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Phyllis Maloney

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

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

Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2012

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Phyllis Maloney, "Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project" conducted by Sam Redman in 2012, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



Phyllis Maloney

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Interview 1: January 30, 2012
Begin Audiofile 1

Redman: My name is Sam Redman. Today is January 30, 2012, and I'm sitting down in San Mateo, California today with Phyllis Maloney, who will speak to me about her life during World War II on the East Coast. Before we dive into your work during the war, I'd love to ask you a few basic questions about your early life and childhood, but feel free to share as many details as you like. But can we begin by—would you say your name and then spell it for me?

1-00:00:34
Maloney: Phyllis Maloney, P H Y L L I S, M A L O N E Y.

Redman: Great, and can you tell me where were you born?

1-00:00:46
Maloney: I was born in Friendsville, Maryland.

Redman: Would you care to tell me what your birthday is, when you were born?

1-00:00:52
Maloney: March 12, 1916.

Redman: How old would that make you now, Phyllis?

1-00:00:56
Maloney: That would make me almost 96.

Redman: Almost 96 years old.

1-00:01:03
Maloney: I will be 96 in March.

Redman: Okay, all right. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents? Who they were. What their personalities were like.

1-00:01:12
Maloney: My mother was born in Maryland, and my father was born in Pennsylvania. I will tell you how they met. They had in Williamsport, Pennsylvania a postcard exchange club so people could try to meet one another from different parts of the country. So they exchanged post cards, and that's how they met. They met in Friendsville, Maryland, and were married in March 11, I think it was, in 1911.

Redman: So had they been born on the East Coast? Were they from there originally as well?

1-00:02:05
Maloney: I'm not sure exactly where my grandfather was, but my grandmother was born in—my mother was born in Friendsville, Maryland, and my grandmother too.

Redman: Okay, so your family had been in the United States for some time.

1-00:02:23

Maloney: Oh, yes. My grandfather was of German descent, but he was not born in Germany.

Redman: I see, okay. Did you have any siblings?

1-00:02:35

Maloney: I had a brother and a sister, and they're both gone.

Redman: And did they stay on the East Coast?

1-00:02:44

Maloney: My brother stayed in Florida and my sister stayed in Maryland.

Redman: Do you have any early memories of attending elementary school—of being a really small child?

1-00:02:58

Maloney: Not really. We were—in 1925 I had an aunt in Florida whose husband was a carpenter and contractor. So he told my father if we moved to Florida he would always have a job with him. So we moved to Florida and lived there ten years.

Redman: Oh, is that right? What was that like as a small girl growing up in Florida for a little while?

1-00:03:34

Maloney: It was very nice. But to this day I do not like the weather there because it's too hot and humid. Of course, it was like that in Virginia too.

Redman: I see. So then eventually your family moves up back to Virginia.

1-00:03:51

Maloney: No, my parents never lived in Virginia.

Redman: So when you became a little older did you move up to Virginia yourself?

1-00:03:57

Maloney: I moved to Maryland to take care of my grandmother, and then I eventually moved to Uniontown, Pennsylvania, where I worked in an ice cream store for seven years. My first husband met me there.

Redman: At the ice cream shop?

1-00:04:19

Maloney: Uh huh. So then my first husband was an automobile mechanic, and many times they didn't have a—it was a small garage, and they didn't have work. So he put his name into the employment office to try to get a job. So

Pennsylvania Central Airlines was wanting mechanics during the war because a lot of the men had gone into the service. So he went down to Washington, DC and got a job with the Pennsylvania Central Airlines.

Redman: So he found work initially there.

1-00:05:07

Maloney: Um hmm. My first husband. Then he didn't like being down there alone, so he told them that he was going to have to leave because he didn't want to be down there by himself. They said, "Bring your wife down. We'll give her a job."

Redman: Is that right?

1-00:05:26

Maloney: So they gave me a job as an apprentice mechanic—

Redman: Wow.

1-00:05:33

Maloney: In April of 1943.

Redman: April of 1943. Let's get back to that in a moment. But I want to ask first, what was your family's religious background? Did they have a background in terms of religious faith?

1-00:05:51

Maloney: Oh, yes. My parents belonged to the Christian Church, and they were very active in that. We didn't always have a minister, a full time minister, so they would have one, and we often had them at our house for dinner on Sunday.

Redman: I was going to ask if your parents went to services, but you said sometimes there was a minister in town that they could do services. and sometimes there just wasn't a minister around.

1-00:06:27

Maloney: That's right.

Redman: Now, when you grew up a little more from when you moved to Florida in 1925, by 1929 I assume you would have been a pretty small girl when the Great Depression came around, when the great crash of 1929 happened.

1-00:06:45

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Do you remember when the stock market crashed in 1929?

1-00:06:50

Maloney: I don't remember much about it because we didn't have any money. We weren't into stocks at all. My father worked for a wealthy woman as her

gardener, and he always had a job, which was fortunate because a lot of people didn't.

Redman: That's right. So then when you were growing up after the crash I understand that it started affecting everyone—the Great Depression really started hurting everyone economically. Do you remember as a kid did you start to become aware of what money was, and jobs, and the economy and things like that because of maybe other parents in the neighborhood not having jobs or things like that?

1-00:07:51

Maloney: I don't recall it affecting me at all.

Redman: So did the other kids talk about parents who were out of work or anything like that?

1-00:07:59

Maloney: Not that I recall.

