

Regional Oral History Office  
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Berkeley, California

**Jeanne Reynolds**

**Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project**

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,  
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by  
Esther Ehrlich  
in 2003

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Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project: An Oral History with Jeanne Reynolds conducted by Esther Ehrlich, 2003, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2007.

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Interview with Jeanne Reynolds  
Interviewed by: Ester Ehrlich  
Transcriber: Ann Chen  
[Interview #1: March 5, 2003]  
[Begin Audio File Reynolds1 03-05-03]

1-00:00:00

**Ehrlich:**

So this is an interview with Jeanne Reynolds on March 5, 2003 in her home in El Sobrante. Why don't we start at the beginning? Where and when were you born?

1-00:00:19

**Reynolds:**

I was born in Richmond April 13, 1919.

1-00:00:26

**Ehrlich:**

And what neighborhood in Richmond?

1-00:00:28

**Reynolds:**

I lived on the South Side.

1-00:00:38

**Ehrlich:**

And was it the same home that you grew up in?

1-00:00:43

**Reynolds:**

No, I only lived there until I was seven months. Then we lived for a short time in Concord. And then I moved back to Richmond when I was in the fourth grade and went all through Richmond schools.

1-00:00:57

**Ehrlich:**

And who was in your immediate family?

1-00:00:59

**Reynolds:**

I had a sister five years older and mother and father.

1-00:01:04

**Ehrlich:**

And what about extended family?

1-00:01:07

**Reynolds:**

I had two cousins that were teachers also in Richmond, well, I had three cousins. And they were all teachers. My mother was reared by her aunt and uncle and they lived in San Pablo. My dad's father lived in Concord.

1-00:01:33

**Ehrlich:**

And what about your maternal grandparents? Did you know them?

1-00:01:39

**Reynolds:**

My mother's mother died when she was born, and so she was brought to California by her uncle and aunt. And her father still lived in Iowa. I visited him when I was sixteen years old.

1-00:01:58

**Ehrlich:**

And do you know about the background of your ancestors—what your heritage is?

1-00:02:04

**Reynolds:**

They were Pennsylvania Dutch. They came to—. But I know more about my father's family.

1-00:02:13

**Ehrlich:**

What do you know about them?

1-00:02:14

**Reynolds:**

That my grandfather came from Italy when he was about twelve. And they moved to Jackson, and he worked in the county office in Jackson. My dad was born in Jackson, California. And three sisters.

1-00:02:35

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember the neighborhood that you lived in as a child? Could you describe that to us? The one that you grew up in.

1-00:02:43

**Reynolds:**

In Richmond?

1-00:02:44

**Ehrlich:**

Yes.

1-00:02:45

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I lived on, let's see, Ninth and Chancellor. And it was a neighborhood everybody knew—knew everybody. And Richmond was just one little street, the main street. You walked downtown and you know everybody. We had one department store, one big one.

1-00:03:08

**Ehrlich:**

What was that store?

1-00:03:09

**Reynolds:**

Albert's. Later it became Macy's. And now it isn't even there. And we had two drugstores, two ice cream parlors, that was about it. While I was in grammar school, my mother and dad owned a delicatessen, and it was on Macdonald Avenue. One of those buildings there.

1-00:03:37

**Ehrlich:**

Did you spend time there?

1-00:03:39

**Reynolds:**

Oh yes.

1-00:03:40

**Ehrlich:**

What are your memories of the delicatessen?

1-00:03:43

**Reynolds:**

Well. The school was just about a block and half away. And at noon time, my mother would make lunches and the teachers would let me leave about fifteen minutes early and go get the lunches. And that was a big deal in grammar school, to get to go do that.

1-00:04:05

**Ehrlich:**

And who worked in the store?

1-00:04:06

**Reynolds:**

My mother and dad.

1-00:04:08

**Ehrlich:**

Both of them did?

1-00:04:09

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

1-00:04:10

**Ehrlich:**

And how long did they have that delicatessen?

1-00:04:12

**Reynolds:**

Well they had it until the Depression. And then the Depression—business was bad and my dad went to work for Rheem Manufacturing company. And my mother went to beauty school, and became a beautician.

1-00:04:24

**Ehrlich:**

How old were you when they made those transitions?

1-00:04:27

**Reynolds:**

I would have been about eleven.

1-00:04:31

**Ehrlich:**

So did you grow up with a religious upbringing?

1-00:04:34

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I was baptized at the Christian Church on Sixth Street in Richmond. But later when the Methodist Church—St. Luke's was built, I went there and my children were all baptized at St. Luke's. And now I go to the El Sobrante Methodist.

1-00:04:56

**Ehrlich:**

But as a child?

1-00:04:57

**Reynolds:**

I went to the Christian Church mostly.

1-00:05:00

**Ehrlich:**

Do you have memories of that?

1-00:05:03

**Reynolds:**

Yes. We had lots of fun, and then while I was going to college, I taught Sunday school. And that gave me—since I became a teacher—that was good experience. And we had activities. When we used to go to the plunge, we had the Richmond plunge, and—

1-00:05:20

**Ehrlich:**

What was the plunge?

1-00:05:22

**Reynolds:**

It was a big swimming pool closed-in out of Point Richmond. And it was free days on Wednesdays for girls, Thursdays for boys. So the girls, we used to wear our bathing suits under our dresses at school and then go right from school out to the Point for free day.

1-00:05:42

**Ehrlich:**

What was the name of the church you belonged to when you were a child?

1-00:05:46

**Reynolds:**

It was called First Christian Church.

1-00:05:48

**Ehrlich:**

And do you remember who the other members were? What kinds of people?

1-00:05:54

**Reynolds:**

No, not really. Not too much.

1-00:05:57

**Ehrlich:**

Was it mostly white?

1-00:05:59

**Reynolds:**

Oh yes. There were actually no black families in Richmond at all until the war broke out. There were no black students in school. We had a few families of Asians, Orientals, and they're still here mostly owning florist shops, like the Adachis and Miyamotos.

1-00:06:22

**Ehrlich:**

Do you know what Asian origin?

1-00:06:25

**Reynolds:**

They were Japanese.

1-00:06:28

**Ehrlich:**

Did you know them when you were a child?

1-00:06:33

**Reynolds:**

Yes. Well, I was a close friend of one, Betty Toyota. We pronounced her name Taiyoda, but now they call the car Toyota. But—

1-00:06:47

**Ehrlich:**

It's spelled the same way?

1-00:06:48

**Reynolds:**

Spelled the same way. But she went all through school being pronounced Taiyoda. They were sent to the camps when the war broke out. But the florist families came back and they've done well. I don't know if you know anything about Richmond, but Adachis and the Miyamotos still are big florists.

1-00:07:11

**Ehrlich:**

What do you remember about the Japanese that you knew leaving during the war? Do you have any memories of that?

1-00:07:18

**Reynolds:**

I didn't really realize it so much. I didn't understand it, and then years later, I met this Betty who I'd been friends with as a child. And she was very unfriendly, and I just got this feeling she didn't want to talk to me. I think it was a very bitter time for those families.

1-00:07:45

**Ehrlich:**

So as a child, do you remember any of that being explained to you?

1-00:07:50

**Reynolds:**

No, well, I was in college.

1-00:07:56

**Ehrlich:**

At that point you were in college, that's right.

1-00:07:57

**Reynolds:**

Yes, right.

1-00:07:59

**Ehrlich:**

So, did most of your friends and neighbors attend church when you were a child?

1-00:08:07

**Reynolds:**

Yes, we were quite a mix. There were quite a few Jewish families, and Catholic—. We all mixed together well. We didn't stick in any one little group.

1-00:08:22

**Ehrlich:**

But you were aware that there were a mix of religions?

1-00:08:26

**Reynolds:**

Yeah, that they were other—right. Yeah.

1-00:08:28

**Ehrlich:**

Was there a Jewish synagogue that you remember?

1-00:08:31

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think so. I was a pretty close friend of a Jewish girl. I just don't remember what she did about that.

1-00:08:45

**Ehrlich:**

And any memories of there being Muslim families?

1-00:08:49

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think there were any. And the Mexican families lived mostly down around First and Second Street. They were congregated there. There were quite a few Mexicans. And then the Asians had vegetable gardens and they lived more in North Richmond.

1-00:09:13

**Ehrlich:**

So there were was some sense of different neighborhoods.

1-00:09:16

**Reynolds:**

Yes, there was that.

1-00:09:18

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember any more of that?

1-00:09:23

**Reynolds:**

No, North Richmond was the Asians, and First, Second and Third Street were the Mexican families, it seemed mostly.

1-00:09:36

**Ehrlich:**

And were those neighborhoods that you would spend time in?

1-00:09:38

**Reynolds:**

Yeah, I had friends. There was no racial discontent at all when I was a child in Richmond. We all mixed well, went to each other's parties.

1-00:09:57

**Ehrlich:**

So where did you go to elementary school?

1-00:09:59

**Reynolds:**

It was called Lincoln.

1-00:10:02

**Ehrlich:**

And where was that?

1-00:10:04

**Reynolds:**

At that time it was on Tenth Street, but now it's not there anymore. My mother also attended there.

1-00:10:15

**Ehrlich:**

Did your mother grow up in the same neighborhood?

1-00:10:18

**Reynolds:**

No, they lived in Richmond when she was little, I guess, and then they moved to San Pablo. But she went to Lincoln School and she went to Richmond High.

1-00:10:34

**Ehrlich:**

So what are your memories of elementary school?

1-00:10:39

**Reynolds:**

They were all good. I always liked school. I enjoyed—we had lots of birthday parties, and things like that. The show was our recreation. We went Saturday afternoons mostly, and in those days it was ten cents and you got a candy bar.

1-00:11:05

**Ehrlich:**

Was it one movie house?

1-00:11:08

**Reynolds:**

One movie house.

1-00:11:08

**Ehrlich:**

And what was it called?

1-00:11:10

**Reynolds:**

I think it was The Fox, but I'm not sure.

1-00:11:14

**Ehrlich:**

And where was it?

1-00:11:15

**Reynolds:**

It would have been on Twelfth Street, I guess. I mean, in Richmond.

1-00:11:23

**Ehrlich:**

When you think about elementary school, was it the same mix of children in the neighborhoods who you saw in your elementary school?

1-00:11:32

**Reynolds:**

Right. Yeah. Well, there weren't too many schools. There was one at the Point, and Nystrom, and Lincoln where I went, and Grant. And one in El Cerrito.

1-00:11:51

**Ehrlich:**

Was there a different student population at the different schools? Did they have reputations for having different kids there? Different types of kids?

