

Oral History Center  
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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Bernice Grimes

Rosie the Riveter  
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

*This interview series was funded in part by a contract with the  
National Park Service, and with the support of individual donors.*

Interview conducted by  
David Dunham  
in 2014

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Bernice Grimes



Dale, Bernice, and Marlene  
Walnut Creek, CA, 1946

Donated by Bernice J Grimes & Family

Bernice J Landis – Carlyle – Grimes  
Kaiser Shipyards, Richmond, CA  
December 17, 2007

1942 – 1945 Edward J Landis (my father) worked at **Kaiser Shipyard #3**, in Richmond, CA. Father was a **Leader Man Electrician**. In recognition of his work performance on the *USS General J H McRae* (July 1, 1944 Victory Ship), my father was presented with a picture of the USS General J H McRae. This picture was endorsed to my father and **signed by H. J. Kaiser**.

1943 – 1944 Rose T Landis (my mother) worked at **Kaiser Shipyard #1**, in Richmond, CA. Mother was a **Coast Guard Police** assigned to manning the gates, ships, and all work areas. Coast Guard Police provided, and enforced, security.

1942 – 1944 Scottie Harris (my aunt) was a **Welder at Kaiser Shipyard #2**, and then later transferred to **Coast Guard Police at Kaiser Shipyard #2**, in Richmond, CA.

1943 Dale C Carlyle (my husband) was an ex-marine that worked as a **Coast Guard Police at Kaiser Shipyard #1**, in Richmond, CA. I met Dale at Shipyard #1 and we married in 1944.

1943 Ginger Burns (my aunt) was an **Entertainer** and also owned the nightclub *Thunderbird*, in San Pablo, CA. Ginger entertained for the employees at **Kaiser Shipyard #1**, in Richmond, CA. On one occasion Sophie Tucker was unable to make her appearance at Shipyard #1 and Ginger Burns was called in to replace *Sophie Tucker*.

1943 Bernice J Landis – Carlyle – Grimes worked at **Kaiser Shipyard #1**, in Richmond, CA, as a **Scaler**. A Scaler used a 100 pound air pressure hose with a large chisel attached. We (scalers) followed behind the welders and scaled the slag off the metal, which prepared the ship for the next step. I was petite and often put into areas that others could not fit. One time I was put inside of a stack of large round metal discs. I was placed there to scale, as I was the only one small enough to fit inside the metal discs. When the Welders were through, they forgot I was down in the discs, and they left me there. Eventually someone heard my cries for help and came to my rescue.

**Hair** had to be tied in **bandannas**, under **hard hats**, for protection against Welders fire. Getting too close to the welders caused Welder's Flash, injuring the eyes; burning skin and hair, etc. I learned this the hard way after burning my face. After the injury I wore pancake make-up to help protect face from Welders Burns.

I was also a member of the Labor Union.

Due to my small bones, my wrists could not longer handle the pressure of the high powered hose and chisel, so I was transferred to the **War Bond Department**, where I was a

Bernice J Grimes – Carlyle – Landis

**Graphatypist.** Here I used a **Graphatype** to type the name and address on the metal plates, which were used to imprint the purchased Bonds.

**Air Raid Sirens** were frequent, and the Kaiser Shipyards had **armed artillery** on the building roofs.

Our **motto at the Kaiser Shipyard #1** was “*10 down the ways in 31 days*”. (10 Victory/Frigates Ships built from start to launch, in a 31 day period).

Richmond was a **booming town** 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Rationing was in full force. **Ration Stamps** were issued for gasoline, meats, sugar, coffee, butter, shoes, and miscellaneous items.

**Nylon Stockings** were no more – the nylon was used for parachutes. We just painted our legs with pancake make-up and drew a seam (the style at that time) up the back of our legs.

People were living in **tents**, as they came from other areas of the United States to work in the Shipyards. There was no housing available, even if one could afford it. Eventually projects were constructed, so some of the people could afford a small place to live.

Since there was **not enough housing for Military Families**, my parents remodeled their large Stone House (located in Walnut Creek, CA) into 5 small apartments. **Navy Families from Port Chicago, CA** rented these apartments for reasonable rent.

**Slot machines** were legal (at least for 1942-1945). I was personally acquainted with gaming heads of the area.

We lived in Walnut Creek and drove to Richmond daily, through the Caldecott Tunnel (which was 2 lanes, at that time).

We came to California in 1942 from Okauchee, WI, as my Aunt Ginger (Burns) wanted my mother to help her start a steakhouse next to her Night Club (*Club Thunderbird*). The Kaiser Shipyards offered good wages so Dad (Edward J Landis) went to work there in 1942. Mother (Rose T Landis), Dale (Husband), Aunt Ginger, Aunt Scottie, and myself went to work at Kaiser Shipyards in 1943. My parents liked the California climate, as opposed to Wisconsin winters, so we stayed in California.

Two of my Uncles served in the Navy. (1) **William W Harr** served as a **Sea Bee** in Kodiak, Alaska; (2) **Henry H Harr** served as an **Air Plane Mechanic**. Both Uncles served tours of duty over seas.



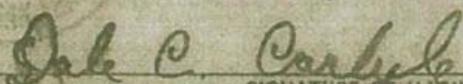
Thor Factory Rep - Ed Landis 1940



U.S. Coast Guard Police  
Kaiser Shipyard #1, Richmond, CA  
Rose T Landis - 1943



U.S. Coast Guard Police  
Kaiser Shipyard #2, Richmond, CA  
Ship Christening - 1943  
Scottie E. Harris

U.S. MERCHANT MARINER'S DOCUMENT	
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD	
NAME	
DALE CECIL CARLYLE	
Z OR BK NUMBER	DATE OF BIRTH
Z-798-026	11-14-24
PLACE OF BIRTH	CITIZENSHIP
Missouri	???
HOME ADDRESS	
Box 27, Rt. 1,	
Walnut Creek, Calif.	
 SIGNATURE OF MARINER	

PHOTO

U.S. Coast Guard Police  
 Kaiser Shipyard #1, Richmond, CA  
 Dale Cecil Carlyle – Ex-Marine  
 1943



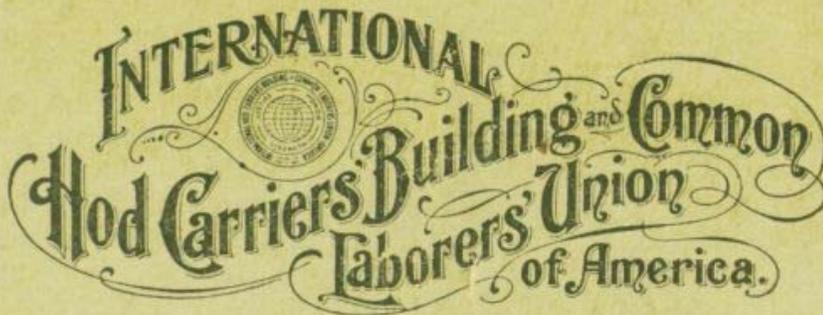
Entertainer  
Kaiser Shipyard #1, Richmond, CA  
Virginia E Silva (Stage Name - Ginger Burns) – 1943  
Owner of Club Thunderbird – San Pablo, CA



U.S. Coast Guard Police - Kaiser Shipyard #1, Richmond, CA  
From Left to Right: Dawes; Donlevey; Machen; Landis  
1943 Christmas Card produced at Shipyard # 1

Bernice Landis #21980

## Membership Book



Affiliated with the A. F. of L.

Headquarters

821-15th St., N. W.

Washington, D. C.

**Local Ledger Page**

This Membership Book shall be used only by the person to whom it was issued by the International Union.

If this Membership Book and membership in the local has been obtained through false statements or fraud, or in violation of article 10 of the General Constitution, this Dne Book shall be void, membership cancelled, the holder thereof shall forfeit all money paid and shall not be entitled to any rights.

The holder hereof agrees that his membership in the Local Union and in the I. H. C. B. & C. L. U. of A. shall be subject to the Constitution and Laws of the Local and of the I. U. and for any failure to comply with same or for failure to pay dues and P. C. Tax, as required by the Constitution of the I. U. his membership shall become void. He further agrees that the officers of the Local are and act as his agents.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

Social Sec. No. \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Book No. *21980*

THIS IS TO CERTIFY, that

*Bernice J. Landis*

Nov 4 1943

on

has been duly initiated a member in  
**Shipyard & Marine  
Shop Laborers'**

Local Union No. **836** of the  
**INTERNATIONAL HOD CARRIERS'  
BUILDING AND COMMON LABOR-  
ERS' UNION OF AMERICA**, located  
in the city of  
**SAN FRANCISCO & BAY  
DISTRICT, Calif.**

and as such is entitled to all rights,  
privileges and courtesies awarded to  
members of the **I.H.C.B.&C.L.U.** of A.

**J. A. LARSSON**

Financial Secretary.

**339 - 13TH STREET**

**OAKLAND, CALIF.** Address.

**Year**

<b>Jan.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>JANUARY</b>	
<b>Feb.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>FEBRUARY</b>	
<b>March</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>MARCH</b>	
<b>April</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>APRIL</b>	
<b>May</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>MAY</b>	
<b>June</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>JUNE</b>	

MEMBERS SHOULD READ THE  
2

**Year**

<b>July</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>JULY</b>	
<b>August</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>AUGUST</b>	
<b>Sept.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>SEPTEMBER</b>	
<b>Oct.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>OCTOBER</b>	
<b>Nov.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>NOVEMBER</b>	<i>11/4/43</i> <i>W</i>
<b>Dec.</b>	Are Your Dues Paid for <b>DECEMBER</b>	



CONSTITUTION OF THE I. U.  
3

Affiliated with Building Trades Dept., A. F. of L.

# SHIP YARD AND MARINE SHOP LABORERS, LOCAL No. 886

RECEIVED OF Bernice J Landis

DATE 10-19-1943

Book No. B9748

Insist on Receipt to receive proper credit

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE
JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.

MISC.	APP.	DUES
	10 <sup>00</sup>	2 <sup>00</sup>
		12 <sup>00</sup>

By CB Hutch Explanation of Misc. ent paid Total

ALL FEES FORFEITED, IF NOT PAID IN FULL IN 30 DAYS  
**THIS IS A WORKING PERMIT.** Members of aforesaid local union are permitted to work with the holder of this receipt until \_\_\_\_\_

L  
No 4036

Affiliated with Building Trades Dept., A. F. of L.

# SHIP YARD AND MARINE SHOP LABORERS, LOCAL No. 886

RECEIVED OF Bernice J Landis

DATE 11-4-1943

Book No. B9748

Insist on Receipt to receive proper credit

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE
JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.

MISC.	APP.	DUES
		2 <sup>00</sup>
		2 <sup>00</sup>

By Messner Explanation of Misc. Total

ALL FEES FORFEITED, IF NOT PAID IN FULL IN 30 DAYS  
**THIS IS A WORKING PERMIT.** Members of aforesaid local union are permitted to work with the holder of this receipt until \_\_\_\_\_

L  
No 5033

B 5511



OFFICE WORKERS' UNION  
No. 20744 #1

37 GRAND AVENUE - TWINOAKS 5933  
A. F. of L. - OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

Book No. .... Date 11/15/43

Received of Bernice J. Landis

- Dues - - - - \$ 1.50
- Initiation - - - \$ .....
- Reinstatement - \$ .....
- ..... - \$ .....
- Total - - - - \$ 1.50

Remarks: 28/10 #886  
93



Secretary-Treasurer.

STEWARDS COPY

OFFICE WORKERS' UNION, No. 20744

37 Grand Avenue, Oakland 12, California

TWinoaks 5933

Req. No. 2072 Date 11/5/43

Name Bernice J. Landis

Address Rt 1 - Box 27 - Walnut

Classification jr ccl @ Yard No. #1 fresh

Starting Date 11/6/43 Shift day

Cleared to Ruelle

Until Laid Off



Cleared by .....



**General Truck Drivers, Warehousemen and  
Helpers, Local 315, of Contra Costa  
County, A. F. of L.**

Phone Martinez 1381

729 Castro St.

Martinez, Calif.,

Dec. 13, 194

Bernice J. Landis

ADDRESS

REPORT TO Richmond Yd. 1 Day shift

Whse. Off, Clk. Reg. #2694

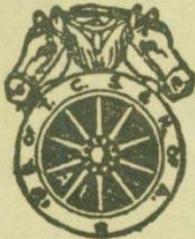
Erle E. Carter  
Business Representative

SOCIAL SECURITY No.

566-30-4582

173

**GENERAL TRUCK DRIVERS & HELPERS, Local 315**



*E*  
of Contra Costa County

I. B. of T., A. F. of L.

729 CASTRO STREET, MARTINEZ

Martinez, Calif.,

12-13

19

43

RECEIVED OF

*Bernice J. Landis*

Dues for Month of

*Dec*

\$ *3.00*

Assessment

*Just app fee*

\$ *2.00*

Initiation Fee Deposit

\$ *5.00*

80969

*Paul E. Burg*

Representative

All money left on deposit for initiation shall  
be considered forfeited in 30 days

168

QUIT   
 DISCHARGED   
 LAID OFF

RICHMOND SHIPYARD NUMBER ONE  
 OF THE PERMANENTE METALS CORPORATION

**DISCHARGE-QUIT SLIP**  
 (TO THE EMPLOYEE)

N<sup>o</sup> 84686

PAYMASTER: PLEASE TERMINATE SERVICES OF BEARER

NAME OF EMPLOYEE *B. Lardis*

BADGE NUMBER *177762*

SHIFT *Day* OFF  A.M. HAS  P.M. HOURS WORKED TODAY

OCCUPATION *Plumber* OCCUP. CODE *103575* RATE *66 PER hr*

O.K. FOR TRANSFER { YES  NO  }  
 RICHMOND SHIPYARD NUMBER ONE OF THE PERMANENTE METALS CORPORATION  
*[Signature]* (FOREMAN) DATE *12/10/43*

ADVANCES AND DEDUCTIONS			EARNINGS FOR THIS PERIOD ENDING			
WHSE. & TOOL ROOMS	INITIALS		PREVIOUS	HOURS	RATE	
			TODAY			
			TOTALS THIS PERIOD			
			LESS ADVANCES AND DEDUCTIONS			
			NET AMOUNT DUE			
			TIME CHECK NO.	Period Ending		
<b>INSTRUCTIONS TO EMPLOYEE</b>						
Please present the pink and yellow copies of this form for clearances in the following order:						
1. To the warehouse and/or tool room for clearance of your safety equipment and/or tools.						
2. To the camp office for clearance of camp charges.						
3. To the paymaster's office for your time check.						
4. Sign the pink copy at the payoff window.						
EMPLOYEE MAY REPORT TO THE PERSONNEL OFFICE FOR RE-ASSIGNMENT.						
PLEASE DO NOT FOLD, SOIL OR WRINKLE THESE FORMS.						
SUB TOTAL - OTHER						
STATE UN. INSURANCE						
FEDERAL OLD AGE						
TOTAL ADVANCES AND DEDUCTIONS						

Here's hoping  
you have the  
Merriest  
Christmas  
and the  
Happiest  
New Year

you have ever had

To Dale &  
Dec 25 1943

Bernice  
U.S. Coast Guard Police  
of Shipyard one  
Your old Pal &  
Trooper in the field.

