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Betty Ellen Kreidler

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

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Interviews conducted by  
Sarah Selvidge  
in 2010

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Betty Ellen Kreidler

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Interview 1: August 24, 2010  
Begin Audiofile 1

Selvidge: Okay, if I can just have you say your name and just spell your last name.

1-00:00:18

Kreidler: My name is Betty Donaldson Kreidler, K R E I D L E R.

Selvidge: This is Sarah Selvidge, and we're doing an interview in San Lorenzo, August 24, 2010. So now you can just go ahead and start, and I'd like to start off by having you tell me a little bit about your early family life. So you could just start with the year you were born, where you were born, and tell me a little bit about your family.

1-00:01:05

Kreidler: Okay, I was born in 1926 in Sewickley, Pennsylvania at the confluence of the two rivers, the Allegheny and the Monongahela, to form the Ohio right there on the point, and I lived for several years in Pittsburgh with my folks. My dad came to California to work for Westinghouse. So my mother then brought me out on the train, and she said I walked the whole way on the train. I guess I was pretty precocious. But anyway, we lived in Oakland for many years, and when I was ten years old we moved to Alameda. Neptune Beach was the big amusement park there in those days, and I learned to swim in their pools, my sister and I. Then in 1938 my dad was a National Guard captain, and so they sent him to Fort Benning, Georgia. So the whole family went to Fort Benning, and we lived there for about six months while Daddy was in a training program.

So even in '38 they knew the war was coming. I was fortunate in those days to see Franklin D. Roosevelt come and review the troops, and my dad looked spiffy on a horse; he always rode a horse. So anyway, we had a wonderful time in Georgia. People were very nice to us, but I was very frustrated in those days with the way they treated the blacks. It just got to me because California didn't really see color. But there they were very prejudiced, and I ran into a lot of arguments with a lot of different people. But anyway, we did—

Selvidge: Before we go on to the next event or next move, I'd love to hear more about both of the things you went to. I'd love to hear more about when you saw Roosevelt.

1-00:03:16

Kreidler: He came to review the troops, and they had in those days they still had the horses with the caissons and all the great music and everything that we had grown up with with my dad being in the National Guard. He stood at the podium and reviewed the troops. We never did see him in a wheelchair, and he was just a magnificent personality. He just exuded confidence, and everybody was quite pleased that he had come to do this at Fort Benning because—

Selvidge: This is 1938?

1-00:03:54

Kreidler: Nineteen thirty-eight, because Fort Benning was just a little outpost in those days. We used to ride horseback across the airport, so it was small. But I did see my first Jeep there. [laughs] They say that the first Jeep didn't come out until '45, but they had Jeeps in Fort Benning in 1938; yeah, they did.

Selvidge: Good, and was the President pretty popular then?

1-00:04:20

Kreidler: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, he was. Yes, he was. Of course, this was in Georgia, and he had his summer home there in Warm Spring. So yes, he was very well liked.

Selvidge: So at this time you were a young—

1-00:04:41

Kreidler: I was twelve, yeah.

Selvidge: Tell me more about what some of the incidents of discrimination that you are describing.

1-00:04:51

Kreidler: Well, my mother had a young lady come in, a young black lady come in and stay with Phyl and I because my sister was only ten.

Selvidge: Phyl is your sister.

1-00:05:01

Kreidler: My sister Phyllis. So she would have because they partied a lot at Fort Benning. [laughs] Oh, yes, yes. So this Maria would come in and stay with us. She was a lovely young lady. She was maybe in her twenties, and she had a couple of small children. But one time she took us to the movies, and she couldn't sit with us. She had to sit in the balcony. So I said to the fellow, "Well, we'll sit up there with her, too." "Oh, no, you can't sit up there." This just really got to me as a California girl; we did not have those prejudices, and it was so evident there. The blacks would walk off the sidewalk and walk around you when you walked down the sidewalk. I just thought it was so sad. I really did.

Selvidge: Is that something you talked about with your family?

1-00:06:08

Kreidler: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, and my mother was always very good to the young lady and paid her well and stuff and gave her little gifts and things because she was, she was just a delightful young woman.

Selvidge: What did your parents explain to you about the differences?

1-00:06:30

Kreidler:

Well, we always talked a lot, and they had no prejudices. They never did. My dad always wanted to form an all black National Guard company. That was his dream to do that. Yeah, because they were still not letting the blacks in any capacity except maybe messmen or something like that in the service. They just didn't do it in those days, and it was tragic. I think it was tragic.

Selvidge:

Tell me more about what your dad hopes to accomplish with this.

1-00:07:12

Kreidler:

Well, he was a captain of a National Guard company in California in Alameda. We always had the auditorium, his armory. We could have dances there and this, that and the other thing. If I had a birthday party I could have fifty kids because we could have the armory to do this in. So, yeah, it was always kind of fun. It was right on the beach at Washington Park in Alameda, so we could spill out into the sand and so forth, yeah, it was fun.

But my mother and dad were before their time I think. They had no prejudices. They really didn't, and they raised us that way, which I think was a good thing. I fought the good cause, but I didn't get very far in Georgia. [laughs]

Selvidge:

What do you mean when you say you fought the good cause?

1-00:08:03

Kreidler:

Well, we had segregated schools. I was in school with all white children, and I'd get in lots of arguments because I was a reasonably bright kid and I was always asking why, why, why. And I did get myself in some troubles. I will say that the Georgia schools were head and shoulders above the California schools. When I came back they skipped me half a grade in those days because I was just bored to tears in my class here.

Selvidge:

What were some of the things that were better about their Georgia schools?

1-00:08:45

Kreidler:

Their math, their geography, their English, specifically the English. They really did teach, they had us reading books, I can't remember any of them now, but I know that when I came back they were just starting them in the class that I would have been in, and I said, "I already read that. I don't want to do that again."

Selvidge:

So the curriculum was a little more accelerated?

1-00:09:09

Kreidler:

Much more, much more.

Selvidge:

But of course only for the white students.

1-00:09:12

Kreidler: Only for the whites, only for the whites. I'm not sure the blacks even went to school. I really am not because you saw them in the streets a lot of times and so forth. I presume they had schools, but—

Selvidge: Were you in a position to be able to know that African-American kids personally or—?

1-00:09:34

Kreidler: No, no, not at all. Not whatsoever. I had several girlfriends from school, and we all liked the outdoors and stuff, and they all had big dogs, so we'd take the dogs and hike across the fields and go down to the river. And then you had to be careful of the water moccasins because you don't want to get bit. The dog got bit one day, and it was a big retriever. My girlfriend, my sister and I carried that dog back, and the mother got it to the vet, and it was okay. But those water moccasins are poisonous of course, yeah.

But it was a wonderful experience I think, and it really taught me a lot. It taught me that other people in the South were terribly, terribly prejudiced. Interesting.

Selvidge: So you came back to California after only about six months.

1-00:10:33

Kreidler: About six months. We came back to Alameda and bought a house on; no, we came back and rented a place on 808 Pacific. Then Mom and Dad were fortunate enough to buy a home on Buena Vista, and we were right across from Del Monte Packing and the old Alaska Packers. Then when the war came they had the big bubbles, glass bubbles that they held the nets up with; the submarine nets and so forth were right across the street. In the middle of the night they'd move them around and bang, crash, and my bedroom was right, my window was right there. We heard this.

But then, Del Monte was where, then, the Liberty ships came in, and so there was a bar called Jensen's, and it was about three blocks away. My father, he was injured in an accident coming home from Georgia, and wrecked his arm so he had to get out of the service. He was so frustrated, so he'd go up to the bar and collect all these poor sailors and bring them home for my mother to cook for.

Selvidge: That was his way of contributing—

1-00:11:47

Kreidler: Yeah, yeah. He raised rabbits. My sister raised squab, pigeons. We had a victory garden. We had a walnut tree. My mother had raspberries and so forth growing, so she always could make a meal for these kids that would come and be homesick, and yeah.

