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Barbara Manakoff and Ann Stepan

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

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Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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Barbara Manakoff and Ann Steppan

Table of Contents—Barbara Manakoff and Ann Stepan

Interview 1: October 18, 2010

Audio File 1 1

Meeting in kindergarten – experiences in school – experiences during the Great Depression – finding jobs at Richmond shipyards – reactions to attack at Pearl Harbor – blackouts – thoughts on Japanese internment – thoughts on migrants from South and Midwest – work in shipyard as steel checkers on craneway – dressing for work – watching ships be launched – going out in San Francisco with work clothes – safety at the shipyard – eating lunch and Victory gardens – pay – segregation and desegregation – lack of interaction with unions – experiences during the Port Chicago explosion.

Audio File 2 34

Port Chicago experiences continued – news and information consumption – reactions to atomic weapons – Hiroshima and Nagasaki – post-war job at Oakland Army Base – post-war job with Pacific Overseas Air Service Command – thoughts on the Rosie the Riveter image – reflections on time in shipyards – meeting soldiers at USO and other dances – final reflections on how Rosie the Riveter is remembered.

Interview 1: October 18, 2010
Begin Audio File 1 10-18-2010.mp3

Redman: All right. My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today with Barbara and Ann, and they've agreed to sit down with me and do an interview today for the Rosie the Riveter project. I'd like to begin just by asking you both if you could tell me your names and where you were born.

01-00:00:28

Manakoff: Go ahead, Ann. You go first.

Steppan: I'm Ann Steppan, and I was born in St. Louis, Missouri.

Manakoff: Well, I'm Barbara Manakoff, and I was born in Oakland, California.

Redman: Okay. And I understand that the two of you met in kindergarten. Is that right?

01-00:00:46

Manakoff: Yeah, yeah.

Steppan: Right.

Redman: So do you remember anything about the circumstances of how you—

01-00:00:52

Manakoff: I remember Miss Estes, the kindergarten teacher. [laughs] That's the only thing I remember.

Steppan: And Mrs. Hiskey.

Manakoff: And Mrs. Hiskey, Ruth Hiskey, right.

Redman: And who's Ruth Hiskey?

01-00:01:03

Steppan: She was a teacher of a class in the upper grades in grammar school.

Redman: Okay. And tell me a little bit about the school. Do you remember the school where you—

01-00:01:13

Manakoff: We both went to—

Steppan: Crocker Highlands.

Manakoff: —Crocker Highlands, in Oakland.

Steppan: And it was called grammar school then.

Manakoff: Crocker, C-R-O-C-K-E-R, Highlands.

Redman: And Ann, you had obviously moved from St. Louis at that point.

01-00:01:30
Manakoff: When did you move?

Steppan: Permanently, out here, when I was about three.

Redman: Three years old, okay.

01-00:01:35
Steppan: So I've been here eighty-three years, [Manakoff laughs] eighty-four years. [laughs]

Redman: Did your parents talk at all about why they chose to move to California?

01-00:01:49
Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: And what were some of their reasons?

01-00:01:52
Steppan: My father's business wanted to open an office in Oakland or San Francisco. And so we went back and forth until they found a spot. And that meant that we stayed here.

Redman: Okay. And what business was he in, what trade was he in?

01-00:02:10
Steppan: Life insurance.

Redman: Life insurance. Okay. And so growing up in that era, were times tough for either of your families during the Great Depression? Do you remember?

01-00:02:21
Steppan: Oh, yes.

Manakoff: Well, yes. My family didn't suffer much.

Steppan: But you don't write much life insurance during that time. [they laugh]

Manakoff: Oh, no. And my dad was a banker, and bankers never suffered, really.

Steppan: Still don't. [they laugh]

Manakoff: Right. Right.

Redman: So do you feel like you could sort of see the Great Depression happening around you, but maybe your own families—

01-00:02:53

Manakoff: You mean now?

Redman: Well, no, as a child growing up.

01-00:02:57

Manakoff: No. No. We were too young for that, really— Well, we knew that there was some things that we couldn't get or have. But my folks, my mother's people were in the cattle business, so we didn't have any problem with getting meat, whereas other people had to use—what did they call—ration stamps for meat.

Steppan: Oh, that was wartime.

Manakoff: Oh, yeah, that was. I take it back. I don't remember anything from the Depression. We were very young.

Redman: Right, yeah. So did either of you have any favorite subjects in school, growing up?

01-00:03:32

Manakoff: Art, for me.

Steppan: Well, Barbara was very good with art.

Redman: Okay. What kind of art did you like?

01-00:03:39

Manakoff: See that little horse on the counter?

Steppan: Oh, yeah.

Manakoff: I made that when I was in kindergarten. Or not kindergarten, in one of the first grades. I liked sculpture. I have a couple of things in the other room that I painted.

Redman: Oh, fantastic.

01-00:03:59

Manakoff: And I was in fashion illustration in San Francisco. So all my training from high school on was art.

Redman: Okay. Fantastic. And you didn't have a particular subject in school?

01-00:04:13

Steppan: No.

Redman: Okay. So tell me a little bit about meeting in kindergarten.

01-00:04:20

Manakoff: Well, how would we remember how we met? We were in the same class. We were in the same class.

Redman: So that relationship continued on throughout your—

01-00:04:32

Steppan: Yeah, we've stayed friends all these years. I changed schools when we moved to Piedmont. Otherwise, I was seventh grade at Westlake Junior High, and Barbara was, too. Then we moved to Piedmont, and I went to Piedmont—

Manakoff: We had junior highs then, between the grammar school and the high school.

Redman: Okay. So moving on from grammar school through junior high school and into high school, do you have any recollections about what the Bay Area was like during high school? What things were like before the war?

01-00:05:20

Manakoff: Well, we had high school sororities. Well, in my high school we did.

Steppan: Piedmont didn't have sororities or fraternities. They had clubs and academic honor clubs.

Manakoff: There were fraternities. In *high school*, of all places. But I don't remember anything— Oakland was a wonderful city then. We never had a fear in our lives when we were young, about anything.

Redman: So you felt like it was pretty safe?

01-00:05:44

Manakoff: Oh, absolutely.

Steppan: Oh, yes.

Manakoff: It never even occurred to us that it *wouldn't* be safe.

Steppan: Right.

Redman: Oh, interesting. Okay. And you were comfortable—

01-00:05:53

Steppan: The entire years, we felt comfortable. I *still* feel comfortable.

Redman: You still feel comfortable—

01-00:05:59

Manakoff: Well, I don't. I've heard so many bad things. And I don't live there, so I don't really— And she lives in Piedmont, so she doesn't live in the part of Oakland that would be not so great.

Redman: So did either of you have any jobs growing up? Or were you mainly focused on school? Did you have an part-time jobs growing up? [They shake heads no] Okay. So no. And were either of you married?

01-00:06:30

Steppan: When?

Redman: Were either of you married at the start of the war?

01-00:06:37

Steppan: Well, Barbara and I heard from my future first husband that there was an opening on graveyard shift, at Kaiser Richmond Shipyards. And we told my mother, “We’re going to work out there.” She said, “Do you have any idea how you’re going to get there?” There was no freeway at that time.

Manakoff: And we didn’t drive.

Steppan: Of course. And we said no, we hadn’t gotten that far. We’d just figured on getting there somehow. Well, my mother said, “Well, I’ll take you if that’s what you’re going to do.” Then she went to work, too, and she’d never worked in her life.

Manakoff: And she also—remember?—she said, “You’re not going to go out there working by yourselves. [laughs]

Steppan: “You girls are not going out there by yourselves.” [laughs]

Redman: So this man who would be your future husband told you about an opportunity at the Kaiser Shipyards.

01-00:07:41

Steppan: He worked there.

Redman: Okay, he worked there.

01-00:07:43

Steppan: So he had the knowledge of—

Redman: Openings.

01-00:07:47

Steppan: Yeah. He was a shipfitter.

Redman: Okay, shipfitter. So what sort of made you both jump up and say, hey, this sounds like something we want to do?

01-00:07:58

Manakoff: Well, let me show you. Let me show you my only claim to fame. And this answers your question. This was in the *Time* magazine of November 10 of 2003. And see? If you read that, that's what we thought.

Redman: So oh, in this blue quote here, it says, "We didn't care about the money. We all did what we could do for the war effort. We felt patriotic and we felt like we were doing our part." That's really wonderfully put.

