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University of California
Berkeley, California

Betty Mosher Samson

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
David Dunham
in 2014

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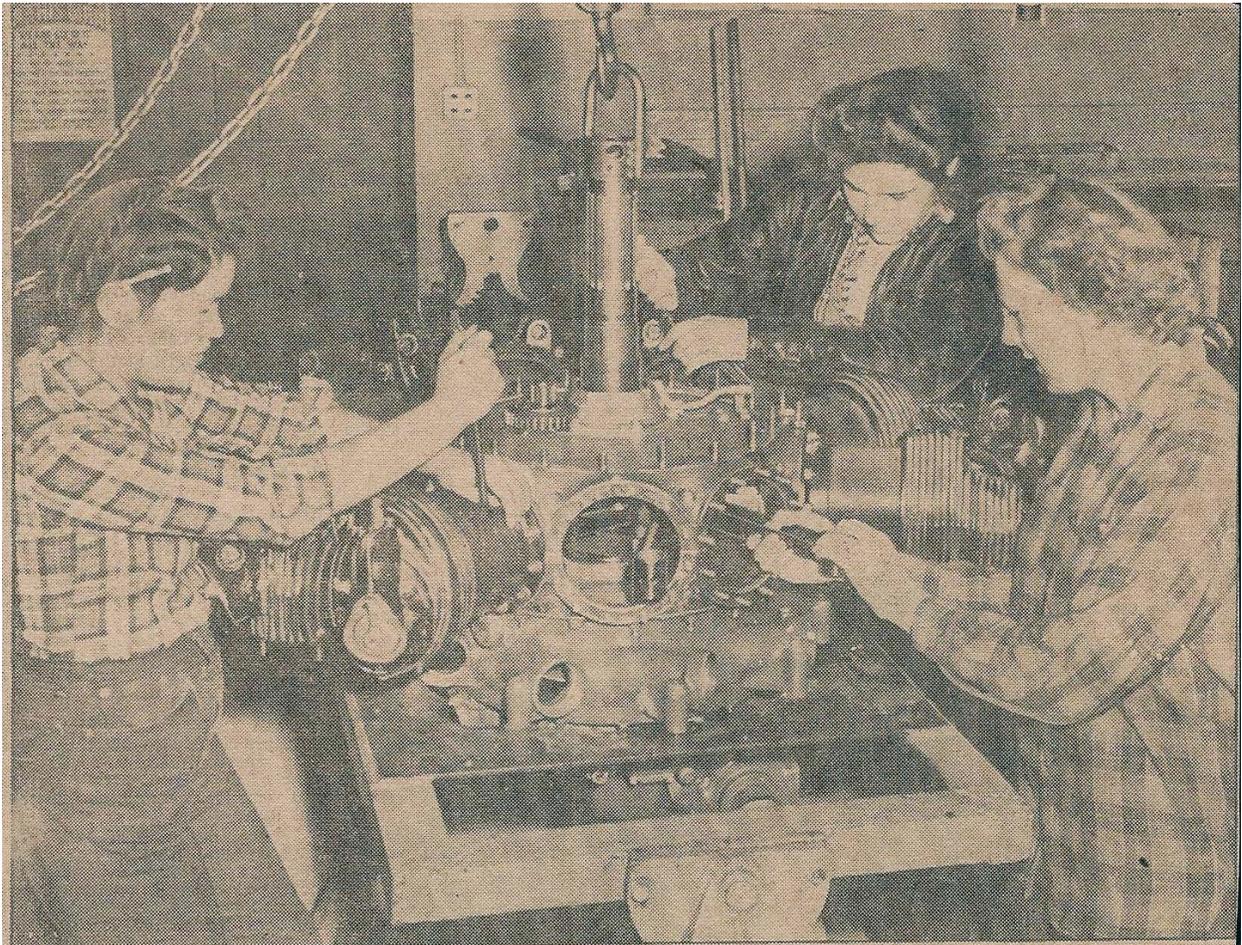
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Betty Mosher Samson, 2014



A course in airplane motor repair is popular with the senior girls at the Grant Union High School. Left to right are Kitty Potts, Elizabeth Mosher and Coralea Spieth.

42-43

Betty Mosher training with Grant Union High School classmates, circa 1942-3

1. Feb 3, 1943 - mech Learner - \$1200.00
 2. May 8, 1943 - to Helper 1500.00
 3. raise to \$1560.00 (no date)
 4. Sept 28, 1943 - to Jr. % mech. \$1860.00
 5. raise to \$1920.00 Dec 1943.
 6. Jan 1944 - From Jr % mech to Jr % eng.
 reduction gear assembler. 96¢ per hr.
 7. raise Grade 10 Step 2 \$102. per hr
 8. Jr % reduction gear assembler to
 Jr % line assembler Grade 9
 step 3 \$104. per hr July, 1945

Brief Description of Assigned Duties
 Assembly of rear cover and blower section,
 installation of nose sections, installation
 of cylinders, sumps, rear harness, front
 harness, push rods & housing, safety wire
 push rods, inter cylinders oil liner, intake
 pipes, inter cylinder baffles, oil line
 from sump, install primer lines, line mags.,
 install rocker box covers, reset #1 valve,
 safety mags., install front plugs, safety
 wire, inter cylinder baffles, check engine
 for test block and final inspection.

1943

THIS PASS IS VALID ONLY FROM THE PERIOD OF 16
 MARCH TO 31 MARCH 1944, INCL. ALL PASSES ISSUED
 PRIOR TO THIS DATE FOR THIS PURPOSE ARE VOID.

This will authorize

MOSHER, BETTY R.

M 9175

MM-4

NAME

BADGE NO.

SECTION

to have access to the working area of all airplanes
 containing confidential equipment, but is not author-
 ized to work on the confidential equipment.

E. J. Borowski
 EDWARD J. BOROWSKI,
 Major, Air Corps,

REMEMBER THESE  WARNING SIGNALS

RED ALERT
 EXPECT AN ATTACK ANY MOMENT

SIRENS, HORNS OR WHISTLES

ONE 3-MINUTE WARBLING SIGNAL
 OR SERIES OF SHORT BLASTS

FOLLOW OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS ONLY

ALL-CLEAR SIGNAL
 ENEMY AIRCRAFT NO LONGER IN THE AREA

1 MINUTE BLAST	2 MINUTES SILENCE	1 MINUTE BLAST	2 MINUTES SILENCE	1 MINUTE BLAST
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THREE 1-MINUTE BLASTS
 TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE BETWEEN

PUBLISHED BY THE FEDERAL CIVIL DEFENSE ADMINISTRATION

Betty Mosher salary records, brief assignment duties

To Betty Ruth Mosher. August 23, 1943

I remember the day, not too long ago,
That I came to work, in a bewildered, dazed way,
I was shown an engine, and told to go,
To work and to learn, for the rest of the day.

I met a man, and a girl I thought fair,
Little knowing they were to be friends of mine, dear,
With the first day about all I could do, was stand and stare
At the men simple generous, and the women so near.

As the days rolled by, my knowledge grew,
I looked forward to coming to work on the line,
The faces of friends, were no longer new,
My thoughts were on engines, ah! I thought, fine!
Well the day finally came, I thought less of work,
And more of my Betty, the woman I loved,
The thought was astounding, from work I would shirk,
Far to the side, thoughts of tools I had shoved.

I was happy, at last I had found the woman for me,
I was proud and glad, I had found you dear,
I wanted to hold you close, for the world to see,
I wanted to shout my love, for the world to hear.

But then a dark cloud, across the skies blew,
I was shocked and was frightened, the thought left me cold,
Rumors of shipping from tongue to tongue grew,
I had that feeling, that coolness of old.

The Army is Cruel, I find one to love,
Then, I shove on with an ache and a tear,
To new fields to conquer, with aid from above,
But Betty my Darling, in my heart you'll be near!

Eddie

Wartime letter from Eddie

They're Coming Back

Mechanical Training For Women In W War II Is Now Paying Dividends

When word got around that aircraft engine mechanics helpers—female—were being hired at McClellan, a lot of people woke up to the fact that the U. S. was really mobilizing. One of the familiar sights of World War II and one which brought the impact of war close to home was the lunch bucket brigades of gals in slacks, brogues and bandannas working at all sorts of jobs usually considered to be in man's domain.

To date, 223 women have been hired here as helpers. Since women do not learn the art of being an aircraft engine mechanic while learning the arts of the home, Civilian Training branch of Post Schools had to step in with a training program which now occupies the first two weeks of their employment here. They learn the rudiments of use of hand tools, what to call 'em, safety rules, and general engine information.

Most pleasant aspect of all this, according to Earl W. Ballew, who as branch foreman for Engine Assembly, has charge of most of the chicks, is that girls and women trained by McClellan during World War II are showing up, ready to go back to work. In other words, the training program of six and seven years ago is still paying off.

Esther E. LaFond, Rt. 1, Box 2122, Rio Linda, is typical of this group. Esther's husband is a cabinet maker and the LaFonds have five grown daughters, one of whom, Patricia, is a key-punch operator in Supply. In addition, Esther's two brothers work here, too, Walter Berg in the Machine Shop and Clifford Berg in Turrets.

Expert Mechanic

Esther worked as an aircraft engine mechanic on the Base from January, 1943 to Nov. 1945, and was then laid off. She had been taught her job here and was considered an expert mechanic when she finished. When hiring recently began again, she applied and has been at work since Oct. 11, 1950. She says of her work: "Women can do as much here on the engine line as men can, once they are trained in the work. There is not so much lifting that a woman can't keep up."

And there's Betty Samson, 2319 Grand Ave., Del Paso Heights, who was Betty Mosher when she was permitted to graduate a half-semester early from Grant Union High School, in Jan., 1943, in order to go to work in Engine Repair at McClellan. Her shop instructor at Grant in 1943, Christie Bagnuda, is now a foreman in the branch where Betty has gone to work again. Betty was laid off in Nov. 1945. In the meantime she got herself a husband, S. J. Samson, saddlemaker at Town and Country Village. But when the word went out, Betty came back and has been at work since Jan. 2.

They Get Bigger

Regarding the changes in the intervening years, Betty says "the engines get bigger and bigger. I started on 1340s (for the AT6) and now I'm working on 3350s (for the B-29). I love this work."

Ballew has this to say about the women coming back: "There are certain jobs where women are more adaptable than men and therefore easier to train. Women seem to like doing this work."

Ballew is one of the "Rockwell pioneers" on the Base and a real old-timer in Air Force Maintenance. He was Private Earl Ballew at the Hawaiian Air Depot from 1930-1933. At Rockwell, he served from 1933-36 in the Army. He civilianized in 1936 and continued in Engine Repair. He was transferred to McClellan in 1939.