- Selvidge: I was just going to ask you actually about what work your father did.
- 1-00:12:15  
Kreidler: He worked for Westinghouse Electric.
- Selvidge: So he had a job with Westinghouse throughout this period.
- 1-00:12:23  
Kreidler: Yeah.
- Selvidge: What kind of work did he do?
- 1-00:12:26  
Kreidler: Oh, he was in Accounts Receivable Pay—office, office work.
- Selvidge: Of course, that's a pretty big company.
- 1-00:12:33  
Kreidler: Oh, yeah. He would take me to work with him every once in a while, and I'd get to earn a quarter or something by doing some accounts payable or accounts receivable for him. [laughs]
- Selvidge: A lot of this time you've been talking about is, of course, during the Depression.
- 1-00:12:55  
Kreidler: Well, no.
- Selvidge: Or was it the later end?
- 1-00:12:59  
Kreidler: By 1938 we were pretty much out of the Depression.
- Selvidge: By the time you came back. But this time before then—
- 1-00:13:07  
Kreidler: Oh, yeah. I can remember my mother having a dollar until payday.
- Selvidge: Did your father have lower wages during that period? He was still employed right?
- 1-00:13:18  
Kreidler: No, he seemed to make a decent wage with Westinghouse, as I recall. We never really wanted for anything, but by payday sometimes—we always rented, and so we were paying rent, and we had big old cars and took gas. Of course, gas and of course everything was cheaper then, too, but my mother was always a good manager, so—
- Selvidge: So for most of this time there was a matter in your family of keeping careful, of being careful—

1-00:13:50

Kreidler:

Yeah. Yeah, and like my mother sewed, she made our clothes and things like that. I learned to sew, and in high school I made lots of my own clothes and stuff.

Selvidge:

So these were things that your family did all along.

1-00:14:05

Kreidler:

Yeah, yeah.

Selvidge:

Not necessarily just during the Depression.

1-00:14:07

Kreidler:

No. My mother and dad were both schoolteachers in one-room schools, my mother in West Virginia, and my dad in Pennsylvania. It always tickles me because he graduated from Slippery Rock Normal Teaching College. Every once in a while you'll hear the football scores for Slippery Rock, and it amuses me. [laughs] So they were both bright people.

Selvidge:

They were both educated.

1-00:14:38

Kreidler:

Educated, yeah.

Selvidge:

Did your mother work after being a schoolteacher?

1-00:14:41

Kreidler:

No. She never worked when we came to California. She never worked, stayed home with the kids. Finally, during the war she wanted a new sofa or something, and so she went to work for the cannery and worked just long enough to get the money to buy a sofa. [laughs]

Selvidge:

How long did it take her?

1-00:15:02

Kreidler:

It wasn't very long. Canneries paid good wages.

Selvidge:

A couple weeks or—

1-00:15:07

Kreidler:

Oh, probably a month or so, yeah. Then after the kids were all gone and everything she went to work for the housing authority. They had a lot of housing, Alameda had a lot of housing for the, what do I want to say, the service people and so forth.

Selvidge:

With the GI Bill.

1-00:15:30

Kreidler:

Yeah, yeah. In fact, one of the ladies that knew my mother from that era lives right across the street over here, yeah.

Selvidge: From working at the housing authority?

1-00:15:47

Kreidler: Well, she lived in the housing. Her husband was in the service, and she lived in the housing. So when she moved out here, my sister was on the street first, and my mother says, "Oh, I know the Deutsches. They lived in housing." So then this house came up for sale, and we bought it quickly and moved down here. We lived up on Via Alamedas for ten years, Carl and I.

My dad was a character. He loved to tease and have a good time. They did a lot of partying. They always went to San Francisco in formals and tuxedos and whatnot, or dress Army uniform.

Selvidge: What kind of venues did they go to?

1-00:16:37

Kreidler: Usually dining and dancing, yeah.

Selvidge: So once you came back to Alameda with your family, you said you skipped a little ahead in school—

1-00:16:54

Kreidler: I did.

Selvidge: And you must have been getting towards the—

1-00:16:57

Kreidler: I was just about ready to go into high school I think, because I was almost thirteen. Oh, I was nearly ready to go into high school, so it must have been in the eighth grade that they put me ahead.

Selvidge: Can you tell me some about your experience in high school?

1-00:17:19

Kreidler: Well, I belonged to the CSF, and there were only two girls and three boys in our class that were members.

Selvidge: Can you just say what the CSF was?

1-00:17:33

Kreidler: California Scholarship Federation. God, I had to stop and think, yeah. We did a lot of partying back and forth with St. Joseph's School. Later Carl and I married at St. Joseph's Church, which was interesting. But I enjoyed my school years. I was bright. I did well and was kind of a shrimp disturber in a way.

Selvidge: What do you mean by that?

1-00:18:09

Kreidler: Well, if something was said that we couldn't do it, I'd find a way to make sure we could, and [laughs] we had a little gang going because we lived in the west end. East end was the fancy part. We lived in the west end. So on football days we'd wear cutoffs and plaid shirts, all the same. There were, oh, maybe ten of us or so, and we got in a lot of trouble for doing that. I don't know why.

Selvidge: What was the objection?

1-00:18:41

Kreidler: That we were dressing alike and that we were being hoodlums and so forth.

Selvidge: Interesting.

1-00:18:47

Kreidler: Aha, it was.

Selvidge: Was it teachers or the school administrators?

1-00:18:51

Kreidler: I think it was the administrators because I took four years of Latin, four years of English, four years of history, two years of Spanish. I mean, I was a student, let's face it, and I did well. I also was in sixth-period gym and was athletic so, but I don't know why they picked on us, but they did. [laughs]

Selvidge: What are some other things that you remember that were objectionable or whether attention—?

1-00:19:26

Kreidler: That was the only thing; that was the only thing. But mostly our dressing and being a gang. I went with a young man who wore a leather jacket and smoked and sat on the church steps across the street from school, and a few things like that. [laughs]

Selvidge: Was he also a student at the school?

1-00:19:45

Kreidler: Yeah, he was, he was, not a very good one because he worked, and he fell asleep. I'd poke him and say, "Wake up, got to listen to this." Then I'd share my notes and stuff with him. But he was a nice young man. And my brother-in-law down the street; he was one of them that was over on the church steps with a leather jacket and smoking a cigarette. [laughs]

Selvidge: The bad boys.

1-00:20:05

Kreidler: The bad boys, yeah, yeah. Funny.

Selvidge: And was there a sense that this geographic divide you were talking about between the west and the east—

1-00:20:17

Kreidler: The east was; they were pretty snooty. They weren't about to include you in their groups and so forth which I didn't care. In later years one of my best friends lived on the corner down here, and she was one of those— [laughs] ah, yeah.

Selvidge: Were they involved in different kinds of activities, then?

1-00:20:39

Kreidler: Oh, yes. They had their little sororities and all the good stuff.

Selvidge: I guess other kinds of organized activities within the school, is that right? Clubs or—

1-00:20:51

Kreidler: There were clubs, but I belonged to a lot of them, the Key Club and so forth and always made scholarship and—

Selvidge: So then the school-organized things tended to be more open.

1-00:21:09

Kreidler: Oh, yeah. We had dances and so forth. It was kind of a fun time; it really was.

Selvidge: You said you had a boyfriend during the activities you went with. Was there a lot of the students dating pretty early in high school or—?

1-00:21:32

Kreidler: Yeah, pretty, yeah, kind of, but like I say, we kind of had a gang. There were boys and girls, and we hung out at Washington Park. Jack LaLanne was one of our heroes. Yeah, it was a fun time.

Selvidge: So you socialized in groups together.

1-00:21:50

Kreidler: We did, we did, yeah. We'd go roller skating; there might be twenty of us. We'd get on the bus and go out to the roller rink, and yeah, things like that. But my grandpa lived with us, and he liked to go to the park and watch the ladies play softball. Some of the girls that were in sixth-period gym with us were wonderful ball players, the Souza girls. They wore shorts, and my granddad thought that was pretty interesting that the girls played softball in shorts. So he'd take us to the park, and we'd run around with the gang of kids and play on the apparatus, and he'd watch the girls play softball. [laughs]

Selvidge: He was surprised that they would be so—that they would wear shorts?

1-00:22:40

Kreidler: Yeah, and he was there. I didn't tell you about him. My grandmother died when I was about five, and she was out here at the time. She sold insurance for a women's life insurance society, which was then WBA, Women's Benefit

Association, to the miners' wives and children. Women in those days really didn't work, and she was one of the original ones who sold for this all women's insurance company. In later years we let the men in, but I'm still a member, I'm an eighty-three-year member. She put me in when I was a year old, yeah. That was the convention I just went to in San Antonio. Some of these gals that I've known for sixty years? [laughs]

But anyway, that was one of the social things that my sister and I did because we were juniors, considered juniors, and that was a good organization to be in. We had a drill team, and whatnot. Our part of it is fraternal, so we did a lot of charity work, a lot of volunteering, even in our early years we volunteered.

Selvidge: What were some of the areas you volunteered for?