1-00:11:58

**Reynolds:**

No, it was pretty much the same, I would say.

1-00:12:02

**Ehrlich:**

And what about how many kids were in your class, roughly, when you were a child?

1-00:12:09

**Reynolds:**

I'd say about thirty.

1-00:12:13

**Ehrlich:**

Any other memories of what elementary school was like?

1-00:12:19

**Reynolds:**

I just liked going to school and we had a lot of fun.

1-00:12:25

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have activities like gym and art and drama when you were a child?

1-00:12:33

**Reynolds:**

We had music. And we did have an art teacher and we had a music teacher. But we didn't do too much with P.E. We played baseball and kickball.

1-00:12:52

**Ehrlich:**

And, memories of any favorite elementary school teachers?

1-00:12:58

**Reynolds:**

Yes, my sixth grade teacher. I really loved her. I just really liked her.

1-00:13:07

**Ehrlich:**

What was special about her?

1-00:13:10

**Reynolds:**

She was just so motherly, I think. [laughs] But I liked most of my teachers.

1-00:13:21

**Ehrlich:**

So where did you go to junior high?

1-00:13:24

**Reynolds:**

Well, there were two junior highs. And I went six months to Roosevelt, which was in downtown Richmond. And then we moved out near the high school, and I went to Longfellow from the high seventh—we had low and high in those days—I went from high seventh to the ninth.

1-00:13:48

**Ehrlich:**

Can you explain the difference between low and high?

1-00:13:50

**Reynolds:**

Well, according to your birthday. If you were born like in—let's see. It was just according to your birthday. My birthday was in April. When my kids were in school, they changed that from the low and high to— and my oldest boy had to skip six months.

1-00:14:27

**Ehrlich:**

Do you know why they had it set up that way?

1-00:14:30

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't. It was just that way when I went to school.

1-00:14:34

**Ehrlich:**

[some noise in background] That's the dog. Were the children in junior high the same kids you went to elementary school with? Or was it significantly different in any way?

1-00:14:47

**Reynolds:**

Well, I changed junior highs, so it was different for me. I met children that came from El Cerrito, which I didn't know them as well. But again, it was easy to make friends. I had no problems.

1-00:15:03

**Ehrlich:**

Any black students at that point. [noise in background] Maybe we should take a quick break. Well no, maybe the dog is taking a break. [more noise] Maybe we better take a quick break.

1-00:15:18

**Reynolds:**  
I'm sorry.

1-00:15:24

**Ehrlich:**  
So we just took a little break to deal with a noisy dog, and now we're back. I was wondering when you were in junior high do you remember any black students?

1-00:15:37

**Reynolds:**  
No.

1-00:15:38

**Ehrlich:**  
And what about Japanese students?

1-00:15:42

**Reynolds:**  
In my own class, there were about two.

1-00:15:52

**Ehrlich:**  
So a few.

1-00:15:53

**Reynolds:**  
There were just about three or four Japanese families that lived here at that time.

1-00:15:58

**Ehrlich:**  
And what about Mexican Americans?

1-00:16:00

**Reynolds:**  
Well, there were quite a few of those.

1-00:16:02

**Ehrlich:**  
And do you remember them being well-integrated into school life?

1-00:16:08

**Reynolds:**  
Oh yes. There was no problem. There was no racial problem.

1-00:16:11

**Ehrlich:**  
So that sense of no problem continued through

1-00:16:14

**Reynolds:**  
Through high school.

1-00:16:18

**Ehrlich:**

So why don't we talk a little bit about high school? Where did you go to high?

1-00:16:22

**Reynolds:**

Richmond Union High School.

1-00:16:24

**Ehrlich:**

Which was the only high school.

1-00:16:25

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. It was called Richmond Union then.

1-00:16:30

**Ehrlich:**

And what year was that that you attended Richmond Union?

1-00:16:33

**Reynolds:**

Let's see, I graduated in '36. So it would have been '33 when I started.

1-00:16:38

**Ehrlich:**

So you went from '33 to '36.

1-00:16:40

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

1-00:16:41

**Ehrlich:**

And what was that experience like for you?

1-00:16:49

**Reynolds:**

Well, it was fun. We had a little—I forget what we call it—recreation room where we had noon dances. I liked all of it. I enjoyed school. I had good teachers. My French teacher was especially good. She'd have us to her home and have French pastries and things like that. She'd write invitation in French on the board for us to answer. And I'd burned myself severely once when I was in high school, and she sent me flowers with a note written in French, which I thought was very nice.

1-00:17:42

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what the actual school was like inside? What it looked like?

1-00:17:49

**Reynolds:**

Well, yeah, I remember it, but it just was a regular school. There wasn't anything different about it.

1-00:17:57

**Ehrlich:**

I was just trying to get a picture of what it sort of felt like to be there, what it looked like.

1-00:18:02

**Reynolds:**

I don't know what to say. It was just a regular school.

1-00:18:14

**Ehrlich:**

And what about extracurricular activities?

1-00:18:19

**Reynolds:**

We had after-school P.E. We played ball, but I didn't do too much of that—I don't think we had too many extracurricular activities.

1-00:18:43

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what you did for fun when you were in high school? [dog makes noise] Shall we take a break?

1-00:18:49

**Reynolds:**

Oh, I'm sorry.

1-00:18:56

**Ehrlich:**

Okay, we are back on after another little pause. And you had said during the break something about the little theatre.

1-00:19:08

**Reynolds:**

We had a little theatre in which plays were given and programs, which was nice. I don't think they have that in many schools now. I don't know, maybe they do.

1-00:19:19

**Ehrlich:**

Who participated?

1-00:19:20

**Reynolds:**

Different classes.

1-00:19:23

**Ehrlich:**

So it was part of the actual school day.

1-00:19:25

**Reynolds:**  
Yes.

1-00:19:26

**Ehrlich:**  
Do you remember being in any shows?

1-00:19:28

**Reynolds:**  
No. [laughs]

1-00:19:31

**Ehrlich:**  
So I'm interested in knowing if most of your friends graduated from high school.

1-00:19:38

**Reynolds:**  
Yes. And many of them went on to college. UC Berkeley or San Francisco State. I went to San Francisco State with four of the people that I graduated with.

1-00:19:50

**Ehrlich:**  
And what percentage of your friends do you think ended up going to college? The majority of them?

1-00:19:58

**Reynolds:**  
Of my close friends? The majority of my close friends did go to college.

1-00:20:03

**Ehrlich:**  
And what do you think about the school in general? In your class?

1-00:20:08

**Reynolds:**  
Probably one third.

1-00:20:09

**Ehrlich:**  
Went to college.

1-00:20:10

**Reynolds:**  
Yes.

1-00:20:11

**Ehrlich:**  
And what did the other two thirds do?

1-00:20:14

**Reynolds:**

Well, some went to business college, which is college too. And some just went to work—just would get jobs.

1-00:20:27

**Ehrlich:**

Was the expectation in your family that you would go to college?

1-00:20:30

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I had much older cousins. One was twenty years older. And they were all teachers, and that was understood more or less that I was going to college to be a teacher.

1-00:20:44

**Ehrlich:**

So do you remember actually making the decision to become a teacher?

1-00:20:48

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I actually myself wanted to be a secretary for a while, but then my mother said go to college and then if you want to become a secretary—after four years of college you don't want to turn around and be a secretary. And I was glad. I enjoyed teaching. I love teaching.

1-00:21:09

**Ehrlich:**

So, why did you choose S.F. State?

1-00:21:21

**Reynolds:**

Oh, because at that time, it was the teacher's college. It was actually called San Francisco State Teacher's College when I went there. And then they dropped the teacher out of it later, but when I went there it was mainly for teachers—primary. If you wanted to be a high school teacher, you went to Cal. But I wanted primary.

1-00:21:44

**Ehrlich:**

So it was really the only choice.

1-00:21:45

**Reynolds:**

Yes. They had a primary school right in the college, where we practice-taught. So we got good training.

1-00:22:00

**Ehrlich:**

Did you feel like there were any other options for you besides being a teacher?

1-00:22:04

**Reynolds:**

No, not really. In those days, it was teacher, secretary, or nurse, practically.

1-00:22:10

**Ehrlich:**

Do you know any girls who went on to do anything beyond those three choices?

1-00:22:16

**Reynolds:**

No, not really.

1-00:22:18

**Ehrlich:**

And what about the boys?

1-00:22:19

**Reynolds:**

Oh, the boys—the ones I knew mostly just went to work. I mean, there was the threat of war coming. Not when we went to college though, that was later. I don't know. I didn't know too many boys that went to college.

1-00:22:45

**Ehrlich:**

So more of the girls went to college than the boys.

1-00:22:48

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. San Francisco State was practically all women.

1-00:22:54

**Ehrlich:**

So it was more typical for boys to get jobs out of high school. And the girls to go on to teach or be secretaries.

1-00:23:04

**Reynolds:**

Well, some of the boys I graduated with went to Cal. Quite a few who did do that.

1-00:23:14

**Ehrlich:**

Have you stayed in touch with friends from high school years?

1-00:23:18

**Reynolds:**

Oh yes. In fact, just two weeks ago, a woman that I went all through grammar school and college who now lives down south was up here visiting a nephew, and we had lunch together. And all my closest friends for years—but many of them have passed away.

1-00:23:44

**Ehrlich:**

I'm interested in knowing what the expectation were when you were a young woman about marriage.

1-00:23:54

**Reynolds:**

Well, in my family, it was get through college before you find marriage. [laughs] That was about it. But a lot of the girls that I graduated with did get married very quickly after high school, but I didn't. I worked two years after I graduated from college before I married.

1-00:24:17

**Ehrlich:**

And was the assumption that you would get married, in general?

1-00:24:21

**Reynolds:**

Yeah, I think so.

1-00:24:22

**Ehrlich:**

Were there girls, young women who you knew who didn't get married?

1-00:24:29

**Reynolds:**

Oh yes.

1-00:24:29

**Ehrlich:**

And what were the attitudes towards those women?

1-00:24:36

**Reynolds:**

Well, I still have a friend I went all through school with that never married. She became a principal in the junior high. We didn't think anything about it really.

1-00:24:52

**Ehrlich:**

So it was a choice for young women. But the majority of the women you knew did marry.

1-00:25:03

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

1-00:25:04

**Ehrlich:**

Are you hearing the dog?

1-00:25:05

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

1-00:25:05

**Ehrlich:**

Well maybe we can try ignoring him and see how that works out.

