

Regional Oral History Office  
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Berkeley, California

Rose Lesslie

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

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Interviews conducted by  
Sam Redman  
in 2012

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Rose Leslie (in center)

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Interview 1: January 30, 2012

Begin Audiofile 1

Redman: All right, my name is Sam Redman and today is January 30, 2012. Today I'm in Mountain View, California with Rose Lesslie. Today we'll mostly be talking about Rose's time working at Moffett Field on blimp aircraft. Before that, however, I'd like to set up by asking you a little bit about what life was like before the war. But before we get into that, would you mind just simply stating and spelling your name for me?

1-00:00:26

Lesslie: My first name is Rose. And my last name is Lesslie, L E S S L I E.

Redman: Now, where are you from originally?

1-00:00:37

Lesslie: I was born in Oakland, California.

Redman: Would you mind sharing your birthdate?

1-00:00:41

Lesslie: March 30, 1926.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about your parents.

1-00:00:50

Lesslie: My parents were immigrants from Croatia. At that time when they came in 1913 that was Austria-Hungary. So that where they figured was their homeland. They didn't know each other before. They met each other in the States.

Redman: Did they meet each other in California or—?

1-00:01:10

Lesslie: No, actually they met in Utah. My mother went there as a very young lady to an arranged marriage, and she married her first husband. And they lived there, and along the way my father met them and knew them, so he was always hanging around because about the only thing my mother knew how to do in those days was cooking and cleaning. She would take in boarders and make a little extra money toward the household by doing that, and my father would come and he would stay with her until he—he would have her save money for him. And when he had a little bit of money there, he's go out and hit the road. And she continued to live with her husband and had children. Along the way when one of my sisters was born, my father said, "I'll come back and I'll be godfather," and he did. And after a while in Utah they moved to Southern California in the Los Angeles area around Gardena. Her first husband died there from—I guess he had tuberculosis or lung problems, and he died. At that time she had three kids and she was pregnant. And she had already buried two kids in Utah. So she had six children before she married my dad. And I'm the only child from that marriage.

Redman: What was your relationship like with those other siblings growing up? Did you know much about them?

1-00:02:50

Lesslie: They carried their own name, I carried mine, and it didn't bother me at all, didn't bother them; we just grew up as a family.

Redman: Oh, but you did grow up all together then?

1-00:02:59

Lesslie: All did.

Redman: So that would make you the youngest of this group.

1-00:03:03

Lesslie: That would make me the youngest.

Redman: So was it brothers and sisters?

1-00:03:06

Lesslie: Yes. I had two brothers; one I lost. Of course, there were two of them died and were buried in Utah many, many years before any of this came along. Then I lost a brother here in 1940, which was a heartbreaker because I was only just before my fourteenth birthday. So it was very shocking for me. It was my first experience with death and to lose my brother that I loved, that hurt.

Redman: That was pretty hard, yeah.

1-00:03:34

Lesslie: Yeah.

Redman: So then you were born then in Oakland, and what are some of your earliest recollections? Do you have early memories of attending elementary school?

1-00:03:46

Lesslie: Yes, Mountain View.

Redman: Okay, so how did your parents end up in Mountain View from Oakland?

1-00:03:50

Lesslie: Well, thank God they picked the best place in the world to come. They moved to Mountain View in 1929 just before I guess the crash, and we lived right in Mountain View; right off of El Camino and 237 is where we were living. It was a great place to grow up. I mean there were two thousand people in Mountain View at that time, so you got to know everybody and everybody knew you, and it was great.

Redman: Now, mainly what was the two thousand or so people that were living out here at that time, much of what they would have been doing were things like working in citrus fields or—?

1-00:04:27

Lesslie: Fruit, fruit, fruit. This is known as the land of fruits and nuts.

Redman: Okay, fruits and nuts, all right. So tell me a little bit about that. Did that shape the community at that time?

1-00:04:38

Lesslie: Yes, and it gave all of the young kids like myself at that time worked the fruit.

Redman: Is that right?

1-00:04:45

Lesslie: Absolutely. I mean I was up to my ears in apricots, and we worked in apricots and we cut them and we spread them on trays; and then they went into the sulfur. They had sulfur deals where they were smoked in the sulfur smoke, and then they'd go out in the fields and dry in the fields, and then they'd be scraped up. And they were dried apricots.

Redman: How old were you when you got your first job picking fruit?

1-00:05:14

Lesslie: Cutting fruit? There was no such thing as child labor laws around here. We started as quickly as we could stand up; and even as we'd stand on top of boxes to reach the trays. First my mother would just come and drop them, and then I would spread them out. Then when I could handle a knife, I handled a knife. Then when the apricots were done, we'd pick raspberries.

Redman: So you worked with your mother early on as sort of a team?

1-00:05:40

Lesslie: My mother and all of us kids were out there. We were all working. My dad was lucky enough to get a job at Stanford University, and in those days that was something. Just having a job was like a small miracle, and he made fifty cents an hour to help feed a family of seven.

Redman: Do you know what he did at Stanford?

1-00:05:59

Lesslie: Yes, he was a gardener.

Redman: He was a gardener, okay. Now do you know how you got paid in terms of— was it an hourly rate versus like a weight of how much you—?

1-00:06:12

Lesslie: With apricots you got paid by the box, and I forget now exactly how much, it's hard for me to remember. It was just a matter of pennies per box.

Redman: But it was a lot of manual labor—

1-00:06:28

Lesslie: Yes, my brother would work with the trays because he was stronger and he was a man. And he would also spread the cots on the trays by picking—a box is about forty pound boxes—

Redman: Wow.

1-00:06:37

Lesslie: So they got strong doing this. A lot of our kids that did work the fruit, especially the young boys, when they went to practice for football, they were right on the top of the list.

Redman: They were ready to go.

1-00:06:52

Lesslie: Yes, they were strong. They were strong from working the fruit with the trays and the boxes in the summertime. When it came football time, they were ready to go.

Redman: Tell me a little bit more about what it was like to go to work with your family and with your parents as a young girl, that must have been pretty interesting.

1-00:07:11

Lesslie: We didn't necessarily like it, but it was the thing to do and everybody else was doing it. Times were very hard, so we were glad to have the means of making some extra money for the family. In addition to that, my parents coming from Croatia, knew all about stretching a dollar and how to do it. So we had our own chickens, we had our own rabbits; we had our own garden long before they talked about Victory Gardens, which wasn't funny. But we knew how to stretch a dollar and make things go.

Redman: How about you mentioned that your dad having a job was a bit of a small miracle in the Depression there.

1-00:07:50

Lesslie: Yes, yes.

Redman: Did people talk about—when you then started going to elementary school did they talk about oh, so and so's dad might not have a job, or they have a job or they don't have a job?

1-00:08:02

Lesslie: I don't remember hearing that much in school.

Redman: Okay, so the kids maybe didn't talk about it very much but—

1-00:08:08

Lesslie: I don't remember that.

Redman: How about church services? Were your parents religious at all?

1-00:08:12

Lesslie: Yes, absolutely. We were Catholic—they were Catholic—and that was a big part of our life.

Redman: Going to church on—?

1-00:08:21

Lesslie: Yes, going to church and sticking with our own religion.

Redman: What do you mean by that? That's an interesting point, so were you encouraged to stick with other Catholic kids?

1-00:08:33

Lesslie: Yes. That's what we meant all the time anyway. We were in school, but we would go to services on Sunday, but we'd go on Saturdays for Catholic, for catechism as we called it. So we were busy. We knew our own kids and our own kids knew us, and in this area there were a lot of Croatian people, a lot of them, and they were all over Santa Clara Valley, not just Mountain View. And they were all farmers. Most of them were farmers.

Redman: That's interesting. Were there other ethnic groups then that were—?

1-00:09:03

Lesslie: Yes, Portuguese, Italians, Spanish, this is what this valley had a lot of.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit more about what an everyday life experience—what might have a day to day life have been during the Depression? You know maybe when you were working with your family. So would you get up pretty early to do this, or how would that work?

1-00:09:35

Lesslie: We got up pretty early, I guess when Mom got us up we'd just go to work. That's the way we were raised, and that's all we knew. A lot of other kids around here, especially the friends that I knew, the Croatian kids, because as a small child I started out with my mother's and father's language being my first language.

Redman: Is that right?

1-00:09:57

Lesslie: So I spoke it fluently and learned it before I learned English. And, of course, as my brothers and sisters came home from school and talked English, that's all I wanted to learn, so I learned English quickly from my brothers and sisters. And in turn we kind of forced our parents to learn. And they did pretty good picking it up.

Redman: But they wanted to speak Croatian in the home.

1-00:10:19

Lesslie:

Yeah, in the home it was easier for them. As so many people. But it was happening in this area in many, many homes, so many of the kids that I went to school with could talk Croatian as fluently as I could. So it was just a normal thing.

Redman:

How about chores around the house? What were some of the chores around the house?