Earl has analyzed the complicated mechanical operations of his branch and has developed separate operations which he believes the women can do such as overhaul of fuel injection lines, assembly of impeller drive, valve tappets, crankcase and reduction gear, oil pump overhaul and installation of induction systems, spark plugs and leads, ignition harness and piston rings.

As Engine Assembly branch foreman he supervises the R4360 (B36, C119), and R3350 (B29) engine overhaul lines and the modification lines on R2800 (A26), R985 (C45), R1340 (AT6), R1820 (B17) and R1830 (C47) engines.

Those Rules

Right now, Ballew is worrying about women's styles.

There are strict safety rules about hair coverings, safety shoes, no jewelry and no trimming on clothing which might get caught in moving machinery. Getting the girls to observe the rules is something else, again!

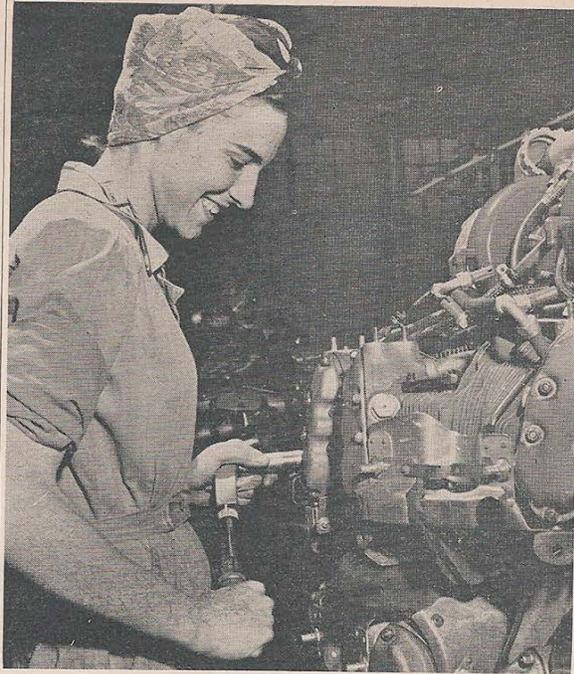
"Is there any legend about that mountain?" asked the tourist.

"Yep," was the reply. "Two lovers once went up the mountain and never came back again."

"Is that so? And what happened to them?" the tourist asked breathlessly.

"Went down t'other side."

Back On The Job



Betty Samson, aircraft engine mechanic's helper, installing cylinder head baffles on an R3350 (B29) engine. Trained by McClellan Air Force Base as a mechanic in 1943, she left in 1945 and was rehired last month in line with the policy of utilizing women in certain types of work in the shops.

Pacemaker Photo by Sam Lambert

REQUEST FOR PERSONNEL ACTION

REQUESTING OFFICE: Fill in items 1 through 12 and A through D except 6B and 7 unless otherwise instructed.
 If applicable, obtain resignation and fill in separation data on reverse.

1. NAME (Mr.—Miss—Mrs.—One given name, initial(s), and surname) Mrs. Betty R. Samson	2. DATE OF BIRTH S-0198	3. REQUEST NO. MDAC-516	4. DATE OF REQUEST 28 Jun 55
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5. NATURE OF ACTION REQUESTED: A. PERSONNEL (Specify whether appointment, promotion, separation, etc.) Reassignment and Promotion	6. EFFECTIVE DATE A. PROPOSED:	7. C. S. OR OTHER LEGAL AUTHORITY
	B. APPROVED:	

FROM— A/F Assembler MDAI 33-21 WB 9 St 4 \$2.07 (d) MDAI-1B2 46121-B (11)	8. POSITION TITLE AND NUMBER	TO— Same A/C MECH.
<input type="checkbox"/> FIELD <input type="checkbox"/> DEPARTMENTAL	9. SERVICE, GRADE, AND SALARY	WB 10 St 4 \$2.11 (d) 2.27
	10. ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGNATIONS	MDAC-3
	11. HEADQUARTERS	46115-0 (11)
	12. FIELD OR DEPARTMENTAL	<input type="checkbox"/> FIELD <input type="checkbox"/> DEPARTMENTAL

A. REMARKS (Use reverse if necessary) **Mrs. Samson has the time and ability to qualify her for a promotion to WB 10. She has worked on different type A/C, and on several occasions shown outstanding ability to learn a job quickly and to complete it in record time. She has a thorough knowledge of crew work and has done work in electrical, tubing and armament.**

B. REQUESTED BY (Name and title) **ARLAND NORDLUND, Asst. Sup't, MDA**

C. FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CALL (Name and telephone extension) **Flossie Conover Ext. 3239**

D. REQUEST APPROVED BY
 Signature: _____
 Title: _____

13. VETERAN PREFERENCE					14. POSITION CLASSIFICATION ACTION			
NONE	WWII	OTHER	5-PT.	10-POINT	NEW	VICE	I. A.	REAL.
			DISAB.	OTHER				

15. SEX	16. RACE	17. APPROPRIATION FROM: TO:	18. SUBJECT TO C. S. RETIREMENT ACT (YES—NO)	19. DATE OF APPOINTMENT AFFIDAVITS (ACCESSIONS ONLY)	20. LEGAL RESIDENCE <input type="checkbox"/> CLAIMED <input type="checkbox"/> PROVED STATE:
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21. STANDARD FORM 50 REMARKS

22. CLEARANCES	INITIAL OR SIGNATURE	DATE	REMARKS:
A.			
B. CEIL. OR POS. CONTROL			
C. CLASSIFICATION			
D. PLACEMENT OR EMPL.			
E.			

F. APPROVED BY

Betty Samson 1955 Evaluation and Promotion Request

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Interview 1: April 17, 2014

Audio file 1

Dunham: Today is April 17, 2014, and we're here in Auburn, California, at the lovely ranch of Betty Samson for the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Oral History Project. We usually start at the beginning, so could you tell me your full name and date of birth?

01-00:00:19

Samson: It's Betty Ruth Mosher Samson. I was born July 26, 1925.

Dunham: Where were you born?

01-00:00:29

Samson: I was born under a big oak tree in North Sacramento. Well, I had a little house under a big oak tree in North Sacramento, California. I lived there till I was about three, and I moved to San Francisco. Near Golden Gate Park. When I was four, we went back to Lake Crystal, Minnesota, where my mother and father had come from. I'm only first generation Californian. Then we lived there till I was eleven, and we came back to Sacramento, California.

Dunham: Can I ask what brought your family to San Francisco from Minnesota? Work opportunities?

01-00:01:09

Samson: Yes. My father worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. You kids don't remember. The times were tough. So he worked for a while in Sacramento, and then they sent him to San Francisco. He got his first Southern Pacific paycheck the day I was born. I'm sure that was a big event for the family. Anyway, we moved to San Francisco; then he lost his job. So we went back to what my mother always called home, and she lived all her life in California, or most of it. Anyway, we went back there, and he worked for his brother. He also did—he was a mechanic, so he did all kinds of work. Until we came back to California again.

Dunham: This is during the Depression, the early thirties. So was it hard to get by then?

01-00:01:56

Samson: Well, I didn't realize it because being a kid from four to eleven—I suppose we were all in the same situation, but you didn't notice you were poor.

Dunham: What about being in Minnesota those years, then?

01-00:02:15

Samson: Well, now, my grandparents had a farm, always. They had several farms while was back there, so we always had vegetables and things like that.

Dunham: What kind of vegetables did they grow?

01-00:02:28

Samson:

Oh, carrots and—I don't think we had cabbage. Well, we might've had cabbage, but not things like you think of in California, like Brussels sprouts or anything. But corn and just the general variety of vegetables.

Dunham:

Did you have to work on the farm at all when you were a girl?

01-00:02:46

Samson:

No. No.

Dunham:

You were in Minnesota from four to eleven?

01-00:02:55

Samson:

Eleven.

Dunham:

What was the background of your grandparents?

01-00:02:59

Samson:

Just farmers. That's all. That's all either of my grandparents, my mother's family or my father's family, did.

Dunham:

Do you know when your family first migrated to the United States?

01-00:03:14

Samson:

Oh, yeah. Can Karri fill you in there?

Dunham:

Sure, please. Karri, your daughter. Please.

01-00:03:20

Karri Samson:

They came into New York before Ellis Island. Came into the Battery area down there, before. So it was 1853.

Dunham:

Where were they coming from?

01-00:03:36

Karri Samson:

They were coming from Germany. It's very complicated.

Dunham:

On both sides, from partly Germany?

01-00:03:43

Karri Samson:

Germany. But a lot of English goes back to the Mayflower. Her mother's family was German, and her father's was English.

Dunham:

Thank you, Karri, for sharing that. Feel free to jump in at any time, too, if you have something to input. What part of Minnesota was this?

01-00:03:59

Samson:

Well, Lake Crystal, Minnesota is in the southern part of Minnesota. It's about sixty miles below the [Twin] Cities, I think. Then we lived in a beautiful area up above the city, about fifty miles, called Taylors Falls. It's kind of famous

because the beautiful Saint Croix River runs through it. They have what they call the Saint Croix Dells. Even today, it's a real tourist attraction.

Dunham: Then what brought you back to California?

01-00:04:35

Samson: I'm not sure.

Karri Samson: Family, probably.

Samson: Yeah. My mother's family were mostly out here, by that time, for one thing. But Dad wasn't doing real well back there, so I think he thought—which he did; he went back to work for Southern Pacific. But he didn't have the job at the time we came back. But he did go back to work for the Southern Pacific for a while.

Dunham: And what did he do for Southern Pacific?

01-00:05:01

Samson: I don't know, he was the boss of something. He was some kind of a crew chief. He was some kind of a foreman, but I don't really know. He didn't work right with the trains or anything; he worked in the yards.

Dunham: When you came back, you came to Sacramento?

01-00:05:30

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: And that's where you stayed then, through middle school, high school?

01-00:05:35

Samson: Well, we lived in downtown Sacramento, and I went through sixth grade down there. Then we moved back out to the North Sacramento area, and we lived right on Grand Avenue, out in the Del Paso Heights area, actually. It was right at the edge of McClellan Air Force Base. Actually, where I went to work was probably two miles from my house, though.

Dunham: Had you known much about McClellan? Then it was what, Sacramento Air Depot or something? It changed names a few times, right? I think. But anyway, McClellan, did you know much about it when you were—?

01-00:06:13

Karri Samson: McClellan Field.

Samson: Yeah, a very dear friend of ours came up from San Diego to help open the base, so we had a little contact with it that way. But they broke ground in 1936, and they didn't even have facilities to do anything until '38.

Dunham: What was school like for you in Sacramento?

01-00:06:26

Samson: Awful.

Dunham: How so?