1-00:24:07

Kreidler: At the park with the little kids and so forth. We would go and play with them and watch them and so forth. But then we were also, as I started to say, we were very active in sixth-period gym which was athletic, and so I played softball and basketball, volleyball, ran track, and then we got a young woman teacher from Hawaii and she taught us to do the hula. So in the years then when the war came on, we went out to entertain the USO by dancing, and that was a fun thing for some of us young ladies to do.

Selvidge: So you did hula performances at the USO. Oh, wow.

1-00:25:01

Kreidler: The high school years were really good years. I enjoyed them. I enjoyed dancing. We had a lot of dances, but I always remembered that we had to cancel our soph hop because it was blackout. [laughs] My dad was an air raid warden, and he marched up and down the block. My sister would take the little red wagon and go out and collect pots and pans for the metal to get melted because they were desperate for metal during the war. She'd also go out on a little skiff with a neighbor boy who was a scout, and he'd practice his SOS with the Morse code with the sailors. They used flags in those days, and so he'd practice his words and so forth with them. My sister would invite them all to come back to mother's house, of course. [laughs]

Selvidge: All the sailors. Did she invite them with Morse code?

1-00:26:06

Kreidler: Yeah, yeah. She'd tell—I can't remember what his name was. But she was young. [laughs]

Selvidge: She sounds precocious as well.

1-00:26:14

Kreidler: She was, she was.

Selvidge: So your family really did, and it sounds like your community really did experience a lot of coming together.

1-00:26:27

Kreidler: We did, we did. It was hard because Alameda was a 30,000 entity, a bedroom for San Francisco, pretty low-key. And it seemed like almost overnight we had 90,000 people there with Naval Air Station and whatnot. So in my senior year I worked in a shop up on Santa Clara in Alameda where they were welding airplane wings, not welding, riveting, riveting. They were riveting airplane wings. Well, I did not do well with rivets. I was terrible. So they put me in the timekeeper's office, and I spent the rest of the war as a timekeeper and secretary for Naval Air Alameda.

Selvidge: So what year was this, your last year in high school?

1-00:27:26

Kreidler: Yeah, I graduated, it was in '45.

Selvidge: In '45 when you graduated.

1-00:27:31

Kreidler: I graduated in '44; no, it was '43, '43 that I worked that summer because I graduated in February of '44, and then I went right to work at Naval Air Alameda down on the base.

Selvidge: Before we talk more about that, which I'd like to, I wonder if you can tell me about the beginning of the war. You told me some about the years leading up to the war, and that some sense that you had for your father involved in the Guard as an escalating military—

1-00:28:11

Kreidler: Yes, we were always a military family. We had friends in Hawaii. My sister had one of her best girlfriends had moved over for the father to work at Hickam Field. So my girlfriend and I, it was a Sunday, when we heard about Pearl Harbor, and, of course, we were all thinking about this one family that we knew there and so forth. And it was weeks before we ever heard anything from them, but they were okay. He had worked the night before or something and was not at the field when the attacks began. But they lived in I think it was Eva, which was up the west side, about, of Pearl Harbor. It was a ways away.

In later years then I had many good friends from Hawaii and had visited over there and so forth, and they lived through that and to hear them talk about the devastation was, and losing people, was really something, yeah.

Selvidge: Do you remember any of the specific stories that people told about that time?

1-00:29:35

Kreidler:

You know, I really don't. I have watched it so much on TV and everything. But just that how shocked we were, and we had all gathered at—there was a dairy-like place up on Park Street and how the kids just seemed to all kind of congregate in that place. And we were just all shell shocked with that news.

Selvidge:

Do you remember if you heard on the radio?

1-00:30:04

Kreidler:

It was radio because we didn't have a television, I know, although my dad worked for Westinghouse, and in 1938 I did see a television at the World's Fair that Westinghouse had, and I couldn't believe it. Oh, and that was a kind of a funny thing. From the park where we congregated we did folk dancing, and so when the fair was on Treasure Island in '38, '39, every Saturday they would take a busload of us kids over to the Fair and we would dance.

Selvidge:

What kind of folk music?

1-00:30:44

Kreidler:

Oh, just, I can't remember, just—

Selvidge:

Just sort of different—

1-00:30:49

Kreidler:

Yeah, yeah. But anyway, and then they'd turn us loose, and we'd have all passes to the Gayway, and so forth.

Selvidge:

So you would do a short performance—.

1-00:30:59

Kreidler:

Yeah, and then we'd stay on, and in those days Carl was a member of a band, boys' band from the American Legion, and he also played at the Fair. So I well could have met him when I was young. [laughs]

Selvidge:

Tell me about your impression of the Fair.

1-00:31:21

Kreidler:

To us it was just a big party. They had lots of exhibits in the exhibit halls and stuff, but we spent most of our time fiddling around the Gayway and the rides and so forth, and wondering if we could sneak in to see Sally Rand do her fan dance. [laughs] Oh, gosh, and we used to ride the A train, the good old A train, I remember that.

Selvidge:

But you did see the Westinghouse exhibit?

1-00:31:51

Kreidler:

Oh, yes, yes, and they did have a television that was made—

Selvidge:

What did you think of it?

1-00:31:56

Kreidler:

Oh, I was amazed, I was just amazed, because we'd sit with my granddad and listen to the radio. *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*. My sister and I'd sit back in there, and he liked my sister better because she was very quiet and calm, and he said I was always up dancing around or doing somersaults or something. [laughs] But he used to smoke a pipe, and we'd sit in there with him. He'd smoke his pipe, and we'd listen to the radio.

Selvidge:

But this new TV—

1-00:32:31

Kreidler:

It was amazing, it was amazing. And then it wasn't until, I think it was 1953, Carl and I got our first TV, yeah. [laughs]

Selvidge:

So in terms of the events of the war, you were telling me about the real shock you felt with finding out about—

1-00:32:52

Kreidler:

It was because I felt like I knew Roosevelt, having seen him, but my dad always said we were getting closer and closer and closer because in '38 they were already preparing our guys. So he kept saying it was inevitable that we were going get into this—we had to get into this war.

Selvidge:

It's interesting that you say about the personal connection to Roosevelt because this is something that historians write about a good bit about Roosevelt establishing himself in relationship to the public through radio.

1-00:33:38

Kreidler:

Well, it was his Fireside Chats, and everybody would gather around and listen to this man. He had a very, I don't know, he just got into your soul with his voice and with the things he said. He was really quite a man, quite a man.

Selvidge:

Do you remember also people who were opposed to him or some of the things he did?

1-00:34:00

Kreidler:

Well, yeah, because my family was Republican, all of them. But my dad because of his rapport with the services really liked the man and thought he was right and so forth. My mother never said very much.

Selvidge:

She didn't talk about politics.

1-00:34:24

Kreidler:

No, no, she was smart. [laughs]

Selvidge:

Well, there were other people in the generation of your father in his family were left.

1-00:34:36

Kreidler: Well, see, I wasn't around my dad's family, wasn't around his family at all. They were all in Pennsylvania.

Selvidge: Okay, but you did have a sense that your dad was different from his family in that Republican—

1-00:34:49

Kreidler: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, and I think it was because he was military, I really do. Once you're up close and personal you get a different feel. If you really listened to that man, he was wonderful, he was wonderful. Have you been to Washington, DC; have you seen his exhibit back there?

Selvidge: Yes.

1-00:35:13

Kreidler: Fabulous, fabulous.

Selvidge: So that really struck a chord with you.

1-00:35:17

Kreidler: Well, and, too, my daughter being in the Park Service, got to see it before it was ever open to the public. They had taken her back there to critique, actually, and critique the rangers that were giving the talks. There was a big conflag about having him sit in a wheelchair, and a lot of people didn't want him to. But that was him, that was him, and then Eleanor, her statue is huge. We thought that was pretty good because that woman was the voice behind the throne, too. She was a wonderful soul.

Selvidge: What do you remember about Eleanor as a personality from that time?

1-00:36:09

Kreidler: Well, I remember the poor thing was such a homely lady, she was so homely. But she also had a very, what do I want to say? Her voice really got to you. When she spoke, people listened, and she was a great, great lady. She did an awful lot; she was just into everything. She was a very bright woman.

Selvidge: And did you find, it's interesting that you mentioned that she was homely, which is, of course, pretty objectively the case, but did you find out something that people talked about much when they talked about her?

1-00:36:51

Kreidler: They did, they did. They said, "Oh, that poor thing," and yet her personality was so marvelous that you soon forgot what she looked like because she was really a great lady, she really was.

Selvidge: So you felt like at the time people took her very seriously.

1-00:37:10

Kreidler:

They did, especially the women. They just thought somebody was standing up for us, too. And the fact that women got into the war and were allowed to do things that they hadn't done before, that men had always done.