1-00:10:42

Lesslie:

We did that, too. We knew what we had to do. And we were very careful and very clean. We were taught from a very early age to take care of our school clothes, take them off when we got home, put on our play clothes and save our clothes so they would last as long as they could because it was very, very difficult to clothe five kids going to school on just a little bit of money that it went a long ways. We grew up not knowing anything about toys really. I never had toys. There wasn't money for such a thing.

Redman:

So you had to make your own fun.

1-00:11:21

Lesslie:

We made our own fun, and we did fine. Everybody else was doing the same thing, kick the can and playing with jacks and just small little games that we can make however.

Redman:

So in a small town of two thousand, this is probably before paved roads really around this—

1-00:11:42

Lesslie:

A lot of them were dirt roads, yeah, you make me laugh. All around us was the same thing. Bayshore wasn't much of anything really. It was a great life. It was different, but it was great.

Redman:

And people got along it seems like, these different groups.

1-00:11:58

Lesslie:

Absolutely, absolutely, and we had no crime. We had no problems here at all. Everybody knew everybody else. And you'd better watch what you're doing because if you're being naughty, your mother would hear about it sooner or later. So you kind of watched what you did and how you did it.

Redman:

Thinking of nowadays, partly thinking of this because I drove from Berkeley near San Francisco, but it seems like now you can drive really quickly to San Francisco or bus or a train; I mean there's so many ways to get there—

1-00:12:36

Lesslie:

Transportation is easy now.

Redman:

Yes.

1-00:12:37

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Tell me about what it might have been like—was San Francisco sort of a distant thought? Did you ever get there growing up as a kid?

1-00:12:43

Lesslie: We didn't get to San Francisco very much. In fact, we didn't get anywhere too much. It was a big deal for us if we got to San Jose. And we'd get to San Jose on a bus. We'd go to buy our school clothes at the end of summer for the school year, and I guess San Francisco I can remember as a kid going to the World's Fair in '39 and in '40. That was a big trip. That was something great.

Redman: I'd like to ask about that, but I'd like to ask right before that in '36 is when they complete the Bay Bridge, and in '37 they complete the Golden Gate Bridge.

1-00:13:24

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Can you tell me—I know the World's Fair sort of served as a celebration in some sense, celebrating these two big new structures. Can you tell me a little bit about—were you aware that these two big new bridges were—?

1-00:13:38

Lesslie: Yes, we were aware of them, but I don't remember crossing them. I can remember my dad having a Model T when I was a kid, and that was something. You used to have to crank it to get it started and it had the old isinglass windows on the side with like canvas around them I guess, there were much—and they had the canvas top with the wooden spokes I can remember that as a child. And then we eventually got a Model A—that was big. And, of course, Dad was the only one that drove in those days. And as kids we never had skates; we never had a bicycle. Not one bike for all five of us kids. There was no such thing. We did without.

Redman: So then tell me a little bit about the World's Fair was like in '39. How old would you have been in—?

1-00:14:29

Lesslie: Well, in '39 what would I have been? I was born in '26.

Redman: So you would have been thirteen, fourteen.

1-00:14:37

Lesslie: Yeah, about thirteen I guess. I went with my mother and father and, of course, I had to stay very close to them because they didn't let me out of their sight. It was exciting to see, but it was only a day trip. Quick up there and see what we could see and then come home. And we did the same thing in 1940, went up for a day trip and that was it.

Redman: Okay, but that was a pretty exciting memory for you.

1-00:15:01

Lesslie: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay. Did anything stand out in terms of musical acts, or seeing the bridges or the city or—?

1-00:15:11

Lesslie: The whole thing, the World's Fair itself, was a beautiful sight. The island was just gorgeous. It was really a pretty thing to see. Everything was so colorful and so pretty. It's hard for me to—just the excitement of it. It was almost like going to Disneyland, it was so big and so pretty.

Redman: That's really great.

Do you have any early recollections of what your parents thought of Herbert Hoover? Did they ever talk about Herbert Hoover?

1-00:15:37

Lesslie: Well, we knew all about Hoover. I guess I can remember him talking about a chicken in every pot, which was kind of funny in our house because we had a chicken in a pot long before he decided we should do that.

Redman: Because your family, of course, was raising its own chickens.

1-00:15:53

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: So then FDR is elected into office, and he's President for many years. Did your parents have any particular opinions on him?

1-00:16:01

Lesslie: Yes. I can remember the NRA, National Recovery Act. I can remember the sticker in our window. I can remember my parents, especially my dad, because my mother wasn't into politics, but my dad was definitely a Democrat, which I have also been all my life. We loved Roosevelt.

Redman: Now those blue NRA stickers and they would say something along the lines of do your part.

1-00:16:28

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Or this household is doing its part.

1-00:16:33

Lesslie: NRA, we do our part, or something, I forget what it was.

Redman: Now tell me what about that meant.

1-00:16:37

Lesslie:

It was the National Recovery Act. It was to help us out of the Depression that we were in that lasted so long. The Depression actually lasted a good twelve years before we ever even started to dig out. So it was big.

Redman:

So that was one way—so your parents were Democrats, they liked FDR, they admired him. Did they ever listen to his fireside chats on the radio?

1-00:17:05

Lesslie:

Yes, yes.

Redman:

Do you recall hearing those a little bit as a young girl?

1-00:17:06

Lesslie:

I can remember we had a I guess it was a Majestic Radio, a big box type radio, and it was in the corner in what was at that time our dining room, and we just sat in straight back chairs all around that radio. And that was a big thing, and that's where we also gathered for Amos and Andy.

Redman:

So Amos and Andy was a big show.

1-00:17:29

Lesslie:

Oh, that was a big show.

Redman:

Let's say I've never heard of Amos and Andy before, is that a comedy hour, a variety hour or—?

1-00:17:35

Lesslie:

It was a comedy, and they were black. And they were funny, and all we'd do is sit around and listen to Amos and Andy and I don't know if they came on for fifteen minutes or a half hour, whatever it was. We loved getting together; Amos and Andy are coming on.

Redman:

Were there other shows like the Grand Ole Opry or anything like that?

1-00:17:55

Lesslie:

No, I don't remember that so much. In my recollection I remember Amos and Andy, and I do remember FDR.

Redman:

FDR's fireside chats, okay. As part of the New Deal, we've talked a little bit about the NRA, but I'm wondering if so FDR launched a series of initiatives like the CCC, or WPA, the Alphabet Soup agencies.

1-00:18:18

Lesslie:

We knew all about them. My husband ended up being in the CCCs. My brothers didn't go to that. The WPA didn't affect us because my dad was still working at Stanford.

Redman:

So your brother ends up going into the CCC, the Civilian—

1-00:18:35

Lesslie: No, my husband.

Redman: Oh, your husband goes into the Civilian Conservation Corps. You hadn't known him at this time yet.

1-00:18:42

Lesslie: Not yet.

Redman: Not yet, okay. But can you tell me a little bit about did he ever tell you what his experience was in the CCC?

1-00:18:50

Lesslie: No, except that I know that he and his brother both joined at the same time so there would be two less mouths to feed at home.

Redman: So they wanted to get out of the home.

1-00:19:03

Lesslie: They got out of the home. My husband's brother went to I think Wyoming. I think he was around Yellowstone. My husband stayed mostly on the East Coast at that time.

Redman: I'd like to hear a little bit more about what life was like as a high school student for you as a young girl in high school, what was—?

1-00:19:25

Lesslie: As a high school student I started, I was a February student, mid-year as they called us, and I started Mountain View High in February of Mountain View of 1940. In March of 1940 is when I lost my brother. So that was a trying time for me; brand new school, just starting, barely a month and I lose my brother, which was a big thing that I remembered. Back then, my mother being from the old country as we always talked, she believed in the old country way of mourning because we had to act just right because people may talk about us, and we had to mourn our brother and all of this which I said I would never do that again to anyone; it was very difficult.

Redman: Interesting. So it was a lot of—can you explain that to me a little bit like wearing black or was it—?

1-00:20:22

Lesslie: She took just about everything she had and dyed it black her aprons and dresses, which was mournful.

Redman: Wow.

1-00:20:28

Lesslie: We weren't allows to laugh or carry on at home because that was disrespectful. We weren't allowed to go to any movies, we weren't allowed to

sing, we weren't allowed to play the radio. So for one whole year there was no radio in the house.

Redman: That's amazing, for a whole year.

1-00:20:44

Lesslie: A whole year and it was horrible. I hated it. And I knew then and I would tell my mother I will never do this again for anyone, and I haven't. It left a very long memory in my mind of something that was just too difficult to bear.

Redman: Right, that's a really interesting story. Now turning back to school, did you have any favorite teachers or subjects when you—?

1-00:21:11

Lesslie: Of course, there's always favorite teachers. Subjects: I never was too interested in intellectual things. I was good with my hands and back then when things were still kind of rough for us, my mother would say "if you want clothes, learn to make them." Well, that was a challenge that left me wide open. I did learn to make them. And I would make a lot of the clothes that I wore, which led me into what was to happen later because I found out that if you could take a piece of material and lay it out properly and cut the pieces out to make full use of the material that you have, and put it all together one piece at a time following the pattern that comes with the dresses, it would sure help with putting together aircraft parts later in life.

