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Berkeley, California

Marcia Henning

Rosie the Riveter  
World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by  
Sam Redman  
in 2011

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Marcia Henning

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Interview #1 April 26, 2011

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01-00:00:07

Redman: My name is Sam Redman. Today is April 26. All right. We are in Walnut Creek, California, and I'm here today with Marcia Henning. Marcia, would you be willing to spell your full name for me—or tell me your full name first.

01-00:00:27

Henning: It's Marcia, M-A-R-C-I-A, Henning, H-E-N-N-I-N-G.

01-00:00:33

Redman: All right, perfect. Can you tell me whereabouts you were born?

01-00:00:37

Henning: I was born in San Luis Obispo, California.

01-00:00:40

Redman: San Luis Obispo, okay. That's a pretty little town, right along the coast.

01-00:00:45

Henning: It's not exactly on the coast, but it's close.

01-00:00:48

Redman: It's close to the coast, right. It's along the coastal freeway, is that correct?

01-00:00:53

Henning: Yes, Highway 101.

01-00:00:57

Redman: Tell me about what it was like to grow up in San Luis Obispo. Were you there for—

01-00:01:05

Henning: Actually, I didn't grow up there. I lived there until I was three years old, and then I left there. But I've been back. I've had relatives there, so I've been back many times.

01-00:01:17

Redman: So there's always been sort of a strong family connection to San Luis Obispo?

01-00:01:20

Henning: Exactly.

01-00:01:23

Redman: When you were three, you moved to a new location? Somewhere in California?

01-00:01:28

Henning: Yes.

01-00:01:29

Redman: Whereabouts was that?

01-00:01:31

Henning: Down in Long Beach, and then to San Pedro. My father was in the lumber business. At that time, lumber was the king thing to be in. It's like steel is today. Lumber was big, so you went where the lumber yards were. He owned a lumber yard in San Luis Obispo, and then sold that and moved down to Long Beach. We lived there. Then we moved to Woodland, California, up by Sacramento, and lived there for quite a while. He owned a lumber yard there.

01-00:02:15

Redman: This would have been in the midst of the Great Depression, so—

01-00:02:20

Henning: No, the Depression hadn't arrived yet. This was just before. The Depression started in 1929 and this was just before that. I was born in 1919. Between there, we moved around to follow where the—at that time, was when redwood first became a thing, the thing to have. But up to that point, houses were built mostly of cedar and pine. Then suddenly they decided that redwood was—that was before we had the thing where you can't build redwood out of just any redwood tree. Nowadays, you can't even cut down a redwood tree without having a certificate for it, especially around this area. As I say, you followed the lumber yards. My dad owned a lumber yard in Woodland, California. You always had a lumber yard by a railroad so that the railroads could bring the lumber down. Then we moved to Oakland. That was really the beginning of the Depression, sort of in a funny way, because the thing I remember the most about moving to Oakland was that children were not allowed to rent in just any house. There was one block in Oakland that was off of Excelsior. There were all kinds of apartments, and there were more children because all those apartments there would rent to people with children. I don't know why they thought that was a bad idea, but anyway, it was a bad idea to have children, even near the grammar schools. In fact, I still have many friends from that one block there, where all of us children grew up.

01-00:04:44

Redman: So there was a pretty concentrated area of Oakland—

01-00:04:47

Henning: Yes, of children. It was just amazing. There were several schools right there. Then we moved to another district, called Cleveland Street, and the Cleveland School. Some of my friends that had been on that block that allowed children to be there also moved. We all grew up together in this Cleveland School. I still have a lot of those friends.

01-00:05:17

Redman: You became good friends with a lot of the kids. You'd mentioned that you noticed a little bit of the Depression before even 1929.

01-00:05:27

Henning:

It was just the fact that when we came to Oakland, the people were very snooty about children. I don't know what they thought we were going to do, but anyway, they didn't allow us to do many things. All of a sudden, that changed. I would attribute it to the fact that the Depression was something they were thinking about. I'm not sure about that. As I say, I still have one friend that I went through all of this with. She lives down in the lower part of California.

01-00:06:16

Redman:

I'm just curious what Oakland would have been like, then. In your later grammar school years, in your early middle school years, a lot of these children were growing up in these families that were concentrated in some of these school districts.

01-00:06:32

Henning:

It was a wonderful town. I really enjoyed Oakland. My husband and I both grew up in Oakland. He was born in San Francisco, but we both enjoyed Oakland. At that time, when the Depression started and you went into the WPA and the CCC, Oakland was a wonderful place. My husband and I went to the first progressive school. You don't know what a progressive school is, probably. We had a junior high school. We went to this junior high school, Westlake Junior High, that allowed us to do things that most of the schools didn't do, which was being progressive at that time.

01-00:07:39

Redman:

My understanding of that would have been a fairly big overhaul from the curriculum from back in the one-room schoolhouse.

01-00:07:48

Henning:

Exactly. They tried everything. All the teachers were wonderful that we had.

01-00:07:57

Redman:

So this is at the Cleveland District now?

01-00:07:58

Henning:

No. I went from the Cleveland School to a different grammar school. My husband did, too. But we went to Westlake Junior High. I was sent there, because most of my friends went to a different high school, but I'm kind of a—what will I say? I like to be active in everything.

01-00:08:26

Redman:

So you were a joiner.

01-00:08:28

Henning:

No, I'm not a joiner at all. I don't join clubs. But I like to do things. Always liked to do things. I like to do everything that I can think of. Someone asked me one day, "Where did you learn to build?" I said, "I don't know, but I could build a house if I had to." It may have come from my fathering being of the

lumber business. I don't know. Our family always built everything. We did everything we could think of.

01-00:08:59

Redman: So you were excited, then, in schools, to experiment along with your teachers?

01-00:09:03

Henning: Right. In junior high school, we sang the entire H.M.S. Pinafore of Gilbert and Sullivan. That was the kind of teachers we had. They tried everything with us. It was fun, because all the other schools were doing the same steady curriculum, and we were experimenting with what we did.

01-00:09:33

Redman: This is something that maybe, as a child, you wouldn't have been necessarily aware of, but did you get the sense that some of your teachers had gone to college?

01-00:09:44

Henning: Oh, they'd all gone.

01-00:09:45

Redman: They'd all gone to college?

01-00:09:46

Henning: All gone to college.

01-00:09:46

Redman: There again, it was different from maybe the one-room schoolhouse days that your parents had gone through school, and now all of your teachers had gone to places like Cal and the University of Chicago, I suspect, and places like that.

