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Rosella Jackson

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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Rosella Jackson

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Interview 1: February 16, 2011

Begin Audiofile 1

Redman: My name is Sam Redman, and I'm at the home of Rosella Jackson today in San Leandro. Today is February 16, 2011. Rosella, can I begin by asking you your full name and where you were born?

1-00:00:22

Jackson: Okay, Rosella Thomas Jackson, born in Salinas, California, 1921, graduated from Salinas High School there, 1940.

Redman: Great, so tell me about a little bit about your parents, what were your parents like?

1-00:00:45

Jackson: My dad was a beet farmer in Salinas, California, and after a certain amount of years they were trying to get the lettuce started in Salinas. The people came to my dad and wanted to know if he would try farming the lettuce—.

Redman: Do you know who came to your dad to ask him?

1-00:01:27

Jackson: No I don't.

Redman: Okay, but someone at some point—.

1-00:01:29

Jackson: Yeah, there were lettuce people from the Valley would come and talk to them about raising the lettuce and it was a new thing, so my dad did. We had a ranch and he started the lettuce, farming lettuce then.

Redman: So that was when you were pretty young when he—

1-00:01:53

Jackson: Yes I was very young, I was probably six or seven years old at that time.

Redman: Okay, and what was he like as a person? Do you remember interacting—

1-00:02:04

Jackson: My dad was a very happy-go-lucky person. He played the accordion. My mom was a very happy-go-lucky person. She sang and, 'course, since my dad played the accordion all the farmers around the area lots of times would get together and have parties, and they were always invited to the parties. My dad played the music for the dances and was just a happy family.

Redman: Your family had Portuguese ancestry, is that correct?

1-00:02:38

Jackson: My dad is full Portuguese, his father came from Portugal. My mom is half Portuguese and half Spanish.

Redman: Okay, so they had a pretty long history in California then by the time you were born.

1-00:02:55

Jackson: Yes, because my grandfather came from Portugal when he was 19, and left a wife and one child in Portugal. And after they were settled, after he was settled here, he brought his family over here.

Redman: And they came—

1-00:03:13

Jackson: They had 13 children.

Redman: Wow, that's a big family.

1-00:03:16

Jackson: That's a big family.

Redman: That's a big family. And what did your mother do? Was she a homemaker? Did she help on the farm or—?

1-00:03:22

Jackson: She did the cooking, not working *on* the farm at all. Sometimes my dad needed her to drive the tractor while he performed the equipment, and my younger sister was very—well she probably was maybe three or four years old and she would ride in a little box on the side of the tractor while my mother drove the tractor to the other end. Then my dad would jump off of the equipment and turn the tractor around and get her started, because she did not know how to drive.

Redman: So she could help out to the extent that she could—

1-00:04:02

Jackson: Yes, Yes.

Redman: When you were growing up—I'm sorry remind me what year you were born.

1-00:04:08

Jackson: 1921.

Redman: 1921, so you were pretty young but—a pretty small child when the Great Depression hit in '29, and then in '30.

1-00:04:18

Jackson: Yes, but I remember it, I remember it happening. My dad lost his farm, and we moved into a small town—it was called Chualar, which is a small town where we went to grammar school.

Redman: Tell me about your father losing his farm. Do you remember some of the details surrounding that? From your perspective as a child, what do you remember about that.

1-00:04:44

Jackson: Well, I remember us leaving the farm, that my dad had all this equipment that he used on the farm. Rather than sell the equipment he kept the equipment, and he went to the other farmers, and he would help them with their farms that they were able to keep.

Redman: I see, and what was that like for him, do you remember? Did that add stress or anything like that? You said he was just a happy-go-lucky guy so did he kind of roll with those new challenges

1-00:05:21

Jackson: Well, new challenges like they couldn't get their money out of the bank. The banks were closed.

Redman: You remember that being a fairly tough time.

1-00:05:35

Jackson: I remember that part of that. Yes. Mmm hmm.

Redman: How about putting food on the table in general? Was that ever a struggle, or did you get any sort of impression about that?

1-00:05:41

Jackson: Well, living on the farm is always a struggle for food. We had our own chickens and the cows, so we had a lot of things on the farm that we need, rather than going to the grocery store. Maybe once a month going to a grocery store to get whatever staples my mom might need for the house.

Redman: So the trip into town might have been a pretty big deal for you as a kid.

1-00:06:12

Jackson: It was. Yes, it was.

Redman: What do you remember about the town? What were some of your impressions as a kid going into town, what that was like?

1-00:06:19

Jackson: My mother had a sister who lived in town, so we had cousins in town. There was that much difference of people living in town and living on the farm. Where they had bicycles and roller skates, and we had crates to make things with or whatever. We didn't have all the things that the kids in town had. So when we made the trip to town, it was rather an exciting thing because we knew we were going to get to ride maybe a bicycle, get to roller skate. It was always an exciting thing to go to town. My dad worked on the farm for many

many hours a day, and he was the only driver. My mom did not drive, so maybe once a month he would take time off to take us to town.