Redman: That's fascinating.

1-00:22:08

Lesslie: It was very simple, if I could follow a pattern and make a dress I could follow a blueprint and make aircraft parts.

Redman: Tell me about how a young girl would find a pattern for a dress that they'd like or find a dress that they'd like, would they see it in a Sears catalog or—?

1-00:22:26

Lesslie: You'd go to the store, go to a clothing store or a place where they have material, they're selling material; they sell patterns there, also. So you go through huge pack of books and find a pattern that you'd like to make a dress of and then it tells you exactly the width of the material plus the length of the material that you need, how much material you need to buy at that width to match the pattern. You have to work with the pattern because material comes in different widths, so you have to know how to lie that out exactly what the pattern shows you to do to make full use of the material; material costs money so you don't want to waste any of it. You learn quickly. And just the same way you can lay out a pattern, you could follow a blueprint.

Redman: Were you finding that you were particularly dexterous? You were good with your hands?

1-00:23:13

Lesslie: Yes, absolutely, better with my hands than with my brain.

Redman: So you took some classes in high school as far as home [economics] and—?

1-00:23:29

Lesslie: No, I didn't take home ec, I just took sewing.

Redman: Sewing, okay, and how about any shop classes or anything like that?

1-00:23:35

Lesslie: No, I never did shop classes.

Redman: Now I'd like to get to the start of the war. I'd like to ask about what you remember about December 7, 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was attacked.

1-00:23:48

Lesslie: It was a Sunday, and I'd come home from church, and all of a sudden they were talking about, "We're being bombed," and "we're being bombed in Pearl Harbor." Where in the heck is Pearl Harbor? We had no idea where Pearl Harbor was. We had no idea at all where Pearl Harbor was. But we were frightened, and in the very beginning we had black out curtains for our windows. They had block captains that would go around making sure that there was no light shining through, so we knew to dim our lights and bring down these black out curtains and stay in the dark, and we were afraid that we would have been attacked. I was surprised they didn't because we didn't have any real protection here. We weren't ready for anything.

Redman: Right, especially along the coast, so now a lot of people were frightened, but my question is always to what extent do you think there was a real fear like a real reason to be afraid versus some of the hysteria that may have popped up, but it seems like you were the fear was pretty legitimate.

1-00:25:01

Lesslie: You better believe it. It was legitimate. I mean even in school they told us that when the sirens would come off, we were to leave immediately. Well, some of us could get caught in the shower in gym, and we knew that we had to move. Of course, the kids, the whole idea was to disperse, that the kids get out there and go home, and we made short work of that.

Redman: Okay, to get out of—

1-00:25:29

Lesslie: To get out and not be caught in one particular spot. And we were very serious about what we were doing. Especially then because it was just all so new and so foreign and so frightening that it was really a scary time.

Redman: So you would have been a young teenager about this time.

1-00:25:46

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: But you would have been pretty aware of what was going on and things like that. Was there a sort of an expectation that the older kids would help with some of the younger kids or—?

1-00:25:56

Lesslie: I don't remember that.

Redman: Don't remember anything like that? Okay.

Now, let's see, I'd like get to Moffett Field in just a moment, but before I do that I want to ask about after a few week after Pearl Harbor, FDR issues an Executive Order to put the Japanese into relocation camps.

1-00:26:18

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Do you recall hearing about that at the time?

1-00:26:21

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Okay, what did you think of that then?

1-00:26:25

Lesslie: Well, I'll tell you that also was something brand new to us because we had grown up with Japanese people, not near as many. I think there were three Japanese boys in my class. I actually got it out of the newspaper and gave it in civil events in school in a report. I mean, the whole thing was quite new and unknown, and they were just talking about it then. And I gave it in a report in class.

Redman: And did you think that this was at the time, a young girl, did you think this was the appropriate step, or were you thinking about your friends that you were going to school with? What were your thoughts at that time?

1-00:27:08

Lesslie: I'll tell you at that time I guess seriously we wanted them out of here. We were mad at them for one thing for sure. We hated them. We were stirred up with that immense hate, and I remember hating them, and we wanted them out of here. I think, of course, I was still too young and I was just a girl and there was nothing I would do, but I think there could have been a lot of trouble here.

Redman: Like as in violence?

1-00:27:33

Lesslie: Yes. I think there could have been at that time. I mean we were caught up in this whole thing, and it's something brand new and frightening, and it scared

us badly, and we didn't know. Some of the things that came out even in the paper. I actually was a saver of newspaper, and even one of our newspapers had the headlines, "Japanese spies in this area."

Redman: Wow.

1-00:27:59

Lesslie:

I mean it was *San Jose Mercury News*. And I even saved that one. At one point I gave away all my newspapers to a friend, but it was something see because they were stirring the pot. We were just going by what we were reading and hearing about, and we were told that the kids would go to American school during the day and they'd go to Japanese school in the afternoon after school was out. We were told that they had books on the love of Japan and against the United States. We don't know if any of that was true. But those were some of the stories that we heard, and, of course, we acted appropriately. How can you say something about our country? We love the USA. We were very patriotic as kids. We sang all the right songs and God Bless America and all these things, so we were stirred up pretty good. And that had a lot to do with it.

Redman: Was there a point pretty early on that some of the young men started going into the service? Was it right away, or was it kind of a trickling in this town?

1-00:29:05

Lesslie:

It was something that I ended up being deeply involved in. I worked on the boys in Mountain View that were lost in World War II, and we ended up losing eighteen. Our school at that time in—the population of Mountain View when I graduated from high school was four thousand, so that's how much we grew in those twelve years.

Redman: It was doubled.

1-00:29:28

Lesslie:

We doubled in that time. And from that four thousand for the whole city, we lost eighteen kids out of our local high school, which was a lot. And they were good kids, and they, too, were all fired up like the rest of us. They were gung ho ready to go.

Redman: So then did you finish high school before finding work, or did you find work—?

1-00:29:55

Lesslie:

I worked every summer. When the school was out for the summer, we immediately looked for work, and all of my family, all of the kids in the area, worked the fruit. So there was apricots and peaches and pears and prunes. A lot of them picked prunes. And the berries and the nuts, we were all working so that was good. Then one year I graduated to Libby's Cannery, and in

Libby's Cannery that would have been, oh, let's see, I must have been about fifteen then. Forty-three and a half cents an hour, working night shift.

Redman: So this was now on the night shift at the cannery - I'm wondering if there were lots of other young women?

1-00:30:41

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Predominantly young women?

1-00:30:41

Lesslie: Yes. They would send out county workers during the day to catch the kids that were under age, so they caught my sister who was older than me because she was working days. They never caught me because I was working nights and the city workers didn't come out at night to see who was working there that shouldn't have been there.

Redman: Too late at night.

1-00:31:00

Lesslie: So we would work, I would work ten, twelve hours lot of nights right through.

Redman: Wow, so you would presumably make a little bit more on the night shift, or was it significantly more?

1-00:31:10

Lesslie: Yes, forty-three and a half cents an hour is what I made on the night shift, and that was acceptable good pay at that time.

Redman: Was it hard work?

1-00:31:19

Lesslie: Oh, I hated it.

Redman: You disliked the cannery?

1-00:31:21

Lesslie: I hated it. It was cold, it was miserable, it was wet, and the cans never stopped coming down that belt. They're just as fast at the end, last hour as they are the first hour, and its work.

Redman: So then shortly after that, was it the summer after the war starts that you found work at Moffett Field?

1-00:31:44

Lesslie: After the war started, that would have been the year that I was sixteen. That would have been 1942 because my sister had applied for work at Moffett Field. For some reason the man that was going to be her boss came to the house. She was going to be working in a ship's service store, which is a place

where the military go for coffee and soft drinks and sandwiches and ice cream. They also had a little store there of little goodies that they could buy, some small jewelry pieces that they could send for their mothers and girlfriends, stuff like that they could buy, and cigarettes.

So this man came to the house to talk to my sister, and he saw me walking around and he says, "Well, how about you?" I said, "I can't go out there." He says, "Why not?" I said, "I'm too young." You had to be eighteen, I guess, to go out there, and I was sixteen at the time. He says, "No, you're not." He says, "I'll take both of you." He says, "You're eighteen, she's nineteen, you're on." So we went to work at Moffett.

Well, I think I forget what we made an hour then, but it was good pay, and it was much better for us. I mean we were raised in a house where we were taught to take care of things and make sure that everything was put back in its proper place, and to wash the dishes and leave everything clean and neat. Well, that was no problem. Out there that was easy for us because we were used to doing things exactly like we should, so keeping the counter and everything clean and doing the dishes and cleaning up after the guys. And I loved serving beer because it was bottled so all you had to do was pop the caps.

Redman: Pop the cap open, easy enough.