01-00:09:59

Henning: My mother was a Stanford graduate, too. My father was from Kentucky, so I don't know what schools he went to. It was fun to be in a progressive school. At that time, all the schools began to join in and do a lot of things. Principally, this was to do with the WPA and the CCC. Everybody was experimenting with getting jobs and doing things. We ate odd things during the Depression. That was the thing I remember. My mother was being very, very—what will I say? Trying to save money, like everybody was. Nobody had any money, so you made do. The thing about the WPA and all of those work projects was that if you ever played an instrument, you were suddenly in an orchestra. That was the thing. The Oakland Auditorium there had a little theater, and that little theater had more concerts than—I grew up with classical music. I don't play a note. My mother and father played—we had an organ and we had a piano, and they played those. I learned to love classical music because we went to every concert. Everybody that ever tooted a horn or played a violin or anything was—

- 01-00:11:44  
Redman: Would go into the WPA.
- 01-00:11:45  
Henning: You would go into a concert system somewhere along the line. It was amazing. They came out of the woodwork. People that you didn't even know knew how to play anything. Suddenly, oh, this is great.
- 01-00:12:02  
Redman: There were opportunities for jobs and to perform.
- 01-00:12:04  
Henning: That's right. My mother and father had many, many, many friends. They were always trying to help the people who—one man literally didn't know anything about anything, except bridge. He liked to play bridge, and he could teach bridge. So they hired him to teach a whole group of people bridge, and he went on from there to teach other groups, and other groups. In other words, they started something where he could earn some money.
- 01-00:12:36  
Redman: I've heard conflicting opinions from people who lived through the New Deal era and saw these Works Progress-type projects. Some people would say the stereotype of the WPA or the CCC is that people were hired to dig a ditch and then fill it in again. That it was just a way for people to have work.
- 01-00:12:59  
Henning: No, that's not true. I even think that today, we could use the CCC for homeless people.
- 01-00:13:10  
Redman: So people that are homeless maybe being in a Civilian Conservation Corps-type of organization.
- 01-00:13:14  
Henning: Right. If they had a reason for being, a reason for joining, a reason for doing something with somebody else. That's what it gave people. People responded to that. They really did. It was amazing. As I say, I wouldn't have known a thing about classical music, except for the WPA. Boy. They had this little theater in the Oakland Auditorium, and so we had all of the best plays that were being given in New York. Everybody went on tour. Not only just the one group, but they'd get another group and they would be the same play. They'd go down South and someone else would go up North and come down again.
- 01-00:14:04  
Redman: So actors hired by the WPA would travel?
- 01-00:14:07  
Henning: Yes, and there would always be one star. There would be all these people that they'd gather. I used to go down and watch them set up the scenery because it was fun to watch them. They'd come in by train. Everybody traveled by train.

It was an interesting time. As I say, we didn't have but one car, which my father drove to work, so we'd always take the streetcar. People don't know what it's like to take streetcars today.

01-00:144:44

Redman: Tell me about what it is like to take a streetcar.

01-00:14:47

Henning: The thing about the streetcars is that you knew where they ran. We went to high school on a streetcar, went to Oakland High School, and we'd go around, and we had to go all through town to get there. We'd get there and then come back on the streetcars. At that time, before the bridges were built, there was the Key System train and the Southern Pacific trains that ran through Oakland. They would go down to what they call the mole, which now is where they're loading the container ships. That used to be the mole down there.

01-00:15:37

Redman: And what was that?

01-00:15:39

Henning: That was where the ferries all came in. There were two trains. The red trains were the Southern Pacific trains, and then the orange trains were the Key System. They would go down to the mole, and you'd get on the ferry to go to San Francisco. People don't realize that. It's kind of funny.

01-00:16:05

Redman: What I'd like to ask, then, is—

01-00:16:08

Henning: And we did the same thing with automobiles.

01-00:16:10

Redman: You could put your automobile on those ferries?

01-00:16:13

Henning: On a different ferry. There were automobile ferries and there were passenger ferries.

01-00:16:17

Redman: I see. Tell me about what that trip on the ferry—let's say you were a high school student and you took a streetcar in Oakland and you wanted to go to San Francisco, before the Bay Bridge opened. So you would hop on the streetcar, travel around the entire town of Oakland, get to the mole station—

01-00:16:41

Henning: The streetcars would just stay within Oakland. If you wanted to go to San Francisco, you got on a Key System train. They came all the way through Oakland. The red cars did, too. I don't know where they—we always were involved with the Key System train. In fact, part of Piedmont, if you know

anything about Piedmont, part of Piedmont—some of the best houses are built right on where the Key System train went, clear up through Piedmont.

01-00:17:08

Redman: So that people could commute to work.

01-00:17:10

Henning: To San Francisco, yes. I don't remember how long it took. You think I would remember that. But people commuted, so it couldn't have taken too long.

01-00:17:27

Redman: I'm thinking about life before the Bay Bridge. Taking the ferry into San Francisco and having the seawater splash in your face—

01-00:17:36

Henning: It didn't.

01-00:17:37

Redman: It seems like it would be a different experience than driving.

01-00:17:40

Henning: It was probably the smoothest thing you ever wanted to do. Very smooth. There was no roughness, no waves, no nothing. You just glided across the water. In San Francisco was the big Ferry Building. All the ferries went there and you got on a streetcar and you went up San Francisco.

01-00:18:15

Redman: Do you think people enjoyed that part of the trip, or do you think they took it for granted? Like, oh, I'm riding the ferry again. Or do you think it was something that was sort of a novelty?

01-00:18:23

Henning: We took it for granted. That's how we were going to get to San Francisco. How else would we do it? The same thing was true where the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge is. You took a ferry across there, and they had automobile ferries and passenger ferries.

01-00:18:43

Redman: I want to get back to the New Deal in just a moment, but I'd like to stay on the bridges just for a minute or two. When the Bay Bridge opened, or when that was being constructed, did you think about that at all? Did you see the construction at the Bay Bridge?

01-00:19:00

Henning: Oh, sure. I'll have to show you before you leave some pictures of my husband. We've been doing this recently with our great-grandchildren. One of them is just fascinated by the fact that my husband's friends, just down the street from where he lived, the father was with Columbia Steel, which was furnishing the steel for the bridge. He got his two sons and Bill an invitation to go over and they were guided along up on the ramparts, we'll call them, where the towers

were before there was any road. They were just up there on the towers. I have pictures of it I can show you. We were very involved with all of it, particularly because Mr. Henning, Bill's father, was very interested in—

01-00:20:00

Redman: The building of the bridges?

01-00:20:02

Henning: The construction. Everybody was interested in the building of the bridges. What it would do for us, all the Key System trains were going to go across the bridge. On the lower deck was all the Key System trains, and trucks went down there. The top floor was autos both ways.

01-00:20:26

Redman: It was just for automobiles?

01-00:20:28

Henning: Yes. There were so many accidents. That's when they changed it to one way.

01-00:20:33

Redman: I see, okay. I'm curious about something you said just a second ago. You said that as the bridges were being constructed, people started thinking, how is this going to change my life in the future, or how is this going to change how I get to San Francisco, or will this change the community? Will it change Oakland? Will it change San Francisco?

01-00:21:04

Henning: We've seen several documentaries on the building of the bridges. Nation-wide, they are much more interested in the Golden Gate Bridge, because everybody talks about it. Actually, it did do a lot, but never has a bridge been used as much as the Bay Bridge has. It opened up just worlds. We were let out of school. When it opened, my husband still boasts about the fact the governor was in the first car, and I think my husband and his friends got in a car right behind him to go across on the opening of it. This was the Bay Bridge. I don't remember the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge. I should have, but it didn't seem to be important to me as much as the other. San Francisco simply stopped. Every company, everything just stopped. Literally. They had an electrical parade at night. Everybody just turned on every light in San Francisco at night. Everybody was dressed up. What it had to do with the forty-niners, I don't know, but they all dressed up as gold-diggers and cowboys.

01-00:22:42

Redman: People, in a sense, were celebrating California history in addition to the opening of the bridge.

01-00:22:49

Henning: It was a very fabulous thing. It's still pretty important.