Redman: Eventually you switched schools, is that right?

1-00:07:19

Jackson: I went to Chualar Grammar School from first grade to eighth grade, Salinas High for the four years of high school.

Redman: Let me ask you about grammar school. Do you have any particularly strong memories of going to grammar school? Did you have favorite subjects in school or favorite activities?

1-00:07:41

Jackson: I think you always remember the times when you're out of school, going out for recess, and also I think the teachers have a big impression on you too. They were not anything like the teachers we have today. Our teacher came always very neatly dressed. That puts an impression on the students to dress as neatly as they can, brush their teeth every morning and that sort of thing.

Redman: Were the teachers fairly strict, or were they pretty lenient?

1-00:08:23

Jackson: I would say kind of strict.

Redman: Do you recall, moving on to high school, what your impressions were like going to high school?

1-00:08:35

Jackson: Going to grammar school we had to walk about three miles to get the bus.

Redman: Wow. That's quite a hike.

1-00:08:43

Jackson: Yeah. My dad would take us in the rainy months. The summer months we walked. High school, we walked to the highway to get the bus to go to high school. Part of the high school year we would go—the bus driver, Mr. Fiese, he had a big route because he went from Salinas all the way to the Chualar Bridge and around the back side of the town and back into town. So this is like probably an hour, maybe an hour and a half drive. At Christmas time he would change and go the other way around, so the kids on that side would have to get up early and we could sleep later.

Redman: That's a pretty good system though. That sounds pretty fair. Do you remember any of the children in your neighborhood, the families in your neighborhood struggling to get by as far as— We talked a little about what the Great Depression was like for *your* family. Do you remember any of the other kids' families, or did it seem— You were sort of growing up so you might have been oblivious to some of that.

1-00:10:01

Jackson: Yeah. I don't recall that anyone else was having problems, but I'm sure everyone probably might be having the same problems that my family might have been having at the time.

Redman: Do you remember where you were when you found out about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

1-00:10:25

Jackson: Yes, I do remember.

Redman: This would have been December of 1941.

1-00:10:29

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: What do you remember about that?

1-00:10:34

Jackson: Well, we were up very early that morning. My first marriage was in 1941. I graduated in '40. In '41 I was married, and at that time that husband and myself and another couple decided to go dove hunting up in the Salinas hills. She and I were in the car waiting for the men to come back. They were out dove hunting, and we turned on the radio, and we heard that, and it was just so shocking to hear that news. That's where I was on that day.

Redman: You were very stunned to hear what had happened.

1-00:11:22

Jackson: Oh, yes.

Redman: Do you remember your husband's reaction?

1-00:11:29

Jackson: No, I really don't.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:11:33

Jackson: It was too long ago.

Redman: What did you do after that? Did you find work fairly soon after that, because you started working in '42, is that correct?

1-00:11:44

Jackson: In the shipyards. When we first were married, neither one of us had a job. So we needed to get squared away to have a job, and at the time his dad had already taken his welding classes at the Salinas Jr. High School, and he was already up here working in the shipyards. So we decided that maybe that's the thing we should do. So then he went to school there in Salinas for, I think,

six weeks. Then we came up here, and then he got a job right away working in the shipyards on his dad's crew.

Redman: This was in the Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond.

1-00:12:37

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: It was about a six-week process to get the welding training?

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: And how about you? Did you see your husband getting this job and—

1-00:12:52

Jackson: Yes, his dad had a crew, so he would be working on his dad's crew. Then his mother went to work in the shipyards, and I said, well, if she can go to work there, I will too. They had an area, I think it might have been like a big tent area, where they would send the people. It was right on the shipyard area, right where the ships were being built, and you would go to school for six weeks.

Redman: That's something that I've wondered about, because some of the people that I've talked to told me that they did welding training in Oakland, and now Salinas, but then other people told me that they trained to be a welder right on sight.

1-00:13:46

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: So how did that work exactly. Do you recall, did people know that they could take a welding class and then come to Kaiser, or you just came and—

1-00:14:01

Jackson: Well, I really think that the welding class that they had at Salinas Junior College was a class that anyone could take, and since he didn't know anything about welding, and we were still living there, that was the closest place for him to get his experience as a welder.

Redman: Now, when you showed up at the shipyards to get work, did you have it in your mind that you wanted to weld, or were you just showing up thinking you wanted to get any sort of work?

1-00:14:30

Jackson: No, I had in my mind that I wanted to be a welder, so that's where I took the classes, right there on the site.

Redman: When you showed up, there was a tent where you—

1-00:14:45

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Tell me about that, do you remember any of that?