Resse  
me



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Interview 1: April 29, 2014

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Interview 1: April 29, 2014  
Audiofile 1

Note: Bernice Grimes' daughter Diana Carlyle and granddaughter Debrah Hanson also participate in the oral history, as noted.

Dunham: Today is April 29, 2014, and I'm here in the lovely home of Bernice Grimes, who's a narrator today for our Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front oral history project. My name is David Dunham. This is interview one, tape one. Bernice, we usually start in the beginning, so could you just tell me your full name?

01-00:00:23

Grimes: Bernice June Landis Grimes. Landis is what people back in the 1940s knew me by.

Dunham: When and where were you born?

01-00:00:28

Grimes: I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, May 16, 1928.

Dunham: Got a birthday coming up.

01-00:00:35

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: Can you tell me a little bit about your family background, your parents, if you knew your grandparents?

01-00:00:43

Grimes: Well, my grandmother had thirteen kids. I did know her. I never met my grandfather on my blood father's side, except an aunt. I never met any of my grandfathers. My mother was a showgirl in the twenties. She started at sixteen years old. After I was born, she decided she needed a home for me. Of course, my father didn't want a home; he was a professional gambler, so he was on the road all the time. So she married my stepfather in 1933.

Dunham: Can I ask for a minute, as a showgirl, what did that mean in the twenties?

01-00:01:21

Grimes: Oh, I can't remember the outfit that she was with, but it was like burlesque. But it was a step above that. I have a big picture in there I can show you of her. A big marquee one.

Dunham: I would love to see that. As a gambler, too, what did that mean for your father?

01-00:01:35

Grimes: Oh, cards. He was a professional card player, for money, during the Prohibition Era.

Dunham: Poker?

01-00:01:37

Grimes: Yes. And he was always running from the cops, my mother said. Prohibition days. So then in 1933, my mother retired from show business. She was twenty years older than me, so she was born in 1908. So then we moved to a little village called Okauchee, in Wisconsin.

Dunham: Now, I've seen Okauchee Lake. Is that—?

01-00:02:05

Grimes: That's it. Yeah, it was Jakels Resort, Okauchee Lake, in Waukausha County, thirty miles north of Milwaukee.

Dunham: I notice in your bio that it said you have American Indian ancestry.

01-00:02:16

Grimes: Yeah. My grandmother's—I couldn't find out, because I've always heard that we're part Indian. When I asked Mother, she said, "Yeah, Cherokee and Sioux." But no further. For some reason, back in those days, it was like being a colored person. They weren't even allowed in the bars, where I was from.

Dunham: So you didn't disclose it.

01-00:02:37

Grimes: Dogs could go in, but no Indians. True story. So then I asked my aunt, and she said, "Well, we're gypsy." And I asked my uncle, and he said, "You're a mixture between a jackass and a wheelbarrow." That's the stories I got. So I finally wrote my grandmother. It was after I had my kids. Then she wrote me a brief letter, and she tells, "Yeah, on both sides." But she never told us what tribes we're from. But yeah, it's all through our family. So we've been trying to do the genealogy, trying to find out something; but without an exact tribe it's tough. So we are part Cherokee, and we are part Sioux.

Dunham: So your mother remarried your stepfather in—was that '33?

01-00:03:32

Grimes: 1933.

Dunham: That's when you moved to—?

01-00:03:36

Grimes: Okauchee.

Dunham: What was life like in Okauchee?

01-00:03:38

Grimes:

Oh, country. Nothing. They finally found a garage to live in. There was no floor, no heat. I remember Mother—I was five years old, because I was boarded out while she worked, with an elderly lady, until I was five years old. So she would hang blankets around. I still have the little kerosene stove she used to keep us warm. That's the way we lived for a long time. It was during Depression days.

Dunham:

So how did your family survive?

01-00:04:10

Grimes:

Well, my mother fished. My dad was always a salesman, my stepdad, and he worked for the {Ballston?} store in Milwaukee. He drove thirty miles, would be sixty miles back and forth, every day, and at one point was lost in a snowstorm for three days. They would save twenty-five cents a week and buy a piece of board to try to put in the house. The neighbors sold them the garage, and all the neighbors got together and put it on a great big wooden type of sled and pulled it up the driveway. My parents had put some money down on a plot on a hill, and they built a platform and put it up on the hill and started building from there. No water, no electricity, nothing.

Dunham:

The winters must've been really hard.

01-00:04:56

Grimes:

Oh, yeah. Very cold.

Dunham:

What kind of heating did you have?

01-00:05:00

Grimes:

Well, we just had the kerosene for a while. Then after they built the house, we had oil heat. Some kind of oil that they bought, and a stove. Some of them still had the old coal stoves and stuff, but we didn't have that.

Dunham:

Was there a school there?

01-00:05:16

Grimes:

Yeah, it was Okauchee School. Someplace, I still have my graduation picture.

Dunham:

What was school like in Okauchee?

01-00:05:23

Grimes:

Well, there were three rooms. It was first, second, third grade in one room, with one teacher; and fourth, fifth, and sixth in the other room with a teacher; and seventh and eighth, the principal had. So a country-type school.

Dunham:

What was a typical day like for your mother, then, after you moved to Okauchee?

01-00:05:47

Grimes:

She was very lonely, because she'd had a very active life, a *very* active life. So she put a garden in. She'd have a garden in the summertime, and raise chickens. I would go around to the rich people that came out on the lake for the summertime and take chicken orders and vegetable orders, and I'd do a little hula for them while I was there.

Dunham:

Oh, you did? So you were a performer too.

01-00:06:09

Grimes:

Yeah, yeah. That's what she did in the summertime. And then she fished. We ate a lot of fish. And she worked in the resort, in the cabins that they had. I think I have a letter someplace; I think she made like twenty-five cents a week turning mattresses and stuff.

Dunham:

What was a typical day for you like, as a child, then?

01-00:06:33

Grimes:

Play. I had a canoe. Summertime, I could go out in the canoe, and fish or swim. She taught me to swim immediately. I was a very good swimmer.

Dunham:

Did you have siblings?

01-00:06:47

Grimes:

No. No. She raised my cousin for a while. He didn't have anyplace to live, so he was with us off and on, and then the sisters would take turns with him. But outside of that, no; just me.

Dunham:

Was your cousin younger or older then?

01-00:07:04

Grimes:

No, I was two days older.

Dunham:

Oh, very close in age.

01-00:07:07

Grimes:

Yeah, and his mother was a showgirl, too.

Dunham:

Were there any community organizations or churches there or anything that you did?

01-00:07:15

Grimes:

They had several churches, but my folks didn't go to them. Well, we had a monastery in Okauchee, and I used to go down and visit with the monks all the time.

Dunham:

What was that like?

01-00:07:28

Grimes:

Well, I don't know, I just enjoyed it. I wasn't raised Christian or anything, but I just really enjoyed them. Then we had an Episcopal church there that I used to go to. And then kind of a walk, which is four miles away from me, we had a Lutheran church, and then a Catholic church. They had churches. Once in a while, if the neighbors went, I would go. But a lot of times I would just walk the mile and go up to the Episcopal church.

Dunham:

Well, so you stayed in Okauchee until '42?

01-00:08:00

Grimes:

Yeah.

Dunham:

Do you remember when you first heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

01-00:08:05

Grimes:

I really don't remember that much about it.

Dunham:

Yeah, you were pretty young, yeah.

01-00:08:10

Grimes:

Because I was thinking, I don't know whether it was kept from me or what. But we were living in Rockford then; my dad had gotten a good job. Every weekend, we drove back to Wisconsin, to stay at the house. But he was a representative for Thor Manufacturers. I still have his pictures from there.

Dunham:

Oh, yeah, I've seen the photo.

01-00:08:30

Grimes:

Yeah, pictures from the newspapers and stuff that I have.

Dunham:

So what did he do for them? He was a salesman?

01-00:08:34

Grimes:

Well, uh-huh. He'd go out to homes and—I have the pictures here, demonstrating. Then my mother went to work there, too. They worked for Progress Electric Shop, on State Street, in Rockford. That's where he started making some decent money. So we stayed there until the war came. Of course, then everything was going into the materials for the military.

Dunham:

Yeah. How did Rockford change, once the war started?

01-00:09:04

Grimes:

I don't know, because we left. We went back. We went right back to Okauchee.

Dunham:

Had Okauchee changed much? Or as a small town it was—?

01-00:09:10  
Grimes: No. No, it hadn't changed. No. There was just nothing there. I took a trip back there in, I guess it was the early fifties, and there wasn't too much change. They did have a different school, but the old houses were still there, and the lake was all weeded up.

Dunham: Well, before we head to California, is there anything else about Okauchee you'd like to share, in what was going on there?

01-00:09:38  
Grimes: Well, it was just a very simple life. Very simple life, and a sheltered life. So when I came to California, it was a, *wow!*

01-00:09:47  
Carlyle: She used to ice fish, didn't she?

Grimes: My mother ice fished, yeah.

Dunham: Did you learn to ice fish?

01-00:09:53  
Grimes: I fished, but I didn't ice fish. She didn't let me go out on the ice.

Dunham: Yeah, was that pretty treacherous?

01-00:09:58  
Grimes: Well, yeah, because if you didn't watch what you were doing and it started melting—we lost a few people there. And she'd stay till the very last minute.

Dunham: Did she ever have any close calls with that?

01-00:10:09  
Grimes: No. No, we got her out. Well, the last time, we had to go get her out, because it was melting so fast. But no, not really a close call.

Dunham: So what was that like, when you had to get her out, though?

01-00:10:17  
Grimes: Oh, kind of scary. "Oh, why don't you come on?" But she just loved to fish. The whole family did.

Dunham: How did you hear about, your family hear about, California?

01-00:10:30  
Grimes: My aunt—well, my mother had two sisters. After she got into show business, she brought in the other sisters. The one, after Mother retired, then somehow she ended up in Sacramento. I don't know how she ended up here, but she started a nightclub in San Pablo, called Club Thunderbird. She was going to open up a steakhouse, because during the war everything went night and day, and things were booming. She needed some help, so she asked my mother if

she would come and help her open the steakhouse. So they came out to do that. Of course, in the meantime, the weather was so nice here. Of course, my dad, having to drive in those—get out and shovel the snow every day, and try to—it was horrible. He loved the weather here. Then they heard about the shipyards, so he got a job out at the shipyards as an electrician. They liked the weather, and they just never went back. They just called their friend that sold houses and sold the house, and that was it.

Dunham: Did you originally move right out to Walnut Creek?

01-00:11:32

Grimes: No, we stayed there. My cousin and I—he was with us—he and I stayed in the nightclub, upstairs; and my mother and dad had a little tiny mobile—I don't know, they weren't even mobiles in those days. They stayed in that, and then they rented a house over on Standard Avenue for a while.

Dunham: What was it like living in the nightclub?

01-00:11:51

Grimes: Oh, [laughs] you'd hear that jukebox going all night long. Of course, in those days—Ginger didn't have slot machines, but they were all over in the area. It was a rough and tough area.

Dunham: Yeah, so slot machines were legal anywhere?

01-00:12:06

Grimes: They were. And I read an article not so long ago, they said that they weren't legal—it was like '44 and '45—but I know they were, because my kids' father worked in a restaurant in Rodeo, and we had slot machines there, and that was 1945. Mrs. Pechart was the wife of the big gangster [Walter "Big Bill"] Pechart that ran everything in Contra Costa County. She used to tell me, "You don't play those slot machines, Bernice." They were only nickel ones. "Because," she said, "you're never going to win." So yeah, they were. But Ginger didn't have them. She had a poker room. She had one of the gangsters in the poker room, and I used to get in the kitchen at the steakhouse, and climb upstairs and watch them gamble. They'd catch me, and they'd get so mad at me.

Dunham: Were there fights and things coming out of that?

01-00:12:55

Grimes: No, she didn't have any fights there with that, no. But across the street there was a bar. I forgot the name of it, but they were always having fights.

Dunham: What street? On San Pablo, is this?

01-00:13:05

Grimes: Right on San Pablo Avenue. It's no longer there.

- Dunham: Do you know what the nearest cross street was or would have been?
- 01-00:13:11  
Grimes: It's changed so much, when I go back over there, I couldn't even tell you.
- Dunham: So you were living upstairs there for a while, and then you said you got a—?
- 01-00:13:20  
Grimes: Then they found a house on Standard Avenue, which we stayed in until they came out here.
- Dunham: This is all within '42 or into '43?
- 01-00:13:30  
Grimes: Well, it's '42. I think it was early '43 when we got started purchasing the house out here. So we came out here in, I think it was the fall of '43. I can't remember exactly.
- Dunham: Right on this property here on—?
- 01-00:13:46  
Grimes: Yeah.
- Dunham: Was it called Main Street at the [time]?
- 01-00:13:48  
Grimes: No, it was called Danville Boulevard. Route 1, Box 27 was our address.
- Dunham: Do you know what the property was originally purchased for?
- 01-00:13:59  
Grimes: \$6,000. We had two and a half acres.
- Dunham: Was there a home?
- 01-00:14:05  
Grimes: Yeah, there was a beautiful—and I'll show you that eventually—big stone house that we have never been able to find out who build it. All stone. I was told it was from Mount Diablo. It had a huge cathedral fireplace in the basement, with all wood floors, and it had a fireplace upstairs. The heat was some sort of gas jets that you had to light with a match. Gorgeous, gorgeous. There were some little things on the wall that we heard at one time; it could've been a gambling house. Then of course, with the war, there weren't any places to live, and we had Port Chicago quite close to here. My parents divided up and made four apartments in that stone house, plus the downstairs, and rented them to service people and people that could afford.
- Dunham: And then they were commuting to Port Chicago?