1-00:33:33

Lesslie: That was great, and here I am sixteen on a military base popping caps off of beer bottles, which didn't seem to bother me at all. And one day a Marine came in and sat way down at the end of the counter. I took a look at him, and in my mind I thought, "I'm going to marry that man." I did.

Redman: Turned out to be your husband.

1-00:34:01

Lesslie: I did, and he was handsome.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about his story. He was in the Marines.

1-00:34:07

Lesslie: He was in the Marines, and they sent him, he was gung ho. He was walking down the street one day with a couple of his friends and my husband said, "Well, why don't we join the Marines?" And they said, "We're not completely crazy." One of them joined the Army; one of them joined the Air Force, and neither survived the war. And my husband joined the Marines. I forget when he went to New York to join, and he left in January.

Redman: So where was he from originally?

1-00:34:35

Lesslie:

He was born in New York and raised in New Jersey, so he was in New Jersey. He went to New York to join the Marines because I guess that's where the recruiting place was. They put him on train; back then the war was so—it was so much the thing to do fast, real fast, as fast as they could. The guys would get on the train from way back East and they would go right to San Diego.

Redman:

Wow.

1-00:34:59

Lesslie:

And at that time every other train got off the track and let the troops come through, and everything got out of their way to get them to San Diego as fast as they could get them there. As opposed to when he came home when the war was over. Everything got in the way of the troops staying on the sidelines.

Redman:

Took forever and ever to get home.

1-00:35:20

Lesslie:

Forever and ever to get them across the country.

Redman:

It must have seemed a lot longer after serving overseas. So now you two met when he was serving in the Marines, so he had been brought out to Southern California to start his training.

1-00:35:37

Lesslie:

Yes. Then he was sent to Mare Island.

Redman:

Okay, and did I read he was at Camp Pendleton for a little while?

1-00:35:46

Lesslie:

That came later. He went to Mare Island first, and then they sent a bunch of those from Mare Island right to Moffett Field. That's when I met him here. I had hardly known him, just a very short time.

Redman:

First, let me ask you, then, what happens at Moffett Field? What happened in those days at Moffett Field? What was Moffett Field like?

1-00:36:12

Lesslie:

Full of servicemen. Sailors and Marines.

Redman:

Mostly US Navy, but then also a lot of Marines.

1-00:36:19

Lesslie:

A lot of Marines, and most of them were from all different parts of the country.

Redman:

Now it sounds like they were working on predominantly blimps at Moffett Field—

1-00:36:29

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: But at that time were they working on entirely blimps, or were they working a few other airplanes an aircraft there?

1-00:36:37

Lesslie: I don't remember other aircraft. I remember blimps and balloons. Because they trained first in balloons and then on blimps.

Redman: So tell me now, why blimps? What would blimps do during the war?

1-00:36:56

Lesslie: Blimps were important because they were our shore patrol. They were out there looking for submarines. They carried depth charges, and they carried a machine gun. There were two other blimp places on the West Coast. There was one in Tillamook, Oregon, and one down in Santa Ana [California] that had blimp stations where the blimps came in; they would go out and do their patrolling, and then they come back in again. At that time Moffett Field was the only place that was outfitted for overhaul and repair. So we got blimps from the other two stations.

When I was working at Moffett after I got done with the schooling we would work seven days; we would be fourteen days on—let's see how this worked—two weeks, we would be on twelve days and two days off, so we'd work right through one weekend. And we would work two shifts, and we were busy.

Redman: So you'd do back-to-back shifts.

1-00:38:06

Lesslie: Back to back.

Redman: So now can you tell me about now in some of these pictures you've shown and including, there's a picture of their World War II Rosies, Hangar One, Moffett Field—

1-00:38:18

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: A lot of young women. Tell me about those other young women that you were working with, a little bit about them, were they mostly—?

1-00:38:25

Lesslie: Some of them were married. This is my class. Some of these were married, and some of them weren't. I was one that wasn't married yet, and this is my picture in the coveralls. On the second row on top, fourth from the end.

They were a good bunch. What happened was, on this particular year, the year after I worked in ship's service store, I was seventeen. I went out to Moffett

like I always did looking for work, and at that time they said, “Well, we don’t have much going on around here, but we have a class starting. We’re going to train women to work on blimps.” I said, “Would we learn to be mechanics?” I said, “I can do that.” I never had a tool in my hand before, but I said, “I can do that.” So I did start, we went to school in Palo Alto. They set up a school in a hurry, and I didn’t even know how to drive. I didn’t even know how I was going to get there. I thought if push comes to shove, I’ll get a bike and I’ll ride seven miles because I was young and strong and able to ride a bike. It didn’t seem like it would bother me.

But I got in with a woman right next to me. She had a car, and she picked me up because we were all in carpools at that time. So I went with her, and we went to school for three months. We got eighty-three cents an hour. We started out with about two hours of book work in the morning; then we went down in the shop and had hands-on tools. So we took little pieces of metal and we drilled holes in them, and we cleaned them all up, and we put rivets in, and we riveted them by hand. And then with different kinds of machinery and tools and stuff. I was quickly using everything, all kinds of hand tools and all kinds of power tools, anything that they had. And it was no problem, I liked it. It was easy.

Redman: What gave you the confidence to dive right into this because you said, “Oh, I can do that”?

1-00:40:24

Lesslie: Yes, I wasn’t afraid of it, and I figured I could learn it, and I did learn it very quickly.

Redman: Is that the big thing? You think a lot of people were afraid of it?

1-00:40:35

Lesslie: Well, I sure wasn’t, and I don’t think most of these girls—although our class was probably about twice this big when we started. And the ones that weren’t suited or felt that they weren’t suited for this, they quickly washed out, a lot of them. But we finished with this many.

Redman: That’s a good size group of young women.

1-00:40:52

Lesslie: That’s a good size group but along the way about that many had just fallen by the wayside and decided it wasn’t for them.

Redman: Now you said many of them were married, some were single, but were many from California, or were they from all over?

1-00:41:06

Lesslie: We were all living in this area, but they came from all over. By that time they were still starting to come from all over. These girls, I didn’t go to school with

any of them, but I think I was probably the youngest in the class at that time. I had no problem with it.

Redman: Now, was the deal that at the end of your class you would automatically get hired at the airfield?

1-00:41:30

Lesslie: Yes, that was the idea. We came right out the next day. This was the last day, and this is our teacher, Mr. Miles. That was the last day, and they sent out a Navy photographer. He took the picture. The next day we reported out to Moffett in Hangar One, and there we were in that great big huge hangar, and I loved it.

Redman: Now, Hangar One is a pretty—now it's a national historic landmark—but it's this massive, massive hangar—

1-00:42:00

Lesslie: You have no idea. It's too bad you couldn't go out there.

Redman: I've read it is almost disorienting to look at.

1-00:42:11

Lesslie: It's all kinds of stories about that. All kinds of stories about different things that have happened there, some of them could probably not even be true. I understand that somebody rode a plane through from one end to the other through the doors had to be opened at the same time. I don't remember seeing both end doors open at the same time. And all kinds of stuff is going on there. I don't think that's even feasible, but these are some of the stories that are told. But it is an awesome sight, and I loved being out there. I love that hangar; I still can't bear the thought of it going down. It's just got to be saved.

Redman: Yes, and that's a big movement now to in the Bay Area—

1-00:42:48

Lesslie: To get it saved yes. And along comes Google, [saying], "We will reskin that hangar themselves at their own cost if we allow them to keep their planes inside, which would take up very little room anyway. I think Google's got, I don't know, five planes or seven planes or something like that out there, different sizes. And they want a place so either that hangar gets reskinned, which is now the proposal for NASA, and NASA's dragging their feet. So we'll keep holding our breath and wondering what's wrong with NASA, come on, let's get this going.

Redman: So I understand there were multiple hangars that eventually went up, but Hangar One was the largest.

1-00:43:33

Lesslie: That's the largest and the first one, and the other two are wooden, and they went up during World War II.

Redman: Were those being built then when you were—?

1-00:43:41

Lesslie: Yes, during World War II while I was there, they were being built, and they needed more room then, but—

Redman: Did it seem to you that the Navy was sort of anticipating using this airfield well past the war? It didn't seem like it was a temporary—

1-00:43:56

Lesslie: It wasn't a temporary deal. Not then, not then. But after the war as Moffett grew and they were flying then P-3 Orions—this was the largest P-3 Orion base in the world, right here at Moffett. So they were taken up with just barely a minute—I don't know exactly how much time between them, but they were up and down all the time.

Redman: So it's an incredibly busy place.

1-00:44:20

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: So then when you show up for your first day of work after training. Did you join a union?

1-00:44:33

Lesslie: No, there was no union then. From the time we were in school we were Civil Service, and we were under whatever Civil Service—let's see, when I was in school learning I got eighty-three cents an hour, and when we completed school and went out to Hangar One we got twenty cents an hour increase, so I was making what eighty-three to a dollar three cents an hour?

Redman: That must have felt like a fortune.