01-00:08:36

Manakoff: That's my only claim to fame, is that— [they laugh]

Redman: So let's step back just for a moment, and let's talk a little bit about the start of the war. Do you guys remember the attack on Pearl Harbor?

01-00:08:53

Manakoff: Oh, of course.

Redman: Do you remember hearing about it and the declaration of war?

01-00:08:54

Manakoff: Of course.

Redman: Tell me some of the things that you guys were thinking about.

01-00:08:58

Manakoff: We thought that was *terrible* that they attacked Pearl Harbor. Didn't we?

Steppan: Yes.

Redman: And so it brought about this new patriotic sentiment, in some sense, and it made you guys want to—

01-00:09:13

Manakoff: Yes.

Steppan: Well, we also had blackouts at that time, and block wardens.

Manakoff: My dad was an area warden or something.

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about the blackouts, what that experience was like?

01-00:09:28

Manakoff: Not so great. [laughs]

Redman: Okay, yeah. For someone —

01-00:09:31
Steppan: You didn't have bright lights for the streetlights. A lot of lights would not be turned on. You had to have your dark curtains drawn. You did not let the light out.

Redman: So then the wardens would walk around the neighborhoods—

01-00:09:49
Manakoff: In those days, we had shades, not drapes like that closed particularly.

Steppan: Some houses had shades.

Manakoff: And they had to have the dark shades. Right? Right.

Steppan: Or draperies that were lined.

Manakoff: Or draperies, yeah.

Redman: So the wardens would walk around the neighborhoods that they were assigned to —

01-00:10:06
Manakoff: And make sure everybody was doing what they're supposed to do.

Redman: Okay. And you said your father did—

01-00:10:13
Manakoff: He was an area warden, which meant that he ordered around the block wardens. Yeah, yeah. That was it. He had a certain territory, I guess. And they walked, they didn't drive in cars, around—

Steppan: It's the same thing, driving or walking your assigned area.

Manakoff: They walked. And they checked everybody's windows to make sure no light was getting out.

Steppan: And anyone who was walking on the street, did they belong there?

Manakoff: Yes.

Steppan: And they should not be using a flashlight.

Manakoff: Right, right.

Steppan: And then they would report if somebody had a little leak of light coming out, and they'd go up to the door and tell them—

Redman: To fix it.

01-00:10:53

Manakoff: Yeah, yeah.

Redman: Okay. So was that scary at all? Or was that something that you just sort of got used to?

01-00:10:58

Steppan: We didn't feel it. We didn't feel it.

Manakoff: Well, yeah. We weren't scared.

Steppan: No.

Manakoff: We just did what we were told to do. My dad, I think they came to him and asked him to be an area warden. Because we'd lived there a long time and all. But I don't remember any fear at that time.

Steppan: No. I don't think we had any fear through the entire war.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

01-00:11:30

Steppan: Because it was not here. It was over there.

Manakoff: The only time I had a little bit of trepidation was when they were saying that the Japanese had submarines off the coast. Remember that?

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: And I didn't— it really—

Steppan: Along the Pacific.

Manakoff: Yeah, it didn't really sink in. [laughs]

Redman: Right.

01-00:11:54

Manakoff: And then they decided that everybody was having a fit about nothing.

Redman: Okay. So when it's right on your doorstep, there's—

01-00:12:03

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: Yeah, okay. So let me ask one question about— Did you know any people who were Japanese in California at the time? And had you heard about what was happening to Japanese or Japanese Americans?

01-00:12:17

Manakoff: Our gardener was Japanese.

Redman:

Oh, really? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

01-00:12:20

Manakoff: Well, he was a wonderful man. [chuckles] He always wore jodhpur pants and boots. [laughs] I don't know why. But he was a wonderful gardener, and he wasn't a young man. He was born in Japan, but he wouldn't have gone back.

Redman:

Okay. So was he assigned to a camp or anything like that, did you know?

01-00:12:42

Manakoff: I don't know. I really don't remember.

Redman:

Okay.

01-00:12:46

Steppan: Probably at the time that that happened, he was not working for you anymore. Because you were on into high school. I mean out of high school.

Manakoff:

Yeah, but he worked for my parents till 1958 or something.

Steppan:

Oh.

Redman:

Okay. So they kept a relationship following—

01-00:13:04

Manakoff: Yeah, yeah.

Redman:

Okay. Interesting. A lot of people were moving to the Bay Area around that time, from places like Oklahoma and Arkansas or from Minnesota and Iowa. Did you have any impressions of people that were moving to the Bay Area to sort of start working in Kaiser shipyards?

01-00:13:24

Manakoff: Ignorant.

Redman:

Ignorant, okay. Tell me about that.

01-00:13:28

Manakoff: [laughs] Well, just a lot of them couldn't read or write. They were pleasant, and we had no confrontations of any kind, but you never felt that they knew [laughs] what they were talking about.

Redman:

Okay.

01-00:13:46

Steppan: I hate to say it, but pretty much of the time, it's the same as that right now. So—

Manakoff: Yeah, right. [laughs]

Steppan: But I didn't know any Japanese at the time. I do now. And my daughter-in-law, one of my daughters-in-law, is Japanese American.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:14:07
Steppan: And her family were in the internment camp.

Redman: So some of that story is still alive.

01-00:14:14
Steppan: Oh, it's always alive, and it's alive in the Japanese, where they felt it was wrong. And I feel it was wrong.

Manakoff: Oh, yes!

Steppan: And I thought it was wrong at the time.

Manakoff: Yeah. We all thought that since they were American citizens, they had no right to do that to them.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:14:33
Steppan: And the fact that they didn't do anything like that with Germans who were here.

Manakoff: No, no. That's right.

Steppan: Only because it was easier for the Japanese to get here than the Germans.

Manakoff: I have— And I'm sure she's still living; I haven't seen her lately, but she was— They stuck them down at Tanforan Racetrack.

Steppan: Oh, yeah.

Manakoff: And she's *never* forgotten that.

Redman: Wow. Okay. Interesting. So just for a moment, I want to get back to impressions of people who were moving to the Bay Area, because I read in one other interview, someone commented that people who were so-called Arkies or Okies didn't know how to cash checks.

01-00:15:19
Manakoff: Well, that's right.

- Redman: So they would get these checks from their new jobs, but they had sort of no idea how to—
- 01-00:15:25
Steppan: What to do with it.
- Redman: Yeah, what to do with that. And so were there any stories sort of like that, where you aware of—
- 01-00:15:30
Manakoff: A lot of them couldn't even write their own name.
- Redman: Okay, so they'd have to make a mark?
- 01-00:15:34
Manakoff: Mm-hm.
- Redman: Okay. So you had some pretty vivid impressions of—
- 01-00:15:39
Manakoff: Well, we just—
- Steppan: Well, the lack of education through the South and Midwest, it was greater than here. And shouldn't have been. Those who worked in the shipyard came from all over the country to work. Some of them had never worked.
- Manakoff: Remember, too the blacks had more freedom here than they ever had in their lives.
- Steppan: Right, right. And many of them just stayed here because it was a better life here. And I don't blame them.
- Redman: So tell me about those first few days of working at the shipyards. So your mother had come along and said, "I'm not letting you guys go."
- 01-00:16:31
Manakoff: Well, and her brother and her uncle were with us, too. *We all* worked there.
- Steppan: Well, Barbara and my mother and I were on graveyard. And my dad was on swing at one of the places on the estuary in Oakland.
- Manakoff: {Ward Randocks?}?}
- Steppan: My father continued with his life insurance sales, but did the other for the war effort. And my brother and uncle were in Yard 2, Richmond Yard 2, as shipfitters. And then—
- Manakoff: Where was Jim? Which yard?

Steppan: Yard 3.

Manakoff: Three. Oh, that's right, that's right.

Steppan: Because we saw him on the outfitting dock.

Manakoff: That's right, that's right.

Steppan: When we finished work, the last ship built in the basin at my craneway and the next craneway, we were no longer needed in that part, to do what we were doing, so they sent us to the outfitting dock and we did the same thing there.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:17:35
Steppan: And my future husband was working on the outfitting dock there.

Redman: Okay. So you started at the craneway, is that correct?

01-00:17:42
Manakoff: Yes. We were called craneway checkers.

Steppan: Steel checkers on the craneways.

Manakoff: Steel checkers, craneway steel checkers.

Redman: Tell me what that is.