01-00:15:00

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham:

It was Navy folks and their families?

01-00:15:04

Grimes:

Yeah. Well, if they had their families with them. Sometimes it was just the sailors and their buddies. Actually, we had one that I knew, {Sutherlands?}, that he did bring his wife from New York, and they stayed with us for years. Then we had another house, a little tiny cottage on the side. Then my dad built a house by himself, with the bricks and stuff. Made the bricks and built a little house. Then the little red house—the second one when you came in—was a garage up front, and they made that into an apartment and rented that out. Then when the freeway come through, we moved that one back to where it is now.

Dunham:

When did they put the freeway in?

01-00:15:47

Grimes:

Oh, God. Was it late fifties?

Dunham:

I'm not sure.

01-00:15:50

Grimes:

I'd have to go back and look at the dates again.

01-00:15:53

Hanson:

They bulldozed this townhouse down. The freeway lays over it.

Dunham:

Oh, wow, so it was—

01-00:15:59

Grimes:

Yeah, just took a bulldozer, *pfft*. We had a well with a big tank up there.

Dunham:

What was Walnut Creek like in '43?

01-00:16:09

Grimes:

Well, it was really just the main street. Like I said, we had a constable and a—I forgot the other one already.

Dunham:

What did you say? It was before we started recording. A constable and a—?

01-00:16:21

Grimes:

Night watchman. Night watchman and a constable.

Dunham:

Did they see much activity?

01-00:16:28

Grimes:

Oh, just kids. They'd drag the main on the weekends and switch drivers so the cops wouldn't know who it was. Of course, they always knew, because

everybody knew everybody. We knew everybody in town. It was a nice little town. Nice little town. I've hated to see it change like it has.

Dunham: Well, growth can be hard.

01-00:16:47

Grimes: Oh, yeah, too much. Too much, yeah.

Dunham: You've seen a lot.

01-00:16:50

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: What were you doing then? You were fifteen, when you first got into town, and then here in Walnut Creek.

01-00:16:57

Grimes: Oh, I did everything. I worked some of the restaurants, I worked out in the fields, I ran the hullers for across the street when he had a big walnut orchard. We had walnut trees here that paid for our taxes. I still have the walnut pole that I knock the walnuts. Just worked out in the fields. Then I worked for {Dick Lamelle?}, who had a big creamery. I don't know if you remember him or not.

Dunham: No, I don't know.

01-00:17:21

Grimes: It's where the bus depot was in later years. But he had a creamery there, and I worked for him off and on.

Dunham: What did you do there?

01-00:17:26

Grimes: Served. He made the ice cream, though, himself, and I helped him as a waitress and a cashier, whatever. In those days, one person did it all. Then my mother was very patriotic. Both of her brothers were in the service, and all of her life, she's been very patriotic. So she got a job at the shipyards, as a Coast Guard Police. They're the ones that manned the gates and did all the investigating through the whole shipyards. When I took her picture down to the museum there, they didn't even know about them.

Dunham: Yeah. So what type of investigations would she be—?

01-00:18:08

Grimes: Well, they were just like the cops there. It was their job. It was through the Richmond Police Department.

Dunham: And I've heard given twenty-four hour and all these different people coming together, that there was a fair amount of stuff going on.

01-00:18:21

Grimes: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: So I'm just curious. Did she have stories of what she was having to deal with?

01-00:18:24

Grimes: She never said much to me. But that was her job. So when she got out there, then she got her sister, who had been a showgirl but got married, and her and her husband were welders out in Shipyard Number Two. So Mother talked Aunt Scottie into going out, and she ended up being a Coast Guard Police. That's how I met my first husband. He was an ex-Marine, and he was Coast Guard Police out there.

Dunham: How exactly did you guys meet?

01-00:18:56

Grimes: Well, my mother had met him, and she introduced us.

Dunham: You're still pretty young at the time.

01-00:19:02

Grimes: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: But mature.

01-00:19:04

Grimes: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Just a kid. Yeah, and everything went twenty-four hours a day.

Dunham: When did you begin working at the shipyards? How did that come about?

01-00:19:17

Grimes: Well, Mother just decided that I should be doing something for the government, too, and for our service people. That's when she took me down, helped me lie about my age, and we got in.

Dunham: Tell us about that, exactly. Did anybody question—?

01-00:19:30

Grimes: I don't remember too much about it. They never really asked a lot of questions. But I looked pretty mature for my age, and, yeah, went to the union and got right in.

Dunham: You started as a scaler, is that correct?

01-00:19:43

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: So what did that mean? Do you remember your first day on the job?

01-00:19:46

Grimes:

Oh, yeah. I do. Not a lot of training. Hundred-pound air pressure gun. Has a big hose that's fastened on the wall, with air, and has a big chisel on the end of it. I have a picture of somebody that had been one there. So they told me very little. I'm supposed to go behind the welders. They weld, and I'm supposed to use this chisel air gun and chisel the slag away. And not get too close to the welders, because of the flash. Always wore my glasses and not because of the burns, welder burns. So I'm looking at this. I put the chisel in, the pig chisel, and I'm looking down at it, and I push the lever, and the thing popped up and cut me right in the face. So first day, right away, my mother went, "Oh, my God!" But that's how I learned to do it, and that's how I did it. Then I got too close. I never got a flash, but I did get a welder burn. I learned to stay away from them.

Dunham:

When you got that first chisel to the face, was there a treatment?

01-00:20:50

Grimes:

It was just like a slight cut.

Dunham:

So did you get some type of treatment for it?

01-00:20:55

Grimes:

Yeah, I went to first aid. They had first aid there.

Dunham:

Then were you off the rest of that day, or you're right back to work?

01-00:20:59

Grimes:

No. No.

Dunham:

Then another time, you got burned, later on?

01-00:21:04

Grimes:

Yeah. They have some ointment or something they put on you.

Dunham:

What was that like? How did you get burned, exactly?

01-00:21:09

Grimes:

Oh, that hurts. That stuff hurts. I got too close to them with their torches. You had to stay a certain distance away. You get to working, and you forget. First thing you know you're right behind them. You can't do that.

Dunham:

In your bio, you wrote about the uniform you wore, and then also something you did especially with makeup, relative to—?

01-00:21:26

Grimes:

We wore, yeah, a lot of pancake makeup, to protect our skin. A lot of it, really heavy. Because you're out in the elements anyway, but with that heat from those welders all the time it was hard on your skin. Then of course, there weren't any nylons or anything, because everything went to military, so we

would just take eyebrow pencil and draw a line down the back of our leg, like we had stockings on, and then put pancake makeup on.

Dunham: How long did that take to prepare?

01-00:21:53

Grimes: Oh, I guess it depends upon how slow you were and who was helping you.

Dunham: Who was helping you, your mom?

01-00:22:02

Grimes: Yeah, Mother would help me.

Dunham: What else in your initial days of being a scale do you recall?

01-00:22:11

Grimes: Well, because I was small, they have double bottoms and all these little ladders you have to crawl up and down. They had—I can't remember what they're called, but—these huge round things. They would stack them up and the welders would weld them. Then they would drop me down inside to scale off the weld. Well, one time they forgot I was down there. It was all noisy and everything—it was change of shift—and I thought, "Oh, my God." They finally heard me and pulled me out.

Dunham: Because you couldn't have gotten out of there?

01-00:22:40

Grimes: No, no, I couldn't get out myself at all. No, they would just drop me down in there, and then to lift me out. Yeah, it's just all the little things that was crazy.

Dunham: What was the makeup of the workforce? Were other scalers mainly men or women?

01-00:22:58

Grimes: We were mostly all women. I don't remember any men scalers. We did have a lot of elderly men, or men that couldn't get into the service because of health reasons. We had a lot of men out there that should be getting credit, too, for what they did, really.

Dunham: We've interviewed some of them.

01-00:23:10

Grimes: Yeah, you really should.

Dunham: But because they tended to be older, unfortunately, we didn't start interviewing in time for most of them. But we've interviewed some men who worked there.

01-00:23:18

Grimes: Have you?

Dunham: Yes. Yeah, definitely. Oh, you just made me think of something else. I know Richmond went from 20,000 to 120,000 during this war.

01-00:23:31

Grimes: When we came over from Pinole, down—I don't remember which highway we took but, but when we drove down in there, I was never so shocked in my life, because like I said, I lived a very sheltered life. There were people living in ditches, tents, lean-tos, anyplace and everywhere. It was a shock, because there was no place to live. Not until [Henry J.] Kaiser started building stuff for people. Dormitories and places for them to live. He did a wonderful job. But there was just no place. The shows, naturally, stayed open day and night because everything did. Nothing closed. Nothing. So people would go into the theaters and sleep. It's the only thing they had.

Dunham: Right. And the bowling alleys, I heard, as well.

01-00:24:12

Grimes: Yeah, yeah, anything, yeah.

Dunham: So did you go up to the shows and such?

01-00:24:18

Grimes: Not so much here, no. When I was in Rockford as a kid I went a lot because the folks were making pretty good money, and I would go to the cowboy shows every Saturday.

Dunham: What were those like?

01-00:24:27

Grimes: Oh, my God. Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy.

Dunham: So these are the movies?

01-00:24:31

Grimes: Yeah, the movies. And they always had the serials.

Dunham: What were you doing during the war years, during your off hours and for fun?

01-00:24:39

Grimes: Well, it was a long trip going over and back, and you're tired; you just went to bed. Because the tunnel only had two lanes, and we would have to leave—I forget what time—early, early in the morning. Then my dad would drop us off across—there was a restaurant across the street from One, where we worked, and he worked in Three. He had to be there, so he'd drop us off, and we'd have to wait. He'd go on to work, and then when our time come, then we'd go across the street to work. So it was a long trip in the car.

Dunham: How long did it take, and what was that drive like then, compared to now?

01-00:25:14

Grimes: Dark, cold, and miserable, that's how I remember that. I remember, when I was cold you'd get the old blankets and try to wrap up. Of course, you had to keep the headlights stripped so that you'd only have a strip of light.

Dunham: Because it was wartime?

01-00:25:31

Grimes: Well, yeah, everything here. And at the shipyards we had the anti-aircraft guns on top all the time. And your blinds had to be closed—well, because we were on the coast. We were on the coast.

Dunham: So there were air raid sirens?

01-00:25:44

Grimes: Air raid sirens, yeah.

Dunham: How often, and what happened when they went off?

01-00:25:47

Grimes: Well, out here we didn't hear them as much as you did in there. You just wait and look and wait. There wasn't anyplace for maybe us to hide.

Carlyle: During the war, when he said, "What did you do in your free time?," did you guys not help at Aunt Ginger's club, because she entertained—?

Grimes: I didn't; I was too young.

Carlyle: Weren't you and Sonny over there at her club?

Grimes: No, we just lived there. No.

Dunham: So you passed at work, but you weren't able to get into the clubs?

01-00:26:18

Grimes: We'd walk through and up the stairs and stuff, but we were not allowed to be in the clubs, no. But she had the restaurant next door, where we ate.

Dunham: Was eighteen the legal age, at that point, for the club?

01-00:26:28

Grimes: I can't remember. I think so. I think with military, it was more than that, and it was a problem because military couldn't go in the clubs, supposedly.

Dunham: Supposedly; but did they?

01-00:26:38

Grimes: Yeah, because they were only eighteen. That changed, in later years.

Dunham: So let's see. Your father was working as a welder?

01-00:26:49

Grimes: No, he was an electrician.

Dunham: Electrician, pardon me. What do you know of his experiences as an electrician?

01-00:26:55

Grimes: Well, I know he was either a leaderman or a foreman, I can't remember which one. He was quite a ways up there. We have a picture of him that was signed by Kaiser, on one of the ships he worked on. But I really don't remember that much. All I know is he was very good at whatever he did. He was just a natural-born person that could do anything.

Dunham: Your aunt who had the club also did entertain at the shipyards?

01-00:27:22

Grimes: She did, yeah. The way it started out there is they tried to get—they would get the Andrews Sisters and Sophie Tucker. Well, Sophie Tucker couldn't go one day, and my aunt was very well-known in town, so they asked her to go out. So she used to go out and start entertaining. We always had entertainment in the afternoon, if you could be there.

Dunham: Were you able to be there?

01-00:27:46

Grimes: I was there once or twice, yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Your aunt, she sang and danced?

01-00:27:51

Grimes: She sang, yeah. She wasn't really much of a dance dancer, except like in performing hulas and stuff like that. But she sang. She was more on the rougher type, like a Sophie Tucker.

Dunham: You mentioned performing hulas; as a kid, you did that. Was that Hawaiian-style hula?

01-00:28:09

Grimes: Yeah, well, my mother taught me that. I was never allowed to be like a showgirl, because they didn't want me to do that; but she did teach me a little bit of that. So all the rich neighbors that came used to get a kick out of that. They'd buy their chickens and tomatoes, and I would give them a hula.

Dunham: As a bonus, huh? Did you ever want to be a showgirl?

01-00:28:29

Grimes: I did, but it was, no. They said that's a no-no, all of them did. I guess it was a pretty rough life.

Dunham: So how long were you a scaler at the shipyards?

01-00:28:41

Grimes:

Oh, I don't remember month-wise. But after a while, my wrists gave out, and I kept having to wear supports on them. So they transferred me to the war bond department and I operated the graphotype. I made the metal plates where the names and address went on your war bonds, or Victory Bonds, whatever you want to call them. That's what I did for a while.

Dunham:

How did you do that? How did that work?