1-00:14:51

Jackson: Yes, they had little cubicles where each person would go in to practice the welding, and they had an instructor, of course. And that's about all I remember.

Redman: Okay. So you would go to these different stations—

1-00:15:09

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: And different instructors would teach you to do different aspects—

1-00:15:12

Jackson: That is correct. Vertical, flat, and overhead, and that sort of thing.

Redman: One thing that I've seen video of, and I've read a little bit about, is that on the first day that people would sign up at Kaiser they would get an identification badge, and they would figure out if some of your salary would go into war bonds. And they would sign up for a health care plan, many of them. Do you remember any of that, signing up for the job, and getting an identification badge, or—?

1-00:15:49

Jackson: I know I had a badge, but I really don't remember signing up for it. I'm sure I must have.

Redman: And then the war bonds drives, do you remember anything about that?

1-00:15:59

Jackson: I don't remember whether we had signed up for any of the war bonds or not.

Redman: And I know you were a young healthy gal at this point—

Jackson: Nineteen [laughs]

Redman: Nineteen. So maybe a health care plan might not have been the thing that was—

1-00:16:14

Jackson: Right.

Redman: —on top of your mind, but do you remember signing up for the Kaiser health care plan at all?

1-00:16:18

Jackson: No. I don't remember.

Redman: Okay. So some people seem to take advantage of that and others maybe not as much.

1-00:16:25

Jackson: Mmm hmm.

Redman: I'm interested in hearing a little bit more about training as a welder. How did that feel? Was that exciting, or was that nerve-wracking?

1-00:16:35

Jackson: Well, no it wasn't. It was more exciting for me. I'm sort of a person who likes to see something accomplished. So in my welding I made it an art, like artwork, to make it look really good. I just remember doing it, and it came natural for me to do it.

Redman: As you were learning, and signing up on the job, and starting off with this, what were some of your motivations, because people will tell me that they wanted independence, they wanted a job, they wanted to help with the war effort. There are a lot of different factors that drove people to the shipyards for work.

1-00:17:21

Jackson: Well, I think that knowing that the men were working there, and we would be there with them, knowing that we were building ships for the men to be shipped wherever they needed to go, being very young, I don't really know that we thought a lot about why I was working there. I only know that we were building ships for the service men, that I can remember.

Redman: But there was definitely a joy in some sense from actually doing the welding itself.

1-00:18:07

Jackson: Oh, yes, yes.

Redman: Tell me about that. Why was that so fun for you? You told me that you liked building things and having a sense of accomplishment, but where do you think that came from, where did that excitement and enthusiasm for welding come from?

1-00:18:18

Jackson: Well, when I was a very young girl I had asthma, and I was sick a lot. And my mom would always—I had a doll, and she would give me material, so that I would make dresses. I would sew by hand if I was home because many times I couldn't go to school. I've always been the type of person to want to do things to accomplish things. One thing doesn't satisfy me. I need to go on to do more things. As you can tell, all the things we have in our house here, I make dolls,

and I just needed to have that to— When I'd finished a weld, I would look at it and say how pretty it looked.

Redman: Okay. So I can see that there's an aspect of accomplishment and a sense of building something.

1-00:19:24

Jackson: There were two women— My husband at that time was a welder on his dad's crew, but he had his own crew then, and—.

Redman: Your husband eventually got his own crew.

1-00:19:45

Jackson: Right. And he had about ten of us on the crew, two women and the rest were all men.

Redman: So you were on your husband's crew.

1-00:19:52

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Any specifics that you can recall about the yard?

1-00:20:01

Jackson: Yard Number Two.

Redman: Was his father at Yard Number Two?

1-00:20:05

Jackson: We were all four of us at Yard Number Two.

Redman: How did that come about? Do you know how people were assigned to different yards? Did you just say "This is my husband. I'd like to work with him"?

Jackson: That I don't know, how they were assigned what yard to work in. The only thing— When I went to school, and I was finished at school, I asked if I could go onto my husband's, at that time, on his crew. So they do. Rather than going out on these other places where you just stood there all night, tacking and not doing anything at all, really.

Redman: Did you start immediately working on the graveyard shift?

1-00:20:51

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: And your husband and his—

1-00:20:54

Jackson: We were all on the graveyard.

Redman: I understand that that paid a little more than the swing shift, and definitely more than the day shift.

1-00:21:03

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: All Right. Was that part of the motivation for working at night?

1-00:21:0

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: What was that experience like. I imagine that—

1-00:21:12

Jackson: Well, when we went on this trip just to see the Memorial Park in Richmond, one of the ladies said to me “How did you get out here?” She asked me where we lived. I said we lived in Oakland. She said “How did you get out here?” And I said that we drove, by car. And she said “My, that was a long drive!” Well, I don’t know what she was thinking about. [laughs] There’s no freeway, so have to drive the streets to get there.

Redman: Yeah. A lot of people did what was called at the time a ‘share the ride’ program.