Selvidge:

So you feel that people attributed some of the changing opportunities for women to some degree—

1-00:37:37

Kreidler:

I think she had a lot to do with it, yeah, because she certainly wasn't a shy person, she was right out there in the front lines.

Selvidge:

Yeah, she was very different from the wives of previous presidents.

1-00:37:50

Kreidler:

Right, right. She was not about to sit home and be a homebody. She was wonderful in her own right. She just had a strong, strong personality.

Selvidge:

So do you feel like she was in some ways a model for women?

1-00:38:11

Kreidler:

I do, I do, yeah. I know she influenced me.

Selvidge:

How did she influence you?

1-00:38:18

Kreidler:

Well, I think because she was so outspoken and so ready to get into the fray of things. I've always been reasonably outspoken, and sometimes it gets me into trouble. [laughs] But yeah, she was a great personality.

Selvidge:

And do you remember being affected also by things she did in terms of discrimination against African Americans and any of those issues?

1-00:38:50

Kreidler:

You know, now I don't remember that of her, no, I don't remember that.

Selvidge:

Just Africans, there were some conflicts between her position and FDR's politically a little bit later—

1-00:39:06

Kreidler:

Oh, I didn't remember that. Isn't that funny? Actually, like I said, Alameda was pretty white. One black girl graduated in my class, and they would not let us have our luncheon at the St. Francis Hotel if she were included. Well, we all just said, "Forget that, we're not going. St. Francis can go to heck."

Selvidge:

And that was a pretty universal position.

1-00:39:39

Kreidler:

Oh, yeah, because she was very popular, and she was a beautiful girl. Either her mother or father was white, and she had turquoise eyes; I mean her eyes

were just gorgeous. So we decided that, yes, we'd make the arrangements and we'd go and we'd take her with us, and we all wore hats. They never even knew that she was black, and we had our luncheon at the St. Francis Hotel. We did go, and she passed, yeah, yeah. And then later I went to Cal with she and her cousins, and the cousins were *black* black, [laughs] so it was kind of cute. But we were all just really good friends. She was a bright young lady, and like I say, my family never ever—color wasn't on the agenda.

Selvidge: It must have been pretty uncommon for people in her parents' generation to have a mixed marriage.

1-00:40:47

Kreidler: Well, in her family and several of the cousins, they were mixed marriages. It was French and black, and she pulled the French with the beautiful eyes and so forth. Lovely, lovely girl.

Selvidge: Were people in the town pretty accepting of the family in general of her family?

1-00:41:12

Kreidler: Yes, well, I think they were service people, probably. I just, I really don't remember. I know that my best girlfriend was so prejudiced. Oh, my God, she was terrible. So this one young man was Chinese extraction, and he asked her out one time, and she went to a dance with him. I said, "I thought you were so prejudiced," and she says, "Well, he's Italian." I said, "No, he's Chinese." Well, she was shocked that she'd gone out with a Chinese fellow.

Selvidge: She would have turned him down had she known.

1-00:41:49

Kreidler: She would have turned him down, she really would have. The Italians were okay. [laughs]

Selvidge: So she had a different—

1-00:41:57

Kreidler: Yeah, yeah, but her father was from South Africa, and he was very prejudiced. It rubbed off on her, and really it lasted for a good many years until she went to work at Oakland Naval Supply and was a boss and had to work with many, many different nationalities. She had to keep her mouth shut. [laughs]

Selvidge: So it sounds like even before the war there were because your family was connected to the service, you really knew people from a lot of different places.

1-00:42:33

Kreidler: We did, we did, yeah.

Selvidge: Well, can you tell me then about when the war effort became—?

1-00:42:47

Kreidler: Moving, yeah.

Selvidge: Got moving, right? And Alameda became more and more important. Can you tell me about some of the changes?

1-00:42:58

Kreidler: Yeah, we had a little problem with some of our gangs at school, didn't like the servicemen because, of course, they were dating the seniors and so forth from school, and there were some kind of interesting fights along the way between the two factions.

Selvidge: The people in the high school were resentful towards the young servicemen dating the—

1-00:43:28

Kreidler: The servicemen were kids. Carl went in when he was seventeen. When I met him he was only eighteen or nineteen, and I was seventeen.

Selvidge: Were you one of these girls dating the servicemen then?

1-00:43:44

Kreidler: I did, I did, because I worked at Naval Air, and I just had my choice of lots of young men to date. Plus my dad would bring them home from bar, and there was always somebody to go out with. The kid that I had been going with had gone up to Sacramento or someplace, and he wanted to get engaged before he left. My mother said, "If you get engaged to him, you can't go out, you can't date." I said, "Oh," didn't sound too good. [laughs] So I didn't get engaged, and we broke up. He came back one time and came to the door. In those days I was going to Cal, and I had a house full of my Portuguese friends because I was taking Spanish and Portuguese out at Cal, and we were having a good old time, and this kid came to the door and I said, "Oh, hi," hi and goodbye kind of, and that was it with him. That was funny. But I went with him all through high school.

Selvidge: Was he the one in the leather jacket?

1-00:44:51

Kreidler: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah. Oh, gosh, it was funny.

Selvidge: So it sounds like you had a pretty active social life.

1-00:45:06

Kreidler: Did, yeah, like I say, we horsed around in that gang from Washington Park, and we'd go roller skating, or we'd go to the city to—we used to go over to, oh, God, what was the plunge over there? My daughter's park, I ought to know it. Huh, can't think of it. But anyway, we'd go over to Playland at the Beach and, take us all day on the bus and street car to get there, but we had a lot of fun. Sutro Baths. We used to go to Sutro Baths on the bus and the

streetcar and whatnot, but always with a group. Sometimes the kids would pair off, but a lot of times it was as a group. And that was fun to be in an association like that, I thought.

Selvidge: So with all these people coming in, service people and, of course, once the war industry got going, people also looking for jobs, how did Alameda change over—?

1-00:46:17

Kreidler: Well, the shipyards opened up, and a lot of people worked in the shipyards. Across the street from us the Alaska packers became obsolete with the Liberties and whatnot. Del Monte, the canning companies were going hog wild because, of course, they were shipping overseas and whatnot.

Selvidge: They were canning foods for going abroad.

1-00:46:46

Kreidler: Foods, yeah. Well, going out on these Liberties and so forth and the transports because, see, they were cargo ships, and they could carry everything from rice and beans to locomotives. They had deep, deep holds, and they would carry the food stuff to the troops. Plus, Carl said, on deck they'd have gasoline and this, that and the other thing. He said it was scary sometimes what these ships did carry.

Selvidge: So all kinds of supplies.

1-00:47:21

Kreidler: All supplies, yeah, yeah, all supplies. And what's interesting about the *Jeremiah* is that you can go down in our holds and you can actually look down into the lower holds and see just how deep the cargo holds were and how much she could carry, yeah.

Selvidge: Just to clarify, because I know and you know, but not people watching this, can you explain what the *Jeremiah*—

1-00:47:49

Kreidler: Oh, the *Jeremiah O'Brien* is the last of the two remaining Liberty ships that still sail, and she's in San Francisco Bay at Pier 45.

Selvidge: You got to do a little plug here.

1-00:48:01

Kreidler: Open to the public, yes. That's nice.

Selvidge: And the *Jeremiah* is typical of the kinds of ships that you saw around Alameda?

1-00:48:15

Kreidler: Right, right. Well, and Richmond. Kaiser did a fantastic job out in Richmond because he prefabbed ships. He was a genius. He really was.

Selvidge: And in Alameda these were different shipyards and did not use the same methods—

1-00:48:34

Kreidler: No, it was Bethlehem and Todd.

Selvidge: Was there a sense of sort of competition between the different ship building companies?

1-00:48:47

Kreidler: No, everybody was for everybody really, and all up the West Coast actually these ships, Liberties, were built up in Oregon, Washington, so forth.

Selvidge: So I know there were a lot of people coming from other places to the area to work, and what about the people that you knew from high school and people you knew in the neighborhood and had grown up with, did a lot of them work in the shipyards and in the war industry?

1-00:49:21

Kreidler: You know, I don't really know because I kind of lost contact when I got out of high school because I went to work right at Naval Air. Then from Naval Air I went out to Cal, and I was kind of two years behind, so I wasn't really with the people who had gone straight out to school.

Selvidge: You were two years behind.

1-00:49:40

Kreidler: Yeah, see I went to work in the shipyards first, ah, the shipyards, Naval Air first, and I probably should have gone on, but I just felt like I wanted to do for the war effort. That's the way we were raised.