Redman: Do you have any early recollections, or did your parents have any thoughts about Herbert Hoover, the President who was in office when the crash happened and during your early childhood?

1-00:08:14

Maloney: I don't recall them talking about it.

Redman: Well then how about FDR? FDR is elected into office.

1-00:08:22

Maloney: Oh, yes. He was a great president.

Redman: So you really liked him.

1-00:08:24

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: What about your parents? Did they also have the same feeling?

1-00:08:30

Maloney: Well see, my mother died in 1929.

Redman: Is that right? What was that like for your family then after your mother's passing?

1-00:08:45

Maloney: Well, it was very sad, and my father never remarried. I had a brother and a sister, but my sister had to go to Maryland to take care of my grandmother.

Redman: And you would eventually go up—

1-00:09:05

Maloney: Um-hmm, also. And my brother was in the CCC camps.

Redman: Will you tell me about that? That's the Civilian Conservation Corps.

1-00:09:15

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Tell me what that was like for your brother? Do you know how he found that job or what he did?

1-00:09:22

Maloney: I don't recall, but we had a cousin in Pennsylvania, so I think he got in touch with my brother, and they were in the CCC together. They were in Pennsylvania in CCC.

Redman: Did he ever write you letters or tell you what that experience was like for him?

1-00:09:42

Maloney: Not really.

Redman: Not really? Okay, but it was good work for him, I expect.

1-00:09:47

Maloney: Yes, it was. Otherwise he may not have had any jobs at all.

Redman: Tell me about how far along each of the siblings went in school. How far did your brother go in school?

1-00:09:57

Maloney: We all just graduated from high school.

Redman: But you all did go all the way through high school.

1-00:10:02

Maloney: Yes, because we had no money to go any further.

Redman: How big was your high school class? Do you remember how many students were in the high school with you?

1-00:10:15

Maloney: Um-hmm. I remember how many were in my graduating class.

Redman: How many?

1-00:10:18

Maloney: Twenty-eight.

Redman: That's a pretty small school.

1-00:10:23
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: So you knew the other twenty-seven kids pretty well?

1-00:10:26
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Now was your brother pretty unique in going into the CCC or the WPA or the National Youth Administration, or the Tennessee Valley Authority? Were any of those other jobs programs hiring—?

1-00:10:43
Maloney: I don't think so.

Redman: Do you remember listening to FDR's Fireside Chats?

1-00:10:55
Maloney: Yes, I do, but I don't remember any of his—what all he talked about.

Redman: Okay, but you remember sitting down next to the radio—

1-00:11:01
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: What was that like? You don't need to talk about what he specifically said, but did it make you feel any way to hear him on the radio, or did you have a particular—?

1-00:11:13
Maloney: Not really.

Redman: Did you listen to any other radio programs growing up?

1-00:11:20
Maloney: We listened to the Grand Ole Opry from Tennessee.

Redman: From Nashville.

1-00:11:27
Maloney: Uh huh.

Redman: Now what is that show like? If I had never heard the Grand Ole Opry before, what would you tell me about it? What is it like as a show?

1-00:11:34
Maloney: It was just nice music.

Redman: Music. Kind of a variety hour show? Would there be some comedy skits maybe in between the music or—?

1-00:11:48
Maloney: I don't recall many skits.

Redman: Okay, but the music was what you tuned in for.

1-00:11:51
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Did you have any favorite subjects in school?

1-00:12:06
Maloney: Well I was very good in spelling, and if I maintained a certain average I didn't have to take the exam. I liked English pretty well, and wasn't too fond of geography or history. But I took three years of Latin, and I did pretty well in that.

Redman: Are you glad you took the Latin?

1-00:12:44
Maloney: Not really. Some of our words are derived from Latin, but I don't think it's—there just happened to be an opening there—I had to take something so I—I liked Latin.

Redman: What were the other people like in Florida at that time? My guess is that in Florida they would have had some pretty different attitudes about race and people being in different places and segregation—

1-00:13:18
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: That there were certain areas that white people could go and certain areas that black people could go.

1-00:13:23
Maloney: That's right.

Redman: That must have been a little different from Pennsylvania.

1-00:13:28
Maloney: Very different, and the black people lived in a certain part of town. They were—I recall if a white woman was walking down the sidewalk they would step off the sidewalk. And I also recall being on a bus in Tampa, Florida, and there was a black man who thought he'd sit up front. The bus driver made him go to the black seat. That was called the Jim Crow law?

Redman: Was that surprising for you to see?

1-00:14:10
Maloney: Yes it was. I think they weren't treated right.

Redman: So did that bother you a little in that—

1-00:14:20

Maloney: Not really.

Redman: Not at that time?

1-00:14:21

Maloney: Not at that time.

Redman: But later on you started to think about that then.

1-00:14:26

Maloney: I thought about it and so—

Redman: Okay, that's very interesting. So then tell me a little bit about how you met your husband, your first husband. You said you met at an ice cream shop.

1-00:14:40

Maloney: Yeah, in Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

Redman: In Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

1-00:14:44

Maloney: I worked in this ice cream shop. I dipped candy, I made ice cream, and of course waiting on customers too. It was a small store, and this man I worked for had some stores in different towns like in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania where Punxsutawney Phil came from.

Redman: Where on every Ground Hog's Day he sees his shadow or—

1-00:15:15

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: So then there must have been a little bit of a different attitude about race up in Pennsylvania. Was anyone welcome in the ice cream shop, or was it still whites predominantly?