01-00:17:49
Steppan: Now, Richmond Yard 3 is the only shipyard that builds ships in basins. And you've got the craneways at the top to supply what builds the ship.

Manakoff: And the craneways were running on rails, right?

Steppan: Yeah. And I think this was the first basin building shipyard in the country.

Manakoff: Yeah, it was.

Steppan: Probably in the world.

Manakoff: It was, yes.

Steppan: It may still be the only one, because they're still doing them on the ways. And with the ways, you build it on a slant. Everything's on a slant. And then when you're ready to launch it, you knock out the supports underneath—

Redman: And it slides.

01-00:18:42
Steppan: It would slide down.

Manakoff: It would slide and go sideways, going down into the water.

Steppan: But in the basin— You've got gates at the end. There's no water in the basin until it's ready for launch.

Manakoff: Like a lock.

Steppan: Yeah, it's a lock.

Redman: So then you flood the basin, once the ship is ready.

01-00:19:01
Steppan: Yeah. And then after it's dedicated, the gates open and it goes out on its own and around to the outfitting dock.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: Okay. Fascinating. So when you guys say, when you were steel checkers, so was that a safety element? Were you checking the—

01-00:19:20
Steppan: You have the steel on the craneways—

Manakoff: Piles and piles.

Steppan: —and you're supposed to read the numbers painted on the steel plates and all for the location of the plates.

Manakoff: And we kept records.

Steppan: You were supposed to read that when a certain piece is to go onboard.

Manakoff: When the crane takes it.

Steppan: But you had to make sure that it was the right piece. And you did inventory each night.

Manakoff: Yeah, right. We had an outhouse to stay in. [laughs]

Steppan: And you have a crane walker, who is the safety person for the crane, to see that it's not overloaded or that it's not on a tilt.

Manakoff: And these were huge—

Steppan: They're huge.

Manakoff: —what we called gantry cranes in those days. They call them Whirley Cranes or something now.

Steppan: The one that's there still, it's called the Whirley Crane.

Manakoff: But we didn't call them that.

Steppan: No.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:20:19

Steppan: They also did what I think is new for these ships. They built double bottoms. To protect and to have ballast in them. And those were built right behind our local craneways.

Manakoff: Yes.

Steppan: And then we had to get out of the way when they turned them, when they were finished building them. And they turned them with the cranes, and then carried them out, rolled them out—Cranes rolled and carried these out over the basin to be put on the ship as they are part of the ship's keel.

Redman: So in some sense—

01-00:21:00

Steppan: To build the ship.

Redman: —in taking these pieces of steel that were assigned to be one place or another, and sort of matching up the numbers, it's somewhat like a puzzle, it sounds like, like putting together a giant, massive puzzle.

01-00:21:11

Manakoff: Well, these are like manifests. You have to keep track of what they took.

Steppan: But the purpose in some of this, to have them already there ready to go. They'd build a ship in seven days or four days—

Manakoff: Four. They had a world record.

Steppan: —completely. The first one. It was a record.

Manakoff: And still is, I *think*.

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: Four and a half days to build a complete Liberty ship.

Redman: I'm curious about the—

01-00:21:45

Steppan: So—

Redman: Yeah, go ahead.

01-00:21:46

Steppan: —this way. And you say it's a puzzle. Yes. It's worked that way. Next piece goes here. And my mother engraved the plates that went on the ships that say what it was.

Manakoff: And [chuckles] speaking of that, I had a little book, a little leather book a little bigger than this, and it had the whole blueprints of the ship. I didn't know, of course, any of this Rosie business was coming along, so I gave it to the Maritime Museum in San Francisco. But it had more than one plan for each deck.

Redman: Right.

01-00:22:34

Steppan: Well, they didn't just put us out there without some training.

Manakoff: Right.

Redman: So yeah, tell me about what training was like.

01-00:22:43

Steppan: We had to go to class, learn to read the blueprints, learn what it was all about, so that we could do the work.

Redman: And where were the classes?

01-00:22:56

Steppan: In one of the administration buildings.

Manakoff: Wasn't it over by the hospital? Pretty close?

Steppan: The clinic? No. The clinic was too small.

Manakoff: No, I guess it wasn't. No, I guess it wasn't.

Steppan: No, it was in the administration building.

Manakoff: Yes. Right, right. You're right.

Redman: So it was right on the facilities of—

01-00:23:09

Steppan: Yeah. Oh, my, yes. And anyone who worked who was not someone trained for the jobs, they were sent to school there on the property and taught.

Redman: So I've heard that some of the welders would take classes in Oakland or elsewhere before arriving— So this was sort of an onsite training for your—

01-00:23:32

Steppan: Right. So that you knew what you were doing, and where—

Manakoff: And then later on, I was going there for classes to become a shipfitter. I decided I thought that would be better.

Steppan: Well, that's what they were training us—

Manakoff: Yeah, right. But I didn't do it very long.

Steppan: It came under the title of what we were doing.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: Now, let's say I'm building a ship in four days. And there's a graveyard ship, there's a morning—

01-00:24:03

Steppan: Day and swing and graveyard.

Redman: Yeah. This 24/7 operation. And presumably, these records that you're keeping, you would then hand them off to the next crew, and then you'd get them back the next day that you came for work, with—

01-00:24:22

Steppan: Right, yeah.

Redman: So what was that like, to rely on some of these other folks? Did you know who these people were?

01-00:24:28

Manakoff: Well, we knew them vaguely. We knew them vaguely.

Steppan: They could be gone from this spot. Each basin had a steel checker, each one had a three-sided shed to use, keep the inventory papers in.

Manakoff: With a heater in it, so we didn't freeze to death.

Steppan: And we were smart; we brought electric heaters.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: And my crane walker said, "I'm concerned about you young ladies." [Manakoff laughs] He said, "I'm afraid you'll get frostbite." Because he had had frostbite for a time, on his toes.

Redman: So it wasn't just you.

01-00:25:20

Steppan: And so he looked after us. And he was from the South.

Manakoff: Well, they used to call that Pneumonia Gulch, because an awful lot of the people that came from the South and the Midwest had never been in that cold, damp fog. We couldn't sometimes see across the craneway.

Steppan: You couldn't see. You could hardly— In fact, it was very difficult to read the paint on the plates.

Manakoff: On the pieces of steel.

Redman: Well, yeah, let's talk a little bit about that.

01-00:25:51

Steppan: We had cold, rain, fog.

Redman: Okay, yeah. So how did that— Now, I've read in a couple of places that it was quite an adjustment for women who began working in factories, who were maybe wearing dresses or jewelry or lipstick before getting the jobs, and then having to sort of make the adjustment to— You have to dress for the weather. You want to avoid pneumonia.

01-00:26:19

Manakoff: Well, you have to dress for the job, too.

Redman: You have to dress for the job.

01-00:26:21

Steppan: Your hair had to have a bandana.

Manakoff: Bandanas.

Steppan: Scarf. Doesn't matter what it was.

Manakoff: And then a hardhat on top of that.

Steppan: And that way, your hair is not down.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:26:33

Manakoff: And a hardhat on top of the bandana.

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: And then we wore—

- Steppan: It's safer not to have a necklace or something.
- Manakoff: We had heavy boots. We wore heavy boots. I wore what they used to call engineers boots. And we wore Levis. We wore heavy flannel shirts and undershirts and long underwear and jackets and mufflers.
- Steppan: Wore my ski pants a good part of the time, under other pants that were canvas. And they called them tin pants.
- Manakoff: Tin pants. Yeah, I remember that.
- Steppan: And they were like a canvas.
- Manakoff: But I don't think we were terribly uncomfortable.
- Steppan: Well, for one who gets cold easily, yes, it was cold.
- Manakoff: Yes, she does, yeah. I don't get cold. I never did get cold easily. And I spent a lot of my time on a family cattle ranch, and so I was used to Levis and boots and those kinds of things.
- Steppan: And I didn't have Levis.
- Manakoff: She didn't have Levis, she had ski pants.
- Steppan: I never had Levis except when I was in grammar school, I wore my brother's outgrown ones. [they laugh]
- Manakoff: And we wore heavy socks and boots.
- Steppan: Oh, well, you had to in those boots.
- Manakoff: Yeah.
- Redman: So that must've been a bit of an adjustment, to get used to putting on all these clothes.
- 01-00:27:57
Manakoff: Well, the only thing that I had to adjust to was wearing my hair tied up and wearing the hardhat. That bothered me far more than anything else. Nothing else bothered me, really.
- Redman: Interesting. Okay. So could I just step back for a second, to ask how long the training took?
- 01-00:28:16
Manakoff: Weeks. Six weeks, wasn't it, or something like that?