1-00:25:12

**Reynolds:**  
Okay.

1-00:25:16

**Ehrlich:**  
Do you have any memory of people wanting to marry before the war broke out?

1-00:25:25

**Reynolds:**  
Yes. The first signs of war I think there were a lot of marriages. Some hoping that that would keep their husband home and some having babies right away to keep their husband home.

1-00:25:47

**Ehrlich:**  
That was a question that I had, whether you or other people you knew chose to begin a family in relationship to when their husbands were going to war?

1-00:25:59

**Reynolds:**  
No. My husband just felt—we were married in '42. The war had started. But he felt he should go, and he didn't think we should have a family before he left.

1-00:26:16

**Ehrlich:**  
So you made the decisions to wait till he came home. Do you know other people who made the opposite decision?

1-00:26:22

**Reynolds:**  
Yes. And it worked for them all right.

1-00:26:29

**Ehrlich:**  
So the wife became pregnant and had the baby while the husband was gone?

1-00:26:36

**Reynolds:**  
Yes, I knew some that did that. But I also knew some that had the family, and then he was excused from the war because of family.

1-00:26:46

**Ehrlich:**  
And didn't have to go.

1-00:26:47

**Reynolds:**  
Right.

1-00:26:48

**Ehrlich:**

And do you remember any attitudes about any of those kinds of decisions? Public opinion?

1-00:26:53

**Reynolds:**

No. Because they still needed men here to work. The one I particularly was thinking about worked at Standard Oil, and of course that was an important job.

1-00:27:11

**Ehrlich:**

And there was a lot of wartime work here.

1-00:27:13

**Reynolds:**

Oh yeah.

1-00:27:15

**Ehrlich:**

Can you tell us a little bit about your own courtship and marriage?

1-00:27:21

**Reynolds:**

I went to my high school graduation with my husband. And then he went to work. He did not go to college. And I went off and on with him all through college. I graduated. I went to my high school graduation with him and my college graduation. And I taught two years, and then we married. We were married eight months and he went in service.

1-00:27:52

**Ehrlich:**

So he enlisted? Or was he drafted?

1-00:27:55

**Reynolds:**

He was drafted.

1-00:27:57

**Ehrlich:**

How did he feel about going?

1-00:27:59

**Reynolds:**

He thought he should go. He felt he should. And he was in England, France, Belgium, and Germany. I didn't see him for two full years.

1-00:28:13

**Ehrlich:**

Eight months after having just married.

1-00:28:16

**Reynolds:**

Well, for a year he was here. He was in Monterey for a while, and I visited him there. See I was teaching, so I had summer vacation. He was in Arizona, and I spent the summer in Arizona with him. And then he was in New Orleans the next year, and I was all ready to go when he was shipped overseas. And then he was gone for two years.

1-00:28:47

**Ehrlich:**

So he was a local Richmond boy too.

1-00:28:48

**Reynolds:**

Oh yeah.

1-00:28:50

**Ehrlich:**

Did most of your friends who married marry local boys?

1-00:28:52

**Reynolds:**

Right. [laughs]

1-00:28:55

**Ehrlich:**

So it sounds from a lot of the things that you said that it was a very close-knit community.

1-00:29:01

**Reynolds:**

It was. It really was.

1-00:29:04

**Ehrlich:**

And we know that things changed dramatically. Maybe we can move into talking a little bit about that. I'm interested in knowing if you have memories of first hearing that Richmond was going to become a major center for war-related work.

1-00:29:25

**Reynolds:**

I don't remember too much. I just remember the talk of the shipyards. The shipyards were coming to Richmond. My first two years of teaching I was in Antioch. And then all of a sudden, the shipyard was a big thing and people were pouring in here from all the different states. And I was called to teach in San Pablo and then Richmond at the same time. But I had gone to school under the superintendent in San Pablo. He'd been the principal when I lived in Concord.

1-00:30:11

**Ehrlich:**

What was his name?

1-00:30:13

**Reynolds:**

Edward Palmer. And he had been a good friend of my grandfather's. Which made it kind of nice. So I chose to go to San Pablo.

1-00:30:24

**Ehrlich:**

When you say you were called to work, how did that happen?

1-00:30:28

**Reynolds:**

They just telephoned and said that you were hired to start teaching.

1-00:30:36

**Ehrlich:**

Who called? From the actual school? Or was there some kind of central—

1-00:30:40

**Reynolds:**

School, or secretary or whoever did it.

1-00:30:44

**Ehrlich:**

So you had applied.

1-00:30:45

**Reynolds:**

I had applied to both.

1-00:30:48

**Ehrlich:**

Both school systems.

1-00:30:49

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. Well there was kind of a theory here in Richmond when you got out of college that you had teach a couple years in the country. They hardly ever hired you immediately. Richmond was in those days a big school system. Country was Antioch, Pittsburg. A lot of us taught around like that. And I liked it in Antioch. But I got married that summer anyway, so I wanted to live here cause my husband was working here. And I had applied to both school districts. Within two days, I was called first to San Pablo and then by Richmond.

1-00:31:31

**Ehrlich:**

And you chose San Pablo because of your connection with the Superintendent. So, going back to hearing about the shipyards, do you remember hearing that outsiders would be coming to Richmond to work there?

1-00:31:46

**Reynolds:**

Yes, but we had no idea it would be like it was. I mean, it's hardly even—I don't think you can even visualize how it was. People would just come here in truckloads, and live in tents. Housings were put up, and Richmond became just a huge big city overnight. I mean, not a huge big city, but nothing like it what it was. And the schools were just unmanageable practically. My first teaching experience when I got in San Pablo. It was in a big storage room out in the middle of the yard. It was a huge big room, and we were on double shift. And at one point, I had seventy children in the second grade. And then they built a school, and it would cut down. Then, more people would move in. It would build up. We very seldom got any records from the other schools. The people didn't bother to have them sent. I was teaching second grade, and I wouldn't have any idea what the children knew or anything like that. We had a nice auditorium. There were two classes, one on each end. And then in the foyer there was first grade being taught.

1-00:33:20

**Ehrlich:**

You had seventy children while you were on double session?

1-00:33:24

**Reynolds:**

Yes. Not for a long period of time.

1-00:33:29

**Ehrlich:**

Tell us the year you began teaching in—

1-00:33:32

**Reynolds:**

'42.

1-00:33:33

**Ehrlich:**

And that was at the Dover school? Is that correct?

1-00:33:37

**Reynolds:**

No. Dover hadn't been built.

1-00:33:38

**Ehrlich:**

Oh, that was the Market-

1-00:33:39

**Reynolds:**

Market Street School. And it was the only school in San Pablo. And then, I don't think Dover was the first one that was built. By the end of the war, there were seven schools in San Pablo.

1-00:33:54

**Ehrlich:**

And how many were there at the beginning of the war?

1-00:33:56

**Reynolds:**

One.

1-00:33:56

**Ehrlich:**

And this is elementary we're talking about.

1-00:34:00

**Reynolds:**

Yes. We were teaching in the auditorium. I was teaching in this old storage room.

1-00:34:08

**Ehrlich:**

So before we get into more details about the school, and I want to hear all of those details, do you remember what the rumors were of who was going to be coming? Who these outsiders were? Was there talk?

1-00:34:23

**Reynolds:**

Yes, there was talk. [laughs] About the Okies and Arkies all coming. One class I had, one of my first I think, I had a ten year old boy in second grade with his seven year old sister. He hadn't wanted to go to school, and so they didn't make him go. And he had to sit in the back of my room with his feet spread out like this, because we had these little desks.

1-00:34:55

**Ehrlich:**

Where was he from do you know?

1-00:34:56

**Reynolds:**

Oklahoma.

1-00:34:59

**Ehrlich:**

So what were the attitudes of the locals to these newcomers coming in?

1-00:35:05

**Reynolds:**

Not very nice. [laughs]

1-00:35:06

**Ehrlich:**

What do you remember?

1-00:35:08

**Reynolds:**

Well, it was sort of upsetting. I mean, you know, their ways were different. Their children were afraid of the flush toilets. I remember that. They didn't want to have to go in there. I'd have to take the kids in. They do anything to keep from going. Some of the boys went in other places.

1-00:35:31

**Ehrlich:**

Inside?

1-00:35:32

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. The diseases—. Lice was terrible. And impetigo. The children would just be covered with it. That was one thing we did have, a school nurse at each of the schools that stayed all day and just took care of that kind of thing. It really changed the whole set-up in Richmond.

1-00:36:04

**Ehrlich:**

What kinds of things do you remember, sort of your friends and family or just local people saying about the newcomers?

1-00:36:18

**Reynolds:**

They knew that we had to have them, because the shipyards were built. But no one was happy with that. I mean, the schools were going downhill, because we were too crowded. We didn't have supplies. The children—. It just was not a happy situation.

1-00:36:40

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember there being overt conflict? Fights, or—

1-00:36:46

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't remember that.

1-00:36:50

**Ehrlich:**

So it was more just a sense of unhappiness.

1-00:36:53

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. It was wartime and everybody was—. We accepted it, but it wasn't a good feeling, I'd say that.

1-00:37:08

**Ehrlich:**

You mentioned people coming from Oklahoma and Arkansas. Okies and Arkies. At the time, did you think of the word Okie and Arkie as derogatory?

1-00:37:21

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I think so.

1-00:37:24

**Ehrlich:**

And were you aware of African Americans coming in too?

1-00:37:30

**Reynolds:**

Yea, they were coming in too.

1-00:37:32

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have a sense of where they were coming from?

1-00:37:34

**Reynolds:**

They were more coming from the Southern states.

1-00:37:39

**Ehrlich:**

What were attitudes like among locals to this population coming in?

1-00:37:47

**Reynolds:**

As I remember, it didn't seem much different. They accepted them all about the same. They resented everybody coming in. But I don't think they thought of the blacks any differently.

1-00:38:02

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have a different sense of the different newcomers? Did the people from Oklahoma seem different from Arkansas? Did the whites coming from those mid-states seem different from the blacks coming from the South? Could you make any distinctions there? I'd be interested to hear that.

1-00:38:19

**Reynolds:**

Yes, they did. The thing is they were behind. I only taught second grade, but they had not had the schooling that the California kids were getting.

1-00:38:35

**Ehrlich:**

Any of the newcomers hadn't.

1-00:38:36

**Reynolds:**

No. It was difficult. And it was difficult with the parents. They would keep the children out, and they were supposed to write notes. And many of them couldn't write. The parents couldn't write or sign anything. We wouldn't have much contact with the parents,

because in most cases, the mother and father both were working at the shipyards. And the children were just left.