01-00:29:05

Grimes:

Well, it was fine, because I knew how to type because I used to write plays when I was a kid, and I was very good at it. My dad had bought me a typewriter when I was in fifth grade or so, so I had taught myself how to type, so I didn't have any problem with that. With the graphotype, you don't have to be speedy; you just to be accurate. So I did good on that.

Dunham:

I'm not familiar with the graphotype. What does that look like, or how does it work?

01-00:29:27

Grimes:

Well, it's a big machine. Have you ever seen how they make credit cards? Or how they used to? Well, it's the same type of thing, except everything is backwards. When you read it, it's backwards. These were metal plates, sharp metal plates that we used. It was just that you punch the keys. You had the applications. You filled in an application for your war bonds, and then I would type up the information, and then proofread it and get it back. I liked that, yeah.

Dunham:

Did you and your family buy war bonds?

01-00:30:00

Grimes:

Oh, yeah, we did. But I only have the empty book; I don't have the stamps. I think they were ten cents apiece or something like that.

Dunham:

You mentioned writing plays. This was back in Wisconsin?

01-00:30:10

Grimes:

Yes.

Dunham:

Did you continue to write when you were out here?

01-00:30:12

Grimes:

No, I didn't. And I should have; I was very good at it. I used to write the school plays.

Dunham:

So they were put on in the school?

01-00:30:17

Grimes:

Yeah.

Dunham: And did you perform in them, as well?

01-00:30:20

Grimes: Yeah, that's right.

Dunham: Do you remember what any of them were about?

01-00:30:23

Grimes: A lot of them were like the radio programs that you watched, like *Baby Snooks* and those type of things. Mostly comedy.

Hanson: We keep telling her she needs to write a book about her life.

Dunham: That would be great. Well, maybe when you get this, that can help stimulating thinking about that again.

01-00:30:38

Grimes: That would be nice, yeah.

Dunham: I wanted to ask, when you were first working in the shipyards—sometimes we've heard, you starting in '43 a couple years in, but that it was still—men gave women a hard time sometimes, and it could be a little challenging, in that regard. How was that?

01-00:30:55

Grimes: Yeah. I don't really remember them giving me a bad time, but you couldn't get any information out of them. Nobody wanted to help you. That's like I said, they handed me this hundred-pound air pressure gun with a chisel. And that's got to be in there right. Poor dumb me. But you learn the hard way.

Dunham: Why do you think that was?

01-00:31:18

Grimes: The olden days. It's just that's the way men were. It was a man's world, and they weren't used to women being out in it, I guess.

Dunham: How about the mix of races and people coming from all over the country?

01-00:31:30

Grimes: Oh, we had everything and anything. Of course, I was never raised to be a racist type of person, so it didn't matter to me whether they were Japanese, Chinese, whatever. If I liked a person, I liked them; if they treated me right, that's all that counted. We had a lot of black, and I can remember when I first went, that most of the black people were picking up nuts and bolts, before they were really given decent jobs. Then they found out that, yeah, they can.

Dunham: Do you know what that job was called then, if they were just kind of doing that?

01-00:32:00

Grimes: No, just labor. Just labor.

Dunham: Anything else you did as a scaler? Or the main thing was following the welders and—?

01-00:32:11

Grimes: Yeah, and then if there were debris afterwards, you'd have to clean up. If we were on the ship itself, doing something, then we would have to sweep up. I can't remember whether one of the other girls and I had a radio or whether they played music or whatever, but she and I used to dance with a broom when we weren't being watched.

Dunham: Tell us about that.

01-00:32:29

Grimes: Mostly with the Andrews Sisters; we loved that. So we'd be dancing with the broom, and then here'd come the boss. We never got fired for it, but it was kind of fun.

Dunham: Were there other things you did when you weren't busy working, when you maybe had breaks or time?

01-00:32:49

Grimes: Not really. Well, you had a break, but I can't remember doing anything. Even nowadays, if you give me a break at work, I'd just rather be working.

Dunham: We've heard, with all the different folks, sometimes there were some shenanigans going on in the shipyard. Maybe more than just dancing. You mentioned knowing a lot about gambling. Did you ever see any gambling going on?

01-00:33:08

Grimes: No, I didn't. I've heard that they would sneak stuff in and out, like alcohol in their thermoses. That part, I did hear from my mother. Or try to steal wires or something, anything that they could get out the gates. But outside of that—there were fights with guys. Not so much women, that I can remember, but guys would get in fights.

Dunham: Did you see any of those?

01-00:33:33

Grimes: No, I didn't, I just heard. Well, my husband, or future husband, got into one with a guy. It was a stupid thing, but it was a big fight.

Dunham: Do you know what it was about then?

01-00:33:44  
Grimes: Oh, he put something in his lunchbox that wasn't presentable to him. He had a very bad temper anyway, and I guess he really just knocked him out. That's about—that one, I remember. But that's the kind of stuff that went on, prank stuff.

Dunham: Your husband, you said, then worked in the Coast Guard Police, as well, right?

01-00:34:03  
Grimes: Mm-hm.

Dunham: Did he have any stories about having to deal with challenging situations?

01-00:34:07  
Grimes: Not really. Not to me. But see, with him, I was still a kid.

Dunham: How old was your husband? How much older was he than you?

01-00:34:18  
Grimes: He was eighteen.

Dunham: Oh, so he was very young, too.

01-00:34:20  
Grimes: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: So you married soon thereafter?

01-00:34:26  
Grimes: I got married in 1944. Met him, and then left in early '44 and moved back to Missouri and got married.

Dunham: Was that where he was from?

01-00:34:39  
Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: What was Missouri like?

01-00:34:41  
Grimes: Hah. [laughs] Worse than Okauchee. Oh, my God, yeah.

Dunham: How so?

01-00:34:46  
Grimes: Oh, yeah. Quite an adjustment to that type of living.

Carlyle: Rural.

Grimes: Yeah, very rural.

Dunham: What part of Missouri?

01-00:34:55

Grimes: Greentop and Sublette. They were about ten miles from Kirksville.

Dunham: What were you and he doing there in Missouri?

01-00:35:06

Grimes: Nothing, really. He was still a kid. We stayed with his father and his stepmother.

Dunham: So there wasn't work to be had there?

01-00:35:18

Grimes: Well, at one point, he had gone on to {Idowa?} and worked at the ordinance plant and different things. He couldn't find himself. It was just one thing and then another.

Dunham: Then you had your first child soon then?

01-00:35:33

Grimes: Yeah. She was born in Missouri. In Greentop, Missouri.

Dunham: How long were you in Missouri then?

01-00:35:50

Grimes: Oh, not too long, because we traveled quite a bit. Then we went to Florida for a while, and then back out here, and then back to Missouri. He just had that sand-in-the-shoes feeling.

Dunham: So all through the forties, kind of, and beyond?

01-00:36:06

Grimes: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: You worked in the war bond department for a little bit. Now, I was looking at your union cards that you scanned. Do you remember about joining the union?

01-00:36:21

Grimes: Very little. I didn't know that much about it; all I knew is you had to join the union. I'm sure my mother was with me.

Dunham: What I wanted to ask was the different sort of names there. The first one said, the International Hod Carriers Building and Common Laborers Union.

01-00:36:38

Grimes: Yeah, that was the laborers. Yeah, it was weird, huh?

Dunham: That was when you were a scaler?

01-00:36:41

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham:

And then it said Shipyard and Marine Shop Laborers, so that was maybe the local outfit. Then I saw Office Workers Union, which I assume was when you were with the war bonds work.

01-00:36:50

Grimes: Right.

Dunham:

But then I saw General Truck Drivers and Helpers, in Contra Costa County. Was that for you?

01-00:36:59

Grimes: Yeah, it was my name on it. I worked three different unions, but I never could figure that—.

Dunham:

That was just while you were working at the shipyards, too?

01-00:37:04

Grimes: Yeah, yeah. I don't know where that came in. No, I don't know.

Dunham:

You've talked about your mom being very patriotic. How did you feel about the war effort and kind of your working there?

01-00:37:26

Grimes: I don't think I really thought too much about it until we were out here and I would see the convoys going by. In those days, we had the truck convoys, with all the service people. My aunt that had the nightclub, very patriotic. Always for the servicemen, when they came. But I don't think I really thought too much about it. I knew my uncles were both in the service. One of them was in Alaska. I've forgot where it was already; way out in the end of it. And one of them was in Africa; he was an airplane mechanic. But outside of that, I don't really—I was thinking about that the other day; I don't even really think I thought much about it. We knew everything was rationed. You couldn't have this, that. You'd get in a line to maybe wait for butter, if you had a stamp for it. Gasoline was hard to get.

Dunham:

With your long commute, was that a problem?

01-00:38:22

Grimes: Well, we all had the stamps, and so—.

Dunham:

Okay. How many of you were commuting together?

01-00:38:27

Grimes: Well, it was me and my dad and my mother. Of course, you got stamps the minute a child was born, so—then she had a neighbor back here that rode with

us for a while, and then Dale would ride with us. So we all chipped in together on that.

Dunham: So Dale initially moved out here with you guys?

01-00:38:44

Grimes: Yeah, for a little while, yeah. But with gas, I think those that worked in that industry got a little better rate, or a little better amount that they could get, than somebody else.

Dunham: Why did you move out to Missouri?

01-00:39:04

Grimes: Why'd I go to Missouri? It's because his folks were there and he wanted to go see them

Dunham: Did you know that you would be kind of leaving indefinitely, when you went?

01-00:39:14

Grimes: No. At that age, you don't really think that—I didn't think that much, just go.

Dunham: How did you travel?

01-00:39:20

Grimes: Bus. Greyhound bus.

Dunham: What was a Greyhound bus like in '44?

01-00:39:23

Grimes: Miserable. I think it took five days. Yeah, miserable.

Dunham: Were you pregnant then?

01-00:39:30

Grimes: No.

Dunham: So at least it wasn't that, too.

01-00:39:33

Grimes: No. Yeah. Yeah, bad enough that way.

Dunham: Do you remember where you stopped on that bus journey?

01-00:39:41

Grimes: No. They made several stops, but as I say, it was a miserable trip. Because we didn't have bathrooms on them, like they do nowadays. You'd have to wait till you got to a stop.

Dunham: And then would the bathrooms vary? Or would it just be maybe on the side of the road?

01-00:39:56  
Grimes: Oh, it was like anyplace else. Yeah, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

Dunham: You mentioned the convoys. Were those right down Danville Boulevard?

01-00:40:06  
Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, so right by your house?

01-00:40:08  
Grimes: Yeah. Because they had fort—and I forget what is over here near Livermore. And then we had Fort Ord, up in Monterey. I forgot the one that was over here; it was an Army fort of some kind.

Dunham: So was there a particular way family and you would observe, when they came by?

01-00:40:25  
Grimes: Oh, just wave to everybody.

Dunham: Just wave, yeah, yeah.

01-00:40:26  
Grimes: It was just a little two-way street. We always waved at all of them.

Dunham: I know a lot of times, because you were a kid, you said that your parents and aunt didn't talk to you so much about it. Did they ever, later, kind of tell you about their experiences during that time? Running a nightclub, I know you said she was open to the soldiers, but must've been in that boomtown, right?

01-00:40:55  
Grimes: Yeah, boomtown. I remember a lot about, well, the gangster talk and stuff like that. There was a lot of that.

Dunham: Yeah. Well, I haven't heard much about that. Can you tell me a little about what—?

01-00:41:05  
Grimes: Well, I can't remember Pechart's first name, but he ran the whole Contra Costa County. He had a big, beautiful home there in El Cerrito. A few years, or a few months ago—or maybe last year—I know one of the places where he lived, they were going to remodel it, and they found all these steel doors and everything. Yeah, he was mafia, one of the big ones. He ran everything. Everything.

Dunham: Yeah. So what, that meant gambling?

01-00:41:31  
Grimes: Gambling—.

Dunham: Liquor or drugs at the time?

01-00:41:32

Grimes: Yeah, horse races.

Dunham: Where were the horse races then, do you know?

01-00:41:37

Grimes: Well, I can't remember. Do you remember the name of the—? Out there?

Carlyle: There's one that's still out there.

01-00:41:42

Grimes: Golden Gate Fields. It used to smell real bad. There was no control over the sewage out there. When you could cross that bridge, my God, you'd want to die. But that's where they had horse races.

Dunham: Did you ever go there?

01-00:41:54

Grimes: No, I didn't. My uncle used to go all the time, but I didn't.

01-00:42:00

Carlyle: Mom, tell him about Aunt Ginger recording when Uncle Bill came home and had to go back, and they had all the sailors and all the military people talk over at Club Thunderbird.

Grimes: Well, she did a lot of that. She entertained. We do have a tape someplace, but I don't know where it's at. They weren't talking very nice about the Japanese, of course.

Dunham: Sure, yeah. During the war, yeah.

01-00:42:23

Grimes: Yeah. Was a whole bunch of them, and she interviewed every one of them. I don't know where that tape is; I got it here someplace.

Dunham: Interviewed them during that time?

01-00:42:32

Grimes: In her nightclub. In her nightclub, when they would come in, yeah.

Dunham: So what was that recorded on, on a reel-to-reel?

01-00:42:38

Carlyle: Originally, it was a reel—. Well, we don't know, originally.

Grimes: No.

Carlyle: She had it re-done to eight track, and then later, to a DVD.

Dunham: Well, I would be very interested in hearing that.

01-00:42:49

Grimes: Okay, I'll see if I can find it.

Dunham: Would you be open to our possibly transcribing that, if it—?

01-00:42:54

Grimes: Oh, sure.

Dunham: We don't mind the rough talk. That's a primary document that would be of interest.

01-00:42:59

Grimes: They should be all in that one place where—my mother was great on recording everything and anything. We've got tapes from, my God, before she was born or where she was little. So I spent several thousand dollars and went down, because it was done on those big reel-type, and I had them all redone on CDs. I'll see if I can find that for you.

Dunham: But so you were describing, so this is just soldiers who were visiting.

01-00:43:23

Grimes: Sailors.

Dunham: She would interview them about their experiences?

01-00:43:27

Grimes: Mm-hm. Because my uncle had come back from Kodiak, Alaska, and he had brought three friends with him. They stopped at my aunt's club, and she put them up there while they were on leave. So that she was interviewing them before they had to leave again. They had to go out again, and go back. So we found that one day.