1-00:21:54

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: Did you participate in something like that, or— Naturally, you would have driven with your—

1-00:22:00

Jackson: Yes. We all four would drive, because we worked in the same yard, same shift.

Redman: Did you use the same car then, because I know some groups would rotate the car that they would use?

1-00:22:16

Jackson: Oh yeah, we always went in his dad’s car. His dad always drove us.

Redman: As far as rations go, I know that rubber was rationed on tires.

1-00:22:25

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: So did you give your rations, then, to—

1-00:22:30

Jackson: Well, I’m not really sure how they processed that. The men took care of that.

Redman: A lot of people were moving into Richmond and Oakland during that time.

1-00:22:45

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: Can you tell me about any experiences you may have had meeting new people, new types of people when you went to the shipyard.

1-00:22:53

Jackson: There's a lot of different types of people working in the shipyards. More men, of course, than women.

Redman: You said on your crew that there were about ten men and two women, is that right?

1-00:23:09

Jackson: Mmm hmm.

Redman: Two women including yourself or two other women?

1-00:23:11

Jackson: No, I was included. Another lady besides myself.

Redman: Did the two of you become friends.

1-00:23:18

Jackson: Yes, we did.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about your relationship with this other welder.

1-00:23:23

Jackson: He always put us together to work. Normally, if we were going to do overheads, or whatever jobs we had to do that night, usually Joy and I worked together. Her name was Joy. I don't remember her last name. But they lived in the housing area where all those warehouses are now, right there on, I think it's MacDonald Boulevard.

Redman: So in the federal housing—

1-00:23:54

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Had they moved in from—

1-00:23:57

Jackson: They moved in from another state.

Redman: Do you recall where they moved from?

1-00:24:00

Jackson: No, I don't.

Redman: I know a lot of people were moving here from the South, from places like Arkansas and Oklahoma.

1-00:24:09

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: And some people in California, some native Californians, had some pretty different impressions of what these people were like.

1-00:24:15

Jackson: OK. We had, on our crew, we had an Indian fellow. He was from Ada, Oklahoma. We were paid on like every Friday, Thursday night. Friday night, we come into work, and I don't know how this man made it through [laughs] the night. But he was a really great guy. If the other lady and I needed a lead for our welding machines to go somewhere and we didn't have it, he always had a bunch of lead all stacked up in case we needed extra lead for Joy or myself. But I don't know how many times he fell through a manhole. [laughs] He'd been drinking all day, but he'd do his job. And he'd chew tobacco, and he'd put his helmet down and weld, and then he'd put it up and he'd spit [laughs] That's kind of gross in a way, but he was a really nice guy. A really nice guy.

Redman: Some of these folks may have had different life priorities at the time—

1-00:25:34

Jackson: Oh, yes.

Redman: Did you get the impression that there were a number of different people like this man, who would go out and party and have a good time—

1-00:25:43

Jackson: Oh, I think so, yes.

Redman: But people typically managed to make it to work the next day even if they were kind of dragging a little bit?

1-00:25:50

Jackson: Yes, they would.

Redman: Now, the other interesting thing is that I usually think the time to go out and have a good time and celebrate is usually at night. But if you're working at night, my understanding is that the bars and the restaurants and everything was open all day.

1-00:26:09

Jackson: I don't know. We never went out to eat that I recall. We're not bar people, so we didn't do that.

Redman: So your social life, and maybe much of your life, was revolving around the home and your home life—

1-00:26:27

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: —that you were developing at that time.

1-00:26:29

Jackson: Yes, and working.

Redman: I see.

1-00:26:30

Jackson: Because we'd sleep part of the day, and then, of course, I would get up earlier in the evening to fix our lunches for going to work. Also getting our dinner before we left. So our life was pretty much around just working, eating and sleeping.

Redman: Let me ask about lunches for a minute, because I find that a lot of people have really interesting memories surrounding their lunch. Because I know that there was rationing at the time, so there was only so much— You couldn't get butter; you'd had replacement margarine. There was only so much meat. But there were victory gardens, and canning. A lot of people did canning.

1-00:27:15

Jackson: Mmm hmm.

Redman: Do you remember what you brought to lunch? Do you have any vivid memories on that?

1-00:27:20

Jackson: No. I know I used to do a lot of baking. I'd bake and make jelly rolls and muffins and things like that that we could use in our lunches.

Redman: Did you ever have a problem with sugar, having a shortage of sugar, or was that—

1-00:27:38

Jackson: No. Maybe some people might have, but I don't remember us having a shortage of anything. I think we got along very well.

Redman: And that includes, it sounds like, rubber for tires, and meat and—

1-00:27:57

Jackson: Yeah, because we owned a car also, but we always drove with— Dad always drove his car.