1-00:39:10

**Ehrlich:**

So do you remember having black students during this time?

1-00:39:15

**Reynolds:**

Actually, we were double shift. Because most of the blacks moved to what's called North Richmond, they came in on a bus. The morning session at my school was solid black, practically. And I did do a lot of subbing, because I live close to the school. And some of the teachers were coming from San Francisco, and they couldn't be called to sub and get over there in time. And I lived near the school. So I often taught the black children too.

1-00:39:52

**Ehrlich:**

Why is it that the black children were there in the morning?

1-00:39:55

**Reynolds:**

It seemed like when the blacks moved in, they all moved into North Richmond. So they had to be brought in by bus. And the bus brought them in in the morning. And the walkers came in the afternoon. They were called the bus and the walkers.

00:40:14

**Ehrlich:**

So the walkers were the children—.

00:40:15

**Reynolds:**

The walkers were the children who lived close around the school.

00:40:20

**Ehrlich:**

And were there any differences between the black children and the Okies and Arkies?

00:40:26

**Reynolds:**

Not too much. It was about the same. Actually, they were all good little kids. You couldn't have a class of seventy today and—that wouldn't be possible I don't think. But they were all nice little kids. I don't remember any discipline problems when they were little. They seemed to like coming to school. I had a little radio with a phonograph on top, and I would bring it on Fridays. I'd tell them if they were good all week, I'd bring it on Friday. And I had children's records, and they would just sit there enthralled. Well you wouldn't find that in today's child. Who'd want to listen to that? They'd see something better on TV. I don't remember hardly any discipline problems in those days.

00:41:27

**Ehrlich:**

So will you take us through a typical day? Say your first year teaching the second graders at Market Street. It's 1943.

00:41:38

**Reynolds:**

No. '42.

00:41:39

**Ehrlich:**

'42. Will you take us through a typical day?

00:41:42

**Reynolds:**

Well, it was a real shock to me because I'd been in Antioch with about thirty-two in a classroom of very well-educated families. And it was a complete different situation, but I coped. And the children, as I said, were good, and they wanted to learn. They were anxious to learn, but I don't think they got the education they should have. You couldn't listen to that many reading groups. I had to take two or three one day. It was certainly not an ideal situation.

00:42:27

**Ehrlich:**

So can you describe from when you got there in the morning—did you teach the morning shift?

00:42:33

**Reynolds:**

No, I taught afternoon.

00:42:35

**Ehrlich:**

So can you sort of describe a typical day, even though they all were probably different?

00:42:41

**Reynolds:**

I'd have to stand in the doorway, and they'd have to all come in like this with their hands spread wide to see if they had impetigo between their fingers. And if they had that, they had to get sent to the nurse.

00:42:54

**Ehrlich:**

So you would inspect every kid?

00:42:55

**Reynolds:**

Yeah. And we were supposed to now and then, check their heads for lice. We had these little sticks. The nurse did a lot of them, but we were supposed to watch too. Then they would come in and have a regular school day. I don't remember anything different.

00:43:19

**Ehrlich:**

Well, how did you manage to have a regular school day with seventy kids? Where would the kids sit?

00:43:23

**Reynolds:**

They sat together, if you can imagine. In the second half of second grade in those days, I don't know if they're doing that now or not, we started cursive writing. And you could imagine two kids sitting in one desk trying to write.

00:43:39

**Ehrlich:**

Two kids would share one desk?

00:43:41

**Reynolds:**

Right. But then a school would open, and the class would be cut down to maybe about thirty-five or forty, which wasn't too bad. I had about forty seats in the classroom, I think.

00:43:58

**Ehrlich:**

How would it be determined which kids would move on to the new school?

00:44:03

**Reynolds:**

By where they lived.

00:44:04

**Ehrlich:**

So then for a little while, things would be better. And then?

00:44:10

**Reynolds:**

Then they would gradually creep up again as more families came.

00:44:16

**Ehrlich:**

So aside from the children sharing desks, can you give us some more sense of what it was like in the classroom?

00:44:32

**Reynolds:**

Well, I tried to keep it as normal as possible.

00:44:39

**Ehrlich:**

Were you the only teacher in the classroom? Did you have an assistant?

00:44:42

**Reynolds:**

No. Then there was the morning teacher. And that was another thing. We had to share the same books and stuff. The morning kids had the books that we had. It really was a bad time for that first year. Then they had about enough schools. The schools were just coming up like mushrooms. They were building them as fast as they could. We had the old Market Street school, and by the end of the war, we had either seven or eight schools. So you can see.

00:45:20

**Ehrlich:**

Was there a distinction between the schools in San Pablo and the schools in Richmond?

00:45:23

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think so.

00:45:26

**Ehrlich:**

You think the children who came to your schools were the same children more or less who came to the Richmond schools?

00:45:31

**Reynolds:**

I think so. Maybe in downtown Richmond they might have still had the older families. The schools that were out on the South side and ——. Some of those were families were moving into housing. They had it more like San Pablo.

00:45:53

**Ehrlich:**

In terms of the overcrowding.

00:45:53

**Reynolds:**

Right. But my cousin was teaching at Lincoln school in Richmond, and we used to call every night to see who had the most kids. And I think she only reached sixty, something like that, where I did get up to seventy-two at one point.

00:46:11

**Ehrlich:**

And was there any overlap in terms of the teaching staff at Richmond and San Pablo? Or were they distinct systems?

00:46:19

**Reynolds:**

Sometimes the children at seventh grade—

00:46:23

**Ehrlich:**

They went to junior high.

00:46:24

**Reynolds:**

They went to Richmond.

00:46:25

**Ehrlich:**

But in terms of—would you have teachers from Richmond substituting at a San Pablo school?

00:46:32

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think so.

00:46:37

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have a sense of the kinds of living conditions that children were exposed to?

00:46:42

**Reynolds:**

They were terrible.

00:46:43

**Ehrlich:**

Tell me about that.

00:46:47

**Reynolds:**

Some of them lived in tents. They had public restrooms. They didn't have bathrooms.

00:46:55

**Ehrlich:**

Where were the tents?

00:46:58

**Reynolds:**

They were out in North—what's called North Richmond. Just the living conditions were bad. I don't know.

00:47:11

**Ehrlich:**

Did you ever go down and visit there and see the tents?

00:47:14

**Reynolds:**

Not really.

00:47:15

**Ehrlich:**

But you heard about them from the kids?

00:47:17

**Reynolds:**

Right. Well, I did go where the black children came from, North Richmond. I was down there a few times when they were at school, Verde. I subbed in there a couple of times. But I didn't go down. I can't say I did.

00:47:38

**Ehrlich:**

What else about the living conditions for your kids?

00:47:43

**Reynolds:**

They were on their own. The mother and father were working. I remember one little boy. He was eating his lunch, and he had this pale brown liquid. It had an odd smell, and I said, "What is that?" And he said, "Beer." And he says, "There wasn't any milk, so I put beer in my thermos." This was second grade.

00:48:18

**Ehrlich:**

What else did you remember?

00:48:31

**Reynolds:**

We sold stamps for bonds, I used to do that. I came early and collected all the money and passed them out. They could buy them for a dime, a quarter. Quite a few of them bought each month.

00:49:00

**Ehrlich:**

Explain how that worked.

00:49:02

**Reynolds:**

We'd get these big sheets of stamps. And the children would bring their money to school, and the different teachers would collect them and put how much she needed for her classroom. And I came early and sorted that out and then would pass them to the different teachers. Then we would give them to the children.

00:49:26

**Ehrlich:**

And what would the children get?

00:49:28

**Reynolds:**

They had books. They were bonds. By the time they was eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents when they were filled, and then they were worth twenty-five dollars. We did that. We stopped banking at school when we started the bonds.

00:49:52

**Ehrlich:**

What do you mean you stopped banking at school?

00:49:54

**Reynolds:**

Well, when I went to school, we used to bring money in and we had bank accounts.

00:50:00

**Ehrlich:**

When you were a student?

00:50:04

**Reynolds:**

Yes. They did it the same way we did the bonds. And the teachers in San Pablo and I think Richmond also handled the rationing. We did that in our auditorium in the evening. People would come and sign up for their sugar and gas. And we as teachers—we were in charge of the whole thing. We had a lot to do.

00:50:31

**Ehrlich:**

Was it specifically for the parents of your kids?

00:50:33

**Reynolds:**

Yeah.

00:50:33

**Ehrlich:**

Tell me more about that. Anything you remember about the rationing?

00:50:41

**Reynolds:**

Well, they'd sign up, and we'd have to help them. A lot of them had difficulty filling out forms, and we would have to help them fill out the forms for what they were getting.

00:50:54

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what was rationed?

00:50:56

**Reynolds:**

Gas, sugar, shoes. I don't think meat was rationed, we just didn't have much of it. Those were the big things. Shoes you were allowed, I think it was three pairs a year. But I was fortunate. My father-in-law gave me his tickets. [laughs]

00:51:32

**Ehrlich:**

Was rationing a hardship on you personally?

00:51:36

**Reynolds:**

As I told you before, with the gas, teachers were allowed—certain professions got more. And teachers were allowed more. And because I worked also at night as secretary of the evening high school, I was able to get more gas. And I would save it and walk to school, so that I could have some on the weekends.

00:52:01

**Ehrlich:**

To do what?

00:52:02

**Reynolds:**

Well, I had two very good couples as friends. Their husbands had not gone in the service. And they would take me places like San Francisco or some place like that. And they would use my car with gas in it. So it made it nice for me. We'd go to movies or dances.

00:52:22

**Ehrlich:**

Actually, I want to ask you more about your social life. But I was thinking about what you said about the children not really being looked after because both their parents were working. Do you remember any stories or any sense of what your students did when they weren't in school?

00:52:52

**Reynolds:**

There must have been someone who looked after them. Just the older sisters and brothers probably. But most of the parents did work. Their children were on their own.

00:53:05

**Ehrlich:**

I've heard stories of very young children getting jobs working as bootblacks, shoe shiners. Do you have any memories of that?

00:53:16

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't.

00:53:17

**Ehrlich:**

I've also heard that some children, they say during the war, were drugged so that their parents could work? Do you remember hearing rumors of that?

00:53:35

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't remember any of that.

00:53:45

**Ehrlich:**

Any individual children that you can still remember from the first year teaching?