- 01-00:22:55  
Redman: Yes, it absolutely is. What's interesting to me is that you could argue that the Golden Gate Bridge—it's a pretty remarkable structure, and architecturally, it's gorgeous, but the Bay Bridge does a lot of the work.
- 01-00:23:16  
Henning: I can't tell you what it opened. Right now, we could use three of them.
- 01-00:23:22  
Redman: Exactly. It's so busy.
- 01-00:23:25  
Henning: You could really use three of them. It's still fascinating to me that you can get from here to there without thinking of getting on the train and getting on the ferry. I kind of miss that, however. I liked going on the ferry. It was fun.
- 01-00:23:47  
Redman: What about it was enjoyable? The view or the process? What did you like about going on the ferry that was—
- 01-00:23:52  
Henning: It was relaxing. Very relaxing. When you're going across a bridge, you're trying to drive and keep the other people from driving too fast. When you get on a train and you go to the ferry, you're relaxed. So you're relaxed going to work. They walked. They walked from the Ferry Building to their jobs. There was no obesity then. Everybody was walking like crazy.
- 01-00:24:46  
Redman: You'd get a little exercise in the morning.
- 01-00:24:29  
Henning: Everybody expected it.
- 01-00:24:35  
Redman: Today, there is, I think, a little bit of an expectation that—and I don't commute every day into San Francisco, but for my friends who do, they might say—or commute to Oakland or whatever direction—that if there's a problem on the BART train, you might be a couple of minutes late and it's sort of expected. The idea of taking a streetcar to a ferry, then walking from the Ferry Building, it seems like things could be behind, things could be delayed. But it seems to have run fairly smoothly in your experience.
- 01-00:25:06  
Henning: Oh, it did. When you don't expect anything else. Nowadays, it would be an inconvenience, but to us, it was what we did. I have a funny story on that. I was always taking ballet lessons. Every girl I knew took ballet lessons then. It's not so today. Ballet is kind of a passé thing. I got into the {Christian?} School of Ballet in San Francisco. My mother was delighted that I was allowed to come into that. That would be just wonderful. Today, I would not be tall enough or long-legged enough to do it, but anyway, at that time, I could

go in. Years before they ever started this Nutcracker that they have now—I've been thinking about this because of the kids, my grandchildren—they decided to put on sort of a showing of the Nutcracker. They featured more the children than they do today when they put on the big Nutcracker. Mother was just delighted I was going to be in this—oh, isn't that wonderful—until she found that she had to take me over there every day on the ferry, get on a streetcar, go up there, come back again. She said, "All right, we did that once. We're not going to do that again. That's too much trouble." So we didn't do that.

01-00:27:01

Redman: She was proud, but it was a little—

01-00:27:02

Henning: Proud, but that was a little too much. Also, because the showings were at night, she didn't want us traveling around at night. There weren't a lot of cars then. When we got back on this side, then my father had to be waiting with the automobile to bring us home. My mother thought that wasn't a good idea, so that stopped right then and there.

01-00:27:27

Redman: Let me just ask one or two more questions about bridges, and then we'll go back to the New Deal, and then we'll get into the war. The last question I want to ask about bridges, if you have any comments on either the Golden Gate or the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. You had mentioned remembering when those two events happened. You obviously remember the Golden Gate before the Golden Gate Bridge was there, as far as what that looked like and people maybe wanting to come in from Marin, but then the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. I think of that as being this gorgeous view driving over it, but it's maybe not as iconic as either the Bay Bridge or the Golden Gate Bridge.

01-00:28:11

Henning: The San Rafael Bridge? It opened up an awful lot. Because you can go the other way—you can go up through Vallejo and Napa, and that way. We used to have a little ranch up in the Valley of the Moon, or above that, so we would go up there a lot. During the war, my father was given extra gasoline rations so that I could drive him up there. He couldn't drive the car himself. He had heart trouble. I would drive him up there because of that.

01-00:28:52

Redman: During the war?

01-00:28:53

Henning: During the war. But before that, we always would go—one time, we would go the bridge—Frank Lloyd Wright said of the San Rafael Bridge, he thought it was the ugliest bridge he had ever seen. Frank Lloyd Wright did. We happen to know the people who designed it, so we had to keep very quiet about that. It should have been built bigger. It isn't as easy for the use that it should have, especially with shipping and trucks.

01-00:29:37

Redman:

It's interesting to me that you've got a bridge structure, or an infrastructure that you're building, in the 1930s, and there's no way to really anticipate that Napa, for instance, is going to become the wine capital of the world in some sense, and arguably one of the most active and driving-centered tourist activities in the country. People fly in all the time to San Francisco and then drive—

01-00:30:06

Henning:

You ought to read a book called "Napa." You ought to read that, and it will tell you a lot about that whole area.

That whole Napa Valley changed so completely that if you read the book "Napa," you'd understand a little bit more than I can tell you. It was—

01-00:30:42

Redman:

Yeah, but just in your experience.

01-00:30:48

Henning:

For instance, before the war, all that is now grapes was prunes.

01-00:30:58

Redman:

And that's what your father—

01-00:31:00

Henning:

We had a little prune ranch. They used to have a festival when the prune trees were in bloom. It looked like the whole valley was filled with popcorn balls. All these white, fluffy blossoms. It was a beautiful sight. It really was. The little town of Healdsburg and all up in there and all down the Napa Valley is still my favorite place to drive. I'd rather drive there than anyplace else.

01-00:31:36

Redman:

It's gorgeous up there.

01-00:31:37

Henning:

Oh, it's just beautiful. I have so many memories. My father taught me driving up the Napa Valley, and just beyond that, there's a mill, an old mill called Bailey's Mill up there. I still have a square nail that my father stole from there because it's so old. He said, "You ought to keep this now. You're never going to see another one like it." It was a wonderful, wonderful place. Everything there now is all in vines. It's all in wine vines. My husband and I went back, trying to find the ranch. It's just overgrown with vineyards. But the thing was, as more like a hobby than a job, but it was a job, I used to conduct tours. People would go up there. One day, I happened to ask a man, because I saw all the lug boxes that held the prunes now hold grapes. I saw some with my father's initials on it. So I asked the man about it, and he knew where the ranch was. He said, "What did you sell the ranch for?" The reason we sold it was because the people who we had to take the prunes in to be dried—it's an association for prunes—we had to take them there, but they wouldn't work for women. It's an actual fact. They would not work for us. We couldn't get

people to pick the prunes because they wouldn't work for women. All these Okies and Arkies and everyone that came out to build ships, before they built the ships, they were up there picking prunes. They just moved around. The whole of California is like that.

01-00:33:58

Redman:

So they would pick for your father, but then eventually the farm passed down to your mom or to your sibling—

01-00:34:06

Henning:

My mother. They would say, yes, they would do it, and they wouldn't. It was very difficult, so that's why we finally sold it. When we sold it, though—now, this is going to be hard for you to believe.

01-00:34:23

Redman:

About what year did you sell it? Following the war?

01-00:34:28

Henning:

I don't think my husband was home. My dad died in 1945, so it was 1946 that we sold it. We sold it for \$10,000. Isn't that awful? It later sold for \$25,000 an acre.

01-00:35:01

Redman:

I'd like to step back to the New Deal just for a moment and ask if you'd ever heard of the NYA, the National Youth Administration. What were your experiences with that? Did you know any young people?

01-00:35:15

Henning:

I didn't have any experiences with that. Why, I don't know, except that it really pertained more to a little older than I was at the time.