1-00:45:03

Lesslie: Hey, it was, why that's forty dollars a week. Come on, that's big time. We're swinging now. We were doing good, and us women were very, very glad. Some of them were helping the household. And me, I was just a single girl at that time, but I was still taking my money home to my mother because that's what we did in those days.

Redman: Right. Now I'd like to—let's actually do that bigger question on another tape. I'm just going to end this with a really simple question. You'd mentioned the share-the-ride programs, the carpooling programs.

1-00:45:38

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Is that something that continued on with these young girls?

1-00:45:40

Lesslie:

Oh, you'd better believe it. All during the war it was *share the ride*. And we were very used to—you didn't see anybody driving around single in a car. The cars were loaded because they had to be.

Redman:

So I understand that both gasoline and rubber for tires were rationed.

1-00:45:58

Lesslie:

Absolutely.

Redman:

Was one harder to get than the other for any reason, or was it pretty much—?

1-00:46:05

Lesslie:

Well, tires were very hard to get. Tires and shoes. Shoes were hard to get. You had to have stamps to get shoes. You got extra stamps if you were in war work. So we could get the shoes that we needed to keep on our feet. Gasoline was almost impossible. It was very hard to get the gasoline that you needed. It was like everything else, it was rationed.

Redman:

So you pooled together your ration stamps.

1-00:46:31

Lesslie:

Yes, we pooled the ration stamps. I remember the ration books that everything that you can think of was rationed.

Redman:

So I've heard some stories about there being a bit of a black market for rationed goods during the war.

1-00:46:47

Lesslie:

There was some of that, too, although I don't ever remember being involved or hearing about any of it myself.

Redman:

Okay, so it was maybe something that was out there, but most people wanted to follow the rules.

1-00:46:58

Lesslie:

Yeah, we did, we pretty much did.

Redman:

How about were there war bond drives?

1-00:47:03

Lesslie:

Yes.

Redman:

How would those work?

1-00:47:05

Lesslie:

I can remember them talking about it. I guess they had some war bond drives out there. I can remember them talking about, I forget, one of the actresses that came to Moffett—I forget what her name was right now, but there was a movie star that came out at one time. The war bonds? I can remember buying

war bonds even when I was in school. At that time you'd buy in coins, quarters or dimes or whatever you had you could buy little stamps and put them in a book until you had filled the book, and then you'd get a \$21 war bond.

Redman: Now I know I'm jumping back a little in time, but before the war were you reading about stuff going on in the Pacific like say Japan and China and lend-lease and all of the things going on in England and—?

1-00:47:54

Lesslie: There were things going on that we heard about in Europe more than about what was going on in the Pacific. It was a shocker what happened in the Pacific. We didn't expect it coming from that area.

Redman: Now when that did happen and essentially you're a part in a project to defend the coast, did your attention turn to the Pacific then?

1-00:48:21

Lesslie: A lot, because my brother was in the Pacific, as well as my husband.

Redman: So then you were thinking about the Pacific a lot.

1-00:48:27

Lesslie: I was thinking about the Pacific, although I was well aware of what was going on in Europe.

Redman: Okay, so let me just pop in a new tape.

## Begin Audiofile 2

2-00:00:04

Redman: My name is Sam Redman. Today is January 30, 2012, and I'm in Mountain View, and this is my second tape today with Rose Lesslie.

When we left off we were talking about what it was like to work at Moffett Field. The next question I'd like to ask—this is kind of a two-part question—I'd like to ask what the relationships were like between the men and the women working there.

2-00:00:39

Lesslie: Well, at that time what they used to say in World War II, they're either too young or too old, and that was true when we hit the tar. We started out in the fin room with the group of women that I had here. We were making new fins and rudders for blimps. And believe it or not, that room was full of women only. We had a male lead, and we didn't really need him. This particular case—here's one of the jigs that was there. It's a very large jig, this one. In nothing flat I was running this jig by myself.

You have to get extrusions, material that are much like this, were put in here and we'd get it all together and if you're working on top, that's easy, but on the bottom we'd get on scooters and we'd be laying right on our back just barely off the ground scooting around on wheels. And we'd be riveting and drilling and riveting up above our head—

Redman: Would you do those two tasks then separately? Would you go through and do all the rivets first, or—?

2-00:01:40

Lesslie: We'd drill and rivet as we go. We'd lay out all the metal, and we'd put little gussets for rivets, and we'd use equipment that was hand held that would rivet and buck at the same time. We'd go around doing that by myself, and then I'd get on the scooter and go underneath and work as much as we could. And as we'd get it as tightened up as much as we can, as far as you could go, then you'd loosen the fasteners that hold it in place and raise it up and get any of the rivets that you couldn't get otherwise and finish doing it.

And the ends where we had castings attached to the aluminum, we used to take material and dip it in linseed oil for the reaction of dissimilar metals. You put a piece of cloth with linseed oil on it between dissimilar metals.

Redman: How long did it take you do you think before you got this whole process down? I mean had you been pretty well trained—?

2-00:02:47

Lesslie: In learning it? It didn't take me no time at all. I just fastened them in there and started drilling and riveting. It was easy. It wasn't hardly a challenge. It was something very easy. Something that I enjoyed doing. I always liked working with my hands, and I was good at putting things together.

Redman: I asked about how the men and women got along. So the men never gave the women a hard time, it seems like, because they were so outnumbered at this place.

2-00:03:23

Lesslie: They were pretty much—well, it was kind of strange for them. All of a sudden they got women in their domain, and here we are. It wasn't very long after that that I was asked to come into the metal shop. Of course, I didn't really understand all of this too much, and I kept saying, "If I don't like it, can I come back?" But I didn't know this old geezer came in there to pick the girl that he wanted to come work in the metal shop. I guess I was young and kind of cute that that time, so he looked at me and decided he wanted me. I found out a little bit more about him a little bit later.

Redman: I see.

2-00:04:04

Lesslie: But there were challenges even then.

Redman: Now, how about between the military personnel and the civilians? Was there a good relationship there, was there ever any tension, or was it pretty good?

2-00:04:16

Lesslie: One of the first things that we learned when we were hired on was stay away from the sailors. And, of course, the hangar at that time was full of Navy people. Now what happened there was our blimps were made in Akron, Ohio, most of them came. The bags were made, and then the structure themselves were all made in Akron. Well, when the war started all kinds of strange things were going on because of necessity. So, we needed blimps out here in a hurry, and we needed trained people in a hurry, so they went in to Akron, Ohio where the kids actually came out of school and went right to work for Goodyear. And they were used to this, so there were a lot of kids that knew each other all the time they were growing up and all the time they were in school they were all together in very tight buddies. All of a sudden we needed them here. And they took these kids and just, "You're in the Navy and you're out there."

And one of my dear friends that was there, he bypassed boot camp entirely. He went from being in Akron, Ohio to being at Moffett Field. He thought he'd died and went to Heaven; he loved it out here. And his story is out of the base, too, which is interesting to read because he thought this was kind of like going to college walking into that beautiful, beautiful—Moffett Field is a gorgeous place and very beautiful the way it's planted and the way it's laid out and everything. He thought he died and went to Heaven finding work out here. Well, these guys grew up; they used to call it Akron West because they were all in the barracks; they all grew up together; they all knew each other forever. I mean it was like Heaven working out here, and they loved being out there. But the first thing we heard as girls going out there to work was, "Stay away from the Navy." We pretty much did.

Redman: That was my question, how successful you might have been in—?

2-00:06:18

Lesslie: We didn't bother them, and they didn't bother us.

Redman: Tell me about security regulations. What would it have been like to get on base? What did you need?

2-00:06:32

Lesslie: We had our own badges, and we were checked every time going in and out by the Marines at the gate. They'd check us and made sure we were okay. And we were just used to that.

Redman: My other question about signing up, you would have been a young—I presume you were pretty healthy in these days, but was there health care offered for these young women by any chance?

2-00:07:00

Lesslie: I don't remember any of us having a problem.

Redman: Then what about the young women who were married? Were they without kids yet? I'm wondering if they had to have people watch after their kids or—

2-00:07:14

Lesslie: I can only remember one couple that I learned to like and know very well. She and her husband were both working there; they had kids. But they worked out something that they didn't have to change shifts. One stayed on one shift and one stayed on the other, and they each took a different shift and took care of the kids. Now with us, the Navy in their infinite wisdom back then decided that we would change shifts every single month for the duration of the war. We switched from days to swing to days to swing for the whole time I was out there; and that is hard.

Redman: Yes, I can imagine.

2-00:07:53

Lesslie: Because you're barely getting used to one shift, and, boom, you're on another one.

Redman: Now would the day and the swing shift, were those at different pay rates, or were they the same? Do you remember?

2-00:08:04

Lesslie: I don't remember if we got more for working nights or not. I don't remember that. I just remember that we had one short paycheck and one long one because we worked twelve days and two days off, so we'd get one long check and one smaller one.

Redman: Much of your money went back home to your—

2-00:08:23

Lesslie: My mother, yes.