00:53:50

**Reynolds:**

I think I told you this. I remember that I had this ten year old boy and his seven year old sister in the same grade. And he had come from Oklahoma and didn't want to go to school in Oklahoma, so they didn't send him. And his sister was very protective of him. She was a smart little thing, and she'd run back, he always sat in the back of the room,

and try to help him with stuff. That was kind of interesting. I really don't remember too much about anything special.

00:54:35

**Ehrlich:**

Each day did you know who the children in your class would be? Or was it always changing?

00:54:40

**Reynolds:**

It didn't change too much. What you started out with you kept pretty much, until a new school opened, and then they would leave. And then we would get new children, but it stayed pretty much the same, I think. You know that was a long time ago.

00:55:02

**Ehrlich:**

It was. It's amazing how much you remember. Did you have any Japanese children in your class?

00:55:09

**Reynolds:**

I don't think I did. I don't remember that I did. And in my own class, I didn't have any black children. The black children all came from North Richmond and they came on the bus. Later I probably did, but right during the war, I don't think I did have any Asians. Well, actually, I guess they were in the—.

00:55:44

**Ehrlich:**

In the camps. I was wondering if you had any memory of that transition or any stories that the Japanese that you knew going to the camps.

00:55:50

**Reynolds:**

Well, I did. I knew some of the families that did go.

00:55:59

**Ehrlich:**

Can you talk a little bit more about some of the health problems that the children had?

00:56:06

**Reynolds:**

Well, that was mostly impetigo and lice.

00:56:09

**Ehrlich:**

Were they easily treated?

00:56:12

**Reynolds:**

Well, the impetigo—I'd never seen it before. It would be scabs. But I can remember one little girl with just scabs on scabs. And they would have to go to the nurse. And the nurse

would have to pry those scabs, and the kids just hated to go. And they'd cry and scream and not want to go. But she had to treat them. They were in and out of the classroom doing that a lot of the time. Lice was a problem. The parents would use coal oil on the kid's head. The girls would come to school with scarves on their head, and you could smell this coal oil. But I think the nurse did something different, but I don't know what she used.

00:57:00

**Ehrlich:**

Was there just one nurse for all those children?

00:57:01

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:57:04

**Ehrlich:**

So how hard was her day?

00:57:43

**Reynolds:**

Her day was hard too. As I told you before, I used to get these notes when the children were absent. I should have saved those notes, because a lot of the parents could barely read or write themselves. And I'd get a note that so-and-so had a rising. I'd ask the children what is a rising, and they'd just look at me. But I guess it was boils. I don't know. I had more notes that were they were out because they had a rising.

00:57:46

**Ehrlich:**

Like a different culture.

00:57:49

**Reynolds:**

Yeah.

00:57:51

**Ehrlich:**

Well, we should take a little break now.

[End Audio File Reynolds1 03-05-03]

[Begin Audio File Reynolds2 03-05-03]

00:00:02

**Reynolds:**

Okay, would you like a cup of coffee or something?

00:00:18

**Ehrlich:**

So this is the second tape of our interview with Jeanne Reynolds. And I wanted to ask a little about the local kids' reaction to the newcomers at school. Can you remember?

00:00:17

**Reynolds:**

At first, I think they were kind of divided. The local kids stayed with their friends and didn't want to include the newcomers. But it gradually changed, and they were accepted. But they seemed so different at first. As I said, they were afraid of the flush toilets, they hadn't had some of the things in school that the other children had had. I don't think there was too much acceptance at first. But that changed.

00:00:54

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember name-calling?

00:00:57

**Reynolds:**

Yes, I think they did quite a bit of that? Okies, Arkies.

00:01:08

**Ehrlich:**

How did the parents of the local kids respond?

00:01:16

**Reynolds:**

Well, I think we all knew that it had to be. The shipyards were open and they needed help. I think on the whole they were accepted. They were upset about the way the town was going, with the way people were living, with the conditions and everything. But it was war, and we accepted it just like we did the rationing.

00:01:49

**Ehrlich:**

I remember hearing that in some of the schools they had special classes for children who couldn't read.

00:01:59

**Reynolds:**

I don't think we did in San Pablo.

00:02:03

**Ehrlich:**

And what about transportation issues? How did the kids get to school?

00:02:07

**Reynolds:**

As I said, the morning children were all bussed. The kids that lived around the area walked. But I do remember we did have some busses in the afternoon also, because I can remember doing bus duty late till five o'clock at night. So some of the other children were bussed also.

00:02:32

**Ehrlich:**

The white children.

00:02:33

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:02:34

**Ehrlich:**

And do you remembering there being problems with the basses coming late or the parents complaining? Any stories about that?

00:02:40

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't remember anything like that.

00:02:43

**Ehrlich:**

So let's talk a little bit about who the teachers were.

00:02:46

**Reynolds:**

They were a mixture. It had been just a small school, and then we went on double shift with all these extra rooms. I remember two or three of them came from San Francisco everyday. And I was fortunate that I lived fairly close. Another teacher and I used to walk together every morning. One I remember came from Oakland. They were from all over really. The original staff was still there, and there only about six of them.

00:03:35

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember teachers coming from other parts of the country?

00:03:41

**Reynolds:**

Not so much then, right during the war time. Afterwards, we had a lot of teachers from other states. But right during the wartime, I think most of them were local Californians.

00:03:58

**Ehrlich:**

I remember hearing that there was a serious teacher shortage. Do you remember that?

00:04:07

**Reynolds:**

Especially after the war, it was even worse, because—I don't know if I should say this or not. I was pregnant, and I kept wanting to quit. And they kept saying we haven't got a teacher to replace you. Finally, I got to stop in January, and I had my first child in February.

00:04:34

**Ehrlich:**

What year was that?

00:04:36

**Reynolds:**

That would have been '47. The war was over. A lot of people had returned to their states, and we were left with a shortage of teachers.

00:04:47

**Ehrlich:**

So does that mean that some of the teachers had been from other states during the war?

00:04:54

**Reynolds:**

There must have been, cause I don't remember that where I was teaching. But I know there was a severe shortage right after the war. Course it was a big baby boom. Lots of children being born.

00:05:13

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember teachers being brought back from retirement in order to teach?

00:05:17

**Reynolds:**

Yes. We had one. She was in her sixties and they brought her back. Her husband was quite a famous lawyer in town. And she didn't take her salary. She donated it, and she taught for three or four years.

00:05:44

**Ehrlich:**

And was that during the war years?

00:05:45

**Reynolds:**

In San Pablo on the double shift.

00:05:54

**Ehrlich:**

Was she recruited? Do you remember how that all worked?

00:05:59

**Reynolds:**

Well, we just needed teachers. I don't know how they did it, but I know we had some coming from San Francisco and all over. I really don't know how they were doing it, but they must have been advertising or something.

00:06:12

**Ehrlich:**

And do you know of any teachers who were teaching on emergency credentials?

00:06:17

**Reynolds:**

I don't think too many were. I think most of them were credentialed teachers. As far as I can remember at my school anyway.

00:06:25

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember there being any tension between teachers who had been in the school system and new teachers coming in?

00:06:37

**Reynolds:**

Well, the original teachers I think resented the whole thing, the fact they were on double session. And we were all taking up space. I think there was a little tension between the ones that had been there and the new ones that were all coming in.

00:06:57

**Ehrlich:**

Do you have any specific memories of that?

00:07:01

**Reynolds:**

No, not really. Just kind of a feeling.

00:07:04

**Ehrlich:**

Right. Which is how a lot of things are. You can just feel them. Were you a member of the California Teacher's Association?

00:07:15

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:07:16

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what role it played during the war years?

00:07:23

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't.

00:07:29

**Ehrlich:**

What does that association mean to you?

00:07:31

**Reynolds:**

I think they try to do their best for the teachers in their schools. And I get their magazine every month. I think it's a good organization.

00:07:52

**Ehrlich:**

I have heard that some teachers quit during the war in order to take higher-paying war work. Do you have any memory of that?

00:08:05

**Reynolds:**

I myself don't know any that did. But I've heard that too.

00:08:11

**Ehrlich:**

And also that some teachers just couldn't handle the difficulty of teaching under the kinds of circumstances you've described.

00:08:23

**Reynolds:**

Well, I've heard that too. I again I don't know anybody that did.

00:08:28

**Ehrlich:**

You don't know personally anybody who quit. Do you remember how morale was?

00:08:35

**Reynolds:**

On the whole, it was pretty good. Because everybody thought they were doing their war effort. It was like the rationing. We just did it and accepted it. And in the schools, it was the same way. We were doing the best we could, which wasn't good—I mean, the children were not getting a good education, but we were doing the best we could with what we had.

00:09:07

**Ehrlich:**

You think the teachers felt some pride in that?

00:09:09

**Reynolds:**

I think so. I think we all though we were doing as good a job.

00:09:16

**Ehrlich:**

Did you all have any time to meet together as teachers to have any kind of meetings?

00:09:22

**Reynolds:**

We taught afternoons. So yes. I think we started at 12:30. And we'd have a teacher's meeting at 11:30. And the morning teachers would meet in the afternoon, while we were teaching. Yes, we did have meetings.

00:09:43

**Ehrlich:**

Do you have any memory of the kinds of things you discussed? Was it mostly just crowd control?

00:09:52

**Reynolds:**

Doing what we can do. Right.

00:09:59

**Ehrlich:**

Was there a PTA during the war years?

00:10:00

**Reynolds:**

I don't think so. I don't remember they're being one at all.

00:10:05

**Ehrlich:**

It seems like it would have been awfully unwieldy.

00:10:08

**Reynolds:**

It would have been. And I imagine most people were either working or trying to take care of their families.

00:10:17

**Ehrlich:**

Are there any specific parents that you remember from that second grade?

00:10:23

**Reynolds:**

Once in a great while, I'll read a name in the paper and it'll ring a bell. I remember a few. There were some mothers that tried to be helpful, would come down and do things for us. I don't remember anyone specifically.

00:10:53

**Ehrlich:**

But you remember some effort on the part of some mothers.

00:10:56

**Reynolds:**

Oh yea.

00:11:01

**Ehrlich:**

Did you feel like your family and neighbors, were people were supportive of what you were up against as a young teacher?

00:11:09

**Reynolds:**

Oh, I think so. I think so very much.

00:11:14

**Ehrlich:**

Did your mother have any advice?

00:11:17

**Reynolds:**

No. She wasn't a teacher. I had cousins who were teachers, but they were all in the same situation I was in.

00:11:25

**Ehrlich:**

Where were they teaching?

00:11:26

**Reynolds:**

Two in Richmond.

00:11:30

**Ehrlich:**

Any stories you remember from your cousins?