1-00:15:34

Maloney: We didn't have that many black people there.

Redman: Okay, so it was a pretty small town I would guess—

1-00:15:39

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: It was pretty white town.

2-00:15:46

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Were most of the people European ancestry? Like Germans, or—?

1-00:15:49

Maloney: A little bit. That was a coal mining town. We had people from various races, and I remember the Russian women who used to come in to buy nuts to make some kind of desserts, and they would be wearing their black babushkas on their heads. They could speak enough English to tell you what they wanted.

Redman: What did you think of the different immigrants that you were working with? Did you think it was an interesting thing to have people come in and out and—?

1-00:16:25

Maloney: Yes, I thought it was interesting.

Redman: So then your future husband just came in one day and got a scoop of ice cream?

1-00:16:35

Maloney: He came in with a cousin of his and said to his male cousin, he says, “I want a date with her.” And he got it, and the rest is history.

Redman: All right. So then he found work as a mechanic eventually.

1-00:16:52

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Did he have training as a mechanic?

1-00:16:54

Maloney: I don't think he had training probably, just had the aptitude for mechanics and—

Redman: So he was able to do it.

1-00:17:03

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Had he grown up working on automobiles or things like that?

1-00:17:13

Maloney: Well, he was born in a very small town in Pennsylvania, and I don't recall him talking about that much.

Redman: How about your parents? Did your parents own a car?

1-00:17:22

Maloney: No, never had a car.

Redman: So then when you were growing up how did you get around if you needed to get from place to place? How did people get around before the automobile?

1-00:17:36

Maloney: Well, we did a lot of walking.

Redman: Do you think that's changed quite a bit?

1-00:17:44

Maloney: Yes. [laughs]

Redman: You think of all the cars that are around today. That must be quite a change from growing up without a car.

1-00:17:51

Maloney: I don't recall my brother even having a car when—he was older than I but—

Redman: Can we talk a little bit about the start of the war? I'd like to hear what you remember about December 7, 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you remember hearing the announcement?

1-00:18:11

Maloney: Yes, but I don't recall much about it.

Redman: Did you hear it over the radio, or did someone tell you? Do you recall?

1-00:18:23

Maloney: I heard on the radio, I'm sure.

Redman: Okay. Then the next day the President made a speech announcing that we were going to war with Japan and Germany.

1-00:18:34

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Do you remember how you felt at the start of the war? Were you scared or apprehensive or were you—?

1-00:18:41

Maloney: I don't recall too much about that.

Redman: So then the early days of the war starting in 1941—then they start rationing.

1-00:18:52

Maloney: Oh, yes. I have some ration books.

Redman: Tell me what rationing was like. What's a rationing book?

- 1-00:18:58
Maloney: Well, they had stamps in there. You had to have stamps before you could get certain things. We used to go from Uniontown to—no it was from Virginia to Pennsylvania. We got acquainted with a man who owned a gas station about halfway between. He says, “Don’t ever worry about having enough gas to get back, because I’ll see that you get enough to get back home.”
- Redman: Okay, so even though you only had so many rations, you may have a friend who would help you out if you got stuck? Inside the ration books you’d have these little stamps that you could give to a butcher, or at a gas station, or things like that. So you mentioned gas, but was anything else tough to find during the war?
- 1-00:20:19
Maloney: Well we didn’t have much of a problem because we lived in a furnished room at that time, and we took our meals with the lady next door, and she took care of all that.
- Redman: Okay, so did you pay her to be sort of the house mother or how—?
- 1-00:20:35
Maloney: We paid for our meals, and we rented a room next door to her before we got an apartment.
- Redman: Oh, so she furnished the room.
- 1-00:20:46
Maloney: Um-hmm.
- Redman: This older woman that you lived with. So did you spend any time then in Washington DC?
- 1-00:20:57
Maloney: Oh, yes. We lived right across the river in Alexandria, Virginia.
- Redman: Now, Alexandria, Virginia is a pretty busy place. It’s almost like a little extension of Washington, DC. There are lots of government buildings, lots of people live there. What about in those days? What was Alexandria, Virginia like?
- 1-00:21:20
Maloney: Well, I’ll tell you how you got an apartment. I think this is interesting. We had to buy the furniture that was in the apartment to get an apartment.
- Redman: Even before you could get an apartment, you had to get all the furniture together?
- 1-00:21:33
Maloney: They had the furniture in there.

Redman: Then you had to buy it?

1-00:21:38

Maloney: Yes. To get an apartment.

Redman: Really?

1-00:21:41

Maloney: Really.

Redman: That seems like an unusual arrangement, but I understand that housing was so hard to find.

1-00:21:46

Maloney: That's true.

Redman: So was it hard to find any place that would do it, and then you were willing to buy the furniture if—?

1-00:21:54

Maloney: Well, that's the only way you got an apartment. So before that we just lived in a furnished room in private homes.

Redman: So that was the arrangement that you had with this woman who would make meals?

1-00:22:05

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: So it was pretty hard to find an apartment in those days.

1-00:22:13

Maloney: Yes, very difficult.

Redman: Now Washington, DC. I understand would change a lot between 1941 and 1945. But during the years of the war I understand that a lot of new buildings went up in Washington, DC, and the Pentagon had just been built as a big building there. Do you remember, was there a lot of construction there during the war? Was there a lot going on in Washington, DC?