01-00:06:40

Samson: I was not a real good student, but I had a lot of fun.

Dunham: What kind of fun?

01-00:06:45

Samson: I got through all right. I got through it okay, but I wasn't brilliant or anything. Not like I am now. [laughs] Anyway, I enjoyed school and did well.

Dunham: What did you do for fun when you were a kid?

01-00:06:59

Samson: For fun? Oh, we played out on the rural streets. We played all kinds of things, like kick the can and football. The girls played football with the boys. Baseball, stuff like that. Rode our bicycles. Kids do the same with vehicles nowadays; they go over things and—well, that's what we did with our bicycles, too. We had courses; we'd do all kinds of dumb things.

Dunham: And doing that on your own, as opposed to today, when things are little more tightly structured, if you will.

01-00:07:28

Samson: Yeah, yeah. Right.

Dunham: What was a typical day like for your mom, when you were growing up?

01-00:07:44

Samson: Life was probably not real good for Mom. My dad kind of left us off and on, from the time I was fourteen. So it wasn't a real fun time for her. The war years were probably a little better. But we didn't have a lot in those days, and it was kind of hard to get along.

Dunham: Did you have siblings?

01-00:08:03

Samson: I had two younger brothers. They're both gone now. One four years younger and one was ten years younger.

Dunham: Both quite a bit younger. Okay. Did religion play any role in your life when you were growing up? Did you go to church at all?

01-00:08:22

Samson: Oh, yeah, I went to church quite often, actually, but I don't—different churches.

Dunham: So it varied.

01-00:08:26

Samson: Yeah. I consider myself a Methodist. So that's what we attended up here.

Dunham: You went to Grant Union High School, is that right?

01-00:08:36

Samson: Yes.

Dunham: Any particular memories about Grant Union High School?

01-00:08:40

Samson: Oh, yeah, I loved school. We were the only school in maybe all of California; we had our own swimming pool. That was really something in those days. It still is in existence, and it's a beautiful old—it's kind of Spanish style. It's a really nice school.

Dunham: Were you on the swim team then? Or did they have a swim team?

01-00:09:04

Samson: No. Just learned to swim. It was part of our gym class.

Dunham: Yeah, yeah. Did you play any sports?

01-00:09:11

Samson: Oh, I played a little baseball, and just the things you kind of had to do. We had to do physical education, in those days. No, I was never real involved in stuff like that.

Dunham: Do you remember when you first heard of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

01-00:09:33

Samson: No, I really don't.

Dunham: It was a Sunday.

01-00:09:39

Samson: I do remember the President's voice. It's a funny thing—and my girls, it's hard for them to believe this—but I had no clue that President Roosevelt was crippled. They kept it such a secret that it never came up until years later. Anyway, we always used to hear his voice on the radio. We, of course, didn't have any other kind of communication. Yeah, I don't remember just where I was or what happened when that—.

Dunham: And you would've been a junior in high school?

01-00:10:12

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: So how did school or life for you change, after the US entered the war?

01-00:10:18

Samson: Well, several of the boys went ahead and enlisted. Especially the senior boys. But some of the junior boys did, too, with their parents' permission. Things started changing quite drastically, about that time.

Dunham: What other changes were you noticing?

01-00:10:36

Samson: Well, for one thing, this course in aircraft mechanics came into existence.

Dunham: How did you first hear about that?

01-00:10:44

Samson: Well, you just heard about it in school. I don't really remember, exactly, David. But you were talking the other day, asked me if it was in coordination with McClellan; and yes, it definitely was. They sent instructors to instruct us in this. I remember it starting in my freshman year of my senior class.

Dunham: In the fall of your senior year?

01-00:11:09

Samson: Yeah, it would be in the fall, yeah.

Dunham: I just wanted to make sure I understood correctly.

01-00:11:15

Samson: Yeah. Then I graduated mid-term; I didn't go all the way.

Dunham: Then you continued with your training, starting in January '43?

01-00:11:22

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: What was the training like?

01-00:11:26

Samson: Well, I've always been mechanically inclined and come from—my brothers were both mechanics, my father was a mechanic, and it just kind of came to me more naturally than it did a lot of the girls. But I don't know, I just found it challenging and interesting. It sounded like a good job.

Dunham: Had you done work with your father, growing up? And your brothers?

01-00:11:50

Samson: No, not really. No.

Dunham: No? But you'd done some in school? Or you just kind of developed a quick aptitude for it?

01-00:11:56

Samson: No, but I was always physically active and doing things.

Dunham: How long was the training period after you'd gotten out of school?

01-00:12:06

Samson: Well, it would've been one semester. Then we went to post schools. I think that probably was a couple weeks only.

Dunham: What did you call it, post school?

01-00:12:17

Samson: Well, it was on McClellan Air Force Base, and it was that, a post school. You learned more, oh, about McClellan Field and what they expected of you and that. We didn't necessarily do engine—

Dunham: So in other words, an orientation to the base—

01-00:12:35

Samson: Yeah. Paperwork.

Dunham: Do you remember anything about that orientation that was surprising, or just anything that stood out?

01-00:12:42

Samson: No, not really.

Dunham: In your training courses, was it predominantly women? Or was it a mix of men and women?

01-00:12:50

Samson: All that was women. But the funny thing—I've thought about this—many of the women that did this, once they got there, it wasn't something they really wanted to do, I think. They took office work, a lot of them.

Dunham: How long would you say most of them lasted?

01-00:13:15

Samson: Well, where I went to work in engine repair, none of the girls I went to school with ever came there. So it's kind of hard for me to really guess.

Dunham: It's a great point you made that's not often stated.

01-00:13:31

Samson: Yeah. Most of the women I work with come from other places, where the girls I went to school with and trained with didn't.

Dunham: What was the makeup geographically, racially, of the women you were working with?

01-00:13:46

Samson:

Yeah. Well, I had two girlfriends. One of them, she lives in Michigan. She went all through this with me, and I don't think she lasted six months. She packed it up and went back home to Michigan, to do something else.

Dunham:

Was the issue the work being too physically demanding? Or what do you think were the reasons for the other women leaving?

01-00:14:12

Samson:

I think they just found out they weren't really that interested in doing something like that. Doing paperwork or office work was maybe more feminine.

Dunham:

Sometimes we've heard stories, particularly—and you came in '43, but even then—of men sometimes making it pretty difficult on the women, too. We don't necessarily call it harassment, from that period, but there were certainly stories of harassment or hazing or teasing and things of that nature. Did you experience any of that, or observe it?

01-00:14:46

Samson:

I never had that experience, and I don't think we really had a problem with that. Of course, I was only seventeen years old, so they treated me like their little sister or something a lot. But I never noticed anything with the other, the older; there were a lot of older women, wives, that their husband had gone on to the service and everything. I don't think the men there really resented us at all. There was a little difference, like [President] Obama's worried about now, in wages. It was harder for us maybe to advance than had it been a young man. But that wasn't the people we worked with's fault.

Dunham:

Do you know what the difference in wages was?

01-00:15:42

Samson:

No, I don't know, but I know that it was a little more. When I went down to the shops, I was making \$100 a month. Believe me, that was a lot of money. Then in July of 1945, when I left, I was making \$1.04 an hour, which is what, maybe \$2400 or something like that.

Dunham:

Yeah. Well, I'm curious, backing up a minute. I know you had had the intensive training. Was there an interview process, both a written or oral interview, and/or a physical exam, before you actually started to work?

01-00:16:25

Samson:

No. That seemed to be an accepted thing, that you took the course, you went to post school, and you went to work.

Dunham:

You mentioned the woman who came out from Michigan, and other parts of the country. Do you know what the recruiting process was for them, and how they heard about the opportunity at McClellan?

01-00:16:43

Samson: Well, my friend Judy, of course, was with me in high school, so—

Dunham: So she had previously been there.

01-00:16:48

Samson: Yeah. But I had another friend, Coralea, who was a lifetime friend—she was a neighbor girl—and she was with me there, too.

Dunham: Do you remember your first day on the job, what it was like?

01-00:17:03

Samson: Yeah, it was kind of exciting. I thought I was real cool.

Dunham: Can you tell us about it?

01-00:17:06

Samson: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I went to work with some gentlemen, some Chinese men, that were Auburn men. Of course, I had no idea what, even, Auburn was. Because the difference between Sacramento, near Sacramento, and Auburn, was, in those days you didn't just get in your car and fly down there; it was a long ways. So anyway, in later years, I became friends with them. But I went to work with them, and we were doing fuel injection lines on a little engine—I mean it was a little engine from what I worked on later—I think they were 945s or something like. Anyway, we were doing fuel injection lines. You just hook the lines up and safety-wire them and that kind of stuff.

Dunham: Are there specific tools or things you were using to do that?

01-00:18:00

Samson: No.

Dunham: No? It's just manually—?

01-00:18:02

Samson: Yeah. They, of course, had all that stuff there for you to use.

Dunham: You mentioned the Chinese men from the Auburn area. What was the other makeup of the coworkers, geographically, ethnically? Do you recall kind of the variety? And did it change over the course of the war? [brief comments between them as her microphone is adjusted]

01-00:18:34

Samson: Yeah, there were some—oh, I could almost count the black people, at that point.

Dunham: Very few at the beginning?

01-00:18:44

Samson:

Yeah, *very, very* few. We had a janitor, Luther, who was a really nice man. I didn't even have any—we had one black kid in the high school. We had a few Japanese kids in high school, and there were Japanese workers, and some Chinese, but it wasn't—

Dunham:

So you had Japanese workers, though, during World War II?

01-00:19:09

Samson:

Yeah.

Dunham:

Because most Japanese on the West Coast would've been incarcerated.

01-00:19:13

Samson:

I wondered about that, but we did have a couple Japanese men that—I don't know why. And they didn't disappear, so I don't know. As a matter of fact, we had a Japanese man—his name was Watanabe—and he was a representative from Pratt & Whitney, in the East. So I don't know.

Dunham:

Well, then maybe because he was visiting from the East. The East Coast of the United States, you mean?

01-00:19:44

Samson:

Yeah, that could be. Or of course, he might've been half, too. I don't know. I don't know what the designation was, at that—nowadays, we're so mixed up nobody knows anyway.

Dunham:

But at that time, it was pretty straight—when they had the evacuation order, there was a period of time where you could move to the Midwest or the East Coast, and a very few Japanese Americans did.

01-00:20:07

Samson:

Oh, yeah. It was bad up here in Auburn, because we had a lot of Japanese landowners and farmers and ranchers, and they all lost their homes and everything.

Dunham:

You'd mentioned there were some Japanese students in your school. Did you know of some—?

01-00:20:25

Samson:

Yeah, there were quite a few Japanese. I didn't know anyone that finally went away to prison camp.