Dunham: So it's your uncle and his fellow soldiers.

01-00:43:51

Grimes: Mm-hm, mm-hm. He was a Seabee.

Carlyle: It had Aunt Scottie on it, too, and Aunt Scottie worked at the shipyard, too.

Grimes: Yeah. I have her picture there, too.

Dunham: Aunt Scottie was the welder? Or she was also—?

01-00:44:04

Grimes: No, she was a welder, and then Mother got her a job out with the Coast Guard Police.

Dunham: Oh, and she transferred. What else do you remember about Kaiser and the shipyards and patriotism at the shipyards, or other guests?

01-00:44:24

Grimes: Everybody was very, very patriotic. You thought nothing about having to give up types of food, meat, bacon, anything. Everybody was very patriotic. More so than I can ever remember before. It just was nothing. If you used up your coupons and couldn't get anymore, tough. You didn't worry about that. That was it. You knew it had to go to our military.

Dunham: Was there anything you particularly missed?

01-00:44:54

Grimes: It's not that you missed it, but the harder things were gasoline and butter and bacon; and of course, meat was a no-no. You just got canned goods, if you could.

Carlyle: You still don't like Spam.

Grimes: No, I can't eat Spam by itself, no.

Dunham: Did you have to during that time?

01-00:45:11

Grimes: We had Spam, yeah. Of course, when we went to work, my mother made fried egg sandwiches for us, or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; that's what we had.

Dunham: I know with the gas being limited, it was hard to get around extra, but did you travel ever to San Francisco or elsewhere around the Bay Area, at that time?

01-00:45:29

Grimes: Not during the wartime. Afterwards, we did, but not during that.

Dunham: You always worked the day shift, too, is that right?

01-00:45:38

Grimes: Yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: Were you working six days a week?

01-00:45:43

Grimes: Five.

Dunham: What did you do evenings and weekends?

01-00:45:46

Grimes: Well, we had walnut trees. During the season, we had to take care of the walnut trees. Like I said, there were two and a half acres here; you had to see that it was weeded and get somebody to disc for you.

Dunham: What is that, disc?

01-00:45:59

Grimes: Well, that's what the farmers did when they have this big metal thing, and they go through the fields and make the furrows. That got the weeds up.

Carlyle: Kind of like plowing.

Grimes: There was an old man here—we called him Nature Boy—and we used to hire him to come in and do the discing for us, because you had to keep the weeds down because of fire.

Dunham: Then you just could go collect up—?

01-00:46:24

Grimes: Well, now, we didn't plant anything. We tried planting a garden when we first came out here, and it was horrible because this is adobe soil out here. You would have to buy so much extra stuff to go in with it, and of course, we didn't have the money. Nobody did, really. So back home in Wisconsin, the ground was wonderful. Mother raised chickens, and we used the chickens' manure. But coming out here, she just gave up; we just couldn't do it. It's not easy. You have to put a lot of money in to get a good garden going.

Dunham: How did the family have the money to initially buy this property, the \$6,000?

01-00:46:59

Grimes: I have often wondered about that. I don't know if he got a good payoff when he had to leave his job.

Dunham: Because that's a considerable sum.

01-00:47:06

Grimes: Yeah, yeah. I don't know. Because before that, we had gone to Florida to see my grandmother. That was in 1942, also. We had just gotten back when my aunt called and wanted them to come—or not called, but wrote. I don't know where they got it. But of course, they were very thrifty, both of them, because of living through the Depression years, and they had probably saved it. Because on our trips, when we stopped, you would get the cheapest sandwich you could get, or you'd get hard boiled eggs. At one point, when we went through Salt Lake City, my mother decided she was going to dip her hard boiled egg out in salt. Well, it wasn't salt, it was sand. But we ate very simple, honestly.

Hanson: I thought you told me that a neighbor loaned them some money.

Grimes: No. Oh, no. No.

Carlyle: Yeah. She's got the paper where grandpa put down a couple hundred dollars, and then the papers were—

Grimes: That was out here. That was out here, not back there.

Dunham: Yeah, you said the property initially was \$6,000?

01-00:48:03

Grimes: Yeah, when they first came out here. When the first couple of payments that were due, my dad was down on his back—he had a back problem—and they didn't have the money to make their payment. My mother was walking downtown crying. There was an old house with a lot of ivy and stuff around, and this little old lady stopped her and she said, "Why are you crying?" My mother told her, and she said, "Come in." It was Abby Johnson. She was Jehovah's Witness. She just wrote her out a check for \$500. Had a stack—because in those days, you saved stuff, during the war—she had a stash up in her attic, of food, and sent food over for us and that's—and my mother paid her back.

Dunham: Had your dad hurt his back on the job?

01-00:48:50

Grimes: He had a problem all of his life. They said that he had a spot on his spine. Every once in a while, he'd go to stoop down and he couldn't get up. Then they said it was sciatica. Who knows? But he didn't seem to have any problem while he was working out at the shipyards.

Dunham: This was before he went to work at the shipyards?

01-00:49:07

Grimes: No, I think it was during. Yeah, because he went to work in 1942 out there.

Dunham: So he had to be off for a while, and when you're off, then you just—.

01-00:49:13

Grimes: Yeah, yeah. I don't know what, yeah.

Dunham: Not like today, where you might get Disability or something. Right, yeah.

01-00:49:17

Grimes: No. No, no.

Dunham: That sounds very fortunate, that you had—that was a neighbor, who—?

01-00:49:24

Grimes: Yeah. Her family had a lot to do in building this whole area, too.

Dunham: What was that family name, do you remember?

01-00:49:33

Grimes: Well, her name was Johnson, was her married name, but I forget what it was before. We've done a little research, trying to find out who built that stone house.

Carlyle: Originally, that property was awarded during the Mexican part, to Captain Orris Fales, F-A-L-E-S.

Grimes: Yeah, but how Abby's family—

Carlyle: —that was in the Johnson family, married into that. That's it. They just go all the way back to {Arbutus?}, and their cemetery was way back on the hill up there. Then Abby was like the grandchild that kept going on the property.

Dunham: What else about those, I guess, early years of Walnut Creek? I'm curious.

01-00:50:15

Grimes: Oh, my. Well, we had a bakery; we had a little corner grocery store. And then on the corner here—that building is still there—was Arthur's Market, where he sold liquor. And we had a barbershop and we had a shoe repair shop, and a little dress shop, and a police department, if you wanted to call it that, and a newspaper. It was the *Walnut Kernel*, in those days. It was just one really main street. There was a few things on a side street, like a funeral parlor; but mainly it was just Main Street. There was a theater, El Rey Theater, and then there was another theater they had there, the San Ramon or the Ramona, that they used in the summertime. Elwood Laws owned that. He owned both theaters. Then {Lamelle's?} Creamery.

Dunham: There were movie theaters?

01-00:51:05

Grimes: Yes.

Dunham: Did you go to them at all then?

01-00:51:08

Grimes: I didn't go that much. Well, I was working. I was working all the time.

Dunham: So you worked at the shipyards, and you worked with the walnut trees?

01-00:51:14

Grimes: Yeah. Yeah, I took care of walnuts.

Dunham: And you were also working at the creamery during the same time?

01-00:51:20

Grimes: Off and on, yeah.

Dunham: Racially, in Richmond, folks are coming from all over; but I assume Walnut Creek was much more—.

01-00:51:32

Grimes: Just they had the regular people here.

Dunham: But not so much of a mix of ethnicities here then.

01-00:51:36

Grimes: No, there wasn't. Not in those days, no.

Dunham: Maybe we'll take a little break, and I think I'll change the tape. But thank you.

## Audiofile 2

Dunham: This is April 19, 2014, tape two, with Bernice Grimes. You were just mentioning about having to put kerosene in the car. Can you tell us about that?

Carlyle: This is not April 19.

Dunham: Oh, thank you. April 29. Thank you very much.

02-00:00:15

Grimes: I was just wondering about that.

Dunham: April 19 was my dad's birthday, so I get it stuck in my head. Thank you.

02-00:00:18

Grimes: Oh, okay. Yeah, Dale and I were going to drive to Missouri. Gasoline was still rationed, and this was, I believe, 1944. So we used all the gasoline tickets up with the car, and we had kerosene rations. So he pulls into a service station, and he says, "Fill it up." Well, the guy fills it up, and he gives him the ration ticket for kerosene. The guys looks at it, and he said, "I can't use this!" Just, "That's all I got." Well, anyway, that's what he did for the whole trip, and he blew the engine up, in the car. In Jefferson City, Missouri, the whole engine blew up, from kerosene.

Dunham: Wow. So that did not work.

02-00:01:02

Grimes: Wasn't smart, no.

Dunham: So that was the end of that car?

02-00:01:05

Grimes: That was the end of that car, yeah.

Dunham: Now, you had one trip, which you did by bus, but this was another trip, when you come back and forth?

02-00:01:14

Grimes: Yeah, this was later in '44, yeah.

Dunham: You'd come back and forth somewhat?

02-00:01:21

Grimes: Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: Just remind us, when you're talking about traveling, you mentioned that before you came out to California, you visited Florida. How did you get there and what was that experience like?

02-00:01:31

Grimes: We drove, we drove. My grandmother lived in Florida. My mother—the family's always been very close, and so she wanted to go see her mother. So we had just come back from Rockford. That job had ended, so we took the trip, drove to Florida.

Dunham: Anyway impressions of Florida at the time?

02-00:01:52

Grimes: Negative, of Florida.

Dunham: Or travels through there?

02-00:01:55

Grimes: Oh, well, no. Well, of course, as a kid, the mountains and stuff, it was gorgeous. It was a hard trip, but we drove.

Daughter: She remembers swimming in the ocean and her grandmother making her snort saltwater.

Grimes: Well, yeah. Old Indian remedies, yeah.

Dunham: Tell us about that.

02-00:02:12

Grimes: You snort salt water, and that it's good for your sinus and everything.

Dunham: Did you have a cold or anything, or it's just preventive?

02-00:02:19

Grimes: No. No, that's what did you'd go in the ocean. Another time I was out in the ocean—the same place, Lake Worth, Florida. We were at West Palm Beach, because my mother's sister Helen had a big massage parlor there. Health Department? What was it?

Daughter           Health club?

Grimes:            Yeah, health club. So I'm swimming out there with my cousin, and he said, "Oh, get out right now. Get out right now. I have cut myself and the sharks will be coming." I'm trying to get out, and the undertow's taking me back. That was not easy.

Dunham:           Did you see any sharks?

02-00:02:54

Grimes:            No, I did not.

[audiofile stops & restarts]

Dunham:           And we're back. Well, while we broke, we also looked at a lot of—you have a lot of amazing photos of your family. We talked a little bit going back before the war, too. We looked at a photo of your mom performing, and you were describing her outfit. Can you tell us about that?

02-00:03:14

Grimes:            Yeah. It was—I forgot the name of it already.

Daughter           Radium.

Grimes:            Radium. It was radium, and it was this little two piece. Well, like a bikini type. She performed in that and danced in that and sang with that. But she would never let me touch it because it had something to do with cancer, and it was a very dangerous thing. I was already grown. I don't know what she ever did with it, but there was radium in it. What happened is they'd turn all the lights out in the show and put a spotlight on her, and it glowed.

Dunham:           I'd not heard that before. We were also talking about your mom and some run-ins she had with the mobsters or the mafia.

02-00:03:55

Grimes:            Yeah, one of their jobs as showgirls was to entertain. In those days, during the twenties, it was mobsters. Then after the show, they would have to go down and sit at the tables with them. She had her hair blonde at that time. She sat down at the table, and one of the gangsters had said, "Oh, look at the dirty blonde," and wiped his feet on her white gown, and she hit him in the head with a bottle, because she had a temper. Well, one of the musicians came down and got her out of there right now. I think it was the violin player, she said. "I have to get you out of here; they're going to kill you." Well, they got her out, but in the meantime, they found her. How, I don't know. But my uncle was sixteen years old, and he went by to see her one day, and they had thrown her out a window. Her leg was very—I can't even describe the scar that she had. That long and wide. And hit her in the head with a bottle. But he put a tourniquet around her and saved her. But they had tried to kill her,

because you don't fool with them. Then another time, her and Aunt Ginger were working in Cicero, Illinois, at the speakeasy that was Capone's, upstairs. We were always upstairs. As they're coming down the stairs, Eliot Ness was coming up the stairs, with their rifles or shotguns or whatever they had. He told them, "Get out, get out," and they got the girls out and got away from there, because they were raiding the place. So she always liked Eliot Ness.

Dunham: Oh, because he got her out.

02-00:05:29  
Daughter

But Aunt Ginger said that they didn't know who it was until the next day, when the papers came out for Saint Valentine's Day massacre; then they knew it was Al Capone.

Grimes: Yeah, they weren't sure who they were.

Dunham: And that very massacre was reported.

02-00:05:44  
Grimes:

Yeah.

Daughter: That that *was* who was giving Grandma and Aunt Ginger a bad time at the time.

Dunham: Yeah. Wow. Do you know if your mom or aunt ever dated any of those folks?

02-00:05:56  
Grimes: I've got some pictures out there, and she's standing with some pretty wealthy-looking people and cars and stuff, and she had lots of diamonds and things, so I'm sure she did. I'm sure she did.

Dunham: Wow. I know what I wanted to ask. After being thrown out the window, did that impact her performance career? Was she able to continue performing?

02-00:06:14  
Grimes: She worked up until she retired; would take me until I was five years old.

Dunham: What we talked about earlier, yeah.

02-00:06:19  
Grimes: Yeah, I forget how old—well, Bug was sixteen then, so I don't know how old she was.

Dunham: Then we were talking a fair bit about the Club Thunderbird and your aunt, out here in San Pablo. She had affiliations with—what's, again, the—?

02-00:06:38

Grimes: Pechart. I can't remember his first name, but I've got an article here someplace on him. He had quite a business going out here, and he ran all of Contra Costa County.

Dunham: Did they have a business relationship then?

02-00:06:51

Grimes: They were just friends. I don't know if she met him through the club, but she even knew him in Reno. What was that club there in Reno that she was friends with? Maples? The Mapes clubs.