Redman: On the other hand, it sounds like there were a lot of people moving into the area that might not have had a car or access to housing. I know you'd mentioned your friend lived in one of the federal housing projects that came up.

1-00:28:21

Jackson: Right.

Redman: You'd see people at work. Did you get any sort of impression of where they went home to that night, or would they talk about that?

1-00:28:30

Jackson: I have no idea.

Redman: How about your housing situation? Did you find an apartment or a house, or—

1-00:28:37

Jackson: When we first came up, my mother in law and father in law already had an apartment. Her mother owned a duplex in Oakland. They stayed there with her. Then when we came up we stayed there. It was two bedrooms. They used the living room as a bedroom. So we stayed with them until we found an apartment, which wasn't very long. We found an apartment in Berkeley probably maybe six months after we came up.

Redman: What was Berkeley like at that time?

1-00:29:17

Jackson: Have no idea. [laughs] I have no idea. I don't really remember even going downtown Berkeley.

Redman: Interesting. So you had a little bit of tunnel vision in terms of you were working really hard at that time.

1-00:29:38

Jackson: Yes. Yes.

Redman: What about your money? Were you saving your money then, or were you investing it into—Did you have long term plans? Did you want to buy a house?

1-00:29:52

Jackson: Never thought about buying a house. We saved our money and used it accordingly, I guess. That's all I can think of at the time.

Redman: You mentioned that other welders would help you out a little bit, that they'd carry extra leads. Would they show you tips and tricks, and would you show other welders if you figured out anything or had a solution to a problem? Would you guys help each other out on the crew?

1-00:30:25

Jackson: Well, yeah. I'm sure we did. When we worked on the ship, there's a part of the ship that's called a deep well, where the water drains out. It's probably about 12 feet long and maybe two or three feet wide and maybe two feet deep. There's a manhole at one end. Each one of us, on every ship that we worked on, had to go in that deep well. Whether you were lady or man, you went in the deep well. You took all your equipment with you, and after you got in there, your boss would put this big fan over the hole to draw the smoke out while you were in there. Those are the kinds of things that I remember, working in the double bottoms where you crawl in, and that's when you need the extra lead. The machines were on the ground floor, so as we worked from the double bottoms, and they start putting the shell on the ship when they finished the last part of the top of the ship, then they put on big ladders, maybe, I don't know, 20 feet wide, big ladders up the side of the ship. So when your machine is not working like you want it to work, you have to go up and down this ladder to get in and out. And if you needed any lead, there was always extra lead down below. I would throw one of those leads over my shoulder and go up that ladder [laughs].

Redman: But if something went wrong, you'd have to go all the way—

1-00:32:22

Jackson: Have to come back down again. That is correct.

Redman: Would your team of ten or twelve welders, would you move around the ship pretty much constantly, or were you—

1-00:32:32

Jackson: Yes, his crew would work the whole ship.

Redman: And you'd spend most of the time outside. Is that correct? Or all of your time outside? Or all your time inside?

1-00:32:44

Jackson: No, inside.

Redman: So you were covered underneath the shelter.

Jackson: The only time we worked outside is when the bottom of the ship— When we first started to lay the bottom together—

Redman: —the double bottoms?

- Jackson: —the double bottoms, then we were working outside a lot because there are no sides on the ship or anything.
- Redman: When you were working in some of the tighter spaces would you ever feel a little claustrophobic?
- 1-00:33:11
Jackson: No, I never did.
- Redman: That's interesting because it strikes me that it might be a little dangerous. You never felt endangered? And if you're nineteen, you maybe feel invincible, is that right?
- Jackson: I think so. [laughs] I did not feel worried about going down in the double bottoms because there's only one way in and one way out— Well, no, there's more than one way in and one way out, but when you go in one way at this end, you're crawling all the way to that end. And there's a cross panel to be welded to each side of the ship there, but you're crawling on your—. And you take all your equipment down there with you.
- Redman: Talking about workplace safety, do you recall being a part of a union at Kaiser, and do you remember any of the union activities?
- 1-00:34:02
Jackson: I think we were union, but I have no idea about the activities.
- Redman: Did you have to go to meetings, or anything like that?
- 1-00:34:09
Jackson: Not that I remember.
- Redman: One account of the Kaiser shipyards that was written in 1944 describes the scene as sort of like a Disney movie, that things were moving about at a fast pace, and everything was sparkling clean. So I've been told that there were work crews constantly sweeping up and cleaning up after welds and after all the various things. Do you recall that it was a clean work environment?
- 1-00:34:42
Jackson: Yes, it was okay, as far as I remember. I don't remember. I think they had big trash cans in certain areas where you'd put your—You know, we would eat our lunch right on the ship, so there were always places to put things. I think there were trash cans, but I'm not real sure. It seems to me like they had those.
- Redman: Interesting. Another thing that I've read about the Kaiser shipyards is that people were assigned fairly particular and small tasks. All of these tasks would be brought together on the main floor. And it sounds like you were taking some of the units that had already been prefabricated and then welding them to the ship and sort of adding to this jigsaw puzzle.