Selvidge: So why don't you talk a little more about that decision that you made to, you graduated in February—

1-00:50:03

Kreidler: I graduated in February of '44 and went right to work at Alameda Naval Air. I worked out in one of the hangars, and I would do the specs for the Cosmolining of the weapons and the planes that went on the carriers to go overseas. That was my job.

Selvidge: You said there was sort of a decision for you between going to college and taking a job.

1-00:50:33

Kreidler:

Yeah, and, too, my folks weren't rich, and so what I made I gave my mother so much a week for room and board supposedly. Well, she put it away, and when I went out to Cal then she doled it back out to me to go to school, so I had to pay my way to school. So that was good. In those days it didn't cost you a mint.

Selvidge:

Right. Well, I'd like to hear a little more about the working environment. You had mentioned, when we were talking about Eleanor Roosevelt, women contributing to the war effort.

1-00:51:14

Kreidler:

Well, Kaiser was the one, and Marinships in San Francisco also, with the women in the war effort. They hired women because they were seamstresses, they could do a straight line, they were wonderful welders, and we had no one on the West Coast to rivet. The East Coast shipyards they did all riveting, but there weren't enough of them to support this effort, and so we opened up and they decided that they could weld these ships. And that's exactly what they did. Almost every ship you see from the West Coast will be welded. The *Jeremiah O'Brien* is different because it's welded and riveted, so it's kind of an oddity. She was built in East Portland, Maine actually.

But like I say, Kaiser was a genius. He did the prefabbing. He put together a ship from keel to in the water in four and a half days, which was totally amazing, and he just did it to say he could. And, of course, then it took them another three days to outfit her and put the fo'c'sle [or forecandle] on and whatnot, but amazing things they did. Roosevelt had said we have to build a ship that can carry supplies to the Allies, and so he called the Liberty ships the ugly ducklings because they were just, they're not a beautiful ship, they really aren't. But they were steady, and they had a very, very simple engine, it was from an old British tug engine, and it's triple-expansion steam. And, of course, they were not expensive to run because they ran on any old yucky bunker fuel you could find, they would run on them. And our ship, the *Jeremiah O'Brien*, actually has only had her boilers repaired once in sixty-seven years. And these ships were built to last five years or five trips, and she's still steaming away, so we're very proud of her.

But anyway, Roosevelt was the one who got this going, and this was early on, and it was to support the Allies. And every person that comes from England during the war years says, "Thank you, you saved our bacon." "We would have been speaking German today." [laughs] So it kind of makes you feel good.

Selvidge:

Yeah, and then I'm interested in this idea you mentioned a moment ago of women having certain skills, like from sewing and other kinds of—

1-00:54:28

Kreidler:

They had good eyes because of the sewing and whatnot, and a lot of them came from the Midwest out here, and they had never worked probably outside the home; they always worked in the home. But everybody in those days they made their clothes and everything, and so they were used to fine work I think.

Selvidge:

And is that the thing that people talked about at the time or that people had a sense of, of sort of transferring the home skills—?

1-00:55:03

Kreidler:

I really didn't know that until years later when I went to Marinships and went to Kaiser Shipyard and saw all these marvelous pictures and stories about these women that worked in the war. It was just fabulous those things that they did from home bodies out to the work force, and they worked hard in sometimes not too great conditions.

Selvidge:

What about your own experience in the time you worked in the shipyard, the time you were doing the clerical work?

1-00:55:42

Kreidler:

It was a big party for me. It was reasonably easy work. I was a good typist. I just did my job and—

Selvidge:

Yeah, but this, of course, you were doing work that was more similar to the kind of work that women have done in previous—

1-00:55:55

Kreidler:

Right, and it was funny because I always took pre-college stuff, but my last six months in high school I had taken everything, four years of Latin, two years of Spanish, the whole bit, and there really wasn't one other thing I had to do to get a grade. So I took some business courses, typing and computer, not computer, calculator and whatnot, and it served me well because—

Selvidge:

So these were skills that you learned in high school—

1-00:56:27

Kreidler:

Yeah, yeah, I learned them in high school, and then I passed the test to as a typist for Naval Air, so that worked out rather well. But like I say, I worked out in one of the hangars. I would have views of some of these in those days big carriers coming in and whatnot. Of course, we never knew who they were or where they were going or anything like that. Interesting.

Selvidge:

Was there a sense that you had during the time of fear about being on the coast where there was a lot of military—?

1-00:57:09

Kreidler:

I never was afraid, we weren't afraid. We'd go out at night, go to the dances in Oakland. Sometimes some of the kids would take us over. Sometimes we'd take the bus. Then we'd take the bus home, and we'd get off on Webster

Street, and they had what was called the dime cabs. You paid ten cents, and they'd take you right to your door. So that's what we'd do so we wouldn't have to walk that couple of blocks down from the bus.

Selvidge: We're just getting to the end of the first tape, so I'll go ahead and stop that.

[Begin Audiofile 2]

Selvidge: This is our Tape 2, and we were talking about your work, those two years in between high school and college, and you were talking about some of the preparation for that work through some classes you took at school and things like that. I wonder if you can tell me a little bit more about the day to day of working around in the atmosphere of providing—you talked a lot about the atmosphere providing supplies for the Allen. I wonder if you can also talk about some of the people you met at work and kind of day to day operations and as much as you remember.

2-00:01:08

Kreidler: Well, I met one girl at work that ended up being a bridesmaid at my wedding. We became very good friends, and she was married and her husband was in the service, and she lived close to me. So anyway she became a very, very good friend. Actually, day to day it was just go to work, type up whatever, and we never really knew exactly what was going on, of course, because everything was hush-hush.

One time one of the carriers started to leave and got stuck in the mud and had to stay there until the tide came in, and so we got a pretty good view of her, never did know which one it was. [laughs] That was kind of funny. And one time they brought a Zero airplane [Japanese fighter plane] back and had it flying around the base and sent up one of our Spitfires or something, and they were doing some maneuvers, so that was kind of—I mean, interesting things went on, but actually it was just work—

Selvidge: It was very routine.

2-00:02:20

Kreidler: Yeah, eight hours a day, and that was it. However, at night we went to the USO dances at the YWCA in Oakland and the Women's City Club, the old Women's City Club, and then there was a place called the Stardust or something, but we had to wait until we were older to get in there. [laughs] We were too young. But we danced oh, probably three or four nights a week we went to dances and met kids. It was just—that was a fun time; it really was. We met a lot of interesting people and kids from all over the world. One fellow, Arkie from Arkansas, he dated my sister for a while. She was pretty young. But anyway, he was the one that introduced me to Carl, so that was kind of interesting.

Selvidge: Yeah, tell me about that.

2-00:03:27

Kreidler:

Well, I think I told you before, my dad used to go up to Jensen's and bring all the sailors home, and we had a victory garden, and so Mom would cook for them. This one night, here comes Arkie, and he's got this little sailor in tow. Carl was small, and so he came in and he sat on the piano—oh, my mother would get up in the middle of the night and play the piano for us to sing and entertain and whatnot. My dad would sleep through everything. But anyway, here's Carl, and he's sitting on the piano bench, and he's got his sailor hat on, and he doesn't take it off the whole time he was there. My mother says, "I don't want you to get involved with that kid. He doesn't have any manners." [laughs]

Selvidge:

I'm just going to pause for a moment here.

2-00:04:22

Kreidler:

Hello, surprised me.

Selvidge:

So you were saying your mother didn't like him at first.

2-00:04:30

Kreidler:

No, didn't have any manners, don't get involved with him. [laughs] Well, he didn't have any manners because he'd been across the international date line, and they'd shaved a swatch down his head, and he wouldn't take his hat off because his head was shaved. [laughs]

Selvidge:

Why did they shave his head?

2-00:04:52

Kreidler:

Well, when you go off the international date line, there's a big ceremony and they did this to all the sailors when they crossed the international date line. [laughs]

Selvidge:

That's funny.

2-00:05:08

Kreidler:

But it wasn't for a long time that—oh, it probably was six months or so before he ever came back. Well, by then he had this nice wavy red hair, so that was okay. [laughs] But that was funny. But yeah, my mom would get up in the middle of the night and pound on the piano, and we'd all sing. Because for a while there I worked swing shift. Now, I don't know why I worked swing shift, but I did.

Selvidge:

So the swing shift is over at midnight, right?

2-00:05:38

Kreidler:

It was 3:00 to 11:00.

Selvidge:

He would bring people over after that.

2-00:05:43

Kreidler: Yeah. [laughs]

Selvidge: That sounds like fun.