00:11:33

**Reynolds:**

This one, she taught in an eastern school in Richmond. They had a lot of problems too. They were on double shift. I don't think she ever had quite as many children in her classroom as I had at one time. She was twenty years older than me, so she'd been teaching a long time. Probably handled it better.

00:12:04

**Ehrlich:**

How did you feel you were doing when you were teaching?

00:12:13

**Reynolds:**

I think I felt I was doing all right.

00:12:14

**Ehrlich:**

It must have been tough because you didn't have much experience at that point.

00:12:19

**Reynolds:**

No, I'd had just two years. And I'd had real lovely classes, and all the equipment and everything you needed. And it was a shock to my system that's for sure. But I don't know we just coped in those days.

00:12:36

**Ehrlich:**

Any more memories of shortages of supplies in the classroom?

00:12:43

**Reynolds:**

Yes. I don't really remember that.

00:12:57

**Ehrlich:**

Was their chalk for the chalkboard? Were there chalkboards?

00:13:01

**Reynolds:**

There was chalk, yes. I had no problem with that. I had a big chalkboard, which was nice. But the kids had to share the books. And then of course the morning children used the same books. So they were collected everyday and had to be repassed out everyday. Because they were sitting in different seats. They was a big problem.

00:13:32

**Ehrlich:**

Seventy books to pass out is a lot of books.

00:13:35

**Reynolds:**

Yes, it is. Well there weren't that many books, they had to share.

00:13:40

**Ehrlich:**

So they were shared between morning and afternoon class and—

00:13:43

**Reynolds:**

In the class too.

00:13:46

**Ehrlich:**

How many children per book?

00:13:49

**Reynolds:**

Well, I tried to keep reading groups down to be about twenty if I could.

00:13:58

**Ehrlich:**

It is hard to imagine.

00:14:01

**Reynolds:**

Yea it is. Hard for me to imagine I did it.

00:14:04

**Ehrlich:**

If you had twenty children in reading group, what were the other—

00:14:10

**Reynolds:**

Well, they'd be doing paperwork, arithmetic, or reading. I had a big chalkboard, and I just put questions, work for them to do from their readers.

00:14:29

**Ehrlich:**

Did you know all the names of all your students in the class?

00:14:33

**Reynolds:**

Yea, I never had much trouble learning the children's names.

00:14:40

**Ehrlich:**

It seems like a feat to me. [Reynolds laughs] I was going to ask you whether you, at any point, contemplated quitting. But from everything you said it sounds like you didn't

00:14:55

**Reynolds:**

No, I never thought about quitting. I did not have seventy the whole wartime. I'd have that many and a school would be built—That made it hard too. You'd be getting new children, and you didn't know where they fit. I'm sure those children were not getting the education they should have been getting. Couldn't help it.

00:15:22

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have any follow-up with any of those children as they moved onto junior high? Or to later years in elementary school?

00:15:30

**Reynolds:**

There were a couple that I did. They turned out to be fine. I can't think of too many. Actually, the one I told you about, the ten-year-old and his sister. Did I tell you that down the street from here—

00:15:52

**Ehrlich:**

Tell me now.

00:15:53

**Reynolds:**

This family lived down the street here, and I found out one day their name was Hous. I was talking to the father once and I said, years ago, during the war, I had a boy named Odie Hous and his sister Julie. And he said, Oh, my uncle Odie and Aunt Julia. And I thought that was really something. I mean, from [laughs].

00:16:47

**Ehrlich:**

We can talk about that. Did you have any contact with Walter Helms, the superintendent of the Richmond schools?

00:16:57

**Reynolds:**

Well, cause I went to Richmond schools.

00:17:01

**Ehrlich:**

And he was the superintendent then?

00:17:03

**Reynolds:**

Yes. He was superintendent when I was going to school. And I actually applied when I applied in San Pablo too. Other than that, my dad knew him well. They were both Masons together.

00:17:20

**Ehrlich:**

Interesting. Any memories of him?

00:17:25

**Reynolds:**

No, not especially. He was the principal in San Pablo when my mother went to school.

00:17:32

**Ehrlich:**

There's a lot of connection between San Pablo and Richmond.

00:17:35

**Reynolds:**

Oh yes.

00:17:35

**Ehrlich:**

They're really a stone's throw of separation.

00:17:39

**Reynolds:**

Of course it's all one district now. You know that.

00:17:46

**Ehrlich:**

Maybe now is a good time to talk about your work at the evening school. At Roosevelt Junior High. When did you begin working at the evening school?

00:17:59

**Reynolds:**

Probably in '42. 1942.

00:18:08

**Ehrlich:**

And how long do you think you worked there?

00:18:09

**Reynolds:**

I worked there till I was pregnant. So 1947. I probably started the evening school in '43. See, the war was over, but they still ran it for a while.

00:18:30

**Ehrlich:**

So, why is it that you took that job?

00:18:37

**Reynolds:**

My friend was a librarian in the Richmond schools, and then she worked as a librarian in evening school. And she said they needed somebody badly in the office. And there wasn't a lot to do socially. Since I taught the afternoon shift I had the mornings to prepare my class. So I went down and they were happy to have me. And I just started working there.

00:19:06

**Ehrlich:**

So you didn't do it because you needed the finances?

00:19:09

**Reynolds:**

Oh no. I did it more cause they needed me. It was needed.

00:19:15

**Ehrlich:**

Was that part of your feeling of obligation to help the war effort?

00:19:19

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:19:21

**Ehrlich:**

You just walked in and applied, and they scooped you up? You didn't have to go through an application process?

00:19:31

**Reynolds:**

Uhuh.

00:19:32

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember your first day?

00:19:38

**Reynolds:**

Yes, I almost split. I walked in and the principal took me into this room and there were stacks of, what do you call them, transcripts about yay high. And he said, those have to be sorted by schools and state, and we have to send for them. And get them sorted for the children and try to get them into the right class, so we can work on that diploma. And that's what I did for about a month. Worked on that. And then I interviewed the kids and talked to them and tried to help them get placed in the right classes.

00:20:26

**Ehrlich:**

So to back up a little bit for people who don't know, explain what this evening school was.

00:20:31

**Reynolds:**

It was a replacement of high school. There were few girls, very few girls, practically solid boys. They worked at the shipyards, but they hadn't graduated from high school. And they wanted to get their high school diploma. So it was called an evening high school. We did have graduations.

00:21:04

**Ehrlich:**

Did the shipyards require that these boys go to school?

00:21:10

**Reynolds:**

Now that I'm not sure of. But I think it was, cause some of that were only 16. I don't know that was the shipyard or the school department. But I think it was required. Because we kept a strict roll call. The shipyards kept it, and they would send it down at night and I would double-check it with our roll that they were working and going to school.

00:21:39

**Ehrlich:**

So the shipyards wanted them to be going to school, and the school wanted them to be working too.

00:21:44

**Reynolds:**

Right. They had to do both. Otherwise they had to go to public school if they quit working.

00:21:49

**Ehrlich:**

So it was an understanding between the shipyards and the school?

00:21:55

**Reynolds:**

Actually the principal of the night school worked at the shipyards.

00:22:00

**Ehrlich:**

What was his name?

00:22:00

**Reynolds:**

Bob Zecker. Wait, he was like a vice principal. Doctor Olsen, I forget his first name—

00:22:19

**Ehrlich:**

Alden.

00:22:21

**Reynolds:**

That's right. Now somebody must have told you that.

00:22:27

**Ehrlich:**

I've read about him.

00:22:28

**Reynolds:**

Yes. He was the principal. But Zecker was the one—he worked at the shipyards and he worked at the night school.

00:22:42

**Ehrlich:**

So tell me more about who these boys were? And occasional girls?

00:22:49

**Reynolds:**

Well, they were just boys from all over the states; just they'd come to California. Of course, there were some local kids too. I mean, they were kids who wanted to get their high school diploma but still worked in the shipyards.

00:23:04

**Ehrlich:**

Did they work full time in the shipyards?

00:23:06

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:23:07

**Ehrlich:**

Do you want kinds of hours they worked there? And then what kind of hours they went to school?

00:23:11

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't. But I think they put in a full day.

00:23:15

**Ehrlich:**

And what were the school's hours?

00:23:21

**Reynolds:**

I think it was six-thirty to nine.

00:23:24

**Ehrlich:**

Everyday?

00:23:26

**Reynolds:**

Yes. Five days.

00:23:30

**Ehrlich:**

And tell me about your job of sorting through those transcripts. What did you find and what were you trying to determine? Where did they come from?

00:23:40

**Reynolds:**

I sorted them by states and then by schools. Then I'd work with this Mr. Zecker to try to see what classes they needed to get a diploma. For the first few months that's all it was. Trying to get the kids into something that they were going to get credit for and graduate. I had to send for a lot of transcripts. A lot of them didn't have their transcripts.

00:24:14

**Ehrlich:**

And how did that work out?

00:24:16

**Reynolds:**

Well, mostly I'd get them, and see whether we had them placed right or placed wrong. Then after that was all sorted out, I did a lot of office work cause I could type. We were in an old shack at Roosevelt for a while and then we moved over to the school. After the war ended I didn't have to do much of anything. I used to type letters to my husband half the time. He was still overseas when I first started working; it was kind of hard. But it was fun. I enjoyed it.

00:25:12

**Ehrlich:**

What do you remember of the boys?

00:25:13

**Reynolds:**

Most of them were nice boys that were hard-working and wanted to get their credentials.

00:25:22

**Ehrlich:**

So you think the motivation for them even though they had relatively good paying jobs was they wanted these diplomas?

00:25:30

**Reynolds:**

They wanted the diplomas.

00:25:31

**Ehrlich:**

Why do you think that mattered to them?

00:25:34

**Reynolds:**

I guess they thought after the war they would probably beat it.

00:25:42

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember where the boys were from?

00:25:45

**Reynolds:**

They were from different states.

00:25:48

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember the states?

00:25:51

**Reynolds:**

Not really. I mean, they were just from all over. They weren't just Okies and Arkies. They were from a lot of states.

00:25:58

**Ehrlich:**

So it wasn't mostly Oklahoma and Arkansas. It was all over. Do you have a sense of how many of the students attending were local boys?

00:26:11

**Reynolds:**

I don't think there was as many local as they were ones that had come from other places.

00:26:23

**Ehrlich:**

I've heard that local boys would get jobs, other kinds of jobs, working in stores. Do you remember that?

00:26:30

**Reynolds:**

I think that's true. And then they continued going to day school. I think it was mostly out of state boys that came.

00:26:45

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what the academic program was there?