01-00:35:27

Redman:

So young people, but teenagers?

01-00:35:29

Henning:

I was just kind of in between. It was very useful. From that sprang the program dealing with art people, artists, and gave them jobs building signs. Also, the Coit Tower in San Francisco, that's all painted inside by Rivera. He employed the young people from the Youth Administration.

01-00:36:11

Redman:

I've often heard of that as a New Deal project.

01-00:36:14

Henning:

It was.

01-00:36:15

Redman:

It was NYA. It was young artists working for—

- 01-00:36:18  
Henning: As I say, Rivera was one, and then there was another one, Coruarubias. They hired the young people—
- 01-00:36:28  
Redman: To help them.
- 01-00:36:29  
Henning: Yes, to help them. They did a good job of that.
- 01-00:36:47  
Henning: My father and mother thought they were. Otherwise, they wouldn't have helped. But they got in and helped as much as they possibly could. In fact, most of the college people—my mother's friends were all Stanford people, and Cal—they all thought it was a good program. They all helped. All the college people helped. I never knew anyone that didn't.
- 01-00:37:16  
Redman: So people were involved in the WPA and CCC?
- 01-00:37:18  
Henning: I don't know why anyone would make fun of it, because it was a valuable thing, especially for the young people.
- 01-00:37:28  
Redman: To get experience and jobs.
- 01-00:37:36  
Henning: Like today, the twenties and thirties—that age group is trying to look around at what it's doing.
- 01-00:37:55  
Redman: Now the next question I'd like to ask—let me just check and see how much tape we've used—I'd like to ask about your recollections of Pearl Harbor. Can you situate me in time? Do you remember about how old you were when Pearl Harbor happened?
- 01-00:38:07  
Henning: My husband and I had just announced our engagement. We were out looking for an apartment. This woman said to us, "Isn't it just terrible?" We said, "What?" She said, "Pearl Harbor." We said, "What about Pearl Harbor?" There was no television, don't forget, and radios were more or less scarce—good radios. There were no car radios. When we said, "What about Pearl Harbor?" we didn't know. We were looking for an apartment because we were going to get married. That's all we were thinking about.
- 01-00:38:50  
Redman: Totally took you by surprise.

01-00:38:52

Henning:

Took us totally by surprise. Later on, I had a lot of relatives in the Army and Navy, and they said they weren't surprised. If we're going to get into the war, the thing I think you should realize, more than anything else, and a lot of people don't really realize what San Francisco and the Bay meant. It was the point of embarkation. Us and Los Angeles and Seattle. It was the point of embarkation. Everybody was here. Everybody. If you had an empty room, it was filled. My mother rented out rooms. Everybody rented out rooms. It didn't matter who you were. You rented out a room.

01-00:39:46

Redman:

I'd like to go back and ask you, then, because it strikes me, you were doing an apartment search right before housing in the Bay Area completely changed. Because of that, there were so many people coming to the Bay Area and trying to find housing. I'd like to ask, was it hard for you when you were looking for that apartment right around when Pearl Harbor happened? Were you able to find an apartment—

01-00:40:12

Henning:

That was not a problem.

01-00:40:16

Redman:

But later on, I imagine, it would have been.

01-00:40:18

Henning:

Almost instantly, it changed.

01-00:40:21

Redman:

So you were somewhat lucky to have found an apartment right at that time.

01-00:40:25

Henning:

Right. People don't realize every empty store—because of the Depression, the stores were empty—every empty store, if it had a bathroom, you rented it. There's a whole row of little shops across from Tech High School in Oakland. A whole row. Every one of them was—

01-00:40:54

Redman:

Filled.

01-00:40:55

Henning:

Yes. They rented out so many attics. My husband and I lived in a section of Oakland that was called Adams Point, which is down by the lake. Adams Point was named for some senator. It's where Senator Perkins lived. They had great, big, old, wooden and shingled houses. Three-stories tall. They all had an attic. Every attic was rented out, so much so that the fire department had to come along and put out fire escapes. You'll still see them on some of those buildings.

01-00:41:42

Redman:

Is that right? That's where that comes from?

- 01-00:41:44  
Henning: Yes. The fire escapes were all over the place. You couldn't have people living in an attic and not have a fire escape. People rented out rooms. I had so many relatives. I had fifty-two first cousins. Isn't that awful?
- 01-00:42:07  
Redman: That is amazing. How many siblings did you have?
- 01-00:42:10  
Henning: I just had one, but my father was one of thirteen.
- 01-00:42:13  
Redman: So that's how you had so many cousins.
- 01-00:42:16  
Henning: If you're from the South, it's first cousin and first cousin once removed. That means their children. So I had fifty-two of those. Anybody that was in the Army or Navy, or going to be in the Army or Navy or whatever, had to come through Oakland or someplace, unless they went over to Europe. In so doing, we'd get these phone calls. "Aunt Winifred, you don't know me, but Joe or Pete or Harry or whatever told me that maybe you'd have a davenport I could sleep on for tonight." I never knew who was going to be on the couches when I came down in the morning, because it was always somebody there. That's the way it was all over.
- 01-00:43:02  
Redman: You were open and receptive to putting cousins up?
- 01-00:43:06  
Henning: Sure. They had to have a place to be. I got to know a lot of people I never would have known. Not one of them had ever had an artichoke. That was another thing.
- 01-00:43:20  
Redman: Is that right? So a lot of these people were from the South. A lot of these relatives.
- 01-00:43:23  
Henning: They were all from all over the United States.
- 01-00:43:26  
Redman: They had never had an artichoke?
- 01-00:43:29  
Henning: We learned that the hard way. My mother was always offering them artichokes. We grew artichokes up at the ranch, too. We'd always get them. But they never knew how to eat them, so mother stopped doing that.
- 01-00:43:42  
Redman: These young soldiers would be like, what the heck is this?

01-00:43:47

Henning:

These poor young soldiers, some of them were just babies. They were just sad. They were so lonesome and so homesick. They were just so homesick. If they'd come out with a troop, but the ones that came out—go to San Francisco was their orders. Or, go to Oakland. They were just sad. They were so lonesome. So the Red Cross and the Salvation Army and anybody else that was around would make sure that they had, on Easter or Fourth of July, they would always have someplace to go and have dinner. So we always had somebody in the house.

01-00:44:45

Redman:

I'd like to get into your work with the Red Cross, but I'd like to first ask—I understand that there was a lot of fear on the West Coast that places like San Francisco or Oakland might be attacked. There were blackouts and warnings—

01-00:45:01

Henning:

Oh, the blackouts were fun.

01-00:45:03

Redman:

The blackouts were fun? You enjoyed that, okay.

01-00:45:06

Henning:

Not really. In fact, we were supposed to be married on Saturday night, right after New Years. I think New Years was on a Thursday, but Saturday night, we were going to be married at eight o'clock at night. That was the time to be married at that time, the in thing. Everybody was blacked out. Brides were walking to the churches. The people couldn't get to the churches. Your car lights were dimmed, too. You couldn't turn on your car lights. They enforced it.

01-00:45:51

Redman:

People were pretty strict about it.

01-00:45:52

Henning:

Oh, very. You had blinds made out of black material.

01-00:46:00

Redman:

And there would be wardens knocking on your door.