2-00:05:50

Kreidler: Then, my mother would put down sleeping bags in the living room, and some of these kids would stay over because it would be so late for them to go back. But then they'd have to be at the base by like 7:00 in the morning, so there was always something going on at our house. I mean it was war years, and it was sad, but we really met some interesting people and got acquainted with some people that we never ever would have met. That part of it was fun.

It was not fun when you had to be in the house and all the shades drawn, and you couldn't have a tiny light out, and we'd go out in the hall to study because we could close all the doors and close the hall off, and we could put the hall light on, and we could study out there because, see, I was still in high school when this first started. So that was pretty interesting. [laughs]

Selvidge: Do you remember other things that were difficult?

2-00:07:02

Kreidler: Just that we didn't go out at night very much, except to the dances and whatnot. But just to go out and hang out, you didn't do that. Like we used to before the war, we'd hang out at the park and stuff. We didn't do that any more.

Selvidge: Your free time was more limited to staying in the house.

2-00:07:23

Kreidler: We used to go up and roller skate around the high school because it had a wonderful sidewalk all the way around the high school, so everybody would go up with their roller skates and roller skate around the high school. Couldn't do that any more because mostly the noise, they didn't want the noise. And we had some sirens go off occasionally that, kind of scary, a bit.

Selvidge: How would you know something like that, that you weren't supposed to roller skate around the high school? Who told you—?

2-00:08:02

Kreidler: Well, I guess the air raid wardens, the noise with that rumble? I guess it could be heard, and they just didn't want that.

Selvidge: So did they let people know kind of individually, or—?

2-00:08:16

Kreidler: Oh, through the school, through the school, yeah.

Selvidge: So the air raid wardens would kind of work with the school and they would manage—

2-00:08:23

Kreidler: I can't remember whether the police came or not; it seems to me they came, too, and said we just can't do this. They weren't mean about it or anything, but it was just one of those things that this is the war, and you got to get used to it.

And the rationing, that was part of the fun. My dad would not eat margarine. He had to have butter. He was raised on a farm, and you didn't eat that other stuff. So my mother would save ration stamps so Daddy could have butter. [laughs] I always remember that. We raised a lot of our own food, grew a lot of our own food, and a lot of people did have their victory gardens and whatnot.

Selvidge: Do you remember following the news of the war?

2-00:09:30

Kreidler: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Of course, my dad, because he couldn't go, he wrote all kinds of letters, said he'd go back in as a sergeant just to train; he would this, that and the other thing. He was so upset because he couldn't get back in the service. [laughs]

Selvidge: So he really wanted to be an active participant.

2-00:09:48

Kreidler: Yeah, he did. He did. So he did what he could on the home front, but, oh, yeah, we and my granddad, as I said, lived with us, and he was all into the news, too.

Selvidge: Did you listen to the radio much, or read newspapers yourself, or find out mostly from other people?

2-00:10:05

Kreidler: We listened to the radio, and I did read the papers. And, of course, we talked among ourselves a lot, especially after I went to work at Naval Air. We were always wondering what was going on with everything. That was a pretty big base down there.

Selvidge: Was there a sense that what you were doing there was really connected to the news you were reading about?

2-00:10:32

Kreidler: No, not really, because we were, like I say, we were Cosmolining the planes and equipment mostly to go to the Pacific. Our war was in the Pacific, and so you'd hear the war in Europe and this, that and the other thing was all very prevalent, too, on the news. But we didn't really get a lot of news, and when Carl would write me a letter after he'd gone overseas and stuff, there would be

so much taken out of it that I couldn't tell what he was talking about. [laughs]  
Because they censored everything, they really did.

Selvidge: Tell me what year did you get married?

2-00:11:12

Kreidler: Nineteen forty-seven, February of '47.

Selvidge: When did he go overseas?

2-00:11:22

Kreidler: Well, let's see. I graduated in '44, and I knew him before that, so '43. He probably went in '43 because he was just a year older than I, and I was seventeen when I graduated. So he probably joined in '43, and he went first to the Army with his brother, and they wouldn't take him because he had a bad foot. So he went to the Navy, and they gobbled him up, so that's how he ended up in the Navy. His brother was with Eisenhower's forces in England planning D-Day, when they planned D-Day, so that was interesting.

Selvidge: Then, of course, he was already in the service when you met him.

2-00:12:21

Kreidler: Yeah.

Selvidge: But he was, of course, here, not, and then he went back overseas, is that right?

2-00:12:29

Kreidler: Well, he had been in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean before they shipped him out here, but they had asked for people to go to gunnery school. So he had stepped out, and so they took certain people. Well, they didn't choose him, but he got on the train anyway and went to gunnery school. They weren't about to send him back, so he ended up an armed guard Navy gunner, which is a little branch of the Navy that served on the merchant ships. Yeah, they were a little specific branch. In fact, they were formed in World War I, and after the war they were disbanded. Then when World War II came up, they reinstigated the armed guard.

So anyway, then when he came here, he sailed in and out of Alameda and Oakland, and, I don't think he ever sailed out of Richmond. Then he came over one night, and he said, "I'm going to get on a Navy tanker. It's also a Liberty, a T-2 tanker, and we're going to be coastwise." So he said, "I might be gone for a little while." Eighteen months later. It was not a coastwise tanker, it went to Australia, and he went from Brisbane to then Persia, now Iran, through what they called the [Great] Australian Bight, and he said it was the worst seas he had ever been in in his whole life, thought the ship was going to break apart. So that's how he ended up in Australia for eighteen months, yeah. That was funny.

Selvidge: That's how he ended up in Australia, or—?

2-00:14:30

Kreidler: He was on this tanker, yeah.

Selvidge: For eighteen months, okay—

2-00:14:34

Kreidler: Yeah, that was something, yeah, it was quite a while. The kid that he had joined the service with, his ship was moored right next to Carl at one point, and Carl saw him and couldn't believe, here was his buddy. So they went out and partied. Carl said, "We were coming back on the tram, and the last thing I saw was Billy falling overboard." And he said, "I never saw him again until the end of the war." [laughs]

Selvidge: He was okay?

2-00:15:04

Kreidler: Yeah, he went on in the service. Funny. But, yeah, Carl loved Australia. They were wonderful to him there, the people were wonderful. The men didn't like the sailors too much because they were dating all the girls. [laughs] But Carl said they'd come and get them from the ship and take them home and feed them, and they were good to them.

Selvidge: So he came back, I guess, at the very end of the war, is that right?

2-00:15:36

Kreidler: He got out of service in, yeah, the end of '45 or early '46. He was on Treasure Island, and they were going to send him out again, and he just didn't go. So they sent him out to Pleasanton, out there, and he got out of the service there. Then he worked in the cannery for a while, and then he worked making cement blocks, worked for a fellow made cement blocks, and then he went to work for Bean and Cavanaugh, an Alameda Plymouth distributorship. He worked as a mechanic; well, he worked as a grease monkey, and then they sent him to school to be a mechanic, and that's what he went on to do.

Selvidge: Can you tell me a little bit about your own reactions to the end of the war and the escalating events—?

2-00:16:51

Kreidler: Oh, gosh, V-J Day was something and a half. Everybody was just whooping and hollering all over town, and I had a friend that had a motorcycle, sailor, and he came up and he was giving everybody motorcycle rides all up and down Buena Vista. My father got on the bike and wasn't holding on, and was like this going down the street.[laughs] We thought sure he was going to fall off; he'd probably had a few beers. Oh, gosh, it was just—everybody was just elated that this war was finally over.

But it sure changed the face of Alameda. Neptune Beach just went down the tubes and became a maritime school. The little cottages, though, are still there, the funny little cottages that were—the people from San Francisco would come over on the ferry and then ride the Red Train, used to run through Alameda, ride the Red Trains up to Neptune.

Selvidge: Yeah, tell me how, just could you didn't tell me more about how Alameda changed after the war. I'm really interested in that, I mean—

2-00:18:09

Kreidler: Well, they took the Red Trains were out,; they took those all out, and we had bus service instead of the trains. And the ferry service, of course, quit when Naval Air went in. They no longer serviced Alameda. Then after the war they built beautiful big homes down there and had like a maritime enclave where they had their boats right outside their houses and this and that. And Naval Air, of course, got smaller and smaller and finally closed, and now it's been years, and they're still trying to do something with it. They do have some nice venues down there.

Selvidge: What about all these people that you mentioned about tripling of the population?