1-00:35:36

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: It seems like you probably got a sense of the whole ship coming together, then, whereas some of these people in the prefabricating units only saw the one small part.

1-00:35:48

Jackson: That is correct. I can't remember now, it slipped my mind, but the deck houses— It took two cranes to bring a deck house over. And we were warned because they had dropped them at different times.

Redman: So sometimes the whirly cranes would fail?

1-00:36:12

Jackson: [Narrator addendum: Not the cranes. The cranes could drop a deck house, and this had happened before.] The bosses would warn the people to stay underneath until the deck house was put in place.

Redman: Then you could go up there and begin work.

1-00:36:24

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Do you recall how the men and women related to each other on the shipyards? Did they get along, or was there some kind of—

1-00:36:32

Jackson: [laughs] Yeah, they got along just fine. I think some were too friendly.

Redman: Let's talk about that.

1-00:36:39

Jackson: [laughs]

Redman: So there was some hanky panky at the shipyards?

1-00:36:43

Jackson: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about what that was like.

1-00:36:45

Jackson: Well, I know I knew about it. We worked around a lot of the pipe welders, pipe fitters, and they were the worst of the bunch. [laughs]

Redman: In terms of their sense of humor?

1-00:37:08

Jackson: Well, just, you know. You have to control. You know how much you can do and if you want to do, whatever. You have to just say, you know, "I'm married, I'm not interested."

Redman: So men would make passes or advances at you.

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: But the pipefitters were especially bad.

1-00:37:34

Jackson: Yes. [laughs]

Redman: How did that make you feel as far as— Did that ever make you or some of your women friends, did you ever feel uncomfortable with that environment, or was it something that you laughed off?

1-00:37:49

Jackson: Oh just, you know, just put it aside and go on. Do what you have to do. You know yourself what you want to do, so you just put it aside and say, go on with my work.

Redman: Right. Not interested. One question that I was going to ask was that in 1944 there was a major explosion at Port Chicago. A lot of the people I've spoken to have reported feeling the shakes of this explosion, or hearing a little bit about the explosion. Are you familiar with that at all?

1-00:38:25

Jackson: Oh, I remember it happening, but I don't really remember anything as far as shaking.

Redman: Tell me what you remember about the Port Chicago disaster. What did you hear about it at the time?

1-00:38:41

Jackson: I don't know. I don't have any memories of anything. I just know it was disastrous. It was a terrible thing that happened.

Redman: So you had heard that there was a terrible naval disaster in Port Chicago in 1944, but you didn't hear much else about it.

1-00:39:02

Jackson: No. Well, I don't remember. I don't really recall. I'm sure there was a lot of talk about it and what had happened, but I really don't recall all that much.

Redman: As the war continued on, you stayed on the night shift through the entire time. Is that correct?

1-00:39:26

Jackson: No, I left in '44. I left the shipyard in '44.

Redman: How did that come about, that you decided to leave?

1-00:39:31

Jackson: Well, I just decided I thought that I should leave the shipyard and go to work in a day job rather than be working at night.

Redman: Did that become a little too challenging logistics-wise, or do you remember why—

1-00:39:51

Jackson: It was really difficult to get— Once you left a job working on a government job, well, not a government job but working in a shipyard or any of that type of work going to an office, you could not really go back to work, as I recall. Once you left, you were out.

Redman: That's a pretty weighty decision then, to make that decision to leave.

1-00:40:26

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Did you enjoy the work?

1-00:40:28

Jackson: Oh, yes I did. I really did. I think the big reason I left was because at that time my husband had gone in — He finally went into the service.

Redman: Was he drafted, or did he join?

1-00:40:42

Jackson: No, he was drafted. He had several— I forgot what they called it now. He was called, but then he was given a—

Redman: —A deferment?

1-00:40:55

Jackson: Yes, deferment. Finally, I don't know how many times, but the last time he had to go in. He went in in '44, and I decided that I should maybe leave the shipyard and go to work in an office somewhere. In the daytime.

Redman: So it was partly that he was away, and not going together each day, and the logistics of that?

1-00:41:25

Jackson: Yeah.

Redman: It was his mother that also worked there? And also his father.

1-00:41:30

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Did they stay on at the shipyard?

1-00:41:32

Jackson: They stayed on after that. I don't know how long. But they finally moved. They quit and they moved from here back to Salinas.

Redman: That was before the end of the war that they left as well.

1-00:41:52

Jackson: Yes. Yes. It was almost the end of the war before they left.

Redman: One of the things that I've heard about is that people would go make special trips back to the shipyard to watch ships being launched. But that I know was during the daytime. That the ships would actually be christened and launched.

1-00:41:52

Jackson: Okay, they launched them at night.