Steppan: Oh, I don't think it was that long.

Manakoff: I thought— Three weeks?

Steppan: I didn't think it was long at all. I was kind of surprised.

Manakoff: Was it three? I don't think it was very long, either. They didn't go into fine points about being a shipfitter or anything like that, because—

Redman: They were just trying to get you—

01-00:28:36
Manakoff: We weren't going to be shipfitters at that time; we weren't skilled enough.

Redman: Okay. Did you feel like you had sort of a sense of the entire operation? Or was it pretty—

01-00:28:46
Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: Because we were told about the— Now I can't think; the word went out of me. I want to say platelets; it's not that.

Manakoff: The bulkheads?

Steppan: No.

Manakoff: No? I don't know what you're trying to say or I'd say it.

Steppan: In the one building, they did them up on the top.

Manakoff: The rigging? No?

Steppan: They're shaped to the framework and then you use that as your pattern.

01-00:29:25
Manakoff: Template.

Steppan: A template.

Manakoff: There we go, there we go. Templates.

Steppan: Thank you.

Manakoff: And then, too we were—

Steppan: Words that I know very well, sometimes I can't come up with them.

Redman: That is common.

01-00:29:38
Manakoff: Also too, sometimes after working all night, we'd stop and watch them launch a ship.

Redman: Oh really?

01-00:29:46
Manakoff: In the morning.

Steppan: Oh, yeah. That was interesting.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: So at the end of the four days, seven days, or however long it had taken to complete the ship, if there was a ship about to be launched, you'd stick around and—

01-00:30:03
Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: Especially if it was one that we were working on.

Manakoff: Yeah, right.

Redman: Okay. Tell me about that. Was there a sense of pride in seeing the ship—

01-00:30:11
Manakoff: Oh, of course!

Steppan: Oh, it was fun. Yeah.

Manakoff: There *was* pride. We worked hard. *We* thought we worked hard. Maybe nobody else would've thought we worked hard, but we thought we did. Especially since we'd never done anything like that before.

Redman: So do you feel like some of that excitement came from the war effort itself? You were proud of your contribution to the war effort?

01-00:30:35
Manakoff: Yes.

Redman: But then also your own personal—

01-00:30:38
Manakoff: Yes. Well—

Steppan: It was helping the war effort, but we just simply enjoyed doing it.

Manakoff: Yes, we did.

- Steppan: And learning something different.
- Redman: Okay. Now, that's interesting to me because on the one hand, it seems like it would be very hard work; but it's also a satisfying experience. So were there days where you'd kind of wake up and you were like, oh I don't want to go to work so much this morning?
- 01-00:31:04
Manakoff: Well, we had to get used to sleeping during the day, for one thing, which was a little hard at first.
- Steppan: My mother, when we'd get home from there, we'd do the marketing. And we'd get home, my mother would change her clothes and get right out, maybe into the Victory garden that she made sure we had. And we rented wherever we lived, so the houses would be sold out from under us. And my mother would look for another place that had an empty lot nearby, so that—
- Manakoff: She could have a garden.
- Steppan: —the Victory garden could be there.
- Manakoff: Victory gardens were a big thing during that war.
- Steppan: Yeah. And then she'd just do her regular activities and housework and all the meals and stuff.
- Manakoff: Remember when we went to the opera in our work clothes? [laughs]
- Steppan: We went to the ballet and we went to the opera.
- Manakoff: That was fun. Because we didn't have time to change our clothes before we went.
- Steppan: We didn't have time.
- Redman: So you'd go to some of these events and—
- 01-00:32:24
Manakoff: Oh, yeah. We didn't care about— Everybody pretty much was work—
- Steppan: That's in San Francisco.
- Manakoff: Yeah, we went over to San Francisco, to the opera.
- Steppan: We went to a couple of movies, too.
- Manakoff: Yeah. And we didn't have time to change, so we just went in our clothes. Well, it wasn't so unusual; a lot of people were doing that.

Steppan: Well, a lot of them—

Manakoff: We weren't used to it, [laughs] but a lot of people—

Redman: So maybe prior to the war, you might've put on something special to go to the opera?

01-00:32:50
Manakoff: Yeah, right. Sure, sure.

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: Special clothes were—

01-00:32:53
Manakoff: Sure, sure.

Redman: Everything but the hardhat, I can imagine.

01-00:32:56
Manakoff: Well, at least we'd have worn a skirt.

Steppan: Maybe they'd look at us and maybe they'd ask, what are you in those clothes for? And we'd just say what we were doing. Okay.

Redman: So there was sort of a general acceptance of the culture of the shipyards, do you feel?

01-00:33:13
Manakoff: Well, of course, remember, there were thousands of people working there.

Steppan: And you had the shipyards in San Francisco, you had shipyards in Alameda, you had shipyards in Richmond and then Oakland.

Manakoff: Yeah, right.

Steppan: And repair yards and—

Manakoff: And they all had lots of people working in them.

Redman: So it wasn't a surprise—

01-00:33:32
Manakoff: No. No.

Redman: —when you'd tell someone that you were working in the shipyard. Okay. Tell me about making friends in the shipyard environment. Did you have much of a chance to meet people?

01-00:33:46
Manakoff: We didn't even try, really, because what would we have in common with somebody from Arkansas that couldn't write their own name?

Redman: Okay.

01-00:33:54
Steppan: Well, that's not—

Manakoff: Well, that's part of it.

Steppan: I didn't meet any of them. But we didn't have the opportunity, to begin with.

Manakoff: We only had the craneway people, the safety guys.

Steppan: Right.

Manakoff: And that's all we saw, pretty much.

Steppan: And we went on the outfitting dock. It was always that we were working. And I said, "Oh, good. I can remember my ties, the rope ties, from Girl Scouts."
[laughs]

Manakoff: Girl Scouts, yeah. Yeah.

Redman: So that knowledge came in handy.

01-00:34:38
Steppan: And I had to be sure that things were tied right. [laughs]

Manakoff: Yeah, right.

Redman: Well, that's great. Okay.

01-00:34:44
Manakoff: But we really didn't see very many other people.

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: So it was pretty compartmentalized and separated.

01-00:34:50
Steppan: Oh, yeah.

Redman: That's interesting. So can you talk a little bit about— I know we've gone over some of this, but I'd like to introduce the question of what a typical day was like.

01-00:35:04
Manakoff: You mean night. [laughs]

Redman: Yeah, I guess that's right, a typical night.

01-00:35:09

Manakoff: Well, I'd drive over—

Steppan: It was busy.

Manakoff: I'd go over to her folks' house.

Redman: So you had gotten a car or a license at some point?

01-00:35:17

Steppan: You didn't drive.

Manakoff: How'd I get over there? My mother brought me?

Steppan: My mother picked you up.

Manakoff: No, no. She didn't pick me up at home, I came to your house. And we went from your house.

Steppan: Well, I don't remember.

Manakoff: Or maybe my mother brought me. But regardless, we all went together.

Steppan: My mother did, though, make friends with who she was working with. And afterwards— Now, she worked longer than we did, because we were no longer needed after a certain period of time, when a number of the ships were taken care of. And my mother was still doing the engraving in the electrical department, because that was still needed. And so the women that she was working with, they became friends and they would go to one another's home sometimes, on a weekend or something, for just talking and having lunch. That lasted for a while. And then I think some of them moved away. I know that one of my mother's friends, a favorite friend out of that, moved away. So that kind of cut it off.

Redman: I'm interested in whether or not the work that you guys experienced was either dangerous or strenuous in any way. Were you—

01-00:36:52

Manakoff: Well, it was cold. [laughs]

Steppan: You consider working around the crane, having that steel being swung—

Manakoff: I don't think we ever saw a crane tip over or anything.

Steppan: No, we didn't.

Manakoff: We didn't. But of course—

Steppan: They were making—

Manakoff: —we had to stay out of the way.

Steppan: We don't know whether other shipyards had crane walkers or not, where they were— Well, I know that some places, they had them to watch to be sure that they are not overloaded on one side or another.

Manakoff: Didn't they use to have a sort of a foghorn kind of thing they'd blow if they were coming?

Steppan: I don't recall.