01-00:46:02

Henning:

Oh, absolutely. We did have a sign that said "Blackouts." The thing was, when they began to black out all the churches, my mother said, "No, forget that. We're going to change the date. I am not going to spend all that money just so you're going to be blacked out." So I was married on New Years Day, in a church during the daytime. I always thought that was funny. You'd be amazed at the number of weddings that were—because nobody had prepared for it.

01-00:46:41

Redman: They were all set to go—

01-00:46:42

Henning: This was just going to be normal time. But the blackouts weren't as bad as it sounds. We learned to adjust to it. The only time that I ever was really scared was coming across from San Francisco to Oakland on the Bay Bridge on the train. The train had to stop and turn off all of its lights. We sat there for an hour-and-a-half. Now, that's scary, because they thought there were airplanes in the sky.

01-00:47:14

Redman: Oh, wow. I've never heard that. So this was at some point during the war when you were taking a train back from San Francisco?

01-00:47:20

Henning: Yes. I worked in San Francisco at that time. That's the only time I was really scared.

01-00:47:30

Redman: I can imagine that would be very scary, sitting in that car.

01-00:47:35

Henning: Nobody said a word. They just sat there.

01-00:47:38

Redman: Did they make an announcement saying—

01-00:47:41

Henning: No, they didn't say anything. They just stopped the train and turned off the lights, and all the bridge lights went out.

01-00:47:49

Redman: So you would have not thought to yourself, hey, this is just another power outage? You would have thought, this is something war-related.

01-00:47:58

Henning: Oh, yes. Naturally, that's what everyone thought. That's what everyone thought.

01-00:48:02

Redman: So that was always sort of in the back of your mind?

01-00:48:04

Henning: Oh, of course. There were more supposed sightings of submarines. Everybody saw something. Imaginary or otherwise, they saw something like that. It was an interesting time. People were interested in what they were looking at and what they were doing. You have to realize how many people were here. We suddenly had ten million people here. Everybody was building ships. Nobody ever complained, like when Kaiser was going to build the ships. Okay, let him have the land. Let him do this. It's fine. I think that's the most important thing

to say on this subject, is how everybody—everybody—in the world did what they had to do, and nobody complained. I never heard anybody complain about anything. Even the food we had—the meat was scarce.

01-00:49:20

Redman:

Let me conclude this tape by asking about rationing, and then we'll switch to a new tape. Let me ask about what rationing was like for you in your experience. You had mentioned earlier that your father was given an extra gas ration to get to his ranch in Napa, and you would drive him. That's the first mention of rationing that I've heard you mention. Could you tell me a little bit more about rationing?

01-00:49:46

Henning:

To tell you the truth, I don't remember. Meat was rationed. We had meat stamps. I don't know what else. Gasoline was the main thing.

01-00:49:59

Redman:

I know nylons were rationed.

01-00:50:01

Henning:

We didn't have nylons. We had silk. If you had nylons, I don't know where they came from. Nylons were not invented then.

01-00:50:08

Redman:

You had silk stockings.

01-00:50:09

Henning:

Stockings. My children think this is just hysterical when I tell them what we did. They don't really believe me. It's kind of hard. Nobody paid any attention to it. We just did it.

01-00:50:25

Redman:

It was just known that it was rationed.

01-00:50:28

Henning:

You'd go down to the corner butcher store and you'd get what they had.

01-00:50:35

Redman:

That's the other thing that I ask people. Some people are able to answer this, and a lot of people just don't remember. I know that you would get sort of a tan ration book, and on the front of it, you would write your name and your age, and inside there would be all the coupons. The only trouble I have understanding with it is that the coupons will have, instead of a picture of meat or eggs or milk or whatever, it will have an American flag or a tank. Would you just hand your card—

01-00:51:11

Henning:

They all had numbers on them.

01-00:51:13  
 Redman: Okay, they had numbers on them, and that's how you'd figure out which was used for what?

01-00:51:18  
 Henning: I don't know. The meat rations were little round discs. Little round discs. Little ones. They were the size of my little fingernail. Those were for meat. The gasoline was a book with rationing in it. There weren't a lot of cars.

01-00:51:43  
 Redman: So that wasn't a problem for a lot of people?

01-00:51:45  
 Henning: Yes. My mother was a supervisor at the Naval Supply Depot, so she definitely had a car, but she had a group of people that rode with her that didn't have cars.

01-00:52:08  
 Redman: I know there was an active share the ride program. People were encouraged—

01-00:52:12  
 Henning: Oh, definitely. Definitely. As I say, mother had a car and she had extra gasoline rationing so she could drive to the Naval Supply Center and back. All these people met at a certain point.

01-00:52:29  
 Redman: Excellent. I'm going to stop this tape and then we'll continue on.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 henning\_marcia\_02\_04-26-11.mp3

02-00:00:07  
 Redman: All right, great. I'm back today with Marcia Henning. This is the second tape of our discussion. Now we're really going to continue to jump into World War Two. We talked a little bit about this. Between the start of the war and 1943, a lot of people from around the country moved into the Bay Area to find work.

02-00:00:28  
 Henning: It wasn't a lot of people. It was thousands.

02-00:00:31  
 Redman: Thousands and thousands of people.

02-00:00:32  
 Henning: Yes. They came in. As I say, if there was a place to rent—if it had a bathroom, it was rented. People built bathrooms up in their attics just so that they could rent out the attics. There wasn't enough places.

- 02-00:00:50  
Redman: A lot of these folks were from the South or from the Midwest. A lot of them were known as Arkies or Okies. What were your impressions of these people that were coming to the Bay Area?
- 02-00:01:05  
Henning: To tell you the truth, I didn't have an impression. My husband, at the beginning of the war, he was working in a steel company that built barges for the war. I really didn't have an impression. They were all hired. Anybody that could do anything was hired. If you could work, you were hired. I don't remember having a yes or a no idea about any of them, really.
- 02-00:01:48  
Redman: Now, your husband eventually joined the military. Is that correct?
- 02-00:01:57  
Henning: Everybody in the Bay Area at that time, or at least that I knew, as you can tell by my pictures, everybody was associated with water. Everybody had a boat or knew about boats or something, and he did, and so he was in the Army Transportation Corps. Speaking of rationing, the food we didn't do with—for instance, we didn't have canned tuna fish. That was all going to the military. What else didn't we have? Cream of mushroom soup had just come on the market, and everybody wanted cream of mushroom soup. Every recipe you ever had had cream of mushroom soup. When I would go back and forth up to the ranch with my dad, we'd stop at every grocery store all along the way if they had cream of mushroom soup or canned tuna. The funny part was that while I was doing that, one of the things he transported on his ship over to the war in New Guinea was a whole lot of canned tuna, all in cartons. And you know what happened to it when it got over there? The Seabees took all the cartons and plowed them into the ground so that there would be something to stabilize a runway for airplanes.
- 02-00:03:23  
Redman: So they didn't get used for exactly what people thought they were going to be used for.
- 02-00:03:34  
Henning: The things that happened during the war that you remember are the funny things. For instance, over in New Guinea, there's a full fire truck down in the water, which you can see. What they did was load it on one side of the barge, and the barge tipped over.
- 02-00:03:54  
Redman: Oops. So it's stories like that that—
- 02-00:03:58  
Henning: As I say, the funny things are the things you remember.