Redman: Oh, they did?

1-00:42:16

Jackson: Yes. Because that's the only thing that I was really sad about that I never went on one of the launches. Because they could go. Some of the bosses went.

Redman: And they would actually be on the ship.

1-00:42:31

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: That must have been like a roller coaster ride. I'm not sure I would like that, actually.

1-00:42:35

Jackson: [laughs] I don't know, but it was very exciting to see when you've worked on the ship from the bottom all the way to the top, they would launch them and then they would send them over to drydock. Over there, they would inspect all the welding, all the things that weren't done before. And sometimes our crew would have to go over there and do welding. They'd send us from here over to the drydock. We didn't like working at drydock because it was— Well, the jobs were not— They were really hard jobs to do. Somebody had messed up on a welding, on a weld job, and then of course we'd have to go there and repair it. But we would. We would go over there sometimes. But that was a very interesting thing to watch the ship go out that you worked on from the bottom up all the way to the top.

Redman: That was an exciting moment for you in a sense of accomplishment—

1-00:43:35

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: —and satisfaction.

1-00:43:38

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: It is interesting to me because I wonder if someone would get a different sense of building the ship in a prefabrication unit where they're just working on one small component of the ship versus someone like you who had gone all the way around the ship. You knew every aspect of the ship backwards and forwards, it seems like

1-00:44:03

Jackson: Mmm hmm.

Redman: So that it feels like it's your ship in a sense.

1-00:44:06

Jackson: That is correct. One night they sent us over to drydock—

Redman: There was a Moore drydock? Was that a different thing? The drydock was part of the Kaiser unit?

1-00:44:22

Jackson: I guess it must have been.

Redman: Sorry, go on. You had gone over there one night?

1-00:44:27

Jackson: We went over to finish up some jobs that had not been finished and there's this— I don't recall what they call it now, but they're wide and they're the ones that hold the ship together. Everything is welded to this. And it's square, like that. Someone had started working on this and then left it. So that was my job for the night. So I grabbed a bucket. If we wanted to be comfortable welding, sometimes you'd get a bucket, like these white buckets that you see all the time. Sat on that, and I was right there so I could weld that. I finally got my bead going. I had it going really well. Everything was going well. And you have to build it up because it starts like two or three beads across and keep building it till it's maybe an inch wide. I was pretty much getting to maybe three or four welds across, and in my glasses— in the glass on my helmet, I could see somebody standing behind me. [laughs] So when I finished, I lifted my hood up and these two men were standing there. And they said "What a beautiful weld." [laughs] They were watching me weld! 'Cause they have hoods that they carry around with them, and they put them on to watch the welders. "What a beautiful weld you did there, really great!"

Redman: Did that give you some sense of satisfaction—

1-00:46:20

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: —that other people admired your art that you—

1-00:46:25

Jackson: Yes. ‘Cause like I say, I considered it an art to do. When first went to work in the shipyards, we did arc welding and then maybe just before we left the shipyards they started with a rod that— The arc welding, you had to move your rod to make the bead going across, where this one, you just shoved it in and it would make the bead as it went along. So that was something new that they were experimenting with when we left the yards.

Redman: Did you like that new system that had come in, or did that take a little—

1-00:47:08

Jackson: Uh, take a little out of it because this way you were just pushing down on it. With the other you had to really learn to move it. I took a Navy test, and I passed the flat and the vertical, but I missed the overhead. I knew I wouldn’t pass the overhead because I had a bubble in my overhead, and I tried to fix it, and it just didn’t work.

Redman: Even one small bubble could—

1-00:47:37

Jackson: Yeah. Yeah. ‘Cause they bend it. They take that little piece of iron, piece of metal that you work on, and they bend it. If it doesn’t break when they bend it, then you get your certificate.

Redman: But you did well on two of the three.

1-00:47:57

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: Let’s talk about the end of the war. Often I ask people because they let go a lot of people starting with the night shift. My understanding is that people on the night shift were laid off at Kaiser at the end of the war. Then, people on the swing shift, and eventually, a lot of folks on the day shift were let go as well. But that’s not something that would have affected you because you left.

1-00:48:24

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: So tell me what your life was like at the end of the war. Do you recall hearing about victory in Europe and then victory in—

1-00:48:34

Jackson: Oh, yes, yes. When we heard about the war being over, I had been working, and was working, in an office at that time. And of course we were all excited

about this thing of the war being over. And we decided we were going to go downtown and join the group. We went downtown Oakland and joined everybody else on the streets, dancing and singing and whatever, you know.

Redman: That was a happy time.

1-00:49:07

Jackson: That was a happy time. That is correct.

Redman: Do you remember learning about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the atomic bombs in Japan?

1-00:49:16

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: What did you feel about that at the time?

1-00:49:23

Jackson: I'm not really sure. I'm not really sure how I felt about that.