2-00:19:07

Kreidler: Well, that was it. There just when the Air Station closed then there just was no work, and so all these, what did they call them, where the—oh, God, the word escapes me—the little homes where the people that worked there lived, and the projects, and they just low income and so low rent and so forth. So they tore all those down and started to do some building and stuff. A lot of people, of course, after the war, moved away. But Alameda never was back to the little home community that it was before. The west end, the east end stayed pretty much the same, but the west end really changed.

Selvidge: The east end was the more fancy—

2-00:20:04

Kreidler: Yeah, yeah.

Selvidge: So the west end changed a lot during the war, and then a lot afterwards.

2-00:20:11

Kreidler: Yes, a lot more building and homes and so forth, and then the Air Station just kind of went to pot, and that was really sad. We used to have some good parties out there at the Officers' Club. [laughs]

Selvidge: So then tell me about what you did after the war. I know you soon after went to UC Berkeley—

2-00:20:40

Kreidler: I went out to Berkeley for a couple of years.

Selvidge: That was right after the war.

2-00:20:44

Kreidler: Right after the war, yeah. Forty-five and '46 I was out there. Carl and I were engaged for a year, '46 to '47, and we married in '47. He used to come out to Cal and go to classes with me. That was kind of fun, some of them.

Selvidge: Tell me how you decided to go to college because you already had some experience working and you—

2-00:21:17

Kreidler: Well, I always wanted to go to Berkeley, and I had been accepted, and so I thought gosh, I should at least get a few years in, and my mother's friend would say, "Well, why do you want the girls to go to college? What good's that going to do?" Well, it does do good. It broadens your horizons actually, and I feel like today I can speak with almost anybody I meet and be comfortable, so I think it gives you more confidence to be well read, and I still read today, I read, read, read anything that I can get my hands on.

Selvidge: Well, so your mother's friends were hesitant about the benefits for a girl going to college.

2-00:22:08

Kreidler: Yeah, they didn't know why you would want to send a girl to college.

Selvidge: What about your friends from high school? I know you said that you were now had different friends—

2-00:22:18

Kreidler: I did.

Selvidge: But was it sort of expected that many girls would go to college from your high school?

2-00:22:23

Kreidler: A lot of the girls that I went to school with did not go to college. Or if they did, they certainly didn't go to Cal because my girlfriend Norma and my sister and I and the girl I told you about that she and her cousins went, and they were about the only ones that went to school out there with me.

Selvidge: What about the other girls you met when you got to college? Where were they mostly from, or what was their background?

2-00:23:00

Kreidler: You know, I don't remember. I took Portuguese, and I was in a class of only—there was only about twelve of us in the class, and we were just kind of interested in the language. We did get together and party and stuff, but I don't remember any of those kids. Isn't that awful?

Selvidge: It was a while ago.

2-00:23:20

Kreidler: Yeah, and a lot of my classes were auditorium classes when you go and listen to lectures, so you weren't really friendly with a lot of people.

Selvidge: At that time there must have been a lot of young men coming out of the service.

2-00:23:40

Kreidler: No, no, not really. In fact, when I went to Cal I was able to sit in to do the card tricks. They never let women in there. But so many of the young men were gone that they let us in there to do the card tricks. That was kind of fun. But I continued to go out to the games even after that I was, well, I must have still been in school because I wasn't married to Carl yet. He used to go to the games with me sometimes when he was in.

Selvidge: So you're saying that the men back from the service who would have maybe benefited from the GI Bill, et cetera, that wasn't happening yet—

2-00:24:24

Kreidler: Not very much. Not very much, no. This was like '45 and '46, so a lot of them still were in the service.

Selvidge: So did this feel, then, kind of maybe in retrospect a little bit like a transition period still where there were all of this sort of post-war changes hadn't happened?

2-00:24:53

Kreidler: Yeah, and like I say, in the classes that I was in I really didn't think about it because they were auditorium classes where you listen to lectures and then you did your work and—

Selvidge: So there wasn't necessarily a lot of community feeling in the school.

2-00:25:10

Kreidler: No, no. I didn't feel it anyway. My classes, the Spanish and the Portuguese and whatnot that were small classes, yes; we would get together and have dinners and things like that. But, no, the other classes were too big; they really were.

Selvidge: Did you live with your parents still in Alameda?

2-00:25:35

Kreidler: I still lived with my parents, uh huh. In fact I lived with them until Carl and I married. So, yeah, it was nice.

Selvidge: I guess maybe this is something you don't know, but of the students that you did socialize with, were a lot of them living also with their families?

2-00:25:56

Kreidler:

Yes, yes. A few of them lived in fraternities and sororities, but the war years were a little lean, and so a lot of people were going on a shoestring. I know I rode the bus and the streetcar to get to school. There were no cars involved or anything, so yeah.

Selvidge:

Yeah, so you went to school for about two years?

2-00:26:20

Kreidler:

Yeah, and in my last, the last six months, I went to work in San Francisco at one of the department stores, I can't remember the name of the place. But anyway, when I took the test to go to work, my mom had given me back practically all of the money I had given her, so I needed money. So I just answered yes to everything that I could do it all.

So boy, I quick had to learn how to run a cash register and a few other things. But anyway, I worked for them for, well, were Carl and I married? Yeah, Carl and I were married, and they wanted me to work a Sunday, and it was my birthday. My birthday was always a big deal. We always made big deals out of birthdays. I said, "No," I couldn't work, and so they fired me. So I said, "Okay,"

So I collected, first time I ever collected unemployment, and they sent me out on job interviews, and one of them was as a secretary to the credit department at Signal Oil in Alameda. So I got the job, and I worked at Signal for about nine years. Carl worked in Alameda, too, so we had bought the house out here so we could commute, so it was good. Yeah, it was a good job.

Selvidge:

Was that before you had kids?

2-00:27:56

Kreidler:

Yeah. I was married nine years before I had any kids, almost ten, yeah. Didn't think I was going to have any. [laughs] Surprise.

Selvidge:

I just wonder since we had been talking a good bit about the work during the war period, did you feel like your work atmosphere or experience was much different from the clerical work you had done before?

2-00:28:22

Kreidler:

Oh, yeah. I'm out in a big, airy room with maybe four people, the boss and another secretary and I, and, I guess, second in command. It was airy in the hangar. You'd walk out the door, and you've got this big hangar there. Yes, it was very different because then I'm in a little office with three men, and I'm the secretary, and I feel like I'm squished.

Selvidge:

So it's much more confining.

2-00:29:00

Kreidler:

It was. It was, but Signal was a wonderful place to work. They were really very good to me. I didn't take shorthand, and so my boss retired and another boss came in, and he says, "Well, I want you to have shorthand." I said, "Okay." So I went to night school and took a course in shorthand, and that was it. [laughs]

Selvidge:

Did you feel like any of the classes you took at Berkeley and your time in college contributed to your employment?

2-00:29:36

Kreidler:

I did, because you had to have—how can I put it—you had to be reasonably intelligent to be the secretary to the credit department. I mean, this was pretty much a big deal. I had to be personable on the phone to people who owed money and get them to pay. [laughs] I had to write the letters and so forth, so I had to entertain with my boss occasionally, so that stood me in good stead because my mother and dad had always entertained. I knew how to do that, too, and so, yeah.

Selvidge:

So it was a pretty demanding job.

2-00:30:23

Kreidler:

It was. It was. I liked it. My boss used to send me over to Treasure Island. He was a chief in the Navy. He'd send me over to Treasure Island to pick up booze for the Christmas party. By this time I'm pregnant, and I'm over at Treasure Island gathering the booze for the Christmas party. [laughs]

Selvidge:

So then did you stop working shortly after that then?

2-00:30:54

Kreidler:

I did after I had Chip. Well, I quit; I was about eight months pregnant, I guess, and I quit, or retired really. After I had Chipper the girl that took my place did not do well. My boss was kind of a blustery old guy, and you just had to kind of talk back to him. She was kind of mousy, and she'd end up in tears. I tried to tell her, "Don't listen to what he says. He just barks sometimes. You just have to take it with a grain of salt." He was really a delightful man.

Selvidge:

What kind of things would he say that were difficult?

2-00:31:39

Kreidler:

You know, I guess he'd bawl her out for not getting something done or something like that, and she just would be in tears. So she went on a leave or something for a couple of months, and they asked me to come back. So I did go back for just a short while and fill in until she got her act together. [laughs]

Selvidge:

Once your son was already born, you went back.

2-00:32:03

Kreidler: Yeah, yeah.

Selvidge: What about child care, did you have your sister—?

2-00:32:07

Kreidler: Oh, my mother, my sister, yeah, helped me out.

Selvidge: Then you did not go back to work when the kids were little.