Redman: This is maybe hard for you to remember, but it would seem to me it would be interesting to be going through the Depression and now being able to buy many of the things that you'd maybe see or clothes, or things like that, and then suddenly to have all of this money. And yet to be in the war and to know that you were in the midst of the war; you probably didn't want to go buy lot of expensive clothing or jewelry or anything like that—or it might not have even been available, new cars or new washing machines or things like that weren't being produced during the war.

2-00:09:05

Lesslie:

There wasn't that much that we could really get, but my husband was gone. I wasn't that interested; I didn't go out at night. If I was working days you can be sure I went to bed early because I was tired—we worked, we'd get tired. On nights the same way, I'd sleep during the day, and then we'd start at 3:30 and we'd go until about midnight, I guess, something like that.

Redman:

Now I understand you wrote a lot of letters to your husband.

2-00:09:32

Lesslie:

Over 1,200. Which is easy to figure out, all you have to do is count the days, and I never missed a day.

Redman:

You wrote one every day.

2-00:09:43

Lesslie:

Sometimes twice, and there were times I wrote three of them. I just keep mailing. I told him when he left that he would never get a Dear John letter from me, and I made sure he didn't. But he told me a lot of stories about a lot of guys that got a lot of weird things from their girlfriends and wives at home.

Redman:

Is that right, that would be kind of demoralizing or tough news from home and things like that?

2-00:10:11

Lesslie:

My husband used to tell stories about the different things that would happen to some of his buddies.

Redman:

What sorts of things would you put in these—it seems like that's a lot of writing to hear.

2-00:10:24

Lesslie:

A lot of writing, and that's why ever since World War II I've hardly written to anybody. It's hard for me to even get a Christmas card out. My daughter addresses them, and then I sign my name and let them go.

Redman:

So what sorts of things would you say in those letters?

2-00:10:46

Lesslie:

As much as I could say about what I was doing and what the weather was like, what I was doing, what was going on in the area, or what movie I saw, stuff like that.

Redman:

Just little things.

2-00:10:57

Lesslie:

Just little things. There wasn't a whole lot I could say, and there wasn't a whole lot he could say because every single letter I got had gone through a censor.

Redman: So now he was out in the Pacific, and his letters would have been censored because they didn't want people to know what locations the different troops were moving in—

2-00:11:21

Lesslie: Right.

Redman: Did you have to self-censor in terms of what you could say about—?

2-00:11:31

Lesslie: No, I said anything I wanted to in my letters. There wasn't anything I could say that would be a big problem anyway.

Redman: I'd like to get back just for a moment to the other girls you were working with. It seems like from the photographs most of them were fairly young and most of them appear to be white.

2-00:11:50

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Were there any women of color working at the field in that era, do you remember?

2-00:11:55

Lesslie: I don't remember any black ones, now that I'm thinking of it. I don't remember any black women.

Redman: How about the sailors? Would there have been black sailors out there at that time? They would likely be in segregated units, of course, in this era, but—

2-00:12:13

Lesslie: I don't remember any black ones, I don't. All these kids from Akron, Ohio.

Redman: And they knew each other—

2-00:12:22

Lesslie: Of course.

Redman: That's the amazing thing.

2-00:12:25

Lesslie: I used to watch them, and I'd think, "My God, what on earth are you doing, because we had the little tracks at the top of the hangar, and they'd go up there and they'd drive these—well they're like little cars, but they're mobile. They can be driven back and forth. They would hang on a little—they called them boatswain's chairs. They'd drop a rope with a chair on it, and they'd pick the sailors up from the ground, and they'd work on the tops of the blimps. And these crazy kids, of course, they're just kids, too, they'd get out there if the hangar was empty, and they'd push each other. And man, could they swing that thing, would swing like you wouldn't believe it. I'd think, "My God, are

you guys crazy?” And they probably had to be careful because I’m sure they didn’t want to have the right officer—

Redman: Right, to see that.

2-00:13:05

Lesslie: —to see the stuff that was going on. But they’re kids, and they’re acting like kids. They were young, and they were fearless. I’d say, “Now which one of you were sitting on the chairs?” And, “Which one of you were driving them from up above on the tracks?” And they’d say, “We all did.” They’d say in unison because I have visited with them since I’ve been older and I’ve made several trips out to Akron. They still get together just about weekly, they go for breakfast together, and they meet each other. I’ve gone out there and joined them at their meetings. I told them, “You know the first thing we heard was, ‘Stay away from the sailors.’” And they’d all laugh and carry on. We’d talk, and we got to be really good friends long after this was all over.

Redman: It’s funny, too, that they almost had like an alumni club—

2-00:14:03

Lesslie: Yes, they still get together and they’re still living there, and they’re still tight friends.

Redman: What was your housing situation at this time? Because so many people working at places like Kaiser or the shipyards in Oakland or Richmond or San Francisco, the housing was impossible to find. But this is some distance away from those areas. I’m wondering what the housing situation would have been like for most of those workers.

2-00:14:35

Lesslie: Well, we rented for most of my childhood days we were renting. At the time we were renting with my brothers and sisters when we were very young, our rent was \$16 a month, and I can remember my mother going and talking to the landlord—who were also Croatian people, but they were the farmers—and asking them if they could lower the rent. Of course, that never happened. But along about 1941 we bought our first home here, my dad did. We had a little over an acre of land and a huge old house. We had chicken coops out there; we had everything on this huge piece of property, and it cost, let me think, \$1,850 for a house and over an acre of land right here in Mountain View.

Redman: One thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars?

2-00:15:23

Lesslie: That’s right. Then we moved in 1943. My mother was looking around, and she heard that the druggist downtown was selling his home, and that home was the most beautiful home in Mountain View. I was flabbergasted. I felt like Cinderella. We moved into this gorgeous home in February of 1943, and that lovely home this druggist told my mother—it was built in 1926. He says,

“It cost me \$6,000 to build this home.” He says, “I figure we easily got a \$1,000 out of it as \$5,000, and that home would probably go for a million and a half today easy, no problem. I felt like Cinderella in that gorgeous home.

Redman: So that’s where you were living during the war.

2-00:16:20

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: And you would contribute some money to your mother.

2-00:16:23

Lesslie: Pretty much all of it.

Redman: And that kind of went into a pool—

2-00:16:29

Lesslie: It went into the household expenses, and I know I felt that I was going to stay with Mom and Dad until that house was paid for, and it pretty much was by the time I went to get married.

Redman: Wow, that’s amazing, just amazing. I’d like to ask a question about 1944. In that year there was a massive explosion at a place called Port Chicago.

2-00:16:54

Lesslie: Port Chicago.

Redman: Do you recall hearing about that?

2-00:16:56

Lesslie: Yes. We knew what happened. Of course, in your mind the stories that they tell it’s hard to visualize it in your head of how serious that was and how bad it was. And, of course, that affected mostly black people. They were just sitting ducks in that place in a way.

Redman: Would people in the Navy talk about this at all? Do you know if there was—?

2-00:17:21

Lesslie: I don’t remember the guys talking about it so much here. I don’t remember seeing too many black Navy or Marines even.

Redman: But did workers talk about it, or how did you find out about it, newspapers or—?

2-00:17:33

Lesslie: The paper, in the paper. I guess at that time on the radio. But in the paper.

Redman: Did you have any thoughts about that explosion at all at the time?

2-00:17:50

Lesslie: It sounded horrible, but it was to me like a distant place. It was no place that I would ever see or come near.

Redman: How about during the same era, San Francisco and Oakland, for as much as there's an influx in Mountain View, there's an enormous growth in San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond.

2-00:18:10

Lesslie: Exactly.

Redman: Can you tell me; did you hear a little bit about—I know there were big articles like there was a big article at the end of the war about called, “Richmond Took a Beating,” talking about how it had grown so quickly and the city wasn't ready for it.

2-00:18:26

Lesslie: Exactly, they weren't. I can visualize what happened to them up there, but I guess they had to find housing in one hurry. How they handled all of that, I don't even know. But people were coming in here mainly from the South, the Southeast area. A lot of them were coming out here looking for work, I mean this was like the Promised Land, and boy, they were coming. There was work to be done, and those girls were learning, and some of those welders, they had a pretty tough job with what they were doing, too.

Redman: So it seems like that there were a number of jobs here for young women like you, but there wasn't the quite the mass movement at that time the way there was in Oakland or Richmond. Okay, so Mountain View was still—

2-00:18:56

Lesslie: Mountain View still stayed kind of quiet, and there was plenty enough of us to handle the work that we had out there. We didn't need any more. We were handling it pretty well ourselves.

Redman: I'd like to hear a little bit about the end of the war because there's a great story about your husband coming home underneath the Golden Gate Bridge and you seeing him for the first time throughout the whole war. But before we get to that, I'd like to ask about hearing about the end of the war, dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Did you hear that news?

2-00:19:48

Lesslie: Oh, of course.

Redman: What were your thoughts on that—?