- 02-00:04:02  
Redman: In 1942, you had mentioned to me, you started working for the Red Cross. Is that correct?
- 02-00:04:08  
Henning: In '43.
- 02-00:04:09  
Redman: In 1943, you started working for the Red Cross. Can you tell me how that came about? How that opportunity came up?
- 02-00:04:16  
Henning: I have no idea. They asked for volunteers.
- 02-00:04:20  
Redman: Here, let's pause the tape. Oh, let me hand you this poster.
- 02-00:04:26  
Henning: See, right behind the chair?
- 02-00:04:28  
Redman: Yes. Here we go. Oh, wow. Look at this. Is this an original? This is an original?
- 02-00:04:36  
Henning: There's the original. I had a copy made of it, which is on the other side. That's the original. I would go around and talk to different groups about what donating blood was for and how they made it into plasma.
- 02-00:04:59  
Redman: The process of donating blood, and plasma in particular, was a fairly new innovation at the start of the war.
- 02-00:05:06  
Henning: Someone discovered—and I don't know who. I should know. The whole blood destroys itself. You can't use it. It spoils, in other words. They separate the red corpuscles from the white, and you use the plasma. Carter Lab in Berkeley, and all across the nation all the different labs, did this. They collected blood all across the nation, but we did it here in Oakland.
- 02-00:05:41  
Redman: Could you just hold that straight for a moment? Perfect. There we go. Continue. Go ahead and tell me about this.
- 02-00:05:55  
Henning: A different church donated its building so that the Red Cross could set up the collecting of blood there. They donated everything. A church did. The church is still in Oakland.
- 02-00:06:11  
Redman: So you would speak to members of—

- 02-00:06:14  
Henning: To different groups.
- 02-00:06:16  
Redman: To different groups and organizations, members of the public, about how this was an important project of building up these supplies of blood.
- 02-00:06:26  
Henning: It saved lives. It saved a lot of lives. This tells about going out to the different hospitals that I would do. My husband was working in the steel company out in Albany, I think it was. Or Oakland. Anyway, he would get the groups of men to come down. It was a big night. They'd go and donate their blood, and then they'd all go and drink red wine. That was a big thing. There were different groups. The cutoff age was sixty. All the different groups would come. Sororities and fraternities. Everybody came in a group.
- 02-00:07:18  
Redman: You can set that down whenever you're ready. Thank you. By the way, it's a beautiful picture of you in that image. It's just gorgeous.
- 02-00:07:27  
Henning: Black hair.
- 02-00:07:30  
Redman: Would you recruit students, say, on the University of California campus? You mentioned fraternities and sororities might come down as a group, so would you go knock on a door or talk to them?
- 02-00:07:44  
Henning: It was amazing that you really didn't have to do too much. People were very willing to do it if they could. There's a limit. You have to weigh so much. One of my friends, who you should know, because I'm sure she's in this Rosie the Riveter thing, anyway, she always was very allergic to poison oak, and it was in her system. They wouldn't let her. You had to have certain things that you could and could not have. You had to weigh a certain amount. You had to be a certain age.
- 02-00:08:27  
Redman: I know that the Army, at first, would segregate blood donations by race. Was that true with the Red Cross, or do you know if that was true?
- 02-00:08:44  
I know in the Army, African Americans were not allowed to donate blood for white soldiers, but that rule was later changed.
- 02-00:08:52  
Henning: At least if it was, I was not aware of it. I was not aware of it at all. We had one whole contingent of Chinese that came all the time.
- 02-00:09:02  
Redman: And their blood would just be incorporated into—

02-00:09:05

Henning: Right.

02-00:09:10

Redman: I'd like to get back to your work with the Red Cross in a moment, because that's extremely interesting, but I would like to ask about the Japanese in the Bay Area during World War Two. I know a lot—

02-00:09:23

Henning: We should be very ashamed of ourselves for doing that.

02-00:09:26

Redman: Tell me what your impressions of that were at the time and what you think of it now.

02-00:09:31

Henning: There probably were some people that should have been shuttled off that way, but like Madame and Professor Obata from University of California, that was a crime. They had never done anything but work hard for the University of California. To me, it was just cruel. It really was cruel. If you read any of the books about it, it was a cruel thing. I honestly don't think it was necessary. Unless the people who do such things were just sitting on their thumbs, I can't help but believe that, for instance, the FBI or somebody wouldn't know who they were—and certainly Madame and Professor Obata were not among them. I think that was just a terrible thing to do, to shuttle them all off that way. That's my opinion of it.

02-00:10:38

Redman: At that time, I know there would be some people that would have had conversations along those lines. There may have been some people that needed to have attention from the FBI or be taken care of in one way or another, but the vast majority of people do not belong in internment camps. Was that something that people would discuss privately, or was that something that wasn't discussed really at all?

02-00:11:06

Henning: I don't remember it being discussed. People were kind of astonished that it happened. I don't know who started it or why they started it. It went back to the First World War, when they were mad at the Germans. Most of these Japanese that they took were born here. I had a lot of Japanese and Chinese friends. We kind of were an international settlement in our family, and my father particularly. When my dad was in the lumber business, one of the things that we used to do was, as a kid, my dad would take me on the ferry. We had an old car. It was Dodge and it looked like an ice wagon. We'd go over to San Francisco and go along the waterfront when the Maru boats came in from Japan and the Chinese boats came in. We'd get the crates, the ceramic things came in. The crates were all mahogany. Dad would get them and bring them home, break them up. At that time, which a lot of people don't know, and there's been very little ever written about it, the El Camino Real that goes

down the peninsula, from there up to the top of the hills over towards the ocean, used to be solid chrysanthemums. Both Chinese and Japanese. They marked which row was the big chrysanthemum, and this kind of chrysanthemum, little ones, with figurines, and they cut them out of this mahogany. Dad would take the crates that were all broken up and give them to them so that they could carve the mahogany. For instance, Fourth of July, when you needed firecrackers, dad would take me down to Chinatown and we'd go down and visit everybody. We always had to have tea. You'd have tea and you'd get firecrackers. They'd give those to me.

02-00:13:42

Redman:

So there would be mixing and you'd see people. It wasn't a sort of thing where people would be segregated, one group or another, in your impression.

Let's get back to the Red Cross just for a moment. First, I'd like to ask, in 1944, there was a massive explosion in a place called Port Chicago.

02-00:14:25

Henning:

Yes, I remember it well.

02-00:14:26

Redman:

Tell me what you remember about that.

02-00:14:29

Henning:

I had just had a baby. I just had my daughter. I was in bed. I was at my mother's house. My husband was overseas. My mother's house had windows that were opened out, not up and down this way. They swung out this way. The explosion pulled them all out. I remember that. I was in bed. That's in the days when you stayed in bed after you had a baby. Nowadays, you get up and go home.

02-00:15:03

Redman:

So you were recuperating a little.

02-00:15:08

Henning:

The windows all went out from the suction.

02-00:15:10

Redman:

Were they blown off their—

02-00:15:12

Henning:

Suction pulled them open.

02-00:15:16

Redman:

That's a pretty enormous event.

02-00:15:18

Henning:

Oh, it was terrible. The thing that was interesting to me is you can say all you want to say about the Red Cross. Since I was a member of it, I shouldn't say this, but we talked about it among ourselves even. Everybody, of course,

immediately started sending every help we could think of. The Red Cross—sandwiches and coffee and whatever. We go up there. The Salvation Army were already there.

02-00:15:48

Redman: Is that right?