1-00:22:42

Maloney: Not too much. It was afterwards that it—

Redman: Oh really. So after the war it really grew in size?

1-00:22:48

Maloney: On V-E [Victory in Europe] or V-J [Victory over Japan] Day a friend of mine, she and I went into Washington, DC, and when all these servicemen—that was exciting time. You know the picture they took of the—was it a sailor taking—?

Redman: Yup, the sailor and the girl kissing.

1-00:23:13

Maloney: We got hugged, too.

Redman: I want to get back to that party—that big party at the end of the war. But before I ask that, let me ask about—were there lots of servicemen around Washington, DC during the—?

1-00:23:28

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: So lots of men in uniform?

1-00:23:31

Maloney: Yes, and I worked at the USO.

Redman: Oh, tell me what that was like. What was it like to work at the USO?

1-00:23:35

Maloney: Well we—a friend of mine—we worked in the USO, and they had a snack bar there, and we cooked hamburgers for the servicemen that came in. We had hung up their overcoats, and oh that was—they were heavy.

Redman: Oh, heavy overcoats that they—?

1-00:24:00

Maloney: Yeah, the very heavy ones.

Redman: The wool, yeah, okay. So did you meet young men then in the service from all over the country?

1-00:24:11

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Tell me what that was like for you.

1-00:24:14

Maloney: Well, of course I was married at that time, so I wasn't looking for a man. But my friend that I was with, she was looking for somebody, but she didn't really find anybody.

Redman: But you might introduce yourself and cook for the troops and dance and things like that.

1-00:24:33

Maloney: She danced with them some, but I was not a dancer so—

Redman: What type of music would people listen to? Was there jazz or swing or—?

1-00:24:42
Maloney: Mostly swing.

Redman: Swing music at the USO dances.

2-00:24:47
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: So then I wonder, did you ever go to the Smithsonian Museums in Washington, DC?

1-00:24:51
Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Do you remember what those were like? Was that impressive for you to see?

1-00:24:56
Maloney: Oh yes—very much so. I even saw the Hope diamond there.

Redman: Do you remember any skeletons on display or anything like that in Washington, D.C., or was the Hope diamond—is that what stood out the most?

1-00:25:17
Maloney: Um hmm.

Redman: I'd like to hear a little bit more about when you first found your job—when you came to work on the first day. Did you have to sign up and get an ID badge and things like that?

1-00:25:32
Maloney: Oh, yes. I've been looking for an ID badge, and I cannot find it.

Redman: But you think you might have it still to this day somewhere? Tucked in a corner somewhere, right?

1-00:25:42
Maloney: Tucked in the corner.

Redman: So they took your picture, and they gave you an ID badge. Tell me about what the airport was like. When you'd go to work and show up for work each day, what was it like?

1-00:26:04
Maloney: Well I—I would show up for work each day, and I worked in what was called the nacelle shop which is where the engine was attached to the—it would be attached to the air frame. But I installed accessories on aircraft engines like a fuel pump, hydraulic pump, prop[eller] governors, even carburetors. I worked with a few women, but some of the men weren't eligible to go into the service so there were still some of those around.

One of the men was teasing me one time, and I happened to have a wrench in my hand, and I said, "If you don't stop teasing me, I'm going to hit you with this wrench." Actually the wrench did slip out of my hand and did hit him—didn't hurt him. After that they says, "Don't mess with her, she'll hit you with a wrench."

Redman: You had mentioned that there were a few women working there with you—.

1-00:27:15

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: I understand as more and more men were drafted into the service, were more women working there over the course of time? Or was it about the same number—?

1-00:27:25

Maloney: About the same.

Redman: You said many of the men who worked there weren't eligible for one reason or another.

1-00:27:31

Maloney: That's right.

Redman: Maybe were they too old or were they 4-F or—?

1-00:27:36

Maloney: My husband was ineligible because he had high blood pressure. He was 4-F.

Redman: So people like that would have stayed at work.

1-00:27:44

Maloney: Yes, that's right.

Redman: Did you join a union?

1-00:27:49

Maloney: Yes, I did for a short while.

Redman: Do you recall the name of the union by any chance?

1-00:27:55

Maloney: Airline Mechanics Association. And I have my book somewhere.

Redman: So you hung on to that. What did you think about being a part of the union? Was that just kind of a matter of course, or were proud to be—?

1-00:28:09

Maloney: It was just a matter of course. No pride in it.

Redman: So how about health care. You probably were a pretty fit young woman at that time—

1-00:28:17

Maloney: I was.

Redman: But do you recall—were you guys offered any sort of health care plan or things like that?

1-00:28:26

Maloney: I don't recall any health care plan.

Redman: Now the young women, I assume most of them who you were working with, most of them were maybe either single or young and married, and their husbands were away. But I assume there weren't very many mothers.

1-00:28:46

Maloney: No, there weren't. It was mostly very young women looking for a man. Some of those weren't very good workers. And they sort of abused their sick leave.

Redman: Were the young men—how did they work with the young women? Do you think—?

1-00:29:10

Maloney: Oh, they worked fine with them.

Redman: So there might have been some teasing like how you'd mentioned the young man teasing you and you getting back at him with the wrench. But was it pretty light hearted, or were there sometimes where people would say offensive things or mean things?

1-00:29:26

Maloney: No, not really.

Redman: So people were pretty friendly to one another?

1-00:29:29

Maloney: Yes, very much so. They were very nice to the women.