2-00:19:50

Lesslie: Well, all of a sudden I knew he'd come home. I knew the war was over. Finally the fear that you had, that lump of fear that you had in your heart all the time. One of my husband's very good friends was killed in the war. He

was killed in the invasion of Guam. And when they left Moffett and my husband was leaving, he was leaving also, and he stayed with me after my husband left, and I cried and cried and cried with him. Then later I heard that he was killed, and that hurt a lot because I wanted him back, too. And, of course, he didn't make it. But my husband coming home, that was another big thing.

Redman: So I've heard a phrase from vets who were over in the Pacific, who they used to say to each other, "Golden Gate in '48."

2-00:20:41

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Was that a phrase that your husband—

2-00:20:46

Lesslie: Yes, that was one that they—they thought it would be '48 because things were still moving kind of slow. I mean to all of a sudden have this bomb that they dropped, this is, "What on earth is this? What is going on? What is happening? This is moving fast now. All of a sudden it's moving fast, things are changing radically because we expected there to be an invasion of Japan, and they expected huge numbers would be killed on both sides. And for some reason I guess after those two bombs, and I guess the head of Japan decided to—I can't even think of his name right now [Emperor Hirohito]—but he decided that it was time for the people to accept the end.

Redman: Right. So then can you tell me the story of your husband coming back and his seeing the Golden Gate Bridge?

2-00:21:41

Lesslie: Yes. He was on Guam when the war was over, and he was going to get on the aircraft carrier *The Bon Homme Richard*. And aircraft carriers are top-heavy. And there was a huge storm, typhoon I guess it was, was coming in, and they were very afraid because the best place for a ship to be is not at the dock, out to sea. And they had to move that, they were trying to move that aircraft carrier. My husband was on board the aircraft carrier in the dock and somebody was yelling, "Abandon ship," about three different times. And my husband said he looked over the side, and he thought to himself, "Am I going to die after all I've been through?" He wasn't in any hurry to be abandoning ship from that height because it must be very high up in the air. And he was afraid.

They finally got the ship away from the dock, and as I recall, they took the ship as they did with many other ships and headed for the Sea of Japan in a show of strength. I guess they just rendezvoused in the Sea of Japan, and then they head for home. So all I got from him at the end was he wrote a letter and up at the top he wrote, "Last letter from Guam." And then I knew I had to stop writing. And that was kind of strange all of a sudden.

Redman: You'd written a letter every day.

2-00:23:10

Lesslie: Every single day. And then at work, at Moffett, they knew that, of course I would—he's coming home, he's finally coming home, the war was over. And somebody out there—I never did find out who—some sicko—got on the phone and pretended he was him. And talked to me in it. And, of course, it got me all shook up and all excited and everything before I realized I hadn't heard his voice in way over three years. Thirty-nine months is a long time.

Redman: Sure.

2-00:23:43

Lesslie: So that kind of really hurt me a lot. I didn't think that was funny at all. But along the way he headed for home. And, of course, they had the "Welcome Home" signs out on the coast here for them to see. But my husband said, as the Golden Gate came into view, tears started rolling down his face, and he was ashamed, so he said he took a quick glance behind him and saw that all the Marines were crying. And he says when they got under the Golden Gate people on the bridge above must have known what was happening. I sure didn't know exactly when he'd get here, but they dropped flowers on them. So there's flowers all over the top of the ship.

Then they docked in Alameda, and they put them on buses and they bussed them to Treasure Island. And then he called me on the phone, and I kept saying, "Is that really you? Is that really you?" I couldn't hardly believe, and it was in the evening, and I thought now how am I going to get there? I don't have a car. I don't know how to drive. I don't know how I'm going to get there. So I called my brother-in-law—

Redman: And you're so close in terms of—

2-00:24:49

Lesslie: Getting there, right. And I knew what I needed to do because my sister's boyfriend—she was in love with another Marine that was a friend of my husband's—and he had come in. He shouldn't have because he had less time, but they came home on a point system. So many different kind of things, so many months over there, so many different things, so many different islands that you've been on, or different battles that you've been, or all these points added up to people coming home. Well, my husband had way more points than he did, but he got home sooner. So I went to Treasure Island for him when he came in. And my husband wrote and said, "Do the same thing when I come, come the same way, I'll be in the same place." Thank God he was coming to Treasure Island, not down in southern California.

So I went to San Francisco with my brother-in-law, and he let me off at a certain place where I knew I could get a Navy bus to take me to Treasure Island. And when I went to get on the bus, there were too many people there.

And I said to the bus driver, “How often do the busses come?” And he said, “Every ten minutes or fifteen minutes,” whatever it is. I says, “I’ll wait.” I didn’t want all these people around when I met my husband. And as it is, when the next bus came, I was the only one on it.

And he was waiting in the meantime watching the busses come in. And I guess he saw all the people going, and I was on the next one. And I could see him standing there. And it was unbelievable. I mean I cried, and I cried, and I cried, and it was just—I think his uniform must still be wet. It was just really something to see him. So he was here for I believe three days. I stayed with him that day. I think the next day was Sunday, and I went out there early in the morning, and we went to church together. And then I stayed on base the whole time, and they were pretty lax, and the war was over, so the guys at the gate didn’t bother me that much as far as going in. I stayed way past the time when I should have been gone. “The heck with them, I’m not going.”

Redman: Right, it’s the end of the war.

2-00:27:07

Lesslie: I just stayed with him, and then one day I brought him home. He came home to Mountain View, and he didn’t even know what to do on the train. I mean he wanted to get some water. He didn’t know how to take a paper cup and fill it with water. He didn’t know how to take money and pay for the ticket. He just didn’t know anything. And when I took him home I wanted to give him a glass of milk, and he couldn’t handle the glass of milk.

Redman: Wow, because he hadn’t had fresh milk in—

2-00:27:39

Lesslie: He hadn’t had milk or fresh meat for many, many, many months, but his stomach couldn’t handle it. They had been on the stuff that they’d been eating for so long.

Redman: The rations, yes.

2-00:27:50

Lesslie: Normal food, and even after we were married it took him a long time to get used to food and eating normal meals.

Redman: Wow.

2-00:28:00

Lesslie: He was very skinny. He was very, very skinny.

Redman: Was it a shock for you to have him back, or were you just so relieved that you were willing to—?

2-00:28:08

Lesslie:

It was a shock to have him back; all of a sudden he's here. It's a learning experience, and then I said, "Can you get discharged here?" Well they wouldn't let him. At that time they wanted to discharge them as close to where they enlisted as possible. So he enlisted in New York, but they sent him to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and that's where he got out. And, of course, I was here, so along the way there was some buddy of his that was in a veteran's hospital. I guess the parents or somebody—I don't know how the connection was made—they asked my husband to go and see him on the way home. And he did, he stopped off at the VA Hospital somewhere and visited this friend that had been hurt, and then he went on home. Of course, his family were all waiting for him, too. And along was coming shortly thereafter I left Mountain View for the first time in my life, left my mother, left California to go all the way to New Jersey. It was a learning experience. I went back there and, of course, I met him. I met all his family, but it was a very hard adjustment for me.

Redman:

Must have been very different from California.

2-00:29:26

Lesslie:

Snow was falling when I went there, and I'd never seen snow fall, so I was just flabbergasted with all this white stuff coming down. It really got me; I'd never seen anything like this. Then that was okay, but the muggy weather, that was the end of me. I cannot handle this.

Redman:

So how long did you stay in New York, New Jersey?

2-00:29:48

Lesslie:

I went back in December; I was married the twenty-third of December just before Christmas I was married.

Redman:

So '45.

2-00:29:57

Lesslie:

Forty-five, my husband was able to get a place for us to have our honeymoon in Times Square, New York. We were lucky enough to find what we found, couldn't even find any place. Then we stayed in North Arlington, I married him, we rented a room; we had a room upstairs in a house where we rented a room, and finally I was quickly expecting a baby in nothing flat. I came home in the summer, and my husband came home after me because he wanted to stay and get his vacation pay because he got time for all his service time in the plant where he worked. He worked for Thomas Edison before he was in the service, and then he got his vacation pay, and he was such a Scot, he wanted that vacation pay; so he waited a little longer, got his vacation pay, and then joined me in Mountain View. But he really landed into fairyland here because this place was blooming, and my husband was in the building trades.

Redman: So he was in building. Now I wanted to ask because you, when you came back out here you reconnected in some—did you go back to Moffett Field or were you—?

2-00:31:14

Lesslie: No, I was pregnant, and I was going to have a baby, and I moved home with my mother and father because there was no place to go. So along came the GI Bill, along came the homes—?

Redman: FHA? The—?

2-00:31:32

Lesslie: What did they call them? No, the GI Loan.

Redman: Oh, GI—?

2-00:31:34

Lesslie: GI Loan, so we looked to get a house built. My husband could have built it, but he didn't have the contractor's license. In those days to get a GI loan, you had to have a contractor's license. So we got a contractor that built this house, and, of course, my husband was right here just about daily. After he got off of work, he'd come over here and check everything, put in a few more nails or do whatever he had to do—

Redman: Right, sure.