00:26:49

**Reynolds:**

Well, I know they had English and math. No college subjects, like French or anything like that. It was just the basic things. I think they had a wood-working class. It seems to me they did. Woodshop. I remember that.

00:27:19

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what you were paid?

00:27:23

**Reynolds:**

It wasn't much. No. My teaching job, I was only getting 120 dollars a month. That was after two years of teaching, and I didn't make much at the night school. I got paid by the hour, but I don't remember if it was fifty cents or a dollar. It wasn't a lot.

00:27:52

**Ehrlich:**

Do you know what people in the shipyards were making? Why kind of money?

00:27:58

**Reynolds:**

They were doing pretty well, I think. I really don't know.

00:28:01

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember ever thinking about how much more money you could be making if you were doing war-related work?

00:28:07

**Reynolds:**

I thought of it a few times, but I thought I'd rather stay with what I was trained for. And they needed the teachers just as much. And of course that was good in the end, because I had all those years in when I retired which helped.

00:28:33

**Ehrlich:**

How was the evening school different from the continuation school?

00:28:39

**Reynolds:**

Continuation school was more for kids who just didn't want to go to school, I think, and had to, by law. Whereas the evening high school, the kids were motivated to get their credentials, but they wanted to work for the war effort too. I think that was a big difference.

00:29:00

**Ehrlich:**

Was the continuation school at Roosevelt too?

00:29:06

**Reynolds:**

No, I think it was at Richmond High. At least when I went to school, there was a continuation at Richmond High.

00:29:19

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember the vocational education for national defense programs?

00:29:26

**Reynolds:**

No.

00:29:29

**Ehrlich:**

Who were the teachers at the evening school?

00:29:38

**Reynolds:**

Woodrow Snodgrass taught English, and he later became the superintendent of Richmond Schools. Betty Moist was the librarian there. Mr. Zecker taught. There were a couple of teachers from Richmond High that taught at the evening high school too. And then Mr. Motel taught at Roosevelt Junior High in the day and worked at the evening high school.

00:30:17

**Ehrlich:**

So it sounds like it wasn't unusual to have two jobs.

00:30:20

**Reynolds:**

No, not during the war, it wasn't.

00:30:24

**Ehrlich:**

Did most people have more than one job?

00:30:30

**Reynolds:**

Well, most of the people I knew were teachers, and a lot of them were doing these extra things.

00:30:39

**Ehrlich:**

What was your relationship like with the teachers? Did you have much contact with them?

00:30:47

**Reynolds:**

The ones I taught with? Yes. We were very friendly. One teacher lived by me, and we walked to school every morning.

00:31:02

**Ehrlich:**

I actually meant when you were at the evening school.

00:31:03

**Reynolds:**

Oh, at the evening school. No, I didn't have much contact with the teachers. I worked with Mr. Zecker a lot, but the other teachers I didn't have much contact with.

00:31:16

**Ehrlich:**

Do you have any distinct memories of any of the students at the evening school?

00:31:24

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think I do.

00:31:27

**Ehrlich:**

But you remember them as well-behaved?

00:31:28

**Reynolds:**

Yes. Most of them were really trying hard to get their high school diplomas. And then that kept them out of having to enlist too.

00:31:45

**Ehrlich:**

Were there any African American boys?

00:31:47

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think there were very many. I don't remember very many of them.

00:31:56

**Ehrlich:**

And what about Mexican Americans?

00:31:58

**Reynolds:**

I think there were quite a few of them.

00:32:06

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember the fire at the junior high?

00:32:10

**Reynolds:**

Yea, well that was after the war. I remember, but I don't know much about it.

00:32:20

**Ehrlich:**

You remember it as being after the war.

00:32:23

**Reynolds:**

Yea I think so.

00:32:24

**Ehrlich:**

Anything else about the evening school that we haven't talked about that seems important? Or that doesn't seem important?

00:32:44

**Reynolds:**

No, I really can't.

00:32:51

**Ehrlich:**

Actually I have another question. Do you remember overcrowdedness being a problem at the evening school?

00:32:57

**Reynolds:**

No, it wasn't too bad. The classes were fairly normal, twenty-five or thirty.

00:33:10

**Ehrlich:**

Since we're talking about adolescent-age kids, I've heard that there were a lot of problems with truancy. Do you have memories of hearing about stories about kids not going to school who were supposed to be in school?

00:33:29

**Reynolds:**

Oh, I think there was a lot of that. I don't know any specific cases. I think other states hadn't been as strict as California in going to school. And they didn't think it was necessary. I mean, if they wanted to stay home, it was okay. I think there was a lot of that.

00:33:51

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember seeing a lot of kids out on the streets?

00:33:55

**Reynolds:**

No, because I was probably in school.

00:33:57

**Ehrlich:**

You were too busy, right?

00:33:59

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:34:03

**Ehrlich:**

What about problems with juvenile delinquency?

00:34:10

**Reynolds:**

I didn't know too much about that.

00:34:16

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember hearing about there being a curfew for kids under sixteen? Not being out past ten o'clock at night without their parents?

00:34:31

**Reynolds:**

No.

00:34:38

**Ehrlich:**

So anything else about the evening school that we've missed?

00:34:46

**Reynolds:**

No.

00:34:49

**Ehrlich:**

Did you go to the graduation?

00:34:54

**Reynolds:**

It wasn't a very big one. It was just about twenty kids, I think, that graduated. But it was quite a fancy affair. They brought their girlfriends, and the girls wore formals. I wore formal, and the principal. It was very nice. The kids were all happy.

00:35:17

**Ehrlich:**

Did their parents come?

00:35:19

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:35:19

**Ehrlich:**

Do you have an impression of the parents?

00:35:24

**Reynolds:**

Well, I think they were just glad their kids were graduating from high school.

00:35:34

**Ehrlich:**

Did you have any friends who were newcomers?

00:35:48

**Reynolds:**

Not too many. I stuck mostly with people I grew up with. Well, some of the teachers I taught with came from different places. Of course, I was friendly with them, but not close as I was with people I grew up with.

00:36:10

**Ehrlich:**

Maybe we could focus a little attention now on your impressions and memories of Richmond during the war. Can you talk about what it was like for you to live in Richmond during the war? First of all, we haven't talked about where you lived.

00:36:31

**Reynolds:**

When the war first started, I lived on Costa Avenue. And it was near Richmond High, but it was in Richmond. And course when the war first started, I was teaching in Antioch. But I came home on weekends. Now it sounds funny to say you lived in Antioch and you came home on weekends. But it was a long ride in those days. Now it's about a half a hour, forty minutes. What did you ask me, what about where I lived?

00:37:11

**Ehrlich:**

Where you lived.

00:37:13

**Reynolds:**

Yes, I lived on Costa Avenue with my parents.

00:37:18

**Ehrlich:**

What are your memories of what it was like to be in Richmond during the war?

00:37:27

**Reynolds:**

Well, we were on so much rationing. And I worked so much. On the weekends, I did go to a lot of dances and stuff with friends. We had parties. And I played a lot of bridge. I always liked cards. And Richmond was changing of course, but we still just had the one big store Albert's. That part never changed.

00:38:02

**Ehrlich:**

What was it like when you say it was changing? Can you say more?

00:38:10

**Reynolds:**

Well the downtown was being built up. Where I lived as a child was becoming kind of a poor part of town. It was changing that way.

00:38:30

**Ehrlich:**

Different kinds of families moved in. What kinds of families?

00:38:33

**Reynolds:**

People that'd just come to Richmond. I don't know really. I was never a racist at all. The town just changed. I don't know how to explain it.

00:38:57

**Ehrlich:**

Were the families that moved into the neighborhood you grew up in, were they black families?

00:39:02

**Reynolds:**

Most of them moved out of Richmond, farther out than downtown Richmond. When I was young and my husband too, we all lived down right in the town. Eighth and Ninth Street. And it seemed like during the war, the Richmond people moved out more towards Mira Vista and that way. I don't know how to explain it.

00:39:31

**Ehrlich:**

And did you move too?

00:39:33

**Reynolds:**

Well yea, my parents had bought this house on Costa, and that was quite a ways out. That was out by Richmond High.

00:39:42

**Ehrlich:**

And what was that neighborhood like?

00:39:45

**Reynolds:**

It was nice.

00:39:45

**Ehrlich:**

What was the ethnic mix there?

00:39:49

**Reynolds:**

Just plain American white.

00:39:53

**Ehrlich:**

So what was it like to walk around downtown during the war years? I've heard that it was very crowded. Do you remember that?

00:40:00

**Reynolds:**

It was crowded, and it was strange because you had grown up where you knew everyone when you walked downtown, and now you did not know anybody. I had an interesting experience once. This black man came up to me and asked me if I could tell him how to get to Oakland, and I said, "The bus'll be here in any minute." He said, "Oh I would not ride on the bus." And I said, "Well, you can't get to Oakland by walking." He said, "Oh yes I can." I said, "Well, then just walk down straight down to San Pablo and Avenue, and turn right." But I said, "It was a long, long ways," and he started out.

00:40:48

**Ehrlich:**

What sense do you make of that?

00:40:52

**Reynolds:**

That he was afraid to ride on the bus. That's what I thought.

00:40:58

**Ehrlich:**

Was he from the South?

00:40:59

**Reynolds:**

He must've been, I'm sure.

00:41:01

**Ehrlich:**

So that's would you assumed.

00:41:02

**Reynolds:**

Any other memories of those kinds of encounters?

00:41:15

**Ehrlich:**

What were the streets like, in terms of crowds?

00:41:25

**Reynolds:**

I don't know. I don't remember that it was so crowded that you didn't walk or anything. It was normal.

00:41:35

**Ehrlich:**

So it didn't keep you from doing your business.

00:41:37

**Reynolds:**

Oh no.

00:41:41

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember there being a lot of traffic?

00:41:44

**Reynolds:**

We were on strict gas rationing too, so people were not just driving to be driving. Today, at the high schools you see all those cars. You didn't see cars—kids walked or went on the bus.

00:42:07

**Ehrlich:**

So do you remember there being shortages of certain supplies?

00:42:14

**Reynolds:**

Oh yea. Sugar. Well, it was difficult to get meat too. We weren't rationed on it, but there wasn't much meat. We always managed. It wasn't that hard. We had the blue and red stamps, you've heard about that.

00:42:44

**Ehrlich:**

No, tell me about them.

00:42:47

**Reynolds:**

I don't remember what the distinction was. Blue was for so much, and you got those, and then you used them for shopping. And when you ran out, well, you waited until the next supply.