2-00:32:23

Kreidler: No, not until they were in high school. I went to Hickory Farms because this one girlfriend of mine kept getting me into these things. We worked just over the holidays at Hickory Farms packing and shipping the boxes and so forth. I did that for quite a few years. It paid well and was only a few months. So it was kind of fun. Then I collected unemployment one time; they sent me out on job interviews, so I went to this one and it was to do the testing in the mall to question people in the mall, auditing and so forth. So I went to work for them, and that was kind of a fun thing. Then it got to be outside auditing and traveling, and I liked that. So I did that for quite a few years, quite a few years. But the kids were all graduated and out, and I even put them to work at Hickory Farms. [laughs]

Selvidge: So, let's see, there should have been different things that I could ask you about at this point. We've covered some of the big questions. I'm wondering is there anything that you think I should ask about or expected me to ask you, but I haven't yet?

2-00:33:50

Kreidler: Oh, gosh, I can't think of much. I think we've covered pretty much, pretty much, yeah.

Selvidge: Well, in that case I just want to maybe ask you some final questions about some of the things that you've already brought up to kind of take those through a little bit farther.

2-00:34:06

Kreidler: Okay.

Selvidge: Because one thing we had been talking about is that women's opportunities in the workplace and the fact that we were talking about Eleanor Roosevelt a little bit and different questions. I wonder if you have any thoughts about how you've seen that change maybe with your own daughter, raising a girl.

2-00:34:37

Kreidler: Yes, with Terry, the Park Service was pretty much male, pretty much male, the National Park Service. She went to Chico State four years, graduated, and graduated in parks and recreation administration, and it has served her well. So she served an internship down at Coyote Hills down here, and that was her

last six months of college. Then she applied for the National Park Service, and she ended up on Alcatraz for five years. Then she opted to go to different parks, which was probably smart because they were more accepting to women in the parks after that five years. So she went to Cuyahoga [Valley National Park], and then she spent two summers at Mesa Verde, Colorado, wonderful park, interesting, different parks, and six weeks at Grand Canyon for ranger skills, a few months up here in Lava Beds [National Monument], Captain Jack's Stronghold, the last Indian war.

She's had a diversified career, and so then during this time they sent her back to Washington, DC, and with five other people she put together a book on getting and treating your volunteers. It's an interesting album. I volunteer for her, too, so I do scout work, anything I don't have to think about. So I was putting together this album for her, and I started reading it, and it was wonderful. She said, "Mother, you're supposed to be working." I said, "Wait, I'm reading." [laughs] She's a very, very good writer. She can really put her words on paper.

Selvidge: It sounds like she's had a very successful career.

2-00:36:57

Kreidler:

She has, and it was all because the groundwork was laid for women to get into these different services, and the services had to diversify. So that was good for her because she got in at a good time, and now there's lots and lots of women who are superintendents of the different parks and so forth. And she enjoys what she does. That's always nice when you like your job.

Selvidge: Yeah, absolutely. I just thought maybe you'd want to have a little bit of opportunity to talk about your own volunteer work and being a docent and talking—just to tell me a little bit, some of what you and I talked about maybe a little before the interview. I know that's something that's been important to you.

2-00:38:01

Kreidler:

Oh, yes. My daughter gave my husband a ride on the *O'Brien*, a trip on the *O'Brien* for a birthday, and me. So we went. Well, the old Navy armed guards that were volunteers on the ship got a hold of Carl and convinced him that he needed to volunteer, so he did. Well, I did, too, and I worked in the office. It was interesting, but this office had no windows, and I felt very closed in. So after a lady that I really liked left the office, I went to the ship and took a docent course and became a docent.

So then I worked on the ship also with Carl. Carl had refurbished all the guns and then made the trip to Europe in '94 for "D-Day plus Fifty," which was an amazing feat for this old Liberty ship, took her thirty-three days to get across to England, and the Coast Guard made us put radar on; that's the only change on our ship. They've never come to take it back, so we still have the radar.

But they wanted to keep track of us because we were so slow. The ship probably makes eleven knots, that's pretty slow. But she still sails today, bless her heart, and we're having a cruise next Saturday, an ecology cruise on the bay. We go the gate, and it's always a thrill to go under the Golden Gate. In May we have a memorial cruise, and we lay the wreaths for our fallen companions and so forth. We also do—we scatter ashes off our stern, mostly crew members who have gone over the bar. But anyway, yes, it's an interesting, interesting ship, and I meet people from all over the world. It's wonderful because I get to converse with so many people and tell our story.

Selvidge:

Yes, I'm wondering if you could just tell me, let's say you meet someone on one of the docent tours, and they don't really know a lot about this history or they don't know anything about you. I wonder how you would explain to them why you think this is so important.

2-00:40:26

Kreidler:

Well, usually when I talk to people the first thing I ask is, "Where are you from?" Then they're open to whatever you want to say. I tell them that the *Jeremiah O'Brien* was a cargo ship that carried cargo to the Allies during World War II, and they were unarmed; a merchant marine could not arm their ships. So Congress put through a law that we would have to arm the merchant ships. Their first armament were like telephone poles painted black to fool the submarines. Didn't fool them very much. So they finally got armament on board, and then they put the Navy gunners on.

They carry a complement of fifty-six merchant mariners to run that ship. The old engine—you have to have an oiler down there that squeezes oil into this gear, so the oiler has to work all the time. You have water tenders, you have engineers down there, and they can only stay so many hours in that hot engine room, so you had to have a lot of people that could do engine work. You had to have a deck crew, and you had to have a galley crew because they fed these men rather well on the merchant ships.

They had the one mess hall that says gunner's mess. The other says crew mess. They were really separated. They did have some issues with one another. If a Navy man was sunk on a ship, his pay continued. If a Merchant Mariner was sunk on a ship, and the ship was gone, that was it, no pay. So even though they made decent money to start with, the pay stopped if they didn't have a ship, where in the Navy, pay was less but it continued. So there was always a little friction between them about this. They usually had a ninety-day wonder for their commanding officer, the Navy gunners. Sometimes some of them were older than this kid, who was just out of West Point or whatever. Not West Point, Annapolis.

So anyway, the gunners between themselves had a good camaraderie, and now on the ship we still tease them a little bit about, and we get teased, too. But I work with a great gang of fellow, and a lot of them were in World

War II. The two fellows I work with in the doghouse—that's what we call where we sell the tickets—were actually armed guards, so kind of interesting for me because they're of the same ilk as Carl was.

I took my first trip and stayed overnight on the ship. We went to Sacramento to do a thing for Homeland Security; they asked us up. They came on board over our water side on the Jacob's ladders, and they took hostages, and they rescued us. They had fire departments there who set fires, fake fires, and extinguished them. We had I forget how many different entities use the ship for this Homeland Security test.

It was really interesting, and we got wonderful letters saying how much it helped them in certain areas that they could do better and so forth, really interesting. I was held hostage with a knife to my neck, rubber, a cute little guy with his arms around me, this little Arab headdress on. I said, "Gee, it's been a long time since I had a nice young man with his arms around me." He says, "Listen, this is supposed to be serious." [laughs] But we did, we had a good time with them. Then afterwards they showed us all their weaponry and stuff, so it was pretty interesting for us, too.

But anyway, I stayed in Carl's bunk in his stateroom, the one that he had sailed in on the Liberties and had gone to Europe in. Well, it was fine getting in the bunk, but it was only about that high off the floor, so getting out was a little bit of a chore. [laughs] But anyway, had a good time, and I just wanted to do it once.

Selvidge: So it's still very active.

2-00:45:20

Kreidler:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We're very active, and always looking to make money because we have to go into dry dock. Our aft from being in the ghost fleet up there for thirty-three years between the water and the air, the aft portion of our ship, the middle, is very, very thin from that wear of the water and the air. So we need to have that fixed, and we're always looking to make money, of course. That's when we do our cruises. But we take in—most of our money comes from the gangway receipts. We get lots of people on board. And it's interesting; they come from all over the world and a lot of them have never seen a ship like this. So I love to tell the story.

I volunteer for Terry in the park, whenever she needs something cooked, she calls Mother, and I also do any work for her like putting pamphlets together and some of her—she does training courses—and some of her training manuals, and I like to help her with things like that.

Selvidge: Okay, well, is there anything else that you would like to mention before we end?

2-00:46:51

Kreidler: Can't really think of much.

Selvidge: Okay, well thank you very much.

2-00:46:57

Kreidler: Well, thank you, Sarah. I've really enjoyed it, enjoyed talking to you, too.

Selvidge: Thank you.

[End of Interview]