02-00:15:49

Henning: They always were. They always were. They always are there first.

02-00:15:55

Redman: Did you go to Port Chicago?

You were still recuperating, but some of your friends would have gone, potentially.

02-00:16:04

Henning: Not in that part. The part of the Red Cross that went were the nurses does. If they needed the plasma, we had the plasma.

02-00:16:15

Redman: But the story had been related to you, that by the time the Red Cross had already gotten there, the Salvation Army was there.

02-00:16:22

Henning: We were used to that. I don't know how the Salvation Army did it, but they did it. They were always right there, no matter what it was.

02-00:16:31

Redman: Would the two organizations work together when—

02-00:16:33

Henning: Oh, sure. I thought that was always something that should be known.

02-00:16:38

Redman: Yeah, that's fascinating.

02-00:16:44

Henning: That was a terrible explosion.

02-00:16:46

Redman: What else do you recall about that, if anything? It's fine if—

02-00:16:52

Henning: One of my husband's uncles—I think he was an uncle—was on one of the ships up there, and it took them about twenty-four hours to get the pieces of glass out of him. Picking them out. Little shards of glass. I remember that part of it. That was horrible. That was just absolutely horrible.

02-00:17:17

Redman: Did people talk about it?

- 02-00:17:19  
 Henning: They didn't know what to talk about. We didn't know anything about that. We didn't know what was going on up there. There was a lot of secrecy. We didn't know anything about that. My husband was overseas, so we didn't get any information from him. He didn't get any information, period. It was a terrible thing. Just awful. It was loading of ammunition. Still, the Navy ammunition dump up here that they're arguing about whether they're going to put low-income housing there or whatever they're going to do.
- 02-00:18:04  
 Redman: Maybe after, people had said, okay, this was—
- 02-00:18:06  
 Henning: It was on the water, so the people came in there in the ships to replenish their ammunition to go overseas, just like my husband. He would take ammunition. In the Transportation Corps.
- 02-00:18:21  
 Redman: As well as food and other—
- 02-00:18:22  
 Henning: Yes. Everything goes in the Transportation Corps.
- 02-00:18:28  
 Redman: You'd mentioned that while a lot of men were away at war, that women would have picked up different games to play with each other, like poker.
- 02-00:18:37  
 Henning: They played poker.
- 02-00:18:39  
 Redman: Women playing poker might not have been an activity that you'd seen before the war, but this was a new trend?
- 02-00:18:46  
 Henning: They would have a day off from their job, from whatever they were doing. So for something to do. Poker was the one thing that everybody knew about. Not everybody played bridge. We didn't play canasta at that time. That was after the war. Poker seemed to be the one thing that the girls all knew about. They were lousy poker players.
- 02-00:19:28  
 Redman: Would there be any money changing hands or would it be—
- 02-00:19:31  
 Henning: I can't remember that, to tell you the truth. There must have been, but I can't remember that.
- 02-00:19:37  
 Redman: Some mild gambling or something like that. So you'd had a baby. You stayed with your mother following your child for a little while. You had mentioned

earlier you were looking for a place in Oakland with your soon-to-be-husband. You guys had a place at the start of the war?

02-00:20:00

Henning:

We rented a little apartment. Not a great one, but who cared? You just got what you could. A lot of people sublet, but we didn't. We rented a little apartment. I guess we had it until Bill went overseas, and then I went home to mother and father. My husband's father had died at that time. We had relatives around to stay with, but I stayed with my mother. My brother was in the service, but he was back East.

02-00:20:50

Redman:

Let's see. We've talked about Napa Valley and how that changed. So your main duties with the Red Cross were recruiting people for blood donation and blood drives.

02-00:21:04

Henning:

That was just mainly what I did. If we had extra time to give, we would just stay there in this little church. It's a little red church in Oakland. It's right off of Telegraph. It's just a kick. They just donated the church and we were there. One little space in the church was a long table with telephones. A telephone company gave us all these telephones so we could do recruiting. People would call and make reservations to bring in a group.

02-00:21:43

Redman:

You had mentioned fraternities and sororities, and then a group of Chinese volunteers would come in together. Would most of your donations take place with small groups coming in, medium-sized groups?

02-00:21:58

Henning:

People always came in, in twos and threes and fours. The thing I remember the most is—I hate to say it, but the men are the biggest babies. They needed help, to have somebody come in with them. The ones that my husband would bring in from the steel mill were good, hardy men, boy. They were the red wine group. They were easy to work with. The men from the offices were not easy to work with, and particularly the tall ones. I always remember the tall ones. If they got a little faint or something—we always fed them afterwards. Gave them a cup of coffee or chocolate and some sandwiches. If they passed out, though—and we had these long tables. We finally had to change it, because if a tall man fainted and you get his feet under one and his head under the other, it's hard for women to get him up. There was no way for us to do that. So we learned to move the tables around so it wouldn't happen. We had all kinds of groups. All kinds of groups. The men from the shipyards came in a group. There would be one one night and one group the next night, and the next night, and the next night.

02-00:23:23

Redman:

It sounds like these were pretty diverse groups in terms of race and background. Is that an accurate sort of portrayal?

02-00:23:33

Henning:

When you think of the war that we had, there wasn't anybody saying, you're this, and you're this, and you're this. They didn't care. You come on. We were going to go to war. Well, the same thing was true with blood. Blood's blood. You want to take it from just everybody who will donate it. They needed it badly. They used the plasma because it could be shipped. Cutter Lab increased its working ability so that they could get out as much as they possibly could.

02-00:24:07

Redman:

You'd mentioned that there was a lab in Berkeley that was processing—

02-00:24:10

Henning:

Cutter.

02-00:24:11

Redman:

Cutter, C-U-T-T-E-R? Okay. So this was a lab in Berkeley that was processing plasma and blood. The other thing I was going to ask—I know donating plasma was a fairly new thing, but during the war, it would have been talked about a lot. There would have been a lot of posters or people saying, hey, would you donate plasma?

02-00:24:32

Henning:

This says the blood donor that they talked about.

02-00:24:38

Redman:

Were people skeptical at all about donating blood, or was it something that people got used to pretty quickly?

02-00:24:45

Henning:

People still donate blood today, but they use it whole. People were pretty resolved about this war. They knew people were getting terribly hurt and that plasma was needed. We didn't have television and we didn't have the radio or anything like that, but the newsreels in the theaters would always show pictures of soldiers being revived with plasma.

02-00:25:27

Redman:

So there was a general awareness through—

02-00:25:29

Henning:

Everybody was aware of it.

02-00:25:32

Redman:

And newsreels in particular, you think, were really important in creating that?

02-00:25:34

Henning:

Oh, yes. Yes. As I say, we didn't even know about Pearl Harbor until the lady told us, and she'd listened to her radio. Always in the newsreels in the theaters, they would have something mentioned about it. It was always something to do with the war in the newsreels at that time. Always.