00:42:58

**Ehrlich:**

Where did you get them from?

00:43:01

**Reynolds:**

That's when I worked at the school, and we gave them out at the school in the evening. Parents came.

00:43:15

**Ehrlich:**

Do you know what your mother's experience—at that point, during the war, she was working at the beauty shop in Albany. What was her wartime experience like in terms of business?

00:43:29

**Reynolds:**

Well, she didn't drive either because of the gas rationing. And she'd ride to the county line, and then walk to the middle of Solano. I remember she gave wet waves for twenty-five cents.

00:43:50

**Ehrlich:**

Did her business pick up during the war?

00:43:55

**Reynolds:**

That I don't really know. But she owned her own shop in Albany. And, she had quite a nice clientele of people. She had a lot of doctors' and dentists' wives. I don't know that the war, as far as that went, made a lot of difference.

00:44:17

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember her telling any stories?

00:44:22

**Reynolds:**

Not really.

00:44:26

**Ehrlich:**

And what about your father's experience at Rheem Manufacturing? Can you tell us what he did, and what his war experiences war?

00:44:32

**Reynolds:**

It was called spray painting. They painted barrels for the oil companies, and he spray painted like this, till his arm wore out and he had to retire. That's all I know about it.

00:44:48

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember him having any stories about what it was like there during the war years?

00:44:51

**Reynolds:**

Not too much. I don't think it affected him too much.

00:45:01

**Ehrlich:**

Was it war-related work?

00:45:02

**Reynolds:**

Yes, sort of, I think. I just remember they were painting these barrels for oil and gasoline, and so it must have been something to do with the war, I would think.

00:45:17

**Ehrlich:**

So he didn't talk about his job too much.

00:45:19

**Reynolds:**

No.

00:45:25

**Ehrlich:**

What about what you know about housing? During the war years, you lived more out of town than you had been, is that correct?

00:45:36

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:45:40

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember seeing the effects of the housing shortage?

00:45:45

**Reynolds:**

Well, I remember when they started building all the war housing out towards Point Richmond. That was all just land, and they built all the war housing out in there. In fact, I even thought of applying for one when my husband got of service, but then I didn't. I remember that much.

00:46:08

**Ehrlich:**

Why did you want to live there?

00:46:10

**Reynolds:**

Well, I didn't particularly want to, but it was hard to get a place to live. So we still lived with my parents for awhile, and then we were lucky enough to find a duplex in 29<sup>th</sup> Street. It was difficult to find a place to live.

00:46:30

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember seeing people sleeping in the streets and sleeping in parks, that kind of thing?

00:46:36

**Reynolds:**

No.

00:46:39

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what those developments, the wartime housing, looked like?

00:46:46

**Reynolds:**

They were just little buildings. They weren't very attractive, but people were living in them, liking it all right, I guess. They were glad to get them.

00:46:56

**Ehrlich:**

Were there any changes in your family's living conditions, in terms of housing?

00:47:02

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't think so.

00:47:04

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember hearing about people taking in boarders into spare rooms in their homes? Or that kind of thing? Or any pressure on people to help provide others with housing?

00:47:15

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't.

00:47:19

**Ehrlich:**

Any stories that you remember about housing? Either to do with your students, or —

00:47:28

**Reynolds:**

Well, I know there was a terrible housing shortage, and people were living under terrible conditions. And they were trying to build these housing units all around.

00:47:47

**Ehrlich:**

I've heard stories of children sleeping in cars.

00:47:51

**Reynolds:**

Yes, well I've heard those stories too.

00:47:56

**Ehrlich:**

What about safety issues? Do you remember any changes in your own sense of personal safety during the war?

00:48:13

**Reynolds:**

No. Oftentimes at the evening high school, I would get out at 9 o'clock. I would walk down and catch a bus out to where I live, and I was not worried. There didn't seem to be much problem with safety. I don't remember being afraid.

00:48:46

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember hearing any stories about crime? Or violence?

00:48:52

**Reynolds:**

Not too much, no.

00:49:01

**Ehrlich:**

Did anybody you know have any kind of experiences of crime during the war years?

00:49:06

**Reynolds:**

Not, that I know.

00:49:11

**Ehrlich:**

I've heard that with all the problems, with all the newcomers in town, that there was heightened crime. And that sometimes people would do sweeps down the streets and pick up vagrants and people who were drinking. Any memories of hearing about that?

00:49:33

**Reynolds:**

No, course I didn't live right downtown during the war, which I did when I was young.

00:49:46

**Ehrlich:**

What was your social life like during the war? I know you've said there wasn't a ton of it.

00:49:55

**Reynolds:**

No. Course during the week, I was working so I didn't do anything. And then, as I said, I had two very close friends that were married and their husbands did not go into service. And they were very good to me. I'd go to their houses a lot. And my husband was an Elk and they had Elk's dances. And I would go with this couple to them.

00:50:24

**Ehrlich:**

Where were those dances held?

00:50:26

**Reynolds:**

At the Elk's Hall. It was in Richmond at that time.

00:50:31

**Ehrlich:**

What were those dances like?

00:50:34

**Reynolds:**

Well they were just dances. [laughs]

00:50:36

**Ehrlich:**

Yup, well you know what that means, and I don't. What was the music like?

00:50:39

**Reynolds:**

The music of that time—Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree—

00:50:53

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember how it goes?

00:50:55

**Reynolds:**

I can't sing. Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me, cause I'll be coming home, something like that. There were a lot of songs in that order.

00:51:06

**Ehrlich:**

Related to the war.

00:51:06

**Reynolds:**

Yes.

00:51:06

**Ehrlich:**

And what kinds of dancing do you do to that kind of music?

00:51:12

**Reynolds:**

Social dancing. With a partner. My friends were all good about dancing. My husband had a couple of friends who didn't go in the service, and they danced with me. And we went to show a lot. We did go to movies a lot. Otherwise that was about it.

00:51:41

**Ehrlich:**

Do you remember what the movies were at that time?

00:51:51

**Reynolds:**

No, I don't.

00:51:51

**Ehrlich:**

Would you go every week?

00:51:53

**Reynolds:**

I don't think so, not every week. We had house parties too. And then I belonged to a bridge club of women. We did that on the weekends a lot. We played at night usually.

00:52:09

**Ehrlich:**

Were most of your friends married? Most of them were married. Did you have any single friends?

00:52:19

**Reynolds:**

Let's see. All my closest friends were married.

00:52:29

**Ehrlich:**

Anything else about your social life during that time?

00:52:37

**Reynolds:**

That was about it. There wasn't much social life going on.

00:52:41

**Ehrlich:**

Because people were working so hard?

00:52:43

**Reynolds:**

Working, and everything was scarce. Gas was scarce. We didn't do much. One summer, I did save some gas coupons, and another husband was in Iwo Jima, went to Russian River, where her family owned a home, and we stayed there for a while in the summer. That was quite exciting for the time. I was able to save enough gas coupons to get back. That's about the only big thing I could remember doing during the war.

00:53:22

**Ehrlich:**

So maybe it's time to talk a little about changes you remember after the war? Do you remember when the war ended?

00:53:35

**Reynolds:**

War ended in '46, I think.

00:53:39

**Ehrlich:**

But I mean, do you remember where you were, or when you first heard that the war was over?

00:53:45

**Reynolds:**

Yes. The friend's husband was in Iwo Jima, and course the German war ended first, and we were still worried about him. My husband didn't get to come home very soon. They let the war brides come home from Europe before they let all the soldiers, which was a very unpleasant topic at the time. And things were still pretty bad after the war for quite a while. And housing was bad with the soldiers returning. It was difficult getting housing. We still lived with my parents for quite a while till we were able to get a place.

00:54:40

**Ehrlich:**

What happened with the people who came here during the war?

00:54:45

**Reynolds:**

I think most of them stayed. I'm sure some went back home, but I think a lot of them stayed. I mean, Richmond was huge, compared to what it was when I was a child.

00:55:03

**Ehrlich:**

So were there any immediate changes you noticed after the war?

00:55:08

**Reynolds:**

Nothing that I can think of. Nothing too immediate.

00:55:11

**Ehrlich:**

So it didn't seem like a big dramatic change, it seemed like things mostly stayed the same.

00:55:18

**Reynolds:**

There was still a shortage of teachers. Some of the teachers, returned to other places when their husbands returned. They left so there actually was as much a shortage of teachers right here in Richmond as there'd been during the war. So we stayed on double session for quite a long time.

00:55:47

**Ehrlich:**

How long, do you know?

00:55:49

**Reynolds:**

My own kids were on double session. Must've been until fifty-five or six.

00:56:15

**Ehrlich:**

A good long time.

00:56:20

**Reynolds:**

My own kids were on double session till my boy was in the sixth grade. My oldest boy and he was born in forty-seven. So that would have been—

00:56:31

**Ehrlich:**

So you did not have the experience of a lot of your children leaving.

00:56:38

**Reynolds:**

No, and I was teaching double session for a long time too after the war.

00:56:46

**Ehrlich:**

What happened with the evening school?

00:56:53

**Reynolds:**

I think they still had something, but it was nothing like during the war. And I'm not sure that it even continued at all. I'm not sure about that.

00:57:05

**Ehrlich:**

Do any other changes that you remember after the war in Richmond?

00:57:12

**Reynolds:**

Just seemed like a different city when everybody came home. Shortage of housing, hard to find places to live. Then we were off rationing, which was nice. We were all young, having our families. And it didn't seem as if it was too different.

00:57:46

**Ehrlich:**

What's your sense of Richmond now?

00:57:52

**Reynolds:**

Well, I rarely ever go down there. See, we had the one big department store there. It was Alberts, and then it was Macy's. Macy's left and went out to Hilltop. There were a lot of little dress shops in Richmond that I used to shop in. But there's nothing now that I ever—I don't go down there much. And I use the El Sobrante library.

00:58:36

**Ehrlich:**

So the Richmond of your childhood where you walked downtown and recognized everybody is gone.

00:58:42

**Reynolds:**

The library was on Fourth Street, and it is now where the Museum is. I go down there once in a while, but I don't go down too much.

00:59:06

**Ehrlich:**

So anything else, either about Richmond after the war, or anything we've left out in terms of your experiences?

00:59:19

**Reynolds:**

I can't think of any.

00:59:22

**Ehrlich:**

Thank you very much.

00:59:23

**Reynolds:**

I don't know if that was very much, very worthwhile or not.

00:59:29

**Ehrlich:**

It was very worthwhile. I really appreciate it.

[End of Interview]