Daughter: Right, right.

Grimes: Yeah, she knew all of them. They were all friends. But how she met him, I don't know. But I had met Mrs. Pechart myself.

Dunham: I knew you said you weren't able to go to the Club Thunderbird a lot, but can you tell us a little more about the scene there, and I guess the type of performances your aunt did?

02-00:07:18

Grimes: Well, during the time that she wasn't performing—of course, they had a jukebox, and all the old-time honky-tonk stuff on it. A lot of servicemen came in. They just loved to go to her place because she was always so good to them and made them feel welcome. Then she did the hulas and Polynesian dances, and played the guitar and sang. You saw the pictures there, and that's what she did.

Dunham: I saw she played the ukulele, too. Do you know the influence of the Polynesian music and dance?

02-00:07:48

Grimes: Just through their years of working. I don't even know where they learned to dance. They were from a very poor family and had nothing to eat half the time. Where they all learned all this, I have no idea.

Dunham: So that was just part of the showgirl performing they learned was kind of the Polynesian influence.

02-00:08:01

Grimes: Right. Yeah. Well, of course, they met all kinds of people.

Dunham: Then she also incorporated some Indian content into her performance here, as well?

02-00:08:13

Grimes: Yeah. Well, she was personal friends with Chief White Club and what she learned from him, I don't know. But I do know that after he died, the wife was

having a hard time, and she gave all his—his headdress and his moccasin stuff that he had given her, she gave them back to his wife, to help her. But I guess it just stuck, the heritage of it that nobody would tell us much about. But I'm sure she knew more. My grandmother said in her letter, "Well, ask your mother if she remembers. She could tell you." Well, my mother didn't know. But then we heard in later years that my youngest aunt, Scottie, she learned all the chants and the Indian dances from Grandma. And she taught them to her kids, so they know.

Dunham: But did you ever learn any of them?

02-00:09:00

Grimes: No. No, she came a few times in Okauchee to see me, and we'd go fishing together and everything, but I could never get any information about our Indian heritage. Even the letter that I got doesn't tell me a hell of a lot.

Dunham: Where did your grandmother live?

02-00:09:17

Grimes: Oh. Well, in later years, she lived in Florida, but she was actually from Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas, around in there. My mother was born in Gunners, Alabama, on a—

Daughter Riverboat.

Grimes: Riverboat, yeah. On a riverboat.

Daughter Her grandmother was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in 1876, and they were back and forth. Her mother was from North Carolina. That was the Trail of Tears time, and of course, the family did not go on the Trail of Tears. So they didn't want the whites telling them what to do and controlling what little they had, so until my era nobody talked about Indians in this family.

Dunham: That's why I'm interested, because Aunt Ginger did have some Indian clothing, so I just was curious.

02-00:10:09

Daughter Yeah, but she didn't talk about it until, actually, before she died and Mom would start asking her questions. And Grandma didn't talk a lot about show business or the Indian stuff because Grandma got religion, and to her, the show business was a bad thing and she shouldn't have done that type of thing.

Grimes: Yeah.

Daughter So all of that was just a cut-off. Because I think Grandma was about twenty-five when she left show business, based on *your* age. So that's why there's not a lot. It's just thank God Mom's got as good a memory as she's got.

Dunham: I did want to ask about that, because we talked in the break, too, about religion and your mom becoming religious. So when and how did that come about, and what denomination or—?

02-00:10:50

Grimes: When she was working at the shipyards and everybody was donating blood they had taken her blood, and she got very sick afterwards. The doctor said, “They must’ve been damn thirsty for blood when they took yours.” Because evidently she must’ve had cancer or something for years. Blamed a lot of it off that glass she had in her head all the time; that was for years. So because of her illnesses—and I had met some Okies, what you called them years ago, were my friends, and they went to Pentecostal church. When I went off and got married she got lonesome, and she had to quit work because she got sick. So she joined the church. And that was it.

Daughter: There is a newspaper article that does say, in one of those books, “showgirl turned preacher.”

Dunham: So where was the church?

02-00:11:41

Grimes: Walnut Creek. My dad built the church with his brick machine, like he built his house—it’s gone now—on Lacassie Avenue. It’s gone now.

Dunham: But the street is there, so it’s there—.

02-00:11:56

Grimes: It was Assembly of God church. He sure did, he made all the bricks right here in our yard.

Dunham: Was he active in the church, too?

02-00:12:03

Grimes: No. No. He was born a Catholic, but he didn’t follow it.

Dunham: But he supported her efforts to be—?

02-00:12:09

Grimes: Oh, yeah, he had to; she was the boss. She was the *boss*.

Dunham: Tell me more about that dynamic, then.

02-00:12:14

Grimes: Oh, yeah. Well, evidently, he was a stage-door johnny when she met him. My real father was, too.

Dunham: What’s a stage-door johnny?

02-00:12:21

Grimes: When the girls get through with their shows and they go out the back door, these guys hang out to date them, and they're called stage-door johnnys. So both of them were stage-door johnnys, and that's how she met him.

Dunham: So she was always kind of the boss of the family?

02-00:12:41

Grimes: Yeah, well, I think so, really, that I can remember, even as a kid. She was very smart. Of course, she only went to fourth grade; she never finished fourth grade. But very smart in finances and things, and figuring out stuff, and sewing, and dance. Anything. I don't know why, or where it came from.

Dunham: Well, you, as well. We haven't talked about it explicitly, but what was the last year of school you completed?

02-00:13:03

Grimes: I didn't finish ninth grade.

Dunham: But you write and are very well-spoken.

02-00:13:07

Grimes: Yeah. Yeah, I ended up being a credit manager over twenty-eight stores. It took me a while, but I did it.

Dunham: It wasn't an obstacle for either of you. But about your mom and the church then. She found this church? Or what was her—?

02-00:13:25

Grimes: Well, she got it through the people that I knew; but then she met some others. Oh, we had another evangelist that had a place over in Concord someplace, wherever she was. We met some people, or she met some people, from Bell, California, and they got her a minister's license, California license. She did a lot of good work in her time. People just loved her, but she had one hell of a temper. Oh, yeah.

2-00:13:55

Daughter: She had a heart, because she was raised so poor on the riverboats. She had a heart for the poor people, regardless of their color. So Grandma would pick places where there were the indigent people, and she would go rent a building and turn it into what she would call a mission, and bring those people in and feed them and preach to them and stuff. She did a lot in Pittsburg and lot of various places like that. And then to the county hospital. They would go there and preach to the old folks that didn't get anyone to visit.

Grimes: Yeah, we did that.

Daughter: Take them fruit and vegetables. I bet they couldn't eat. They can't hard candies, I know, but—

Grimes: Oh, I know.

Daughter So that's how she spent her—

Grimes: And we made packages up, of walnuts and an apple and whatever it was, for all the little poor Mexican families that worked in the fields. Her and I would go and deliver them.

Dunham: Where did those families live and work then?

02-00:14:41

Grimes: Just out for the ranchers, in little lean-tos, garages or whatever; they never had homes. One of them did, but most of them just in the fields.

Dunham: Were those bracero seasonal workers then, at that time?

02-00:14:51

Grimes: Mexicans. Yeah. But they lived around here, because the kids went to school with my kids.

Dunham: So lived year round?

02-00:14:58

Daughter Some of them lived up in the hills in San Ramon, when that was all ranches and farms and stuff, and they picked the crops. Jose and Andy and them.

Grimes: But the crops weren't all the time, because they had the pears and the walnuts and the prunes and apricots, and it was an ongoing thing.

Dunham: Walnut Creek, we mentioned that it was pretty homogeneous during the war, and it has a reputation for keeping that, and whether or not there were actually housing covenant laws preventing people from other ethnicities from living here. I'm interested with your mom's work and with helping people of different colors, were you aware of that? Was that ever an issue at all?

02-00:15:36

Grimes: We didn't have a problem then. Well, of course, we had a lot of gypsies that lived out here. They worked in the fields. They were friends, and they would come over to our house and were friends with us. A lot of people would not. But we were not raised that way. My mother wasn't, nor was I.

Dunham: Was there ever an issue then with having neighbors or other community members in Walnut Creek who clearly were prejudiced, and where that did create an issue for you guys?

02-00:16:01

Grimes: They never created an issue for us that I know of.

Daughter            There was no issue at all about this ethnicity of any kind until probably about the late sixties or mid-sixties, and that wasn't even in Walnut Creek; it was Concord first. My brother and I had tonsillectomies, so Mom and Mar had to go take his paper route. Mother is very light now, and so is my sister; but their skin was dark, dark, dark, and they had black hair, and their eyes were this pitch black, where you can't see the pupil. So the people in Concord called them, quote/unquote, the N word that you're not supposed to say. They weren't, but that's what they used to call them. When growing up here, we didn't know—I would say, "Where'd all these ethnics come from?" Well, we talk about the people across the street, at one point, were Garcias, obviously Spanish or Mexican. But it never, ever, ever, ever, rang a bell. There's not one person in school, that we went to school with, that could've told you, "That's a Mexican, that's a black, that's a white." We were just all people that lived here. So that didn't come into play until the sixties.

Dunham:            As your mom is active in the church, you too become active in the church?

02-00:17:12

Grimes:            Yeah.

Dunham:            This is in your—?

02-00:17:13

Grimes:            We did home missionary work, is what we did. We went to the hospitals and one time the Stockton insane asylum and did some interesting work.

Dunham:            And you became a minister yourself?

02-00:17:25

Grimes:            Yeah, I did.

Dunham:            Are you still active in the church?

02-00:17:32

Grimes:            No. I don't go anymore. I got burnt out with—and you shouldn't, but—too much hypocrisy. What I like to do is I like to help those that need it. Or maybe somebody's sick, where you go visit them or send them a card. That's none of that anymore.

Granddaughter    They all want money.

Grimes:            They're too big. Maybe it's just me. I listen to Joel Osteen in the mornings. I have my belief, and if I could get out and do more I sure would. Before, when I could, we went over to the homeless shelter and fed them. Was a couple years ago or three years ago. But then all of a sudden I got hit with this whatever. But I love helping others; that's my life.

Dunham: Well, that's great. That's what it should be about. We talked about that the Coast Guard Police force was kind of under-recognized, if you will. Now, was it all women, the Coast Guard force? The photos I've seen—.

02-00:18:32

Grimes: No. No, because Dale was.

Dunham: Oh, that's right; Dale was in it.

02-00:18:34

Grimes: I have a picture; I'll have to find it. I can't remember the captain's name, but he was here for the party. It was a Christmas party or something. Yeah, there were men.

Dunham: Tell us about that. So you would have parties out here for—?

02-00:18:47

Grimes: My mother did. Yeah, she'd invite them all out. Of course, we had the big stone house with the beautiful big basement and a fireplace cathedral.

Dunham: Would you guys have entertainment at these parties, since you had a—?

02-00:18:59

Grimes: Well, we just entertained each other.

Dunham: I just noticed that you have a family of entertainers.

02-00:19:01

Grimes: They had a piano down there. Mother used to chord and they'd sing. And we had the hula skirts, and she raffled them off to—I wish I could remember his name. But anyway, I got a picture of him, I think, with a hula skirt on. I'll have to find it.

Dunham: One of the guys?

02-00:19:19

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: That does remind me, not that that's a connection, but one of the things we are asking about is—it wasn't as spoken of during that time, but—did you know of any gay or lesbian folks during that time?

02-00:19:32

Grimes: I did not, no. In fact I worked—when I was first starting to work—across the picket line to get my job, because I had kids to raise. I worked for years in a Men's World men's clothing store, and I didn't know they were gay. In fact, I used to make a joke with one of the kids I worked with. He went to coffee one day with the boss, and I said—I forget what I called him—but “here comes somebody with his fairy godfather.” And one of the other guys called me, said, “Oh, my God Bernice, what are you doing?” I said, “What did I do?”

“Well, Howard’s gay.” I said, “Huh?” Right? I called him the fairy godfather. But we were just friends, even for years afterwards. No. That was my only—except for my son; my son was. But that’s how I found out, that same particular time. But I wasn’t aware of it. Was not aware of it. If it was there, I didn’t see it or hear of it.

Dunham: How was that, if you don’t mind my asking, with your son?

02-00:20:31

Grimes: It was hard until Howard, who was my boss, was one, and he took me out to the restaurant one day and explained the whole situation. I had gone and talked to somebody from a church, I forget. Well, one of the Stowe people that worked in that facility with him, and he tried to explain, too. This is something from birth. They explained it to me, and Howard explained it to me, and I accepted it. That’s it. This is it. But it was hard when you don’t understand. You have to have an understanding of it. But in the shipyards no. Of course, those days, they hid everything. They wouldn’t dare say; they wouldn’t have a job. Wouldn’t have had a job.

Dunham: Let me see. I’m trying to think of what we talked about over the break, that we haven’t covered yet.

02-00:21:26

Grimes: Oh, my goodness. The more you talk about things, the more you remember.

Dunham: Well, I guess just back to the Coast Guard police force. Did they have their own jail-type things? Or did they work with the Richmond Police, if things got to that level—?

02-00:21:41

Grimes: They worked with the Richmond Police, because in one place we have there, it says Richmond Police on it. So they were affiliated with Richmond Police and the Coast Guard. How that enacted together, I don’t know.

Dunham: You mentioned they carried billy clubs, so that was their—

02-00:21:56

Grimes: They had billy clubs. Did I give you the one billy club? Who’d I give it to? It was mother’s.

Carlyle: Either Marlene has it or I have it; one of us do.

Grimes: Oh, well, that’s all they had. Yeah, they didn’t carry guns.

Carlyle: I think Marlene has it.

Grimes: The ones that I knew didn't carry guns; they carried [billy clubs?]. If they did, I wasn't aware of it. But I think what they did is, like your guards anyplace, you'd call the regular police department to—.

Dunham: Right. I know there were some security who would also maybe escort the Kaisers or other big folks, when they came in. Was that part of their role, do you know? Or was it more police?

02-00:22:28

Grimes: If she did, I can't remember. I can't remember. She might have.

Dunham: Did she do that all through the war, from '43 through '45, work as a Coast Guard security?

02-00:22:38

Grimes: Till she got sick; and I forget what year it was.