Manakoff: Yeah, I think I remember that. There was something that the crane operator up there would— He'd like blow a warning.

Redman: So you feel like there were some safety mechanisms in place?

01-00:37:42
Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: Oh, yeah.

Redman: And then also there were individuals that were checking the integrity of the steel? Is that right?

01-00:37:47
Steppan: Right.

Redman: Okay. So I've had some folks mention to me that there were some dangerous or strenuous working conditions, so I always wanted to check that.

01-00:38:00
Manakoff: Well, in our case, it wasn't. I wouldn't call it strenuous; it was just sort of uncomfortable at times, when it was so cold or foggy. But other than that, we had our little huts and our little electric heater. [laughs]

Redman: Okay. You said at one point you brought an additional electric heater?

01-00:38:19
Manakoff: Yeah. Oh, yeah. They didn't give us anything. [laughs]

Steppan: No.

Redman: So at some point, it was enough is enough.

01-00:38:24
Steppan: That was for our health.

Manakoff: Yeah, yeah, they didn't give us—

Steppan: Are you going to stay with Rosie the Riveter? Or are we going to tell you about other places we worked for the war effort, as well?

Redman: Well, let me ask two more questions on that, and then we can talk a little bit about— Well, okay, just three more questions. Was the plant segregated at all by race or—

01-00:38:52
Manakoff: No, no.

Steppan: I thought it was wonderful.

Manakoff: I did, too. I did too.

Steppan: It was just great.

Redman: Tell me a little bit about that.

01-00:38:58
Manakoff: Well, we learned about other people.

Steppan: Anyone and everyone, they were welcome. Anyone who would do the work.

Redman: Let's see. All right. What is this you're handing me? Oh, this is another—

01-00:39:11
Manakoff: See Ann's picture there?

Redman: Oh, right. Okay. Fantastic. And where was this published?

01-00:39:16
Manakoff: *Piedmont Post*.

Redman: Oh, okay, great.

01-00:39:18
Steppan: Which is a local paper in Piedmont and Oakland.

Redman: Oh, fantastic. So I want to ask just a couple more questions about daily working conditions, either at this plant or subsequently. What did you guys do for lunch?

01-00:39:34
Manakoff: Brought our lunch.

Steppan: We brought our lunch.

Redman: Brought your lunch. Tell me what—

01-00:39:26
Manakoff: In a bag. Oh, in a tin box.

Steppan: No, it was a regular lunch box. With the thermos in the top.

Manakoff: Yeah, right.

Steppan: I eventually gave that away. And later on, I thought, how silly. That was special for that time.

Manakoff: I think I gave mine away, too.

Steppan: And my dad, even when I was in high school, he'd fix breakfast up for me and stuff. But for the lunches, for going to the shipyards, I had little strips of carrot and celery. And he'd have candy in there and he had maybe pieces of cake, apple, sandwich. He made it all and had it all special every day for me.

Redman: Great. And was some of the food coming directly out of the Victory garden?

01-00:40:37
Steppan: Some did.

Redman: That's interesting.

01-00:40:40
Manakoff: I have here my record of my wages for all the jobs I had.

Steppan: She, believe it or not, has this book with this information.

Manakoff: [laughs] And we started in November. My first paycheck was November—
No, wait a minute, it wasn't November.

Steppan: '43.

Manakoff: Yeah, November of '42.

Steppan: '42.

Manakoff: And we worked, and the last paycheck I got was the end of April, the next year.

Redman: May I ask what your paycheck was for, your very first paycheck? All right. Let's have a look at this. So \$52.46 for your first paycheck.

01-00:41:23
Manakoff: That's it. Yeah.

Steppan: That was great. It was a lot of money. [laughs]

Manakoff: Yeah. They paid very well. That's why all these people came from the South.

Redman: A lot of people have mentioned to me or have expressed in other interviews, that getting this paycheck meant a new sort of independence.

01-00:41:42
Steppan: For a lot of them.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: Okay. So you guys maybe didn't feel—

01-00:41:46
Manakoff: No.

Redman: —quite the same way.

01-00:41:48
Manakoff: Because we lived at home and we still had all our parents and everything.

Steppan: And put it in the safe. Well, not safe deposit—

Manakoff: In the bank. Put it in the bank.

Redman: So you maybe saved some of the money.

01-00:42:00
Steppan: Oh, my, yes.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about— You said that the plant wasn't racially segregated or segregated by gender, and you really enjoyed that environment.

01-00:42:12
Manakoff: Well, if it was, we didn't notice it. Let's put it that way.

01-00:42:16
Steppan: Well, I don't think it was at all.

Manakoff: I didn't think it was, either.

Steppan: My uncle and brother didn't say anything about it, and we didn't notice any of it. To us, everybody, no matter what, they did their jobs. Sometimes the men would be doing the same thing women did.

Manakoff: Jim ever say anything? Did Jim?

Steppan: No.

Redman: And the men, they tended to be older? Or did some of the men tend to be younger men with physical conditions?

01-00:42:45
Steppan: Well, my brother and my—

Manakoff: No, most of them were older.

Steppan: —future first husband were young. A couple years older than we were, that's all.

Manakoff: But a lot of people were older than that.

Steppan: And a lot of them were not. But a lot of them were the older.

Manakoff: Older ones, yeah. Because they were the ones that couldn't go to war.

Steppan: See, my uncle was in the First World War. So he was working there. He didn't have a job other than that.

Redman: Okay. Now, this is either during— at any point during the war and then after, what your recollections are of unions, either at the plant or at some of these other plants where you had friends and family.

01-00:43:37
Manakoff: We belonged to the Boilermaker Union. And that's where we paid our union dues.

Steppan: But we didn't have to go to the union.

Manakoff: No. No, we weren't forced to do that.

Redman: So you paid your union dues. And did you know a shop steward at all?

01-00:43:56
Steppan: No. No.

Manakoff: I don't remember.

Redman: So you didn't have any other particular experiences with the union?

01-00:44:02
Manakoff: I didn't.

Steppan: I think it was taken out of our paycheck, so we didn't have any contact.

Redman: Did you have any particular encounters with the union?

01-00:44:12

Manakoff: I remember one time, going there for some reason.

Steppan: Well, when we had to sign up.

Manakoff: To the union hall.

Steppan: Yeah. We had to sign up.

Manakoff: Yeah, right. We had to sign up there. But other than that—

Steppan: You'd have to do it individually.

Manakoff: —we didn't do anything with the union.

Redman: So very limited contact or involvement. Okay.

01-00:44:29

Manakoff: None.

Redman: None, okay. Now, this is a little bit of a non sequitur. And if you don't know anything about this, that's fine. But we're asking people if they remember anything about the Port Chicago disaster.

01-00:44:43

Manakoff: Oh, my husband worked at Port Chicago. [chuckles]

Redman: Really? Oh, interesting. All right.

01-00:44:49

Manakoff: But he wasn't there then; he was in the war, overseas.

Redman: Okay, so—

01-00:44:53

Steppan: And my first husband in Vallejo, in the Navy.

Manakoff: And I remember it almost shook our houses down.

Steppan: And I was in an apartment in Berkeley.

Manakoff: Yeah. *Boy*, what a shake, yeah.

Steppan: You knew something happened.

Manakoff: Oh, yeah.

Redman: But you could feel it?

01-00:45:16
Manakoff: Oh, my God, yes.

Steppan: Oh, Gosh, yeah.

Redman: Okay.

01-00:45:20
Manakoff: That was terrible.

Redman: So tell me what you—

01-00:45:22
Steppan: It is now a national park.

Redman: Just very recently, right?

01-00:45:28
Steppan: Right.

Manakoff: Well, my husband worked there thirty-five years.

Redman: Okay, worked at Port Chicago.

01-00:45:32
Manakoff: After the war.

Redman: After the war. Okay.

01-00:45:34
Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: He worked at the Naval Air Station in Oakland, or Alameda, before the war.

Redman: So the explosion sort of signaled this major—

01-00:45:46
Steppan: Catastrophe.

Redman: —catastrophe that you couldn't avoid knowing about.

01-00:45:49
Manakoff: No, no.

Redman: And then did you hear radio reports or news reports?

01-00:45:54
Manakoff: Oh, actually, to me, I hadn't even— It never really sunk in that they were loading ships with ammunition and all that stuff. I don't know why it didn't.

Steppan: We didn't know that until after that.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: So once the Port Chicago disaster happened, you sort of learned about what was going on.