2-00:31:58

Lesslie: And kept up with this house, so we moved here in 1947. I've been here ever since.

Redman: So a lot has changed in this area since that, so maybe we could talk about—well, first, you continued on working on helicopters—?

2-00:32:17

Lesslie: Yes, I did.

Redman: So can you talk about that for a moment before we talk about how much Mountain View's changed since '46?

2-00:32:22

Lesslie: Well, I had two kids in a hurry. My daughter came ten months and six days, boom, there she was. About seventeen months, something like that, after that, my son was born on my birthday. So I have two children, a girl and a boy.

When the children were a little older and I wanted to get them both into Catholic school, and that was expensive and all this good stuff. I decided to go back to work. So I looked in the paper and I saw an ad; Hiller Helicopters was looking for people to work. I thought, "Ah, that's no problem." So I went out there and I loved it. I stayed with Hiller for as long as he was in business in

Palo Alto. He was in East Palo Alto, and I built every single small assembly there is on a helicopter. From one end to the other and from the bottom to the top, I built them all, and I loved it.

Redman: So would you learn on the job these new techniques or new—?

2-00:33:19

Lesslie: It was new to me, but it was still drilling and riveting. So it was everything from tail rollers and stabilizers and control panels on top and skids on the bottom—and litters, which we had litters because it carried stretchers on each side—everything, instrument panels and floor boards and doors and everything, everything single assembly.

Redman: So were these helicopters mostly going over to Korea and Viet Nam and—?

2-00:33:54

Lesslie: Yes, I guess they went to Korea before I was there, but when I was there it was mostly Viet Nam. And they were military, so we built a lot of military helicopters.

Redman: So they would be commissioned, but then would anyone from the military come to the factory to check in and—?

2-00:34:11

Lesslie: Absolutely, they were there checking on those ships all the time every day, as well as our own inspectors. But we built a very good ship. In fact, Hiller has got a great big museum in San Carlos right on Bayshore. And it's a big one, and it's a beautiful thing, it's great to see. It's right by the San Carlos Airport. And it also has a story to tell.

Redman: So now can you tell me a little bit about how—so Palo Alto it doubled in between the time span we were talking about when it went from three to six thousand in just a few years, but that growth seems like nothing compared to—

2-00:34:58

Lesslie: Right because Mountain View must have close to eighty thousand now.

Redman: And that's predominantly affiliated with the technology boom.

2-00:35:07

Lesslie: Technology, right.

Redman: So now I as a person of my generation, I think of the dot-com boom, the sort of late 2000 and on, this massive boom that's been centered in Silicon Valley, but the technology has been growing in this region—

2-00:35:24

Lesslie: Growing and it's going a lot into the medical field.

Redman: The medical field now, okay.

2-00:35:29

Lesslie: A lot of it is coming up for medicine.

Redman: So the boom really maybe started in the 1970s would you say around this area, or was this neighborhood pretty filled in—?

2-00:35:39

Lesslie: Oh, there were apricots on this property and apricots on the property across the street. I just gradually saw them all fill in.

Redman: Okay, so you were one of the first houses in the neighborhood.

2-00:35:50

Lesslie: Yes, after World War II, yes. And we were able to get this house, and we were very, very lucky. The hardest part in building this house was getting the material to build this because we had been outfitted for work. We weren't building houses. So it was hard to get even the toilets and the roofing material and some of the things that we needed to build a house. We weren't stocked for this. We were in a war. We were going gung ho for the war, and that's where everything was at.

Redman: So these factories across America had to be reconverted back into building houses—

2-00:36:27

Lesslie: Exactly.

Redman: Producing nails, or whatever.

2-00:36:33

Lesslie: Getting the things that was needed for civilian life.

Redman: So it took time to build this house.

2-00:36:39

Lesslie: No, not necessarily because one way or another they made it because back then from the time that they put a shovel in the dirt here in this house, three months I had the keys and I was moving in. That's how fast they got things done.

Redman: That is amazing.

2-00:36:53

Lesslie: Now they just drag, drag, drag. It's just awful to see what goes on today.

Redman: By way of concluding here, I'd like to turn back to the war for a moment and your time at Moffett Field. What do you think that that did for you as a young

person? How did that fit in the story of your life, the time that you had at Moffett Field? It seems very important to you today.

2-00:37:23

Lesslie: It was the beginning of my career because like it or not I spent thirty-five years in the shop in high tech industries. It was the only thing I knew, the only thing I handled well, and the easiest thing in the world for me to do. I never had a problem with my work.

Redman: So compared to canning, this was—

2-00:37:44

Lesslie: Of course.

Redman: —so much easier and—

2-00:37:47

Lesslie: Oh, yes, much easier and a lot more fun.

Redman: More stimulating.

2-00:37:50

Lesslie: Yes, and I enjoyed what I was doing, and I did well with what I was doing. I made doggone good money.

Redman: Did people take for granted after the war do you think that women were suddenly capable of doing all of these tasks—?

2-00:38:08

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: Or was it still a challenge?

2-00:38:11

Lesslie: We had some problems. We had some problems. I ran across a pretty good eye opener when I was working at Moffett for a young girl, but I was able to handle it. The main thing was—as wrong as it was for it to ever happen, I was able to handle it.

Redman: Was this a particular story, like an incident, or—?

2-00:38:32

Lesslie: It was an incident that happened out there with my boss. You see, as young people we were taught everything was not a grey area, black and white. You did right; you worked right; you did what you were told. If the boss told you to do something, you got up and you did it. You didn't question, that sort of thing.

Well, my boss told me one day, "Come with me." Out at Moffett in Hangar One, and I went with him. We went up some stairs, and I thought, "I don't

know what we're doing going up these stairs; I don't know what we're doing going up here." But I went with him. Should I tell you?

Redman: Sure, yes.

2-00:39:13

Lesslie: So we went down this hallway, we were on the second deck on the side, and it was a little bit dark up there because all the lights are down below us. There were lights in the hangar, of course, the guys were working out there, but in that particular area it's kind of shady, kind of semi-dark and we walked down this aisle and he came to this doorway and he took a padlock—there was a padlock on it—and he a key out of his pocket and he opened it up and he swung the door open and I'm looking over his shoulder. There was nothing in that room but a bed under the window, and I took off on one hot trot. And that was the end of that. I went back down to my bench and sat at my desk, and he came down and not a word was said ever again. But it was wrong. It was uncalled for. It shouldn't have happened.

Redman: Right, but there probably weren't also the same protections for workers now where you could report something like that.

2-00:40:16

Lesslie: You couldn't report it. But in those days you just shut up. It was wrong, but it was one of those things that happened.

Redman: Yup, and you just tried to put it out of your mind and keep working. Did you ever mention it to the other girls?

2-00:40:33

Lesslie: I don't know if I ever talked to them about it at all. I don't know. But it was just one of those things. And there were times when I was working even at Hiller Aircraft there would be things that were said that shouldn't have been said. Men are men, okay? And sometimes they would say things that were out of line. So you had to think, we didn't go anywhere. We didn't report these things. There was no place for us to go anyway. Who the heck cared?

Redman: Very different attitudes toward that.

2-00:41:04

Lesslie: Very different than today, yes. There were things that shouldn't have happened. And it hurt, sometimes it hurt, but we just kind of put it out of your mind and just kept doing whatever you had to do.

Redman: So that was an eye opening experience for you as a young girl.

2-00:41:19

Lesslie: Yes, at that time, yes. But I was old enough to be able to handle it, and I was only seventeen.

Redman: Now I'd like to turn to by way of summarizing, thinking about—yeah, I'd asked you to think about the war and you'd mentioned this. This is the way it kicks off your career, it jump starts your career. It seems like there's also personally for you it was a trying time with your husband being away and emotionally that must have been hard—

2-00:41:50

Lesslie: Yes.

Redman: And yet at the same time you're doing this new, exciting job.

2-00:41:55

Lesslie: It was good for me at the time. Also at the time the big thing was my insurance. My husband unfortunately didn't have good health, and he had a lot of medical problems and a lot of hospital stays and a lot of serious things. So eighty percent would be paid by his insurance, the twenty percent would have killed us if I didn't have additional insurance to pick up. Because he had two very serious back surgeries, he had open heart surgery twice. He had an aneurism of his aorta once that should have killed him, almost did. Didn't, but those were Stanford things. Eighty percent was fine, but twenty percent would have killed us, and I wasn't working and making money with the insurance to cover.

Redman: To cover that extra cost. We've gone through a lot of things today, we started off talking about life before the war and what your parents were like, what their lives were like, what their backgrounds were like. We talked about the New Deal, FDR and listening to fireside chats. Then we got into life during the war, your job at Moffett Field, what the different girls were like, the training was like, do you have anything else to add before we wrap up today?

2-00:43:07

Lesslie: I can't think of anything.

Redman: We did a pretty good job covering a lot of stuff.

[End of Interview]