Dunham:

I imagine the Japanese coworkers there were probably older, so probably none of them are still around, too, because I would certainly be interested to know their stories, if they were around. But thank you for sharing that. It's interesting. Let's see. You mentioned a few African Americans who were there. At the beginning, were they mostly local Bay Area then?

01-00:21:00
Samson: Yeah, they were local people, yeah.

Dunham: As the war went on, did you begin to have more Southerners?

01-00:21:06
Samson: Yeah, lots of them.

Dunham: Were there any particular challenges with bringing that diverse workforce together?

01-00:21:12
Samson: No. I don't remember any.

Dunham: You'd been in Sacramento for a while, talking about the heat and adjusting to the summers, in particular, was hard. Some people, I heard, went away because they couldn't deal with that. But I just wondered—

01-00:21:29
Samson: Changing the subject a little bit, but when I came back to California as an eleven-year-old, I don't remember seeing an ethnic-group person. Like Asian people, especially. If I'd seen a colored person, I don't remember it. You don't think about those things nowadays, but it was kind of amazing, actually. I lived in this little town, up in Taylors Falls, and we had one Indian man. A real—we called him Wrinkle Meat. Well, he was old and all wrinkled up. [laughs]

Dunham: Where were you living while you were working at McClellan?

01-00:22:23
Samson: I was living on Grand Avenue, right in the house—I was saying it was right on the edge—it actually was almost on the perimeter of—well, of course, McClellan Field had several hundred acres, so I don't know. I could've walked to work if I wanted to take a nice long walk.

Dunham: How did you get to work?

01-00:22:49
Samson: First, we had a bus, just came by the house. Then I saved my money and bought a car.

Dunham: Oh. What kind of car did you buy?

01-00:22:58
Samson: A '35 Plymouth.

Dunham: Oh, wow.

01-00:23:01
Samson: Yeah, wow. I thought that was something else.

Dunham: Do you remember how much it cost?

01-00:23:05

Samson: No, I don't. Oh, it was maybe \$6- \$700. A guy that I worked with sold it to me. We couldn't get gas; he couldn't get tires or anything else. He got tired of keeping it, so he sold it to this dumb kid.

Dunham: Can you tell us about rationing? You had a short commute, so it was okay.

01-00:23:21

Samson: Oh, yeah. A lot of times, I didn't drive. But my father had a shop, a mechanic shop, in North Sacramento. The man that owned the shop building was a good friend, and he had the gas station. So if I was really desperate, I'd drive in and ask Carl for some extra gas until I got my next stamps. Or he'd always have a gallon or two he could give me.

Dunham: Well, people found ways.

01-00:23:52

Samson: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: So you had a connection. So now you had this car. Did that free you up?

01-00:23:57

Samson: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: And you had some income. Did you go traveling and explore—?

01-00:23:59

Samson: Oh, traveling between North Sacramento and work. Not very far.

Dunham: How did things change for your family during the war years? You had this opportunity; what about for your mother or father? Your brothers were still in school, I take it.

01-00:24:18

Samson: Yeah, they were both still in school. Yeah, they didn't get out till after the war.

Karri Samson: Her father joined the Marines.

01-00:24:25

Samson: Yeah, he joined the Marines for a brief period. He had three kids, but he heard he was going to be drafted. So he joined, to get something besides the Army. So he got the Marine Corps, and he became a swimming instructor down in San Diego, and he didn't go overseas or anything.

Dunham: How about for your mom?

01-00:24:50

Samson:

Things remained about the same. She just stayed home and took care of us. She didn't go to work. It probably would've been a good opportunity. But my little brother was still pretty small.

Dunham:

Did you need to help out with the family?

01-00:25:04

Samson:

Oh, yeah. I gave Mom money. I don't remember how much or anything, but I'd buy extra things, too and stuff like that.

Dunham:

We were talking, before we got started, a little bit about the mix of the civilian and the military at McClellan Air Force Base. So can you tell us a little bit about that, and maybe the dating scene or other social aspects, and/or work aspects?

01-00:25:24

Samson:

At first off, we had Air Force boys working with us, for training. I guess as the war escalated, they needed the guys so bad that that kind of—this boy that wrote me this list and went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. Unfortunately, he had some kind of problem and had surgery, and he died at Fort Dix; he never got overseas. But the guys all seemed to kind of move through, and we didn't get any more military trainees. So I imagine they just needed them elsewhere and just went ahead and took them.

Dunham:

But there were some military personnel—

01-00:26:09

Samson:

Oh, there was always military. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they just weren't—

Dunham:

Did you have dances or that type of thing, or other social events? Or how did you get together?

01-00:26:22

Samson:

The guys mostly did civilian things with us; we didn't do—enlisted men didn't have much on the base, actually. I imagine the military families did, because they lived there.

Dunham:

Did you want to read any of that letter that the gentleman wrote to you? Or what do you think? We can certainly scan it later, but if you'd like to, I'd be—

01-00:26:48

Samson:

No, you could go and scan it if you want to.

Dunham:

Is it more of a romantic letter? Or does it talk about—?

01-00:26:53

Samson:

Well, it's romantic, but it also says—oh, he says, "But then a dark cloud arises through the sky blue. I was shocked and frightened. A thought left me cold.

Rumors of shipping from town to town grew. I had the feeling of loneliness of old.” That’s just one chapter of it. But that was about the time they got the message that they were moving out, and they did. This boy, I wish I had known where his family was—it was someplace in Washington state—because I’ve got a whole packet of these poems he wrote, and I’d just love to have the family have them. But I don’t know how to get ahold of them. I have no idea.

Dunham: Were they mostly while he was at the base, or after he—?

01-00:27:49

Samson: Yeah, he wrote some afterward, too.

Dunham: What did you guys do for fun, dating-wise? What did you do?

01-00:28:00

Samson: Well, of course, the guys didn’t have much money. In one of his letters, he said he was sad because he couldn’t ask me out because he didn’t have any money. But we’d go to a show in North Sacramento or just hang out.

Dunham: What kind of show, a movie?

01-00:28:14

Samson: Yeah, movies.

Dunham: What were the movies like then? Would they have the newsreels, the cartoons?

01-00:28:18

Samson: They were good. Yeah. You could sit there half the day.

Dunham: How did you get news of the war? Did you get it from the newsreels, newspaper, radio?

01-00:28:30

Samson: Mostly from the newsreels, yeah. We’d hear about it on the radio, but you didn’t stay tuned to that all day. Being young, you were doing something else. The newsreels were good. It would always fill us in on things. You could see pictures of it.

Dunham: What theater? You said in North Sacramento?

01-00:28:49

Samson: Del Paso Theater in North Sacramento.

Dunham: It’s not there anymore, I imagine.

01-00:28:53

Samson: No, it’s gone.

Dunham: Did you go to music or shows or any of the stuff—they had some stuff on the base, too, didn't they?

01-00:29:03

Samson: We civilians didn't do that.

Dunham: We mentioned that you drove, even though you had a short distance; but I've heard that during the war, bicycling was encouraged because of the limits on rubber and gas. Were there a lot of bicycles and stuff on the base?

01-00:29:21

Samson: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Bicycles were a good transportation on the base, yeah.

Dunham: We talked about your first day on the job, when you were working on those small engines. How did your job change over the course of your working there?

01-00:29:43

Samson: Well, for one thing, I ended up being trained for—we had—I'm trying to explain—maybe twenty-five stations, with the engines starting here and moving on up. I finally trained to do all stations, except magnetos. If somebody was off work, I'd take that position. I liked doing that, because it wasn't the same continual thing. I worked in the carburetor shop for a while, but I got out of that because you just stand or sit at a bench. That's not something I like to do, even to this day.

Dunham: You're energetic; you like to be active.

01-00:30:31

Samson: So that made that much more interesting.

Dunham: So twenty-four different stations?

01-00:30:37

Samson: Actually, between twenty and twenty-five, somewhere like that.

Dunham: You don't have to go through all of them, but what were the range of some of the different—I guess it's an assembly line of—?

01-00:30:48

Samson: Yeah. I've probably got some pictures in my McClellan Field information. But you'd start with two or three parts of the engine, you'd put that together. Then you'd have the holes where the cylinders go, and you put them in. Then you put the cylinders on. And on up.

Dunham: Were there any parts of that there were particularly challenging? You said there was one station you didn't do. Why was that?

01-00:31:12

Samson:

That was magnetos. Well, I worked the magnetos, but I always worked with someone. It was a pretty technical job, and the two guys that worked it were pretty much the ones that worked it all the time. They'd have a girl helper; there was other girls that helped, too. We'd all kind of take our turn there.

Dunham:

In that group of twenty-five then, what would be the percentage of men, women?

01-00:31:40

Samson:

Well, you'd probably have a couple guys and a couple girls. A girl or a couple girls. Probably four to an engine, depending on what it was.

Dunham:

Yeah. We talked a little earlier about maybe challenges with advancement for women. Were there any women bosses or foremen?

01-00:32:01

Samson:

No. No.

Dunham:

Did that affect you? Not necessarily wanting to be that, but for other opportunities for advancement, if you will? Did you think where you might've wanted to do other things?

01-00:32:17

Samson:

No, I can't say I did, really. In that day and age, we were still women. If you know what I'm saying. It wasn't like, "I want to do everything a guy can," that kind of stuff. I don't think the thought of being a foreman or a boss of some kind really entered our minds.

Dunham:

But you strike me—you were a very focused, efficient worker, too. Were there other times when you observed other, be they men or women, who maybe weren't as—?

01-00:32:53

Samson:

Well, yeah. That thought, I'm sure, crossed all of our minds, at one point or another.

Dunham:

What about fashion for women and/or dress code for women at this work?

01-00:33:07

Samson:

Well, we had to wear metal-toed shoes. A lot of times, we didn't do that.

Dunham:

Why were you supposed to wear metal-toed shoes?

01-00:33:16

Samson:

Well, just so we didn't drop something on our feet. But now, this outfit was purchased at Hale's Department Store in Sacramento. It was a big store. Well, it just closed down maybe twenty years or so ago. But anyway, they carried these—they were the only ones in town who carried them—and a lot of the

girls did wear them. I had several—I don't know why I kept one; just nostalgia, I guess.

Dunham: Just for this such occasion. It's wonderful.

01-00:33:48

Samson: Anyway, they probably were pretty expensive, like ten, fifteen dollars.

Dunham: You had to buy out of your own pocket?

01-00:33:55

Samson: Oh, yeah, you had to buy them out of your own pocket, yeah.

Dunham: Did you have to get any of your own tools or anything like that?

01-00:34:01

Samson: No. They were all supplied. And we wore jeans and just plain shirts, otherwise. Usually, we had to have something around our hair. But that was another thing, like the shoes, we didn't always.