01-00:46:11

Steppan: Right.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: And was there any discussion about the ensuing court martial for the sailors that were there?

01-00:46:22

Manakoff: No, not with my family.

Steppan: Not at that time.

Redman: But you'd heard about it—

01-00:46:26

Manakoff: Yeah, later. Later.

Steppan: We thought it was terrible.

Manakoff: Yeah. Yeah.

Redman: And yeah, can you tell me a little bit about learning about that later on? So it was following the war that you learned about some of the working conditions at Port Chicago. Is that correct?

01-00:46:40

Steppan: Yes, when it was all in the paper and—

Manakoff: All secondhand, third-hand.

Steppan: Yeah. But you could just imagine and feel for those that didn't get killed.

Manakoff: Well, and the poor black boys that got killed.

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: The fact that they were segregated so there.

Steppan: And they were the only ones doing it, loading.

Manakoff: Yeah. It was terrible.

Steppan: Because they were black.

Manakoff: Terrible.

Steppan: And that's terrible.

Redman: So at the time, as you heard more and more information about this major disaster that you were aware of, you sort of felt like this was an injustice that—

01-00:47:19
Manakoff: Oh, *absolutely!* Yes.

Steppan: Oh, yes.

Redman: So yeah, do you have any other—

01-00:47:24
Steppan: I've felt there was an injustice in too much of the country.

Manakoff: Yeah, right, right. And I never—

Steppan: And I never had any strange feeling about someone with a different—

Manakoff: I've been a lot in the Deep South. And I never will forget, when I was in my teens and we were down there, and I started to cross a street. And there was a black person that wanted to cross the street, too, but they waited till I crossed the street.

Redman: Oh, wow.

01-00:47:55
Steppan: Oh, yes.

Manakoff: And that just made me feel terrible.

Steppan: Oh, they wouldn't cross at the same time?

Manakoff: No, I had the right of way, as far as they were concerned. They had to come later, after.

Redman: So this was on a trip that you took to—

01-00:48:09
Manakoff: Well, I would just say when I was down there with my folks. But I'll never forget that. I was so embarrassed. I just felt terrible!

Redman: So then when you finally heard about this Port Chicago disaster, that sort of fit with what you understood as being a possibility of racial segregation. But in light of your own experiences at the plant—

01-00:48:33
Manakoff: It wasn't.

Redman: It wasn't. So—

01-00:48:34
Manakoff: And it wasn't a plant, remember; it was a shipyard.

Steppan: It was a shipyard.

Redman: So that sort of threw you a little bit?

01-00:48:42
Steppan: The plant definition is more of one building.

Manakoff: The Ford.

Steppan: And like Ford assembly plant, where the museum— not the museum, but—

Manakoff: And that was right next to Yard 3.

Redman: Okay. And yeah, so if you guys have anything else to add on the Port Chicago disaster that—

01-00:49:10
Manakoff: No.

Steppan: No.

Redman: Okay. And so what I'm going to do now is I just have a handful of questions left, but I'm going to change the tape.

01-00:49:19
Manakoff: All right, we'll let you. [Steppan laughs]

Begin Audio File 2 10-18-2010.mp3

Redman: [asks them to move closer to each other; comments between them] All right, so when I was changing the tape there, you were explaining what the explosion felt like, for the Port Chicago disaster.

02-00:00:37
Manakoff: Yeah, well, I was up in the hills in Oakland.

Redman: So you were in the Oakland Hills.

02-00:00:41
Manakoff: Yes, that's where I lived.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:00:43

Manakoff: And I remember the windows— We had single-pane windows in those days, not vinyl or anything; they were glass windows, set mostly in steel frames. But boy, those windows. I thought they were going to break. But they didn't quite. Although I know a lot of places and people that *did* have a lot of broken things.

Redman: Oh, wow. Okay. So the blast was almost—

02-00:01:09

Manakoff: Oh!

Steppan: It was like—

Manakoff: It was like a bomb.

Steppan: —in a grocery store with things, like an earthquake, where bottles and things fell down.

Redman: Bottles and cans.

02-00:01:19

Manakoff: But much more severe, really, than that.

Steppan: Yeah. Especially the closer you were.

Manakoff: Plus the walls moves a little like this. [chuckles, shakes hands]

Redman: So it was hard for people to ignore what happened—

02-00:01:29

Manakoff: Oh, we couldn't ignore it, but we didn't know at the time what happened. We lived in Oakland.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:01:34

Steppan: We didn't know that that's what happened.

Manakoff: Until afterward.

Steppan: But I did turn on the radio, I think, at that point, to find out what's going on.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: That's my next question, actually. I wanted to ask if you both could reflect for a moment, given the way that we learn about news today— Some people go to the internet, some people watch television, listen to radio and read newspapers. Can you tell me a little bit about how people who lived through

the Second World War learned about news? Were you mainly listening to the—

02-00:02:05

Manakoff: Well, Movietone News at the theater, because we went to the movies a lot in those days, and the radio. To me, that's all there was.

Steppan: Yeah. You know, TV wasn't yet.

Manakoff: Right. So we listened to the radio religiously, for the news.

Steppan: And the newspapers.

Manakoff: And the newspapers, of course. Newspapers were a big thing. And of course— Well, what did I say? The other thing. The Movietone News was really good, at the theaters. And they always, no matter whether you went to a matinee or an evening performance or whatever, you always got a cartoon and a Movietone News.

Steppan: And a second feature and a regular feature.

Manakoff: Yeah. Yeah.

Redman: Would much of the news reports that were coming in, were they focusing on the war effort overseas, but then they would also give you some information on the home front?

02-00:03:04

Manakoff: [coughs] They were mostly focused on overseas.

Redman: Okay. Do you remember in particular, what newspapers you were reading?

02-00:03:13

Manakoff: *Oakland Tribune*.

Redman: The *Oakland Tribune*. Okay. And radio programs? Do you remember any of the specific radio programs?

02-00:03:21

Manakoff: I don't think they had particular names, did they? I don't remember.

Steppan: Laurel and Hardy?

Manakoff: The news, I don't remember. Because if something really important happened, they'd break into whatever soap opera was on the radio. Remember, we had soap operas on the radio.

Redman: [chuckles] So you'd maybe have another program on, and then if something big happened—

02-00:03:46

Manakoff: Yeah, yeah. They'd bust into it, yeah.

Redman: Okay. Interesting. So do either of you remember hearing about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

02-00:03:56

Manakoff: Of course.

Steppan: Of course.

Redman: And tell me how you heard about it, if you recall that, and what some of your memories were about that.

02-00:04:04

Manakoff: Well, heard about it on tel— I guess it was television, wasn't it?

Steppan: It was television.

Manakoff: Yeah. And I thought it was just *horrible*. A *horrible* thing to do to people.

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: And I never felt that it was the right thing to do at that time. What did I know? But that's what I thought.

Steppan: It was worse than expected, I think.

Manakoff: Yes.

Steppan: For the majority of people.

Manakoff: Yes, and all those— And then years afterwards, they show these poor people that were so injured.

Steppan: And burned beyond—

Manakoff: And burned, yes. Oh, it was awful! Awful, awful.

Redman: So now I'd like to jump to the end of the war and some of your work at the end of the war. And then I'm going to ask you a couple of Rosie questions just at the very end. But you worked at the Oakland Army Base, Ann, is that correct?

02-00:05:02

Steppan: Yes.

Redman: Okay, tell me a little bit about that.

02-00:05:05

Steppan:

Well, I worked for the Army Signal Corps, making sure that the shipments were shipped and were ready, and get the billing number and stuff. And then when it would arrive.

Redman:

So was there an easy transition from— You were told—

02-00:05:34

Steppan:

I had contact with Macon, Georgia; I forget, one in Texas; different locations all over, where they were building this stuff, and having it shipped to the Oakland Army Base to go overseas.

Redman:

Okay.

02-00:05:58

Steppan:

I also worked for two trucking companies that did the same thing. But when I was working for the Oakland Army Base, I had to go check some returned cargo in a warehouse. I didn't touch it. I didn't touch anything that was in the warehouse. Just went in, checked what should be, went back to the office. Pretty soon, I had a terrible throat. And the doctor thought it was one thing and treated me for that, and I didn't respond to it. So he said, "Well, let me try something else." And he did and he said, "You have diphtheria." And he said, "I had a man come in recently, who was sick similar to you, and he ended up testing as diphtheria." Well, people just didn't get diphtheria. And he had no idea how either one of us got it. He was doing something entirely different. His job was way on the other side of Oakland. He lived someplace on the other side of Oakland. I lived in Piedmont and worked in Oakland, the base. The only thing I could come up with was the time that I went into the warehouse that had the returned cargo. And I thought, some of that returned stuff has had *all kinds* of—

Manakoff:

People handling it.

