probably, stayed that way after the war, that it opened up our thinking a little bit maybe, yeah. But I think fun is probably the bad word to use for it.

Redman:

Sure.

02-00:23:31

Gray: But it was new adventures. It was doing new things and doing the things we liked for new people. More of that than anything.

Redman:

I like that. That's very interesting. All right, well, I'd like to say thank you for sitting down with me.

02-00:23:43

Gray: Oh, you're very, very welcome.

Redman:

I appreciate it. Excellent.

02-00:23:46

Gray:

Good.