Dunham: Was that ever enforced?

01-00:34:24

Samson: On occasion, yes. I think when a general was going to come in to review the shop, why everybody passed the word. "Get your scarf on, get your shoes on," or something.

Dunham: That was about it then, huh? Okay. I'm trying to remember. I interviewed Becky Naman, who worked in the personnel office for a number of years.

01-00:34:43

Samson: Who?

Dunham: Rebecca Naman or Becky Naman.

01-00:34:45

Samson: Oh, you did?

Dunham: Yeah, do you know her?

01-00:34:46

Samson: Oh, yeah! God, yes. I have some pictures of her here, actually.

Dunham: I'm trying to remember. I know she talked about some issues with the dress code at some time, and changes. It may have been later, more around the Korean—

01-00:34:58

Samson: When I went back in '51, it had changed a lot. Things were a lot more lax.

Dunham: During World War II, I'm just curious. You talked about this one gentleman who you had the correspondence with. How did you meet or have dates with other folks, civilian or military, on the base? Was it working together or—? Where did you eat? Did you eat together?

01-00:35:31

Samson: We had three shifts. But I remember working days and swing. I don't remember working nights. Maybe the girls didn't work night shift, I don't know. Anyway, we'd eat in the cafeteria on the base. Paid for it out of our own pocket.

Dunham: What was the food like?

01-00:35:58

Samson: Oh, I don't know. Hey, for me, food was good. Food was good if you had enough to eat. You'd go down the line and pick out what you wanted, really.

Dunham: That dining hall, did it include civilians and soldiers?

01-00:36:19

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: So was that a place where you—?

01-00:36:22

Samson: Well, you could meet, yeah.

Dunham: Where did you meet?

01-00:36:24

Samson: I don't know.

Dunham: Somewhere. Was there a bar or anything? Did you go out to that type of thing?

01-00:36:31

Samson: Oh, there was lots of bars, David.

Dunham: Well, tell us about the bars.

01-00:36:35

Samson: I was too young for that!

Dunham: Are you sure? You were making good money.

01-00:36:39

Samson: No.

Dunham: It's okay. Your parents aren't here. [laughter]

01-00:36:45

Samson:

I never dated in school a whole lot, so meeting the guys at the base—oh, there were a lot of young civilians that still weren't in the service, at the point I went to work. Like the military, they kind of went, too, when they got drafted or decided to go ahead and join up. But I never had any trouble meeting guys there. It's hard to explain. I don't know.

Dunham:

Well, I wouldn't think so. I was just curious. So going to the movies, what other types of things did you do? Were you working six days a week, five days a week?

01-00:37:29

Samson:

Six days, a lot of the time, yeah.

Dunham:

So your off day was kind of your big day. What did you do during your off day?

01-00:37:37

Samson:

Well, one night on swing shift, I remember the guys took me to a speakeasy down in Old Sacramento. Oh! It was vaudeville. Thank God the guys were with me; it was pretty scary. It was in the worst part of Sacramento. Down in skid row. But they were with me. It was something they did once in a while for kicks, and they decided to take Betty with them. I was perfectly safe; it wasn't—we had a different world, in those days, too.

Dunham:

Sure. Everything's relative.

01-00:38:12

Samson:

Even in a place like that, you were relatively safe.

Dunham:

That speakeasy, so it was a vaudeville show, which means what? Can you describe it?

01-00:38:32

Samson:

We had a softball team that the guys would get to go to. We'd go watch softball playing and stuff like that.

Dunham:

You didn't play yourself, but just would watch?

01-00:38:40

Samson:

No. No, it was all guys. That was another guy thing.

Dunham:

Were there any women's sports leagues or teams on the base, that you know of?

01-00:38:48

Samson:

Not that I'm aware of, no.

Dunham:

I heard they put a bowling alley in, at some point.

01-00:38:52

Samson: Yeah, we had a bowling alley on base, but I don't remember ever going there. We went to a bowling alley in Sacramento, but not on the base.

Dunham: I've heard also that there was so much growth and that there was constant construction going on, and a little bit of chaos. Did that affect you, or you kind of had your area and that didn't really matter?

01-00:39:13

Samson: Well, yeah, there was a lot of construction going on on base. They'd build different places to house all the vehicles and stuff like that. But our building was already operating when I went there. I don't know if you've ever seen any pictures of the early McClellan Air Force Base. It was three hangars. Well, past that, they built this great, huge hangar, which was called Dom Bay, D-O-M. And that's where I went later, with the aircraft, the full aircraft. They'd move them down a line like that.

Dunham: Talk about the work you did once you were working in Dom Bay then.

01-00:40:01

Samson: We had B-29s, at first, when I went down there. Our work slowed down in the engine part, so they sent up there to work on the aircraft.

Dunham: Do you know why it was that the engine work slowed down?

01-00:40:16

Samson: I don't know. I really don't know.

Dunham: Was this in '44?

01-00:40:23

Samson: No, this was after I went back to work in '51. We better go back to getting me fired. Laid off.

Dunham: Yeah, I do want to hear about that. Let me ask you another little earlier question, though, '44. Had you heard about the Port Chicago explosion of July of 1944?

01-00:40:46

Samson: I suppose I did, but I don't remember it, David. I know all about it now, but I didn't—remember now, our communications weren't that—.

Dunham: Certainly. I've interviewed a lot of folks who were closer to it in the Bay Area, who literally felt it.

01-00:40:59

Samson: And didn't know about it, yeah.

Dunham: Well, some who actually felt it or heard it.

01-00:41:02

Samson: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: So a number did, so there's things about that. So all during World War II, you were working on the engines.

01-00:41:12

Samson: Yes. Yeah.

Dunham: So was that a whole variety of planes that you were working on in that department?

01-00:41:17

Samson: Yes. Yeah.

Dunham: What were some of the models?

01-00:41:20

Samson: Well, I don't know what that—that little engine must've gone to some kind of a train or—. Okay, we had 1340s. That was for the AT-6. Maybe we had 2500s. They might've gone to B-24s; I'm not sure, David, about that.

Dunham: Well, let's maybe talk about the end of the war, then. Were you fired before the end of the war or after the end of the war?

01-00:42:05

Samson: No. The war ended in '45, and a few days later we were told we'd leave. It was "wartime indefinite." We knew that when we went there. And that's exactly what they did. I got my layoff certificate in my folder there, where they're just—.

Dunham: You want to maybe hold that up?

01-00:42:29

Samson: I probably can't find it that easy.

Dunham: Well, we'll look at it later.

01-00:42:32

Samson: Yeah, you can get it later.

Dunham: But you still have your layoff certificate. Tell me first about when you first of V-E and V-J Day, and what hearing of—

01-00:42:41

Samson: Well, it was very exciting, for one thing. But by that time, all of us girls had met a lot of servicemen, too. Not just from McClellan Field, but the sailors liked to come to Sacramento, because there were a billion sailors in San Francisco, and you get on a bus and come to Sacramento and there weren't any.

Dunham: Less competition.

01-00:43:06

Samson: But anyway, so we were excited about that, and excited that the guys would be coming home and things would be good again.

Dunham: Were there any particular celebrations in the Sacramento area?

01-00:43:19

Samson: I don't remember any, particularly.

Dunham: So then you got your layoff notice, and that was instant?

01-00:43:28

Samson: Yeah. Well, there was talk. There was talk about it well before, but all of a sudden, you just get this notice, and that was it; we all left.

Dunham: So what did that feel like?

01-00:43:42

Samson: Wasn't very good. I don't think any of us were happy about that aspect. We knew it. We knew it was going to happen, but that aspect of it was—I really didn't want to leave; I didn't know what I was going to do. I had met my husband by that time. No, I hadn't either. Sorry about that, Karri. Wasn't until later that year. Well, anyway, I went to work at the telephone company, became a long-distance operator. I didn't have a whole lot of trouble getting a job at all. So that was a good thing. Yeah.

Dunham: Was it a significant pay cut?

01-00:44:18

Samson: I don't remember, David. It was a good job, so there probably wasn't too much difference.

Dunham: Was it a hard transition, from doing the physical kind of work you'd been doing?

01-00:44:28

Samson: Well, yeah, it was sitting in one place for hours, and it was plugging things in holes. It was a change.

Dunham: How long did you do that?

01-00:44:46

Samson: Well, let's see. I don't remember what my date was. I don't have that written down. Anyway, from the time I left in '45 until October 1946.

Dunham: Over a year. Well, before we move on, I want to ask how you met your husband. But is there anything else from your notes that you would like to talk about, with the war years or that initial experience at McClellan?

01-00:45:16

Samson: No, I think that's probably a good—

Dunham:

We can come back to it, too. As we go through your materials, maybe you might want to—I mentioned Becky Naman earlier, and you said you did know her. Did you meet her during those years?

01-00:45:28

Samson: Yeah. The early years, yeah. Actually, she was still there when I went back.

Dunham:

Yeah, I know. She was there a lot later even.

01-00:45:36

Samson: Yeah. I don't know how long. I'm sure she retired from those—

Dunham:

I think some forty years—

01-00:45:43

Samson: Yeah, I was going to say.

Dunham:

What were your interactions with her? She was personnel—

01-00:45:48

Samson: Oh, she was just an office girl. I never knew her that well; I certainly knew who she was. Did she work for Pancho Hanna? I can't remember.

Dunham:

I'm not sure of the names. I know she was definitely involved with hiring. And she was there before the war started and so played a pivotal role in kind of formulating a lot of that. So I was just curious about that. Well, how did you meet your husband?

01-00:46:12

Samson: I belonged to a horse-roping club, where you throw a rope around. [laughs] Anyway, I belonged to this club in North Sacramento. Some friends who belonged to the club brought this young—well, he was in his thirties; he wasn't a young, young man. But anyway, they brought this guy to a meeting one night, at Hoyt's Doughnut Shop in North Sacramento. I don't know, we just got together and dated, and in October 1946 we were married.

Dunham:

What was he doing at the time?

01-00:46:53

Samson: Well, he had a really interesting life. He left home in Nebraska when he was about fourteen, thirteen, fourteen years old, and he came to California. He was a cowboy. He worked doing—working with cattle. He stopped over in Wyoming, and lived out in a crummy little house, taking care of cattle in the middle of Winter. Can you imagine this kid doing this? Then he came on to California and worked here. Then he worked in the mountains at Lake Tahoe. He'd take people into the back country, hunting and fishing. Then he'd go to

Arizona in the winter, and worked at a mountain lion hunting lodge. He did this until he went into the military, in the Navy. He was almost four years in the Navy. He had just gotten out of the Navy when I met him. So he really wasn't doing anything, at that point. But the summer before we married, he went back to Tahoe and worked the summer, up at Meeks Bay in Tahoe.