Steppan:

—virus and different things. I wouldn't want to work in it. But when I went to get the slip to come back to work, stopped in the clinic and they said, "Oh, you just wanted time off." [Manakoff laughs] Nobody gets diphtheria.

Manakoff:

Oh, yeah.

Steppan:

I said, "Well, *I* did. And if you want to check, you can call the hospital."

Redman:

So they weren't overly concerned at all. They weren't concerned at all.

02-00:08:30

Steppan:

They thought I was just giving a reason.

Redman:

Wow! That's amazing.

02-00:08:37
Steppan: Who would want to be—

Manakoff: Right.

Redman: So did this give you sort of a reason to move on from the Oakland Army Base to do other work?

02-00:08:44
Steppan: No, no.

Redman: You kept working there for a while.

02-00:08:46
Steppan: Yeah. Yeah.

Redman: And how long were at the Oakland Army Base, do you recall?

02-00:08:49
Steppan: Oh, gee. Two years or more. And then I'd say a year at one trucking company and maybe eight months at the other trucking company, and then I no longer worked for them.

Redman: Okay. And then after that, were you married?

02-00:09:13
Steppan: I was married when I was at the Army base. Married my first husband.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:09:21
Steppan: Divorced him then, too. [they chuckle]

Redman: So pretty quick. Yeah.

02-00:09:26
Steppan: And I lived at home. And when I was married, lived at home. But sometime before Port Chicago, I was living in an apartment in Berkeley. And he was in the Navy, at Vallejo.

Redman: Okay. And Barbara, did you continue working after you were told that you were no longer needed?

02-00:09:50
Manakoff: Yeah, I worked for the Pacific Overseas Air Service Command.

Redman: Okay. And tell me about what that—

02-00:09:56

Manakoff: Well, my memory isn't real clear. I worked there for a year, a little over a year. And it was a matter of having to do with manifests that had to go with shipments overseas, mostly to the South Pacific, from Travis Air Force Base. And sometimes I had to take papers to go with the airplane. And I'd have a driver and escort, because they wouldn't allow the papers to be— anybody just to look at them.

Redman: Right.

02-00:10:42

Manakoff: And we had to go clear from West Oakland. The only International Harvester building was a good brick building, and so they took it over. And we had to go from there, clear up to Travis to deliver these papers. I didn't do it real often, but I did it maybe six times.

Redman: So following the war— I know that early on the war, not a lot of women were working. Or during the Great Depression, not a lot of women were working, and then it became more commonplace during the war, for women to have jobs. Did you feel sort of compelled to stay in the working force? Was there some sort of reason why you wanted to continue working? Was it the money, the financial independence? Was it just sort of natural?

02-00:11:37

Manakoff: Both. Both of those things, and the war effort.

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: Okay. So there was sort of a continued—

02-00:11:43

Steppan: Oh, my, yes.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Redman: —throughout the war.

02-00:11:46

Steppan: That jobs were available. And we could continue to help.

Manakoff: Remember how many men had to go to war; we had to take over an awful lot of things that ordinarily would be men's jobs.

Redman: So then I just have a couple of more questions. A moment ago, you mentioned—and I really love the way you put this—this Rosie the Riveter business. [Manakoff laughs] I love that. I wanted to ask if you could both take a moment to reflect on the image of Rosie the Riveter since the end of the war, and what that sort of idea has meant throughout the twentieth century,

and then even today. And now it seems like you're being asked to reflect on these experiences a lot more. What does that make you think and feel?

02-00:12:41

Manakoff: That my memory isn't so good anymore. [laughs]

Steppan: The majority of people now have that one picture of the female—

Manakoff: Oh, the Rockwell picture.

Redman: Right.

02-00:12:57

Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: And that's all they can think of. That's all their mind recognizes of the war effort. And I don't think they even think of it as the war effort.

Manakoff: The one that said, "We Can Do It!" too. With the woman. Well, no, but I'm thinking about the whole body picture that Rockwell did which shows the gal and she's eating her lunch.

Redman: Yeah.

02-00:13:23

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: So you feel like some people miss out on the whole picture.

02-00:13:29

Steppan: Yes. Especially those who are younger and did not go through any of this. And they did not go through the period— Well, we're going through a period now, of bad economy. But there was a lot then and a lot before it, before the war. And they have no idea.

Manakoff: Hadn't been too many years since the Depression.

Steppan: And so many now, the youth— I won't call them youth; they're my kids' age.

Manakoff: They're youth to us.

Steppan: Pennies? What are you doing? I pick up pennies from the street. What are you doing? You don't pick up money from the street. I said, "Any time there's money on the street—"

Manakoff: I'm going to pick it up, yeah.

Steppan: Yeah. And they say, "Well, pennies don't mean anything. You can't buy anything with pennies." I said, "Pennies add up. Then you can buy

something.” But yeah. Right now, too many of the younger generation do not understand saving and what is important. Of course, a lot of them don’t understand that family is important.

Manakoff: I didn’t save much during the war because I boarded all of my horses. [laughs]

Steppan: Yeah.

Redman: Your horses?

02-00:15:16

Manakoff: Well, my family are cattle people, so I had quite a few horses. And I showed and bred horses and sold horses and a big mess. Anyway, but I spent most of my money on my animals.

Redman: Between that and going to the opera and movies.

02-00:15:39

Manakoff: Yeah, right, right, right.

Redman: But do you feel like it did teach you some lessons about hard work and ingenuity or—

02-00:15:48

Manakoff: No.

Steppan: No.

Redman: —you felt like it was—

02-00:15:51

Manakoff: Something new for us.

Redman: Something new, okay.

02-00:15:53

Steppan: Different.

Manakoff: Different, yeah.

Redman: Yeah. And was it exciting, would you say?

02-00:15:56

Manakoff: No. [they laugh]

Steppan: No, not really.

Manakoff: I didn’t think it was exciting.

Steppan: But in a way, yes, because it was so different.

- Manakoff: The only thing I thought was exciting was when we watched a ship launch. I liked that.
- Steppan: Well, I liked it, too, but—
- Manakoff: Our jobs themselves, I didn't think were exciting.
- Redman: Not particularly exciting. Okay.
- 02-00:16:16
Manakoff: Nah.
- Steppan: I just thought it was exciting to be out there in that large area and all those masses of people coming in to work and those going out.
- Manakoff: Yeah. We all had to walk in from the gates.
- Steppan: Park way out.
- Manakoff: Yeah, we had quite a walk to get in there. [laughs]
- Redman: Okay. And everybody would come in at the same time? Or they were coming out.
- 02-00:16:38
Manakoff: Yeah, on the shifts. As one shift quit and the other one started.
- Redman: Okay. Now, the sort of final question that I'd like to ask about—and I can give you a moment to think about it, if you'd like—I'd just like to ask if there's anything else you'd like to share about your experiences or things that we've talked about today.
- 02-00:17:02
Steppan: By being at the Army base, there were soldiers, there were military there, mostly Army. And then you've got the Navy supply and Naval Air Station right there in Alameda. So one was behind the other. And so at one point, we were asked if anyone lived in a certain area, if they could pick up some soldiers—well, soldiers, yes, but they're Army—and bring them to work down there? So I did. And one of them had been a truck driver. And he said, "You know, you're a good driver." He said, "I don't have to worry at all about riding with you." [they laugh]
- Manakoff: Well, that's nice.
- Steppan: But I thought, well. [laughs]
- Manakoff: Yeah, that was nice.

Redman: I bet that was fun.

02-00:18:16

Steppan: Yeah. Oh, and they had a class there at the Army base, for transportation, so that— And they wanted me to take it and to learn the different size trucks and the system, which I did. So then when I went to work for the trucking company, I knew a little more.

Redman: So do you think some of those experiences, the experiences of working as crane checkers and then working at the Oakland Army Base, sort of built on one another and were sort of related, so that you learned some different skills?

02-00:19:01

Steppan: In a sense. In a sense.