Redman: The Japanese living in the U.S. were interned at the start of the war. Did you have any Japanese friends or acquaintances in your neighborhood at the start of the war?

1-00:49:51

Jackson: Okay. Salinas by this time was already lettuce growing, and we went to school with a lot of Japanese children. Yes. Our friends that we went to school with were all sent to internment camps. Actually, a lot of the Japanese lived right on the farms with the families. They had their own house. So, yes, I've talked to a class reunion. Some of the Japanese people have to the class reunion, and I was able to speak to some of the people we went to school with.

Redman: Did that make you feel any way in particular at the time, or is this something you—

1-00:50:45

Jackson: Well, you feel sad. You feel sad because you know even though they're Japanese, they're still your friends, you know? So, it's a difficult time.

Redman: That led to some sort of conflicting emotions.

1-00:50:58

Jackson: Yes, I think so. Yeah, yeah.

Redman: Interesting. Later on, did your feelings about that change, or did they get strengthened, or have you—

1-00:51:13

Jackson: Never really thought about it. Again, I just feel that it was sad to think that all of these Japanese people that were born and raised in the United States had to go through that. That's the only sad part about it, I think.

Redman:

Let's talk a little bit about the end of the war and that jubilation. You were in downtown Oakland. I understand one year later, in 1946, there was a massive strike in Oakland that shut down the entire city for a couple of days in 1946. Do you remember hearing anything about that?

1-00:51:53

Jackson: No. I don't even remember that.

Redman:

Some people recall this and some people—. What did you do for work, then, in the years that followed after the war?

1-00:52:06

Jackson: Okay. After the war—

Redman:

Did your husband return come—

1-00:52:10

Jackson: He returned home, and we weren't sure what we wanted to do. We decided that maybe we should try to open our own business, which was decided then a small restaurant. We purchased a small restaurant by the Laney College. And we had— All the Laney kids would come over for coffee and donuts. We were there for nine years, we had the restaurant.

Redman:

What was the restaurant called?

1-00:52:42

Jackson: Hearth Café.

Redman:

What was that experience like, having your own business, having a restaurant? Was that stressful, was that exciting?

1-00:52:56

Jackson: Well, yes it's very stressful, because you're there at six o'clock in the morning till seven o'clock at night. It was an experience, I guess.

Redman:

A pretty big departure, from working at the shipyards.

1-00:53:11

Jackson: Oh, that is correct, yes.

Redman:

Let me ask a question about your shirt. Your shirt says "World War II Welder" on the front and "Rosie the Welder" on the back, is that right?

1-00:53:23

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: You heard about Rosie the Riveter as this kind of idea, and you thought, well, “I was a welder instead of a riveter.”

1-00:53:35

Jackson: That is correct.

Redman: Tell me about the image of Rosie the Riveter, and do you identify with that image? Do you like seeing that image? What are some of your thoughts on the Rosie the Riveter idea?

1-00:53:46

Jackson: Well, I guess they have their right to be shown as their profession. I just never had any doings with any of the women that worked out on the— There were women working out there as riveters, but I never had any opportunity to really talk to them.

Redman: Was there sort of an alternative phrase? Have you ever heard anyone say “Winnie the Welder,” or “Wendy the Welder”? I’ve sometimes heard that phrase used.

1-00:54:24

Jackson: Yeah, I think so, yes. I think so.

Redman: You maybe didn’t identify with that. You thought of it as a riveting, sort of profession that Rosie was.

1-00:54:35

Jackson: Yeah, because there were women out there doing that.

Redman: You said you’ve been back to the World War II Homefront Memorial in Richmond.

1-00:54:47

Jackson: Yes.

Redman: What did that make you think, and what did that make you reflect on? Now, when you go back and thinking about that time of your life, what do you think?

1-00:54:55

Jackson: Well, you think about all the times that you worked, the nights that you worked, what went on. The men would shoot dice over there in the corner, and all the different things that happened while you were working in the shipyard. You kind of think about that, you know.

Redman: So some of those new experiences.

1-00:55:19

Jackson: Yeah.

Redman: We've talked about a lot today. We've talked about going back to your parents and what they were like and how the Great Depression may or may not have affected your family. And signing up for work and training as a welder and then what that experience was like. Is there anything else, any other particularly strong memories, that you'd like to share with me today?

1-00:55:42

Jackson: About my life?

Redman: In particular your time in the shipyards.

1-00:55:50

Jackson: Not much of anything else. I can't think of anything more. I'll probably think of a lot of things after you've left, but—. [laughs]

Redman: [laughs] The best answers are always when you're in the car driving home

1-00:56:03

Jackson: [laughs] Yeah.

Redman: Thank you. I really appreciate your sitting down with me today.

1-00:56:07

Jackson: Well, thank you for having me do this. I appreciate it.

Redman: Great.

{End tape}