Redman: When you came in to work each day, how did you get your tools? Were the tools just there in the shop?

1-00:29:47

Maloney: No, I had to buy my own.

Redman: You had to buy your own tools.

1-00:29:50

Maloney: Um hmm.

Redman: How did you go about doing that? Did your husband also have to buy his own tools?

1-00:29:53

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: So did you maybe do something—?

1-00:29:56

Maloney: I still have some of them.

Redman: Is that right? Wow. [laughter] So how did that work? Did you just go to a local hardware shop and find some of the tools, or do you remember how—?

1-00:30:09

Maloney: I don't remember how I got them. No, I don't recall—and I don't think we had a shop there that sold them. I don't recall how I—

Redman: So how would you get back and forth to work each day?

1-00:30:31

Maloney: We had a car.

Redman: You had a car at that time.

1-00:30:35

Maloney: Um-hmm. Oh we had a car when we went to Washington, DC area.

Redman: I see, all right. So then by that time maybe rubber was rationed and gasoline was rationed, but you would have had enough rations to get back and forth to work and back.

1-00:30:50

Maloney: Um hmm, because it wasn't very far. Oh, I'll tell you something you might like, some of the beds, they call them hotbeds, because there was always someone sleeping in one. Due to shift work, you know. So they could have three people sleeping in one bed at different times.

Redman: Wow, so some of the workers that you worked with—did you get the impression that maybe that was their housing situation, that they would go—?

1-00:31:28

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: So they were living in sort of a temporary place.

1-00:31:35

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Why would they do something like that? Were the wages so good, or were—?

1-00:31:41

Maloney: The wages weren't all that great, and besides that—the housing was—it was hard to get a place to live.

Redman: Were people doing this, do you think, because of the effects of the Great Depression?

1-00:31:55

Maloney: Could be.

Redman: Could be, or they wanted to participate in the war effort— or something, okay. That must have been a tough thing for people to—

1-00:32:05

Maloney: Yes. Whether or not the sheets were changed all the time, I don't know.

Redman: So did some of the young women who worked there did they, like yourself, would they live—did you get the sense that they were living with their families or were they living with—?

1-00:32:23

Maloney: I don't really know who they were living with. But they weren't too interested in jobs.

Redman: Really? Okay.

1-00:32:34

Maloney: I started the job at sixty cents an hour. It was forty-eight hours a week.

Redman: So did you work during the days?

1-00:32:50

Maloney: Yeah, I was on day shift.

Redman: Day shift, but there was a night shift?

1-00:32:54

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: For the mechanics? Okay. So tell me about Pennsylvania Central Airlines. I understand this later becomes part of United Airlines.

1-00:33:06

Maloney: Yes, they started out as Pennsylvania—as I recall there were two airlines, Pennsylvania and Central Airlines, and they became one—became Pennsylvania Central Airlines. So then they started calling it PCA, the Capital Airline, and they dropped the PCA part and called it Capital Airlines. And they went bankrupt, so United took them over, and everyone who worked at Capital Airlines was offered a job with United. If they chose not to accept that job where it was offered—what city—too bad—they were let go. But I took a

leave of absence because I wasn't sure I wanted to come back to work when my husband was offered a job out here. So I lost nineteen days seniority. So I decided when I came out here I would go back to work. So they found a job for me.

Redman: We'll get into that in a moment because that sounds like a really interesting story, and I'd like to learn more about that. I imagine there was much less air travel in those days than there is today.

1-00:34:37

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: But I get the impression that some of the airplane production during World War II really ramped up and the airline industry really boomed after World War II. Was the airport pretty busy in those days? Did you get the sense for a need for mechanics even on civilian aircraft? Was that ramping up during the war? Were people traveling less during the war?

1-00:34:58

Maloney: I don't think they were traveling a great deal. I didn't travel any because you might go someplace, it wouldn't cost you much to get there, but you didn't have much money to spend after you got there.

Redman: Now when is the first time you took an airplane? Do you recall?

1-00:35:16

Maloney: Well, when I lived in Florida I took a little ride in a small aircraft. But I don't recall—

Redman: Your first commercial flight?

1-00:35:31

Maloney: Don't recall my first commercial flight. We had airplanes that we bought from England, viscount airplanes, and they would hold about fifty people.

Redman: Is that the type of airplane that you worked on—?

1-00:35:57

Maloney: No, I worked on the engines for the DC-3 [Douglas DC-3] airplanes.

Redman: So was that almost exclusively what you did, work on DC-3 airplanes?

1-00:36:08

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: And what were the common problems, or what were the things you remember working on about the DC-3?

1-00:36:25

Maloney: Well, people like to talk about seeing me sitting on top of a engine stand and installing a carburetor. We had to lease some planes to the military, the air transport division, and some of the—they took some of the airplanes to use in the military so—

Redman: Do you remember what you'd wear to work each day?

1-00:36:56

Maloney: Yeah.

Redman: Yeah, why don't you show me this picture? You can hold it up—

1-00:37:03

Maloney: It shows that—

Redman: Okay, so here's—oh, is this you in the image?

1-00:37:09

Maloney: Yeah.

Redman: All right. So your maiden name was McCoy—

Redman: And it says “of the Nacelle Shop, was one of the 29 PCAers to give their blood last month. More are needed, how about you? This is the least our fighting boys can expect of you.” So you gave blood.

1-00:37:34

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Do you recall giving blood in those days during World War II?