Dunham: Did he use the GI Bill at all then?

01-00:48:07

Samson: Yeah, he did. That's another story.

Dunham: What did he use it for?

01-00:48:11

Samson: He became a saddle maker. Quite a well-known California saddle maker. That's what he took, was saddle making.

Dunham: So he used that for an apprenticeship or courses?

01-00:48:21

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: Would that have been an apprenticeship? I don't know how saddle makers learn.

01-00:48:25

Samson: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They had a school out in Oak Park in Sacramento.

Dunham: So he was able to pay his mentor from the GI Bill?

01-00:48:34

Samson: Well, yeah, the government paid him. Yeah. So he became a saddle maker at Town & Country Village in North Sacramento. Or in the Sacramento area.

Dunham: Had you grown up with those interests in cowboy rodeos?

01-00:48:51

Samson: Yeah. Well, yeah, he had, in Nebraska.

Dunham: How about you? Did you grow up with that? Or when did you first get interested in it?

01-00:49:02

Samson: I don't remember. The first thing I bought was a horse.

Dunham: When you were how old?

01-00:49:08

Samson: Well, after I started working.

Dunham: Before the car, you bought a horse?

01-00:49:11

Samson: Yeah, before the car. Yeah, I bought a horse.

Dunham: Did you ever ride the horse to work? No. [laughs]

01-00:49:15

Samson: No. No, I didn't try that one. I could have easily enough. [laughs] If I had a place to leave him there, I could have. Anyway, I was always interested in horses and country living. I suppose because I remember my grandparents' farms.

Dunham: When you had the horse was it at the house, or did you have to have it at a stable?

01-00:49:40

Samson: No, I had a little stable built.

Dunham: Okay.

01-00:49:50

Samson: Are we running out, David?

Dunham: We've got about ten minutes; then we'll take a break, if that's all right. Let me ask, backing up. At the end of the war, some people were able to stay employed at the base, right?

01-00:50:01

Samson: Oh, the men were.

Dunham: Only men? Were there any women in the mechanical roles?

01-00:50:03

Samson: Oh, yeah. No, no women stayed. Yeah. That was the way it was. Yeah. That was a civil service thing. That was it. Unless you might've transferred into some kind of clerical or something.

Dunham: I've also heard that McClellan was doing a lot of the training over the course of the war, and then people were going to other bases and locations. Was that ever a consideration, or did you hear about those—?

01-00:50:34

Samson: You mean for civilian workers?

Dunham: I think so, yeah.

01-00:50:38

Samson: No, I don't remember that. I don't remember any of our guys—of course, you've got to remember that all the guys left were family men. They probably wouldn't want to uproot their families and go somewhere else anyway.

Dunham: Right. So of the other women and others who were laid off, you got a job quickly at the phone company. Did you stay in contact with many of them? What did they do? Did some of them go back?

01-00:51:00

Samson: I really didn't stay in contact with any of the women. Some of the older women, of course, their husbands were coming home, so they didn't even think about going back to work. That was time to go home and raise your family or be a wife again.

Dunham: I wanted to ask—I also asked this the other day, but—was the work fun for you?

01-00:51:29

Samson: Was it fun? Oh, yeah, I loved it.

Dunham:

I have the sense it was.

01-00:51:31

Samson: Oh, yeah. I loved it. One time this one foreman and I—he was in charge of nose sections. That's the thing that fits down over the top of the engine. Anyway, he maybe had two or three people working in there with him. I went to work there for a while, and I was pretty adept in doing the speed-wise. So one day, he and I, he and I alone—his name was Al Tritton—Al and I built this nose section in record time. We just did things like that to be doing it, I guess. I don't think it proved anything to anybody, except to sharpen us.

Dunham: Yeah. Yeah. I was wondering, too. I believe that the WASPS [Women Air Force Service Pilots], the female pilots during the war—

01-00:52:25

Samson: No, I never had any contact with them, no.

Dunham: Did you ever have an interest in flying yourself, having worked on these planes?

01-00:52:36

Samson: Yeah, I did think I wanted to fly. I wanted to be a WASP, actually. My father was living in San Francisco at that time, and I—well, we didn't have money enough for me to go to flying school, because the only flying school was in Nevada. Anyway, it just wasn't feasible to do that at that time. But this friend of my father's said that if I still wanted to do this after the war, why, he'd finance it for me. Well, okay. That didn't pan out at all. But I did have that idea.

Dunham: If that offer had come, you mean, you might've—?

01-00:53:13

Samson: Yeah, I probably would have.

Dunham: I was curious. I've talked to some other—.

01-00:53:20

Samson: And I'm scared to death of flying.

Dunham: Oh, are you? Having been an airplane mechanic—?

01-00:53:24

Samson: Why would I want to do that?

Dunham: Well, now, that's interesting. So do you know why you're scared?

01-00:53:30

Samson: I just don't like to fly. [laughs] So I wouldn't have made a good WASP, no matter what.

Dunham: But does it have anything to do with having been an airplane mechanic?

01-00:53:42

Samson: Yeah. I know what little, tiny thing could go wrong.

Dunham: But you were all very careful, right?

01-00:53:51

Samson: There is one incident. I didn't tell you about this. This friend of mine, Judy Harmon, and I, right after we started work—maybe we were in for just about three months—we decided to go join up. So I suppose we called in sick leave, and we went down to Sacramento. They had the recruiting thing in the top of the post office in Sacramento. Well, nobody'd take us, because I was only seventeen and she was only sixteen. So by the time we reached eighteen, we decided we liked this job, and it was paying good; why do something else? So we didn't join.

Dunham: What do you think would've happened if you had been eighteen then and you'd joined—?

01-00:54:37

Samson: Well, we started with the Marine Corps, and then we went down to Navy, and then—and nobody'd take us.

Dunham: You thought somebody would've bent the rules to take you. But what do you think that would've been like if you had gotten into one of those?

01-00:54:50
Samson: Well, we'd have probably both been good at it. She became a professional journalist later, so I don't know she'd have done; but I'd have probably done the same thing I was doing.

Dunham: You maybe would've done similar work.

01-00:55:00
Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: What would've been the appeal of being in the military itself, then? Was that a sense of greater patriotism or what?

01-00:55:08
Samson: Patriotism was a big thing, David.

Dunham: And we haven't talked about it yet.

01-00:55:12
Samson: Young people, even your age, do not realize what patriotism was, in those days.

Dunham: Tell us about it.

01-00:55:22
Samson: Well, it's something that's a little hard to explain. But everybody was patriotic. Well, everybody that I knew loved our President. I know there were some people that didn't like Mr. Roosevelt. To this day, don't like Mr. Roosevelt. But he was our President and he was a leader. It just was something that was really there, like was in the air.

Dunham: Well, it was also present, probably, in terms of—you mentioned going to the movies, the newsreels.

01-00:56:02
Samson: Oh, everything, yeah. Magazines, everything were.

Dunham: Do you remember the cartoons, as well? At the movies, do you remember seeing cartoons?

01-00:56:12
Samson: Vaguely, but I can't just bring—.

Dunham: Yeah. What about other images? What about images of Rosie the Riveter and women in the workplace? Do you remember seeing that—?

01-00:56:20
Samson: No. I really don't. We weren't famous then.

Dunham: But there was some recruitment of that going on, and so the image was out there.

01-00:56:29

Samson: Oh, I'm sure there must have been, yeah. Especially in the shipyard areas, I think, perhaps.

Dunham: Yeah. But Becky Naman also did talk about at McClellan, how they had to do recruiting and put out materials and—

01-00:56:43

Samson: Yeah. Well, our mechanics course was a recruiting device, actually. We did have Mather Air Force Base, too, which hired a lot of women.

Dunham: What were other examples of patriotism? We talked a little bit about rationing. What about Victory Gardens or conservation of other kinds, recycling? Are there other things you can remember around that?

01-00:57:11

Samson: I don't remember a whole lot about that. Being young, I look back now and think a lot of things. I'm going, "Oh, my God; I didn't know about that."

Dunham: Do you remember any special events at the base? I'd read that on December 7, 1943, General Howard and Governor Warren came and spoke to day- and swing-shift employees. Do you remember anything like that?

01-00:57:40

Samson: The general would have these—I remember General Howard. He'd address us in different areas, physically, quite often, actually.

Dunham: What else do you remember about General Howard, then? We talked about patriotism. Was he a leader that you would look up to?

01-00:58:01

Samson: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Dunham: What about special events? I heard Babe Ruth, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope all visited. Do you remember, or did you see any of them? No?

01-00:58:15

Samson: We were so busy working. I don't remember anything like that, really.

Dunham: I'm going to wrap up this tape, and we'll take a little break and maybe look through some of your memorabilia, and then talk about after the war and the Korean War period. But is there anything else, before we close this tape, you'd like to add about the World War II years and your experience?

01-00:58:46

Samson: Where I worked in the engine repair the test block was right close, where we could just take the engine to the test block, where they'd roar all night. Of

course, we lived really close to the base, so you could hear this awful noise. Now people think a little airplane flying over is a disaster, here in Auburn. “Oh, you’re flying over my house.” They should’ve heard a B-29 bomber take off or come in or something, too. One night I did walk out on the back porch. I don’t know why I did this, but—was it a noise or something? I looked up in the sky, and this bomber burst apart in a big ball of flame. I don’t remember much about that. The story is in *The Sacramento Bee*. I don’t even remember what year it had to be. Probably ’44 or something. But there were parts and bits and pieces all over the countryside for a while. My brother found a machine gun. Of course, he never turned it in. He died up in Oregon; the machine gun’s still up in Oregon.

Dunham: And that was the birth of your fear of flying?

01-00:59:57

Samson: Yeah, really. That did it. [they laugh]

Dunham: Well, let’s take a little break.

01-01:00:02

Samson: Yeah, a break? Okay.

Audio file 2

Dunham: First I’ll introduce us again here. Let me just say, this is tape two with Betty Samson, on April 17, 2014. I’ve just been suggested that there’s a good story about gardenias.

02-00:00:15

Samson: Okay. That’s a World War II story, all right. I was in Sacramento; I don’t know why. I was going by the Owl Drug store on K Street in Sacramento. Out of this door of the drugstore come these two sailors, running like the devil. Almost knocked me down. Grabbed me by my arms and turned me around and said, “Come with us.” So I went with them. I wasn’t going to go far, but ended up down in Capitol Park. They had just stolen a couple of cigars from the drugstore. Not because they didn’t have their pants full of money; just for kicks. So anyway, we ended up walking in Capitol Park, and one of them got me a beautiful camellia. I mean, not—what’s the trees with white flowers? From the South.