Redman: Okay. But in another sense, it was sort of—

02-00:19:05

Steppan: But I don't think I knew it at the time. I don't think I paid much attention at the time. It's just later, looking back on it, realizing that I enjoyed it and I learned something.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:19:20

Manakoff: And I worked for the American Women's Voluntary Services. I don't know if you ever heard of them during the war. But we would sometimes meet the troops and take the wounded to the hospital. And also we'd have, out here at Pittsburg—you know where Pittsburg is?—we had Camp Stoneman, which was the debarkation point for Army. Because I was raised all out on a ranch, I could drive the heavy trucks. And I drove a big Army truck. And we'd fill it full of girls [chuckles] and take them out to dance with the fellows. And that's how I got the—

Steppan: Was that the USO dances?

Manakoff: Yeah. Well, this wasn't the USO, this was—

Steppan: Yeah, no.

Manakoff: But we did go to USO, too. Down in Oakland they had a real nice USO place, where we also went. But what was I trying to say? Oh, that's where I met the fellow I was engaged to, was at one of those dances. [chuckles] And he had a whole bunch of guys that he brought there.

Redman: So tell me a little bit about these dances, if you don't mind. You'd go with a whole group of girls?

02-00:20:33

Manakoff: Well, I didn't dance. I was a driver.

Redman: Oh, okay.

02-00:20:36

Manakoff: I wasn't supposed to dance. I don't know why they had it that way. But I sat and talked to this fellow, Norman.

Steppan: Yeah, I know.

Manakoff: And then we talked and we talked, and we finally got to the point of saying he was going to come and visit me in Oakland, when he had leave. But that didn't last too very long. They were shipped over to Saipan. And then, of course, he wrote me all the time. I've still got all of his letters.

Redman: And did he come back from Saipan?

02-00:21:08

Manakoff: Yes. I guess he was quite famous, in his own right. Had to do with— Well, anyway, I didn't marry him. Everything was a big mess. And so he did get married, and then went to Burma, he and his wife. And he had to do something with the Burmese government. Well, I don't remember what. But not too many years ago, I thought to myself, gee, I wonder if Norman's still alive? So I called the University of— Oh, Columbia. Wasn't Columbia back east? Yeah. And they gave me his name. He was, of course, an alumni. He belonged to the alumni club. So they gave me his name, and I got ahold of his son. And for quite a long time, we were corresponding. He sent me pictures of his family and we talked on the phone all the time. And then his wife got mad. [Redman laughs] Didn't like that too much. So that was the end of that. But it was nice to become reacquainted. Not because we were at any time engaged, but because we were friends. And I've got all of his letters, still.

Steppan: And my future second husband worked for POASC [Pacific Overseas Air Service Corps], downtown Oakland. And he was supposed to go around and— Well, I'll explain what it is. You're doing a job, and he will sit there and watch you do your job, and then he will tell you what you can do to make it easier and quicker.

Manakoff: In inspector?

Steppan: No.

Manakoff: No?

Steppan: Anyway. And then he would do reports.

Redman: Some sort of efficiency monitor or something like that?

02-00:23:30
Steppan: Yes. Similar, yeah. And I've got this big book of all the stuff that he did.

Redman: Okay. So it seems like there were a number of different new experiences that you sort of just rapidly accumulated over a very short span of years. It seems like you guys had a large number of different jobs, you were meeting boys, you were in a working environment. So do you sort of look back at that time period and have any particular feelings about that?

02-00:24:07
Manakoff: Yeah, I was young.

Redman: You were young. [they laugh]

02-00:24:12
Manakoff: Right.

Steppan: No, no particular feelings.

Redman: Okay. It sounds like you're grateful to be out of the cold, out of—

02-00:24:19
Manakoff: Oh, yes.

Steppan: [laughs] Yeah.

Manakoff: That's true. That's true.

Redman: Okay. Well—

02-00:24:24
Steppan: I don't know how I was ever able to ski. [they laugh] I was cold, but I—

Manakoff: And my husband went into the service in '43. '43? '42 or '43. And he was in for five years. And he was just wounded a couple times and he was all over the place. He was in Africa and he was in the Anzio attack in—

Steppan: Germany.

Manakoff: No, not Germany. No, no. He wasn't.

Steppan: No?

Manakoff: No. He was just in the desert, fighting against Rommel. And the Po Valley in Italy, and Anzio in Italy, and at Salerno. All these terrible battlefields. It's a wonder he lived through it, really. But he was a disabled veteran and he was also a decorated veteran.

Redman: Wow. Okay.

02-00:25:21
Manakoff: So I've got him buried over at— We were married almost fifty years. And I've got him buried at Golden Gate National, in San Bruno. Okay, that's enough about that.

Redman: Well, I want to thank you guys both for sharing your experiences. I really appreciate it.

02-00:25:38
Manakoff: You think you're going to make anything out of that? [laughs]

Redman: Of course. This is great. Thanks.

02-00:25:43
Manakoff: Give me back my claim to fame, please.

Redman: Oh, yeah.

02-00:25:48
Manakoff: Yeah, and the newspaper article.

Redman: Yeah, can you talk just a little bit about those?

02-00:25:54
Manakoff: Well, this, I was really *amazed*! I didn't think I— I don't know why— This was the Ford Company, you see?

Redman: Oh, okay.

02-00:26:02
Manakoff: This was an advertisement. But it's also about the Rosie National Park. Because this was written— This is '03.

Steppan: That's right.

Manakoff: Yeah. But they had an article by somebody from Alabama, and me, that wrote— They had quotes from just the two of us. For what reason, I don't know.

Steppan: Because we've had interviews earlier, we've had interviews— I have more interviews.

Redman: So not only with museum exhibits and memorials, but then also advertisements, as well. That's an interesting—

02-00:26:47
Manakoff: Well, I was surprised. I was tickled to death. I thought, gee, whiz, I'm in print!

Redman: [laughs] Excellent..

02-00:26:54

Manakoff: But that was good. And that other newspaper article—

Redman: Yeah, tell me about that.

02-00:26:58

Manakoff: Well, Ann sent me that. She doesn't remember it, but she sent it to me, because I didn't get the *Piedmonter*.

Redman: Okay.

02-00:27:07

Manakoff: There's another section in the back. I thought that it was very good, so I've kept it all this time.

Steppan: This is a picture of something my mother had. And my brother, because it says "T.J. Cox." That's my brother's name.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: And the gas tickets, coupons, the food coupons, tobacco coupons.

Manakoff: Rations.

Steppan: Rationing.

Redman: So the rationing was something—

02-00:27:47

Steppan: All that.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: My mother kept a lot of those things. A small amount of it, so that's what I had that they took a picture of.

Manakoff: But it starts out by saying that— It says that Ann and me heard there was a possibility that they could get a job at the Richmond Kaiser Shipyards during World War II. They *eagerly pursued* [Redman laughs] the opportunity. That was funny. Well, like she said, Jim, her first husband, was the one that got us in there. [chuckles] Otherwise we probably wouldn't have got in there.

Steppan: We wouldn't have known anything about it.

Manakoff: Yeah.

Steppan: And we wouldn't have known anything about what people do for the war effort, I think, because we were doing entirely different things.

Manakoff: And don't forget, Piedmont and Oakland are a long ways from Point Richmond. So we had no contact with anybody.

Manakoff: Oh. "People were working. We weren't alone." Oh, I said that. They just put part of what I said in the article. I said, "We weren't alone. People were working in all kinds of factories that made little parts used in the war, such as machine gun parts. Some people knitted sweaters and socks." That's what Lee's mother, my husband's mother did. "And other people wove bandages." My mother did that. "Everybody pulled together at that time." And I wrote that. I wrote that. And here I was, seventy-seven already, [Redman laughs] it says. And it says, "She added," that's me, "It would be really nice if people today would get that feeling of trying to do something for your country, instead of yourself."

Redman: Interesting. That's great.

02-00:30:21

Manakoff: I wrote that. I don't know why they didn't—

Steppan: I knit the hats for the soldiers.

Redman: You knit some of the hats for the soldiers?

02-00:30:28

Steppan: Yeah.

Manakoff: I couldn't knit if you gave me the— [they laugh] I didn't do anything like that. Ann was clever that way; I couldn't do anything like that.

Redman: That's wonderful. Well, I think that's a fantastic place to end, and I really appreciate your time today.

02-00:30:42

Manakoff: Well, I'm glad you thought enough of us to come out.

Redman: This is great. Thank you.

[End of Interview]