1-00:37:46

Maloney: Well, it was just a case here of being the right place at the right time. No, I didn't do that very often, but a lot of people did. They belonged to the Gallon Club, and—

Redman: So now I see you here wearing some overalls, is that right?

1-00:38:02

Maloney: Yeah, I still have that—it's hanging in the closet there.

Redman: Oh that's funny. So you've got a pair of overalls, and did you wear a head scarf to keep your hair from—?

1-00:38:14

Maloney: Not that I recall.

Redman: How about safety goggles? Did you have to wear any safety goggles working on the engines or anything like that?

1-00:38:21

Maloney: No.

Redman: And no hearing protection for the engines?

1-00:38:25

Maloney: No.

Redman: So it's interesting to think of if you see people working on engines now, they've got the ear goggles and the eye goggles, but those things probably weren't around.

1-00:38:42

Maloney: No, they weren't around at that time.

Redman: Do you think the safety conditions at the airport were pretty good, or were—?

1-00:38:45

Maloney: Yes, I think they were.

Redman: Do you recall some of the steps that they took, or were there safety training or anything like that? Or people just reminding each other to be careful, or how did that work?

1-00:38:55

Maloney: No, just more or less a verbal—

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit more about what the other workers were like? Did you make friends with some of the other workers?

1-00:39:09

Maloney: Yes, uh huh.

Redman: What did you like about them? What sorts of things did you talk about?

1-00:39:19

Maloney: Well, I don't recall anything in particular we talked about.

Redman: Oh no, that's fine. We can take as much time as we like. That's fine.

1-00:39:46

Maloney: Oh I'll tell you the way. The way I stayed on with the airline—when the men were coming back from the service there were times when we didn't have any work in the shop. So I worked in the office sometimes when I—so an opening came up in the office, and that's how I got to stay on. But the other females were laid off when the men came back from the service.

Redman: Oh is that right. So when the men came back, the other women were laid off. But you were able to stay working at the airline in the office.

1-00:40:29

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Do you recall what you did in the office?

1-00:40:33

Maloney: Oh, just general, I kept time on engines and propellers. Engines and propellers were not allowed to run but so many hours. So I kept time on hours and minutes. By their serial number and—

Redman: Back when you were working as a mechanic, did you bring your lunch each day to work?

1-00:40:59

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Tell me on a typical day what might you have packed in your lunch?

1-00:41:05

Maloney: Just a sandwich probably.

Redman: A sandwich and any fruits or things like that?

1-00:41:11

Maloney: I don't think so. The lady that we stayed with, she packed our lunch.

Redman: She would pack your lunch in the morning and—?

1-00:41:19

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Now how about—so I think coffee was rationed, is that right?

1-00:41:22

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: But did people still drink coffee during the war?

1-00:41:26

Maloney: Not quite as much.[laughter]

Redman: Not quite as much. [laughter] So maybe instead of having that second cup in the morning, you'd just have the one or how did that work or—?

1-00:41:36

Maloney: Probably just one.

Redman: So do you recall seeing any posters of things like "Loose Lips Sink Ships" or rationing posters or things like that?

1-00:41:50
Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Posters encouraging people to buy war bonds and things like that?

1-00:41:54
Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: So those were visible around the city. Were they visible at the workplace too, like posters, things like that?

1-00:42:02
Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: How about—did you buy war bonds at work? Were there war bond drives—things like that?

1-00:42:09
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: How did that work, do you remember?

1-00:42:12
Maloney: I don't recall exactly, but we did that. I have a whole bunch of little magazines—this is part of a magazine, and it was put out each month.

Redman: Now when you were working as a mechanic, did you consider yourself a Rosie the Riveter?

1-00:42:36
Maloney: Not particularly. It was just a job. It was a job, and I was there to do the best I could.

Redman: Now how about years later when people started using the phrase “Rosie the Riveter” to talk about women who worked in the industries during World War II, did that—do you still not think of yourself as just working in a job, or now do you look back on it?

1-00:43:01
Maloney: I look back at it and think how important it was, but I didn't give it too much thought before.

Redman: So at the time you didn't think much of it, but now you look back on it and think of it as being pretty significant—pretty important.

1-00:43:14
Maloney: It was pretty significant.

Redman: Let's talk about the end of the war. The party at the end of the war, at either V-E Day or V-J Day, you can't really recall you said which big event you went to, one of the two?

1-00:43:30

Maloney: We just took a bus and went over to Washington, DC because it was so exciting all those people over there and—

Redman: Do you recall hearing the news that the atomic bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war? Do you recall hearing—?

1-00:43:47

Maloney: I don't recall much about that.

Redman: So then tell me a little bit about what this party was like at the end—were there lots of people in the streets?

1-00:43:55

Maloney: Yes. In Washington, D.C. there were just mobs of people there in the street and they were just so excited that it was over.

Redman: A few months earlier FDR had passed away, and he had been President for a long time and especially over the course of your life. By that time he had been President for most of your life and all of your adult life. Were you sad when he passed away?

1-00:44:24

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Do you recall that feeling or—?

1-00:44:27

Maloney: Not particularly.

Redman: Not particularly. Then this new guy comes in, Harry Truman—

1-00:44:34

Maloney: Oh, yes.

Redman: Do you remember having any thoughts of him at first? Did you like him, or were you unsure or—?

1-00:44:39

Maloney: I liked him okay, but he was so different. I don't know, sometimes you're busy working you don't give it too much thought.