Karri Samson: Magnolia.

02-00:01:22

Samson: A magnolia, out of one of the trees. Of course, that was a no-no, too. You didn’t pick flowers out of Capitol Park. Anyway. But anywhere we went, to any of the bars or—then they remained, they both came to see me together; they’d never come separately. One of them was a big Italian boy from New York. They were both Walts, and I don’t remember that Walt’s last name. But

the other one was Walter Wendt, from Michigan. I heard from Walter after—actually, my mom got a letter, after I was married. Anyway, they were just up here on kicks, but any time their ship was in, they'd come up, and we'd all three do something. Finally, Italian Walt kind of backed down a little bit, so he'd give the other Walt some leeway. But then they got shipped off, and I've never seen them again. But the gardenia thing is—any bar you went to, the girls would come around with these trays of gardenias or roses. So I always chose a gardenia. I love gardenias. Of course, magnolias are pretty nice, too.

Dunham: What were the popular bars of the time?

02-00:02:37

Samson: Oh, one of them was The Cellar over on J Street. You went down under the National Dollar Store, and they had this bar. It was really like some San Francisco bars. Oh, there were several good bars. That's the one that kind of sticks in my mind. Oh, there was the Top of the Town. That was a really neat place. They served really fancy meals and everything, too. But it was at the top of the Elks Building in Sacramento. It's still there. You could get up there and see all of Sacramento at night and everything. It was very pretty.

Dunham: Did the bars ever have music, or did you go to music clubs at all?

02-00:03:19

Samson: Any music? Oh, well, some of them, but mostly we had the—what were those things?

Dunham: Jukebox?

02-00:03:28

Samson: Yeah, where we could call other places and dedicate or song or anything. It was kind of cool.

Dunham: Oh. Well, what do you think? How did that work?

02-00:03:36

Samson: Well, I don't know. Now that you ask. Yeah. If your friends were at another bar, you could say, this song's dedicated to so-and-so.

Dunham: So it was like a short wave radio?

02-00:03:50

Samson: Yeah, it was hooked up, some kind of an office place, I guess, because—

Dunham: I've never heard that. Do you know what it was called?

02-00:03:58

Samson: No, I don't have a clue.

Dunham: I'm going to have to research that; I'm really curious. Between-bar musical requests.

02-00:04:06

Samson: Yeah, yeah. I don't know. We couldn't do it from North Sacramento to Sacramento, I don't think, but we could do it—.

Dunham: What does it look like? It's not a jukebox. Jukeboxes are like—

02-00:04:15

Samson: Oh, it looked like a jukebox. That'll drive you crazy.

Dunham: So what was a song that—did you ever request songs for other bars?

02-00:04:25

Samson: Oh, gosh, all the World War II songs.

Dunham: I was just curious, though. Just share some. No? Okay. What kind of music were you listening to? I know you'd gotten into horses and rodeo; did you listen to country music?

02-00:04:36

Samson: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: Did you know Dude Martin, for example?

02-00:04:41

Samson: No, but I knew Bob Wills. And Billy Jack. Lefty Frizzell used to play once in a while; I didn't know him. But we danced to Bob Wills quite often, even after my husband and I were married.

Dunham: You went with fellows to bars. Did you sometimes meet fellows in bars, new fellows?

02-00:05:06

Samson: No, outside of the Owl Drug store, I never really met guys that way. I just knew these were two nice guys having fun.

Dunham: Yeah. Well, that was a—

02-00:05:19

Samson: Yeah, I never just met a guy in a bar. I can't remember anybody. [brief interruption]

Dunham: We also talked, when we had our break, about the time clock, and how the time clock worked at McClellan. Maybe you could tell us about that, and the race to the time clock.

02-00:05:52

Samson:

Okay. Of course, we had a lot of people working, and we'd have a long line at the time clock. If you had a date or had to be somewhere at a certain time, why, you'd kind of scooch up to somebody else's station or pretend you're helping somebody or do something. I was pretty good at this, really. So that's why—how long a suspension did I get, David?

Dunham:

Three days, I think.

02-00:06:17

Samson:

Yeah, I got three days suspension for beating other employees to the time clock. Didn't bother me a whole lot.

Dunham:

Do you remember what you did with those three days off?

02-00:06:30

Samson:

Probably just had fun.

Dunham:

Did you ever go up to San Francisco, during the war years?

02-00:06:38

Samson:

No. That was a long ways from home, in those days.

Dunham:

Were there other places sort of town you ever went to?

02-00:06:47

Samson:

Not really.

Dunham:

Did you go to the mountains?

02-00:06:48

Samson:

Well, of course, you had the gas problem, too. You just didn't go very far from home.

Dunham:

How did your parents feel about you doing the work as an airplane mechanic?

02-00:07:02

Samson:

I don't think they had any particular opinion. Like I say, my dad was a mechanic, so I'm sure he—he came home one day, and I was sitting on the fender of my '35 Plymouth, with the carburetor in my hand. I couldn't get it back together, after I'd taken it apart. He put it back together for me.

Dunham:

And then you learned? Were you pretty good with cars?

02-00:07:25

Samson:

Yeah, I overhauled the '35 Plymouth, all except for honing the cylinder walls. That was a heavy job, and Dad had to do that for me.

Dunham:

So you met your husband, and you were married soon thereafter.

02-00:07:39
Samson: Yeah, we were married in October, 1946.

Dunham: Then you had your first daughter. When was your first daughter born?

02-00:07:49
Samson: Not for nine years. In between the nine years—

Dunham: So you guys were enjoying—

02-00:07:56
Samson: Well, we went for a six-month honeymoon. We went to his family and my family. We went to his family in Nebraska and my family in Minnesota; his mom and dad are in Arkansas. We just made a big thingy. And we came back; we had a job waiting for us at Stanford University.

Dunham: Could you tell us about that trip? This is in '46 or '47? Had you been to the South before?

02-00:08:22
Samson: I hadn't been anywhere before. I'd never been out of the state.

Dunham: Well, you'd been in Minnesota a little bit before, right?

02-00:08:29
Samson: Well, yeah.

Dunham: But not as an adult.

02-00:08:31
Samson: Yeah, during those years, I hadn't been. Karri wants to say something.

Karri Samson: It was six weeks.

Dunham: Oh, six weeks. Well, still. Thank you for clarifying. Six weeks. And you drove?

02-00:08:41
Samson: Six weeks. What did I say, six months?

Dunham: Yeah.

02-00:08:45
Samson: Oh, no, six weeks. [laughs]

Dunham: I was pretty impressed that you could afford a six-month honeymoon.

02-00:08:47
Samson: Yeah, we drove my '35 Plymouth.

Dunham: What was it like seeing—in the South, especially, but also the rest of the country that you saw—?

02-00:08:55

Karri Samson: Bedbugs in Texas.

02-00:08:58

Samson: We were married in Carson City, Nevada. Well, we had dinner with—my mother and two brothers and his brother were with us—so we had lunch and left. We were going to camp out. That's Jim's thing. I'd never camped out a whole lot, but I was game. Well, we get out in the middle of the Nevada dessert. It'd been kind of cloudy and everything. We no sooner got the tarp out and got the bedrolls out and everything, it started to pour. So we put everything back in the car. I remember waking up alongside of the Great Salt Lake, sleeping in the car. That's our honeymoon.

So the next night, we're traveling. We're somewhere, I don't know, between there and Nebraska, and we pull into this town. There's few little towns in between, and not big hotels and stuff all over the freeway. Anyway, we pull in this little town, and they were having some kind of a convention, so no place to sleep. So we slept in the car again, out on the road. The next day, we got into my sister-in-law's, in Nebraska. We spent about a week with them, with his two sisters, and met all the family. He hadn't seen them, of course, for quite a long time, either, because he'd been in the service, and then in California. Then we went on to my grandmother's in Minnesota. Well, my aunt and uncle on the Mosher side, and then my grandma. Visited with them, and then—.

Dunham: What was Arkansas like?

02-00:10:42

Samson: Yeah. My father-in-law and step-mother-in-law lived in Arkansas. That was different, because I'd never been south.

Dunham: What were your impressions of the South?

02-00:10:56

Samson: For one thing, they lived out in this little cottage. It was a long ways to the outhouse. A long ways to the outhouse in Nebraska, too. Jim had to go with me, because I was scared of that one.

Dunham: What time of year?

02-00:11:09

Samson: Well, October. But they have coyotes and stuff like that in Nebraska. Of course, they have snakes in Arkansas, and I'm going, "Aaaaah!"

Dunham: Did you meet any snakes?

02-00:11:22

Samson: I wasn't a country girl at that time. So anyway, we had a nice visit with my in-laws. Then we headed back to California, seeing the sights along the way.

Dunham: Any particular sights that stood out?

02-00:11:39

Samson: Well, Carlsbad Cavern, I'll never forget because I wouldn't have gone in the thing anyway, but I was afraid to tell my new husband that. So when we got there, it was closed for the night. Then like Karri says, one of the motels in Del Rio, Texas, I'm going "Bedbugs." They didn't seem to stay with us, like they talk about nowadays. You get bedbugs and carry them all over. They didn't stay with us; they must've stayed in the bed.

Dunham: Okay. Just itched for the night, huh? So that was quite a trip.

02-00:12:18

Samson: Yeah, that was quite a trip.

Dunham: So you got back; you said you had jobs waiting for you?

02-00:12:23

Samson: Yep, at Stanford University. We managed the old Stanford stables on the campus, which is still standing. Have you ever seen it, David?

Dunham: I don't think so. I've been to the campus many times, but I'm not sure. Where are the stables?

02-00:12:38

Samson: Well, it used to be easy to get to, but now you've got to go out and around. Used to be you could drive right there; it was part of the campus. It's by the golf course. A piece of the golf course separates the main campus from the stables. Anyway, this is where—what's his name?

Karri Samson: [Eadweard] Muybridge.

02-00:12:58

Samson: Muybridge showed the movement of horses for the first time, up in the top of this Stanford barn. You have to go by there sometime.

02-00:13:09

Karri Samson: No, the movie proved that horses do—.

Dunham: Oh, it proved—did he use still photography, or video?

02-00:13:16

Karri Samson: It ended up being a motion picture—

Samson: One piece at a time.

Karri Samson: When he got through putting the footage together.

Samson: Anyway, it was the old Leland Stanford barn, and we lived in it, upstairs. There were apartments upstairs.

Dunham: So how did you get that job? How was that waiting for you?

02-00:13:31

Samson: Well, my husband had worked for the man or woman who were already managing it, so that's how we got it.

Dunham: So did you like that work?

02-00:13:40

Samson: Oh, it was fun. That it was a nice year and a half.

Dunham: What was Palo Alto like then?