- 02-00:26:07  
Redman: You were featured in this poster. I'd like to ask what sort of a role do you think posters played? Do you remember seeing different kinds of posters or propaganda or things like that?
- 02-00:26:20  
Henning: I don't think I'm aware of any of them. I really don't.
- 02-00:26:26  
Redman: What's the story behind this poster in particular? Do you know how you were selected for this image?
- 02-00:26:32  
Henning: I will admit, a friend of mine was in charge of doing this poster. That had something to do with it. They couldn't have just a poster, so they had to have somebody up there, so I was it. That was all.
- 02-00:26:55  
Redman: This is a bit of a different question that you may or may not have anything to say about. I'd love to know about relations between men and women during the war. You hear some of these stories about Rosies starting at factories and there would be some sexism, and then there would be stories about hanky-panky with people during the war. But most people say that men and women generally got along fairly well during the war in their new jobs, new roles, things like that. What was your impression?
- 02-00:27:27  
Henning: I think they did. I'm not aware of any conflict in that sort of thing. I wasn't involved in that. Being in the Red Cross, you were kind of isolated in kind of the upper crust. You weren't down with the Rosie the Riveters. So that made a difference.
- 02-00:28:00  
Redman: Was it mostly women, and women that you would describe as generally educated in that they'd maybe graduated from high school or they'd gone to college or they had some college?
- 02-00:28:12  
Henning: Oh, I think so. The people in the Red Cross were very definitely college people. I don't know how I got in there. I didn't go to college. I went to art schools. Anyway, I volunteered to be in the Red Cross.
- 02-00:28:36  
Redman: The next question I'd like to ask, and I'm getting near to the end of my list of questions, but I'd like to ask how the city of Oakland changed during the war. We talked about this quite a bit, actually, that the shops had opened up and there was lots of hustle and bustle and new activity. There would have been a lot of men in uniform, and even some women, to a lesser extent, in uniform.

02-00:29:01

Henning:

I can't tell you how many people there were here. And all kinds of people, but people accepted them. At least I did. I thought they were here—they were going to build ships and they were going to do this and that. It may have been partly because my father-in-law and my husband were in the steel business at that time. That might have had something to do with it. But you accepted all these people coming in to build the ships. Richmond probably had more people in it than anybody, because that's where the ships were. I don't know what they did about housing them, but as I say, everybody here housed everybody. All along the estuary, there was something going on to do with building ships.

02-00:29:54

Redman:

So the Moore Dry Docks, the—

02-00:29:57

Henning:

All of that.

02-00:29:59

Redman:

All the way down through Kaiser, and then shipyards in San Francisco, too, right?

02-00:30:03

Henning:

Yes.

02-00:30:04

Redman:

To a lesser extent.

02-00:30:06

Henning:

That was where they came in, the ships came in. The funny thing that I think really bothers me about the change from when we were growing up to now, one of the most wonderful things in the world used to be when we'd have Fleet Week. The entire Bay would be the Navy. To see them come in through the Golden Gate was just absolutely marvelous, all the ships coming. San Francisco and Oakland both would be entirely different. It would be full of Navy, and it was wonderful. It was fun. I can only remember another time. When I was conducting tours one time, one of the tourists—we were a group of women. We used to work at the Oakland Museum, in the history section. Finally, one other girl said, "You know, we ought to get paid for this." She established this group. Because we all knew so much about California, we became a group of women that conducted tours. There's a book that's published in San Francisco every month on the different conventions—it's not the same now, but it was then—and the different conventions coming in. One of the conventions that was coming in was the Barber Shop Quarteters. There were thousands and thousands and thousands. People were standing on street corners, singing. There were choruses. There were just four in a group. I've never heard so much singing in my life. They would sing to the cash register people. They'd sing to the policemen. They'd sing to everybody that—

02-00:32:08

Redman: Anyone who would listen.

02-00:32:10

Henning: Everybody that had an ear had to hear this. We'd get on a bus to go someplace, and they'd sing all the way. Coming back from Muir Woods—have you ever been to Muir Woods?

02-00:32:21

Redman: Yes, certainly.

02-00:32:22

Henning: You know coming back, that's kind of a peculiar road going back up there like that? Well, we were on one bus, because the rear end was kind of far out. They started singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee." It was the most wonderful feeling that you had of everybody liking everybody else. The whole of San Francisco was just loaded with people singing. I can't tell you how wonderful it was. And the same feeling we would have when the fleet came in. The Navy would take over San Francisco and everything was going on.

02-00:33:00

Redman: A bustle. I have two more questions left, and I'm not quite sure what order to do them in. Maybe I'd like to do a little bit of a different chronology here. In 1946, immediately following the end of the war, there was an event that the newspapers claimed was a big event, but I'm having trouble finding people who recall much about this event. It was the Oakland general strike. There was a three-day event that shut down much of downtown Oakland. A bunch of the unions got together and had a big strike. Do you remember any strikes at the end of the war?

02-00:33:39

Henning: Not a thing. Not a thing. Well, my husband came home in '46. He was in the typhoon in Okinawa. That was in the end of '45. That was after the war. He was in a typhoon over there, and then came home in '46. That's what I remember.

02-00:34:06

Redman: I'd like to ask you, then, about the end of the war. The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and then, immediately after, the surrender of the Japanese—what do you recall about those events?

02-00:34:22

Henning: I was just grateful it was over. I was just absolutely grateful it was over. It wasn't even a matter of my husband coming home. I just wanted everybody to come home. I feel the same way about the wars going on now. I don't care what Afghanistan does, I don't care what Iraq does, I don't care what anybody does. Let's bring the boys home. I think it's just cruel. I don't know what we'd do with the boys when they came home. We don't have jobs for the ones that are here. I'm kind of a pacifist. I think, more than anything else, I'm a

pacifist. I understand what World War Two was. That was provoked. I understand that.

02-00:35:14

Redman:

Now, you had mentioned that you believed that there are some analogies in terms of the New Deal and the WPA and the NYA and the CCC that could be applied to the economic problems that we're having today. How do you feel about the impact of the GI Bill? That's still something that exists today, but in a little different form. In terms of these soldiers coming home, I know you had a lot of relatives. Your husband came home. What do you think the influence of the GI Bill was on just the community and boys coming home and trying to set up a life and return to normalcy?

02-00:35:53

Henning:

The one thing that was prevalent at that time, the start of the World War Two broke up a lot of kids that were in college. They left college, and they could go back. That was very important. I think that was very, very important. I don't think that pertains to the people today, because there isn't the draft. The draft interrupted things.

02-00:36:24

Redman:

So including people's college educations? People could be in college and they'd be drafted. The GI Bill allowed them to come back and finish up their college education.

02-00:36:32

Henning:

That's right. It was very, very important, I think. If you have a child that—and I've been through this a lot. I have a lot of grandchildren and a lot of great-grandchildren. I think it's important that you stick with the kid, especially if he has a bent of any kind to do something. Stick with him and make sure that he gets started on the road in the right direction.

02-00:37:08

Redman:

I want to ask if you wouldn't mind reflecting on World War Two in your life, in sort of the grand story of your life. What do you think, looking back on the war and the war years, what sort of an impact did that have on you personally?

02-00:37:27

Henning:

A lot, I think. I think it had a great deal. I think mostly was how people worked together. Nobody complained. Nobody fussed about the fact that they didn't have any meat. None of my friends did. They didn't complain about their husbands going off to war. Like my friends whose husbands were in the Air Corps, and they followed them all across the United States. They would get together in a group and get an old car and drive across, and they'd go from Air Force to Air—everybody worked together. I think it's important. Today, when they're squabbling in Washington, D.C., I keep thinking, hey, let's go back a little bit. Let's get along. Let's get along.

02-00:38:38

Redman: Well, I want to thank you so much for sharing your experiences with me today. I really appreciate that.

[End of Interview]