Redman: To politics or the things like that that are going on. You were so busy working, but did you keep up with what was going on in the war at all? Did you read the newspaper or listen to the news? Would people talk about when things like Midway happened, or the Battle of the Bulge, or D-Day? When

those big events happened fighting overseas, would people talk about that at work?

1-00:45:21

Maloney: Oh, yes. They'd talk about that at work. My second husband was in the service, and he wasn't really active duty, he was mostly a radio or telephone operator. He was there at the Battle of the Bulge.

Redman: That's a funny coincidence. My grandfather was there too. I wonder if they ran into each other.

1-00:45:51

Maloney: Oh, my. I've been over there too.

Redman: So you had a chance to go over to Europe and visit—

1-00:45:59

Maloney: Oh we did a lot of traveling.

Redman: Oh that's great. So let's talk about what got you transferred out to California.

1-00:46:09

Maloney: Well, United offered people jobs. They offered my husband a job out here, and so he was working in the sheet metal shop. That's where—he started out out here as a foreman. Then he—but back in the East Coast he built a test cell on the chassis of a bus, and they tested engines on this bus. It was a Washington, DC old bus there they—

Redman: So they would pop in a new engine on this bus and test it out to see how it worked—?

1-00:47:03

Maloney: Um-hmm. They had to test them before they could put them on an airplane.

Redman: Yeah, it makes sense. But its kind a neat rig to think of putting it on an old Washington, DC bus to test out these airplane engines.

1-00:47:14

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: That's pretty amazing. So my guess is that these jet engines, the new jet engines that were coming along were pretty different—

1-00:47:25

Maloney: Very different.

Redman: But in these days it would have been all propellers, but then at the end of the war you might have started hearing about some of these new jet airplanes. But do you recall that at all, or were you—?

1-00:47:41

Maloney: No, I don't.

Redman: So then in the fifties and the sixties maybe as more and more jets start appearing, you start to become a little more familiar with it, I suspect?

1-00:47:51

Maloney: I didn't have anything to do with engines then.

Redman: Now, what I'd like to do is if it's all right I'd like to switch to a new tape and then ask you a little bit about what life was like in California.

Begin Audiofile 2

Redman: All right, my name is Sam Redman. Today is January 30, 2012. I'm in San Mateo, California with Phyllis Maloney, and this is our second tape together today. So we're talking about life at the end of the war and then moving out to California. Do you recall what year you arrived in California with your first husband? Do you recall when that would have been?

2-00:00:32

Maloney: Not with my—my first husband was never in the—

Redman: So would you mind telling me what happened with your first husband? You guys split up?

2-00:00:47

Maloney: I was in a convention in Richmond, Virginia, and my husband had gone to Pennsylvania to see his sister. He'd driven back from there, and he took some roses to a neighbor two doors away from us while he was waiting for me to come home, and he had a massive heart attack. Never knew what happened. He just quit talking. At forty-seven years old.

Redman: Forty-seven. Oh, that's tragic. I'm sorry to hear that.

2-00:01:17

Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: So this was in the fifties?

2-00:01:22

Maloney: He died in 1960.

Redman: Then how did you meet your second husband?

2-00:01:29

Maloney: Well, I knew him at the airline. He worked there.

Redman: What did he do at the airline?

2-00:01:34
Maloney: He was a foreman, and then he was a planner. Four years ago in June he fractured his hip in the living room—went to the hospital, and got pneumonia. Ten days later he was gone.

Redman: Oh, that's—

2-00:02:03
Maloney: This is his picture.

Redman: Okay, that's him with a horse. Did he like horses?

2-00:02:06
Maloney: Oh, he loved horses. He was born in North Dakota. They had horses on the farm.

Redman: So was he mechanical as well?

2-00:02:17
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: So he liked working with engines and planes and—

2-00:02:20
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: He worked his way up to being a foreman. So now when you left working with the engines, back towards the end of the war when the GIs were coming back and they were getting their jobs, were a lot of the women sad about losing their jobs or—?

2-00:02:41
Maloney: I think they were, yes.

Redman: Okay, because women tell me different things about the end of the war. Some women say, "Oh, we were excited to leave working," but other women say they were really sad to lose their jobs because it was good paying and—

2-00:02:56
Maloney: I think it was about fifty-fifty.

Redman: What about the women that you knew? Did they seem like some of them were sad to leave that job?

2-00:03:10
Maloney: Well, I think they were. But I think most of them didn't really—they were just young people and they didn't express their thoughts about it.

Redman: Now did the airline encourage young women to leave, or did they fire them or did they—?

2-00:03:27
Maloney: They just got laid off because the men wanted their jobs back, which I can understand that.

Redman: So then you moved over into the office.

2-00:03:38
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Did you like the office work compared to being a mechanic?

2-00:03:42
Maloney: Oh, yes. I liked both of them. But I liked being a mechanic too. I think it was interesting.

Redman: Now the job that you did in the office sounds pretty interesting. Tracking the number of hours that each engine was allowed to run?

2-00:04:04
Maloney: Um-hmm. Before it had to come in for a complete overhaul.

Redman: Now before the days of computers, I'm wondering how the heck you would keep track of all of those numbers.

2-00:04:15
Maloney: Writing.

Redman: Writing it all down.

2-00:04:16
Maloney: On cards.

Redman: Now how would people let you know how many hours those engines had run?

2-00:04:25
Maloney: Well, we had a department that told me that.