Dunham: But before the war ended. You mentioned the patriotism both she and your aunt—was your father also very patriotic?

02-00:22:50

Grimes: He never said too much. My stepfather was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, which you would never talk about; you couldn't mention it. His mother died at an early age, and his father committed suicide. I know he had pictures of him in his tailor shop, years ago in Wisconsin. But he was kind of a loner that way. He never talked too much.

Dunham: So he came over—did his mother die in Russia?

02-00:23:14

Grimes: No, they were over here.

Dunham: So they migrated.

02-00:23:17

Grimes: But then he raised his brothers and sisters. He was self-educated and very smart. He could do anything. Anything.

Hanson: Jack of all trades.

Dunham: How did he learn to do so many different things?

02-00:23:30

Grimes: On his own.

Carlyle: Survival.

Grimes: Survival, on his own, yeah.

Carlyle: He sent his brother to music school, and in the music school, the teacher threw one of the people out, saying they'd never amount to anything. And then Cass used to laugh about it; who they threw out was Liberace.

Grimes: Was Liberace. In Milwaukee. They were both in the same school.

Dunham: So your uncle was in the school, same class with Liberace, and they threw Liberace out.

02-00:23:51

Grimes: Yeah.

Carlyle: Right. And he was a musician, but not the same caliber as Liberace. But the teacher threw Liberace out as a student, because he would never amount to anything.

Grimes: Yeah, that's what they said.

Dunham: Maybe it had to do with that earlier issue we were talking about. It could've had to do with his sexuality.

02-00:24:05

Grimes: Well, that could be, yeah.

Dunham: Because that was not allowed, in some places, many places. So the end of the war, where were you in August of '45? Do you remember V-E or V-J Day?

02-00:24:27

Grimes: August of '45, where was I?

Dunham: I know you'd gone back to Missouri.

02-00:24:34

Grimes: We were in Rodeo. When President Roosevelt died, it was in Rodeo, right?

Carlyle: Yeah, you were pregnant with me.

Grimes: But you don't know.

Carlyle: I don't know, but you were pregnant with me, in August of '45.

Grimes: Oh, that's what. No, when Marlene was—in '45, I was in Rodeo, and that's where Pechart's wife came in and told me not to play those slot machines, because Dale was working in a restaurant. There's a little restaurant. So that's where I was, in Rodeo, I think.

Dunham: So you had been playing the slot machines?

02-00:25:06

Grimes: I hadn't been, but I could, because it was just a little room like, I don't know, like our bathroom there. It had, I think, three nickel slot machines, and maybe four. People used to come in after work. I'm telling you, we'd cash their paycheck, and every penny would go in there. I went over to these people's house one time, and they actually had soup cans that they were drinking out of, water. And they had kids. Filthy! I'm thinking, "My God!" All their money would go in those slot machines.

Dunham: What did Pechart's wife tell you?

02-00:25:35

Grimes: She had to come get the money out. She's the one that came and cleaned them out and took the money out. She told me, she said, "You never play these, because you are never going to win."

Dunham: There is this intersection of gambling you've seen at different parts of your life. You've mentioned your role in the church and how strongly you felt about helping others. How do you feel about gambling and that?

02-00:25:59

Grimes: I think it's okay, and I love it, but I think it can be an obsession. If you're not careful, it could be like alcohol or anything else. You can lose it; you're gone. You've got to be very, very careful, if you don't limit yourself. Very dangerous. It's a dangerous sport.

Dunham: But it is something you enjoy recreationally?

02-00:26:18

Grimes: I enjoy it, and I've always been very lucky with it. I can't go much anymore, but yeah, I used to go to Las Vegas all the time and win, win, win, and I played slot machines. I never played the cards. But I do know that you have to be very careful. I limit myself; this is it. Even when I had a line of credit with the companies, I would say, "This is what I want, and that's all."

Dunham: I'm not sure if you were here during the time, but I know you said you had soldiers stationed at Port Chicago, or Navy men. Were you familiar with the Port Chicago explosion in 1944?

02-00:26:52

Grimes: I wasn't here. Where the heck—?

Carlyle: You said you were. You said you guys could hear it here.

Dunham: If you were here, I think you would've felt it or heard it.

02-00:26:57

Grimes: No, I didn't think I was. I thought that I was—

Dunham: It was July 17, '44.

02-  
00:27:03

Grimes: What year, '44?

Dunham: Forty-four, yeah.

02-00:27:05

Grimes: Well, I wasn't here.

Dunham: Do you remember hearing it?

02-00:27:08

Grimes: I was probably in Florida, because Marlene was born in October of '44. I was not here. My mother and them heard, but I was not here.

Carlyle: I know one of you guys—

Grimes: No, wasn't me.

Carlyle: Well, whoever told us, that they could hear it.

Grimes: Well, that was my mother and anybody that was here, but I was not. But I know where Port Chicago was.

Dunham: Did you hear about later, and/or the mutiny trial or anything?

02-00:27:29

Grimes: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, as always, the papers were full of everything.

Dunham: What was the perspective on that at the time, do you recall?

02-00:27:37

Grimes: It was always the black people that got the brunt of everything, and they never did anything for them afterwards, is what I understood. They had the bum jobs, and even they didn't go back again.

Dunham: Do you think you had that feeling even at that time, or do you think that came later, that kind of perspective?

02-00:27:53

Grimes: I don't know. I wasn't that familiar with what they did. I know in later years, Marlene's husband was stationed over there, and my cousin's husband was stationed over there, and we used to go over a lot. They were on ammunition carriers. This was after that; they were still at it, so—but I just never really thought too much about it. It was a horrible thing.

02-00:28:22

Carlyle: I don't know what they teach about the blacks, but I do know that they use that Port Chicago explosion at all the bases that do detonation, like in Hawthorne, Nevada right now and stuff. They use tapes and whole thing as their training, to this day.

Dunham: You mean as a caution?

Carlyle: Yes. Because I lived over there and my son-in-law worked on the base, and one of the big guys, the lieutenant colonel, was telling me that that's what they use, the Port Chi.

Dunham: I hadn't heard that, but that makes sense.

02-00:28:56

Grimes: I remember the little town of Port Chicago.

Dunham: Yeah, what do you remember about it?

Grimes: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, we used to have friends who lived over there. They had to give up their homes when the government took it over.

Dunham: Yeah, not unlike when you guys lost your stone house and some of your property here, right.

02-00:29:10

Grimes: No, no. No, well, same type of thing, though. We're taking it, that's it.

Dunham: But they bought them out, you were saying?

02-00:29:20

Grimes: Yeah.

Carlyle: They did, because our friends bought the houses in Antioch.

Grimes: Yeah. But still, it was their homes. They'd lived there for years.

Dunham: There's a lot of animosity, so yeah, that's the other Port Chicago story, if you will.

02-00:29:31

Grimes: But the story with Port Chicago, it was where all the Navy guys used to go over for the red-light places.

Dunham: Oh really? Well, can you tell us a little about that?

02-00:29:38  
Grimes: Oh, yes. Well, yeah. Only what I heard, that there was a lot of that going on over there, and that's where they went to drink and have their girls. So I guess that was a pretty big area.

Carlyle: Well, I think it was supposed to be the largest red-light district in California.

Dunham: Right in Port Chicago, in the town?

02-00:29:54  
Grimes: Right in the town, yeah. And it was only one or two streets to it.

Dunham: Yeah, it's a small town.

02-00:30:00  
Grimes: It was, yeah.

Dunham: Any time there's a big military presence, there's usually something like that around. But that's interesting to know. But you didn't know anybody who worked, per se, there in the red-light district?

02-00:30:12  
Grimes: No, I didn't, no.

Dunham: During the war years, again, and thinking about all the military folks coming through, any thoughts on sort of dating or red-light district type thing, of the time at all?

02-00:30:30  
Grimes: Oh, with us is, we always felt sorry for any of them that were away from their homes.

Dunham: Did you go to USO dances or that kind of thing?

02-00:30:38  
Grimes: No. They had a dance hall in San Pablo. I forgot the name of it already. Mabel Hall. Hall, and that's where Ray Wade and his little band played. Well, we'd go over there to dance, but mostly it was girls dancing together because all the military was gone. Once in a while some sailors came in, but—that was it.

Dunham: Yeah. What kind of music was Ray Wade?

02-00:31:05  
Grimes: Well, hillbilly.

Dunham: Did you know of Dude Martin?

02-00:31:10  
Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: Did you see him live, or on the TV or radio?

02-00:31:12

Grimes: I don't think ever saw him, but I know who he was and his music.

Dunham: We talked a little bit about Walnut Creek. What's your perspective on Walnut Creek through the years, having been here a long time? I know it's difficult to see the kind of growth and change, but—

02-00:31:34

Grimes: Oh, yeah. Well, as an old-fashioned person, it's grown too fast. All the mom-and-pop places are gone, because—

Hanson: All the city council is changing the whole town. There's no history left. They all just want to spend money and make money. People come here to shop, rather than go to San Francisco.

Grimes: Well, you're aware of it; you've been out here quite a while. You've seen the changes. No parking anymore. But what hurt me worst is because this town was built on the mom-and-pops, and they just slowly got rid of them, slowly got rid of them. We had one left, which was a Chinese one. A few years ago, she was going to leave, but I think she might still be here, I don't know. But that's what built the town.

Dunham: What kind of business did the Chinese woman have?

02-00:32:26

Grimes: It's a Chinese place of some kind. It was on Main Street, on North Main. I didn't know her personally, and she wasn't way back when I came, but she was the last one I know of.

Hanson: And then there's a Chinese lady, if she's still alive, that owns George's Giant Burgers [George's Giant Hamburger].

Dunham: How long has it been there?

02-00:32:49

Hanson: That's been there quite a while.

Dunham: We mentioned a little about Chinese and Japanese and probably the soldiers in the interview, of course, talking probably about Japanese, because they were going off to fight them. I guess back in Wisconsin, you didn't know of any Japanese Americans, and when you came here, they would've already been—

02-00:33:09

Grimes: When we came here, this whole area, from here to Alamo—before we came here—was Japanese ranches. *Beautiful*, beautiful. They were all taken out and sent to concentration camps, or whatever you want to call them. So one day in Oakland—I don't know what I was doing over there—it was during the war; I

don't know if I was working at the shipyards then or not—but I'd gone in there for something, because in those days, that's where you went; we had nothing out here. There was a Japanese girl there. As she was walking out of the building, I got to talking to her, and she said, "Why would you talk to me?" I said, "Why *wouldn't* I talk to you?" She said, "But I'm Japanese." I said, "I don't care. *You* didn't cause all this." But she was just flabbergasted that I would talk to her.

Dunham: Do you know, after the war, if any of those families returned to Alamo?

02-00:34:04

Grimes: I hadn't heard. I never saw any of it that was that way before. They lost everything. Some of them, I understand, did come back, but I don't think they came back into this area. But it was pretty sad.

Dunham: Do you remember going to the movies and seeing the newsreels or the cartoons?

02-00:34:21

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: How did you get your news during the war? I guess you were young, so maybe you weren't following it that closely.

02-00:34:26

Grimes: Well, we had newspapers in those days, and the newsreels and radio. Radio.

Dunham: Do you feel that the work you did during the war, that opportunity kind of to do that work, did that impact you later in life? Or what's sort of your perspective on those years?

02-00:34:48

Grimes: Well, I felt it helped. I think that anything any of us did helped, because we didn't give up half as much as our service people had to give up.

Dunham: What other work did you do later in your life?

02-00:35:05

Grimes: I've done, well, restaurant work, I've done field work, I've worked in all the fields and run all the equipment. I went into the retail business as a salesgirl, worked my way up in the men's life to credit manager. When I left—I left that job after eighteen years because of age and sex discrimination—I went to work for a bank and worked my way up from a teller to a loan officer.

Dunham: What happened, if you don't mind my asking, with the age and sex discrimination?

02-00:35:41

Grimes:

We had a manager over me that preferred the young guys. He wasn't gay or anything, but he preferred young guys; he was not a woman person. I kept having to do my job and train somebody else to come in to be the supervisor over me, and the credit manager. He was the top guy. Not the owner, but one of the top ones. I finally got tired of it. I knew the Smith family—because it was Smith's Clothiers—because I had crossed that credit line and met them personally. So we were friends. So I sent them a letter, and I said, "I want the opportunity to either succeed or fail." Because the other guy kept telling me, "You don't have a college education. You don't have this, you don't have that." So I just wrote a big letter to the company and I said, "I'm doing my job. I'm training staff, I'm training the guy to take over my job. I would like the opportunity." I said, "So what that I'm not a male in a man's world here, and I don't have the education? I don't have a college education. However, I would like a chance to either succeed or fail."

I got it. But the guy over me said to me, "Don't think it's going to last." And he fought me for years. Finally, was behind my back. I've always been pretty smart and stuff, and I found a letter in the trash. How I found it, I don't know. But it was to this guy they were interviewing. I had saved everything. It took me six years, but I won the case. I won the case. But so then after that, where do you go? I was eighteen years with them.

So I went to work—her sister got me a job at the bank, as a teller. Everybody said, well, gee, with what you were doing, what are you going to do? You're not going to make this kind of money. I said, "I don't care. I didn't go from working in a pear orchard and picking walnuts to get where I'm at today; I know what my capability is." So I started out there and ended up being the loan officer. Then of course, that bank went under, but—. So that's where I was. Ended up being a credit card investigator, over fraud and stuff, and I worked all over the United States and the world with people, on stuff like that. In fact, I solved a murder in Vallejo for them.

Dunham:

How did that come about?

02-00:38:08

Grimes:

Well, watched my reports as the credit card information comes in, and I always watched everything. I noticed this one guy's account. I was working here in Concord and I thought—I mean Walnut Creek—there's something wrong. Because all of a sudden, all these different charges would just—you follow somebody's life. So I'm watching it, and I'm watching Reno, Alameda, Reno, Alameda; jewelry store, blah-blah-blah. So I get a call one day, and it was homicide from Vallejo. They wanted to know if we had a credit card for this guy. I say, "Yeah, we do." And I said, "It's strange, because," I said, "I've been watching his account." I said, "Something is wrong." So they said, "Well, the guy was murdered." Both of his cars were

stolen; he'd been stabbed twenty-one times and then hit in the head with a piece of tile. They're trying to find the person that's got the card.