Redman: They would submit information to the airline, and then that information would get to you?

2-00:04:33
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: And then you'd keep track of all of it on cards.

2-00:04:37
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Then how were the cards filed away? Do you remember how that system worked at all? Was there a big filing cabinet with—?

2-00:04:47
Maloney: No, it was a rotary thing.

Redman: A big rotary filing—

2-00:04:52
Maloney: Um hmm, with cards on it.

Redman: So you'd be able to find which one corresponded with each—

2-00:04:58
Maloney: They had their serial numbers and—

Redman: That's pretty amazing.

2-00:05:03
Maloney: And it was a very responsible job because if—now and then an engine would come in just to have some work done on it, and it would go back out with some time on it. So you had to keep track of the time so that—

Redman: So the clock wouldn't reset unless it had a major overhaul, the engine.

2-00:05:24
Maloney: That's right.

Redman: And you wanted to make sure that each engine had a major overhaul after a certain number of hours in flight?

2-00:05:35
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Were there times where you would be working on a plane and you'd catch something that was wrong with the engine and you'd think, "Oh, geez?"

2-00:05:44
Maloney: No, I don't recall—

Redman: So mostly it was pretty regular maintenance and pretty—?

2-00:05:49
Maloney: Yes.

Redman: I'd like to ask a little bit about what your reaction was when you moved out to California. Do you remember what year that was? I know this is many years after the war.

2-00:06:02
Maloney: 1962.

Redman: 1962 you moved out to California. So life had changed pretty dramatically since the end of the war but then—was this your first time in California when you came out to—?

2-00:06:19

Maloney: When I was married the second time we came out on our honeymoon. But that's the first time I'd ever been to California.

Redman: Is that right? And what was your reaction? What did you think of California?

2-00:06:28

Maloney: Oh, I loved it. I still do.

Redman: What did you like about it?

2-00:06:32

Maloney: Well, I like the weather. In Virginia we had pretty cold weather.

Redman: It gets pretty cold and pretty hot too in the summertime.

2-00:06:43

Maloney: Pretty hot in the summer and very cold—lots of snow.

Redman: And so this was a good change in terms of weather and—

2-00:06:49

Maloney: Yes.

Redman: Now how long have you lived in this area?

2-00:06:55

Maloney: We came out here and lived at the De Sabla Apartments for a short while in San Mateo, and then my husband and another friend came out together, and they went house hunting together. So we found this house in Belmont. They both found houses in Belmont next door to one another, brand new houses built by two different builders. So we lived in Belmont for seventeen years, and then we were tired of the hill we were on. So we found this house on level ground, and so we bought this in 1981.

Redman: If you were to summarize for me how this area has changed since the 1960s all the way through the 1980s? More cars? More roads? More people?

2-00:08:03

Maloney: Oh, a lot more cars, a lot more people. Yes it's gotten—almost too many people.

Redman: It's filled in quite a bit. Now I'd like to ask a question from a different tack. I'd like to ask, if you could look back on the war in your life and what that moment was, those few years when you were working as a mechanic—well how long—so you said you worked starting in April 1943. Is that correct?

2-00:08:31
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: How long did you work as a mechanic?

2-00:08:38
Maloney: One year.

Redman: One year until 1944?

2-00:08:42
Maloney: Um-hmm.

Redman: Then you stayed on—you did office work there for how many years? Do you have a sense of—?

2-00:08:54
Maloney: Well, until we moved out here. So it would have been from '45 until, let's see, I'm trying to think—

Redman: That's fine, take your time to think it over.

2-00:09:22
Maloney: I did office work from '45 until 1961. I came out here and did office work, too.

Redman: So what type of work did you find out here?

2-00:09:41
Maloney: I had a split job. I sat at one desk in the morning, I did personnel work. In the afternoon I worked with some engineers.

Redman: Now how about children? Did you have any children?

2-00:10:07
Maloney: No.

Redman: No. So some of your women your same age, they must have had to stop working at a certain point because they had kids? But that was not an issue.

2-00:10:18
Maloney: I don't recall that happening while they were—

Redman: Especially during the war, that probably didn't happen very often.

2-00:10:27
Maloney: That's right.

Redman: Now, I'd like to ask if you could think back at the war, what does the war mean to you? How about the phrase "The Greatest Generation?" What do you think of that phrase?

2-00:10:41

Maloney: The Greatest Generation?

Redman: When we use that phrase, what do you think of that?

2-00:10:48

Maloney: I never would give that any thought. Well, it was a pretty great generation because of the things that we had to do to help the war effort.

Redman: And what do you think of the war? In terms of your entire life history, how does the war fit in to your story, do you think?

2-00:11:13

Maloney: Well, I think it's a very important part of my history because we were doing things that we never thought we could do. Like being a mechanic, and we were helping out, and I think it was a great time.

Redman: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with me, any other thoughts on World War II? We've talked about a lot of things today. We've talked about your early life and childhood, and being in school, and who your parents were, what the Depression was like. Then finding work at the airline and all of the different jobs you did there and throughout the war. Is there anything else that you'd like to add on World War II before we conclude?

2-00:12:05

Maloney: I can't think of anything.

Redman: Well, I'd like to thank you for sitting down with me today and—

2-00:12:12

Maloney: Well, it's been interesting.

Redman: Great, well thank you so much.

2-00:12:16

Maloney: And I hope I haven't bored you.

Redman: No, not at all. [laughter]

[End of Interview]