So I did research a little more, and I called them one day and I said, detective so-and-so, "I've got a pattern going here, and I think you should watch it." So I told them what I saw and what I thought. I said, "There's a liquor store in Alameda." I said, "It's a constant." I said, "It's from here to here, here." Okay. Got a call one day, and he said, "Guess what." He said, "I got to thinking about what you were telling me." And he said, "We were going to Reno." He said, "I kept thinking about what you were telling me, and we went to Alameda." He said, "I want to tell you, I got a lap full of coffee. We got him." They got him. Still had the knives in the car. He was a cook down here at Newell Avenue. But anyway, yeah, I had to go on the trail on him.

Dunham: He was here in Walnut Creek?

02-00:39:47

Grimes: Well, the murder was in Vallejo, but the killer worked in Walnut Creek, yeah. But anyway. That was part of my interesting job. Worked on the Black Panthers case, for the Oakland Police Department, too, for a long time.

Dunham: In what way?

02-00:40:03

Grimes: They were crooks. They were opening up accounts that were phony and using all different names and addresses. They came to me one day, from Oakland Police Department, and asked me if I would help them. This is a dangerous job. That was the time where they had found one of them buried alive, one of their own people, out in the desert. So I said yeah. So I did that, and they ended up saying I should be working for them. I got them all the information they needed. But they were crooks. I read this stuff now, thinking how great they were, and I said, "Yeah, right." Oh, they were awful.

Dunham: Did you ever consider doing police or detective work, since you had these relations?

02-00:40:39

Grimes: No, I don't know. I've always been mixed up in it somehow, I guess.

Carlyle: She'd be out chasing someone in the middle of the night.

Dunham: Literally?

02-00:40:47

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: Do you want to share about that?

02-00:40:50

Carlyle: What was {Vandy Van Allan's?} bar? What was that, mom? She'd get us in the car—

Grimes: My cousin ran an ad for a job in the newspaper. So this guy answers, and he's supposed to meet him down at Capwells restaurant. Then they were supposed to meet at {Vandy Van Allan's?} bar. I forget how that went. Anyway—

Carlyle: It was in Lafayette.

02-00:41:12

Grimes: I got ahold of the police department, and I went in undercover. [laughs]

Dunham: You volunteered?

02-00:41:19

Grimes: Well, and they knew. So itp was rough thing, but yeah, we got him. We got him. I don't know what he was doing with the girls, but he'd run the ads and then—it was really no job.

Dunham: What was this?

02-00:41:34

Grimes: I guess he was shipping them over to Mexico or something. I'm trying to remember how that went. Anyway.

Dunham: He was shipping girls to Mexico?

02-00:41:43

Grimes: Yeah, something like that. He had some kind of a racket.

Carlyle: Like slave trade. [audiofile stops & restarts]

Granddaughter —not sure if she'd be able to chase me.

Grimes: Oh, yeah, good old days.

Carlyle: When he asked about the stores and the changes here. I remember before we had our first store at Lucky's, which is where Nordstrom now. But you said something about {a Hegstrom?}, but you guys would buy your meat from Lawrence's, which was on their ranch and stuff like that, and you would go to the farmers market in Concord.

Grimes: No, it was a Williamson's Market that was up on the hill on North Main Street someplace, and we used to get our meat from them. They butchered and everything. I don't know whatever happened to then. Of course, Lawrence's was still around. Everybody bought their meat from them. But yeah, there was a lot of things.

Dunham: Was that meat raised locally here, then?

02-00:42:37

Grimes: I don't know where it was raised, but I just know that they had this big freezer thing there, and we could go and buy what we wanted and take it home and put it in the freezer. But it was Williamson's Locker, is what it was called.

Carlyle: We went to Concord, to the pig farm, to buy the hogs from there. I don't remember, as a kid, them ever going to grocery stores, because we didn't have them.

Grimes: No, we didn't have anything out here.

Dunham: Well, I was thinking about the Thunderbird and your Aunt Ginger again. How did the club do after the war? We'd had the big surge and—

02-00:43:08

Grimes: It did very up until— and I forget what year they closed her down—but she always did well, because everybody liked her. She just had a personality everybody loved.

Dunham: Did she continue to perform and entertain?

02-00:43:19

Grimes: She still did some, but she just went in the restaurant business and ended up being a waitress or a hostess or something. Because she couldn't have anything. She couldn't have a car; she couldn't have anything.

Dunham: So what happened? It was a tax problem?

02-00:43:32

Grimes: It was something with the taxes—that Louie and Danny didn't pay, whatever it was—and she just didn't pay any attention; she let them handle all the business.

Dunham: Because you said at one point, she was defined as the wealthiest woman in Contra Costa? Is that what it was?

02-00:43:45

Grimes: Yeah. It's in one of those newspaper articles, yeah.

Dunham: That was based on the one club, or were there other businesses she was involved in?

02-00:43:52

Grimes: She had two clubs then, and she had horses. She was doing all right. But in those days, little old San Pablo, what was there, you know?

Dunham: But throughout Contra Costa County, I would think that would be something.

02-00:44:05

Granddaughter Yeah, that's a big area.

02-00:44:09

Daughter

She went to being hostesses at the steakhouse or the Broiler fish house and stuff like that. And she worked at the White Club in Martinez for a while, too. But she couldn't let go of the show business part. She tried opening a modeling studio for a while. The only reason I remember that is they tried to get me to go into it, and I hated it. But she continually would get gigs, so-called, like at the Claremont and places like that. In my opinion, she should've bowed out, because you just can't let go.

Grimes:

Well, they never do. Unless they go onto religion, they never give it up, your show people don't, if you ever notice that. They'll come back year after year after year.

Dunham:

The church can be another stage. It's other work, too, but—

02-00:44:52

Grimes:

That's right. Oh, yeah. Oh, definitely!

Dunham:

I want to get back to what you're asking, but I'll just say [briefly], you mentioned about your mom definitely enjoyed the preaching, is that right?

02-00:45:01

Grimes:

Yeah, the preacher's itch, you bet. That's what I call it.

Dunham:

Yeah, well, can you describe what a preacher's itch is?

02-00:45:07

Grimes:

Well, they don't know when to shut up. She wasn't the only one. You hear a lot of them, even now. Say your message and get it over with; don't go on and on and on. We used to go to revivals. You would go and you were supposed to eat. Well, they talk, talk, talk, and I said, "My God, doesn't anybody ever shut up?" That's what I call preacher's itch. Have some sense here.

Dunham:

So you were more concise in your preaching?

02-00:45:35

Grimes:

Yeah.

Daughter

I think Grandma's family had a natural talent and ability. They were all musically inclined, to some degree, they all had beautiful voices. Grandma's not as beautiful a voice as the others, but very talented.

Grimes:

She was when she was younger, though. Her voice changed.

Daughter

But they all had an extreme talent that they inherited, apparently, from their father, I assume. And it was passed on to a number of the cousins. But my

perspective of watching her mother and the aunts is that they all liked to control everything, but they also had a natural ability of entertaining. So if you were ever around them there really wasn't a boredom. Whether it was church, a family reunion, a dinner, strangers on the street, they automatically had the leading questions, and had this whole event going on. If it lagged, Aunt Ginger and Grandma would bust out with a song. You said no to the Western, but I often remember them singing, "Leaving on That New River Train."

Grimes: Well, I don't call that Western. To me, that was like the hillbilly stuff.

Daughter But they had their own way, whether religion, show business, or just mundane social life, there was nothing mundane about their personalities.

Dunham: Did any of your children or grandchildren, relations, pursue entertainment?

02-00:46:55

Grimes: My son could have been, if he would've lived or went into the profession, because—what was that guy's name, Lewis? Jerry Lee Lewis wanted him to travel with him.

Dunham: Oh, really?

02-00:47:06

Grimes: Because he could dance and sing. He was good.

Daughter I thought Little Richard. Jerry Lee Lewis?

Grimes: Jerry Lee Lewis.

Daughter He fraternized with a lot of them.

Grimes: He worked in LA for a while. I personally met Sammy Davis and—.

Dunham: So he was a dancer and performer?

02-00:47:21

Grimes: He could dance; he wouldn't go into it. They tried to get him into it; he wouldn't. But he was good, wasn't he?

Daughter Yes!

Dunham: Do you know why he didn't want to?

02-00:47:29

Grimes: No. Personality-wise, just—

Daughter Yeah! Because he had our family genes, and he was going to control it his way. He was good, he knew the best, and it was going to be his way. He was.

Dunham: That's who you said had started a club?

02-00:47:43

Grimes: Yeah. Yeah, he had bought a club in Colorado, and was fighting them and—the attorney I picked up when I went, when I found out he'd been killed, the exact attorney that I got had said when we went in, "Do you have a picture of your son?" Marlene, her sister, had one. He said, "Your son sat in that very chair three weeks ago, and I told him, 'Do *not* fight them.'"

Dunham: We talked about it off camera, but he got in a fight with the mafia, is that right?

02-00:48:15

Grimes: Well, no, he didn't get in a fight with them; he was fighting them over the contract. The contract that they sold him was illegal. They had taken his money. The guy that sold that contract didn't own it; it was own by the mafias. This guy didn't own it. I forgot his name, but anyway. Yeah, it was quite a—

Dunham: That's very sad.

02-00:48:35

Grimes: Yeah, it is, yeah. Yeah, they had taken his car, his wallet, his jewelry. Everything was gone. Everything.

Daughter: Nobody else went into show business, but they all had a talent. Every one of Grandma's eleven brothers and sisters that lived had a kid that had that beautiful singing voice or a talent, whether they sang in churches or whatever they did. And her great-grandfather obviously had it, too—that's where they got it—because he was instantly made bugler in the Civil War. So I assume it just came up the—

Grimes: Well, I don't know.

Daughter: But anyhow, what happened to us?

Grimes: I don't know. I don't know.

Dunham: So this property, through the years, has it been a place for gatherings and parties and family reunions then?

02-00:49:21

Grimes: Oh, it was for years, yeah. It was, yeah. Sure was. In fact, even when the guys were in the—Marlene's husband that she met, and Bob and them—I used to have all the sailors over, and I'd put up tents out in the yard, put all the guys out in the yard. I'd cook hotdogs and pork and beans for them. I felt sorry for them, you know? Here they're waiting—

Hanson: All of the kids used to hang out here. The kids' friends and all the kids hung out here. This was Mom's house.

02-00:49:52

Grimes: Yeah. Yeah.

Hanson: They'd put up tents in the backyard.

Dunham: It's fun. It's a great space.

02-00:49:58

Grimes: Yeah.

Dunham: Is there anything that I haven't asked you today that you might like to tell us about?

02-00:50:05

Grimes: Oh, I don't know, I'd have to think, and I'd probably have to think about it so long, we've covered so much.

Dunham: Anything either of you think that we—?

02-00:50:14

Carlyle: Just like Mom. You say something and something pops into my head.

Dunham: I'll just ask. I know you've been involved, and you've been great, donating some of your photos and materials to the Park Service. Looking back on the war years and thinking about the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front [National Historical] Park, how do you feel about those years and how it's maybe impacted your life and others?

02-00:50:40

Grimes: Oh, I think the museum part was exciting, that they got the museum together. My kids really didn't want me to give the stuff away, and I thought, "You know what? This is history." So I just did it. I think it's important for generations coming up, because they don't know anything about it.

Hanson: She's made reference a number of times, over the last few years particularly, that that experience, because the women had to go to the work front when the men weren't here, that that was what allowed them, and her generation, to go out in the working world, and what started the change for the rest of us. I'm not so sure that's all good, but—so I think she feels that that brought forth a better livelihood for the women. Or a better lifestyle for the women.

Dunham: It certainly seems like you're a very independent, strong woman.

02-00:51:39

Grimes: Have been, yeah.

Dunham: You've done a variety of jobs and made your way well in the world, so I would assume that you would think that opportunities in the war played some role in that.

02-00:51:51

Grimes: Yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, just to hand somebody this hundred-pound air pressure gun with a chisel on it and don't tell you anything. "Okay, go to work." Okay.

Dunham: You're lucky you weren't hurt worse or somebody else hurt, with no real training.

02-00:52:07

Grimes: Yeah, really, yeah. You learn fast.

Dunham: It's amazing. Well, I want to thank you very much for your donations there, and all of your sharing today. As you said, for future generations, the value of this oral history is that your voice can continue to speak to them for decades and centuries to come.

02-00:52:31

Grimes: We saw an article on Harvey Girls the other night. They were talking, and I thought, "That reminds me of me," because I'd been there and done things. That's what you want to hear, is from the people themselves that are still here.

02-00:52:44

Granddaughter: My daughter and my son-in-law and my two grandsons are coming July 27, and she wants to go to the Rosie museum.

Dunham: Great.

02-00:52:53

Hanson: With Grandma.

Grimes: Well, Elizabeth told me they were going to have a regular display up on me, and I don't if that's true or not.

Dunham: Yes, I think it's part of the permanent exhibits.

02-00:53:05

Grimes: That would be nice. That would be nice.

Dunham: All right. Well, any last thoughts, before I close the recording?

02-00:53:10

Grimes: No, but on pictures, if you want me to look up the couple with Uncle Bill and the guys on it, to go with the tape, I can do that.

Dunham: That'd be great. Yeah, I'll just say on the recording, before we stop, that we have a recording that your aunt did; maybe I'll just ask you briefly about that. So it was your aunt who especially—she had a reel-to-reel recorder.

02-00:53:26

Grimes: Yes. Yes.

Dunham: And she recorded performances, but also she interviewed, in '42—who did she interview, your uncle?

02-00:53:34

Grimes: The Navy Seabees that came in from Kodiak, Alaska to visit her. My uncle brought two or three guys with him, and she was interviewing them, because they had to go. So that's what the tape is; she was interviewing them, how they felt about the war.

Dunham: And then another of the recordings made, we think is a performance, maybe, that they did at the club?

02-00:53:56

Grimes: Yeah, I'm not sure. We have so much, I'm not really sure.

Dunham: We'll see. Thank you very much for sharing those, as well, and sharing all of this history.

[End of interview]