02-00:13:47

Samson: Oh, it was a nice place. You could go all the way down to San Jose, and you knew each little community as you went. Now, if you don't know what you're doing, you don't know even what you went through.

Dunham: Were there places you especially liked to visit on the peninsula there then? What were the different communities like?

02-00:14:08

Samson: Well, it was just different little communities. Like I say, you knew if you wanted to go to Sunnyvale, you knew you were there; or if you wanted to go to Redwood City, you knew. Now you have to, "Let me see, is that—?"

Dunham: So a year and a half at the Stanford stables, and then where did life take you?

02-00:14:27

Samson: Then we came back to Sacramento. That's when Jim started taking his apprenticeship for being a saddle maker. He had been working at a shop just doing stuff, and then he went ahead and did this.

Dunham: What were you doing then? Were you enjoying life, while he was doing that? What were you doing while he was doing his saddle making?

02-00:14:50

Samson: Well, sometimes I wasn't doing anything, but I got a job at [Department of] Motor Vehicles in Sacramento. You could work six months, if you weren't a state employee, if you hadn't taken—

Dunham: As a temporary employee?

02-00:15:04

Samson:

Yeah. So I worked a couple of six-month periods. Then I'd just got to be a state employee when I went to visit out at McClellan Field one day to visit my old friend who was the head of personnel, Jay McBroom—he was a World War II friend—and we were talking; he said, “Well, why don't you come back to work?” I said, “Oh, if you've got some opening—.” He said, “Oh, yeah, we're taking people right and left.” A couple weeks and—I gave my resignation—I was back at the McClellan Field. That was 1951.

Dunham:

They'd already been hiring for a little while, after the Korean War started.

02-00:15:43

Samson:

Yeah. Yeah, they were just kind of re-upping.

Dunham:

Yeah. So what was it like at McClellan the second time around? What had changed?

02-00:15:52

Samson:

Well, at first, it was about the same, because I knew most all the guys, and all the same foremen were the same foremen, and Mr. Mosher was still the superintendent. It wasn't much different, really.

Dunham:

But you had a different job this time around.

02-00:16:06

Samson:

Well, I worked in engine repair for quite a while. I'd say probably three years, thereabouts. Things with the engines just began to kind of unwind. Well, they probably were phasing out the 29s, for one thing, by that time. Well, we had them in the shop; but I think that was going to be the end of them. So either way, I went to work in what we call crew, in the aircraft. We did all the stuff the specialties didn't do. We didn't do electronics, we didn't do electric stuff. The engines were already in. Well, anyway, we did things like taking the glass out, and resealing the glass, and going up the long tunnel inside the B-29 and putting this—it was kind of a casing inside of the tunnel—putting that all back up and getting it all pushed together again, and that kind of thing. Just crew stuff.

Dunham:

Did you enjoy that work?

02-00:17:11

Samson:

Yeah. It was fun. It was something new, too.

Dunham:

Was it very different working on the base as—?

02-00:17:19

Samson:

Well, yeah, it was a lot different. Different work. Some of the people came with me, but not many of them. You made new friends and new acquaintances and stuff.

Dunham: What about the fact that you were now a married woman on the base, versus when you were a single woman back during the war?

02-00:17:35

Samson: It didn't make that much difference. Except I wasn't dating soldiers.

Dunham: That seems like it might've been a bit of a difference. We talked a little bit about all the bikes, although you drove your short commute. But during the Korean War, I read that McClellan was quite a traffic jam, because there weren't the rationing and that sort of thing, and so there were many more people driving now.

02-00:18:00

Samson: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Was it hard to get on? What shift were you doing?

02-00:18:04

Samson: Well, of course, you had to have a pass. I did the same days or—I just did work days or swing; I never did work the graveyard shift.

Dunham: Where were you commuting from now?

02-00:18:19

Samson: We had a small motor home or house trailer—we called them house trailers in those days—on my mother's property right there on Grand Ave. So the commute wasn't bad. Of course, we only had one car. Let's see, we bought this place in late '51, and we didn't move up here till '52. So after that, it was various things. I rode with guys a lot. Or if my husband's schedule worked out, he could drop me off and go to work and pick me up, that kind of thing.

Dunham: You moved up here in '52?

02-00:18:58

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: That was quite a commute.

02-00:19:01

Samson: Yeah, it was quite a commute. Wasn't a fun commute. But I did, though, love the guys from Auburn who were working down there. A lot of the guys had come home from the service, actually. So anyway, I rode with them, down. Most of them worked in or near the area where I worked.

Dunham: How did you come to purchase this property?

02-00:19:21

Samson: Well, we had been looking for some time. In 1948, we drove the ALCAN [Alaska-Canadian Highway] to Alaska, to look at property up there. But, oh, with the logistics of trying to get cattle and my being home sick, et cetera,

why, we didn't do that. But it was a fun trip. I had written for permission to go on the ALCAN, because it was still closed to civilians. In the meantime, in hearing from them they opened it. So anyway, we drove up there.

Dunham: What can you tell us about the ALCAN then?

02-00:20:00

Samson:

It was a wonderful, fun trip, and I wouldn't have missed the experience; but oh, it was awful. Great old rocks in the road, no place to stay. You didn't pull into a motel and say, "I want to spend the night." There weren't any. We never, never stayed. It was all on the ground. A couple times—it was either in Canada or in Alaska or both—the mosquitoes were horrible, so they'd have these big screened areas with picnic tables in them, so you could stop and eat without the mosquitoes driving you crazy. I'll bet in all that trip we probably passed fifteen cars, at the most. So anyway, one night we were so tired we pulled into one of these places, and we ate, and we put our sleeping bag on the table and slept there. My God.

Dunham: Was this summertime?

02-00:21:05

Samson:

Yeah. Yeah, we left in early June. Early June.

Dunham: What had made you so interested in going there?

02-00:21:19

Samson:

Well, free land, for one thing. You could still get free land. You could always get land.

Dunham: So you looked at it, but you just decided it was too far?

02-00:21:27

Samson:

Well, and trying to get cattle there. There weren't a lot of cow breeders in the country yet then. Now, it probably wouldn't be a problem at all, but we'd have to ship them or something.

Dunham: Was your husband experienced with cattle?

02-00:21:41

Samson:

Yeah.

Dunham: How did you come to find this property?

02-00:21:50

Samson:

I looked in the *Sacramento Bee* or the *Sacramento Union*—I don't know which—and just seen a little advertisement. We come up and come to the people—the people that owned it lived not too far from here—and we went and visited them. No, excuse me. The realtor had it then. Anyway, we met the realtor up here, and he took us on a walk around the place. He's telling all

these great things, and I'm thinking to myself, "Well, you big dummy; I already want it." [laughs] But anyway, we had \$2500 saved. No. \$2200. And Mr. and Mrs. Gassaway wanted \$2500. So we came up and met the people. They were a real nice older couple with a couple girls. We told them we wanted it, but we only had \$2200. Mr. Gassaway said, "That's fine." So at \$100 an acre and \$2200 down we had a ranch.

Dunham: It was closer to home, but were you at all apprehensive about being a rancher? Or were you ready to go?

02-00:22:58

Samson: Oh, no, I thought it was great. Yeah. The little house across the creek over here was still standing. How old is it Karri, a hundred and—?

Karri Samson: Well, 1861. Built with square nails.

02-00:23:15

Samson: Anyway, just with him and I, we just kind of patched it together. There's a spring right there by it, so we had water. We didn't have electricity or telephone for a long time, and of course, no water pumped in the house. We just worked and we got goats, and then we began to get cattle. We raised cattle and goats.

Dunham: You continued working at McClellan while you started the ranch up?

02-00:23:49

Samson: Yeah.

Dunham: You were already building and getting the animals?

02-00:23:52

Samson: Yeah. Then 1954, Karri was born. I took my leave. When I returned, Jim would take me to work. He would pick Mom up, and she'd come up and stay with Karri, and then be here during the week, and then we'd take her home on the weekend. She still lived at the Grand Avenue place, by McClellan Field.

Dunham: So you continued working for a few more years at McClellan. One thing I read of McClellan was, in the early fifties, that the Women's Air Force maybe was there and had grown by quite a bit. Did you ever know of that, the Women's Air Force? I was just curious.

02-00:24:33

Samson: We never seen much of the Women's Air Force at all. I don't know why. There certainly must've been some of the women on base. But we didn't see much of military during the Korean War. They weren't involved in our facility, so we really didn't. You might see them. They had a lot of barracks and all kinds of things away from where we worked.

Dunham: What was your maternity leave at the time? Did you get paid leave?

02-00:25:12

Samson: No, I don't think it was a paid leave, no. I'm sure it wasn't. They'd give you the time off and job security, but it wasn't paid, yeah.

Dunham: How much time did you take?

02-00:25:21

Samson: Well, I think you take—was it six weeks ahead of time? Anyway, I was only out for—okay, you were supposed to be born August 18 or something like that, and you were born June 29, so I wasn't off very long. She was born prematurely. Yeah. So anyway, I was home with her longer.

Dunham: Was it hard to come back to work?

02-00:25:53

Samson: Yeah. Yeah, leaving my baby was hard. After not having a baby for nine years, I'm going, "Okay." But it worked out. I had my mom, so that was a good thing. Otherwise, I probably couldn't have.

Dunham: Was the work changing for you then at the base, or what were you doing?

02-00:26:13

Samson: No, it was still the same.

Dunham: But at some point, you mentioned when we were looking at the photographs, that there was a type of work that you were doing that you really didn't care for.

02-00:26:22

Samson: Well, toward the end, when I left in 1957—

Karri Samson: Nine.

Dunham: Fifty-seven or '59?

02-00:26:33

Samson: Fifty-seven. I think it was '57. Well, when I left, shortly before that, things began—in the meantime, the B-29s phased out completely, and we got fighter aircraft. Well, fighter aircraft, which to me, weren't that interesting to work on, but they were okay. Anyway.

Dunham: What was the difference there? Why were they less interesting?

02-00:26:57

Samson: Oh, the jobs were just so different. I don't know, it's just something.

Dunham: They weren't as complex?

02-00:27:04

Samson: Well, they were just dumb.

Dunham: They were dumb?

02-00:27:08

Samson: They were dumb.

Dunham: Did you think the design was poor?

02-00:27:13

Samson: No, but you had to work on stuff—I just didn't like it.

Dunham: Or the job was more like an assembly line, drone kind of thing.

02-00:27:22

Samson: Well, yeah, they moved them right through, like they did the B-29s. You did certain work and—

Dunham: So that was the same. Was it more monotonous? More the same thing over and over?

02-00:27:33

Samson: Well, yeah, you did do the same. You were at one station, and you stayed there, yeah.

Dunham: Whereas before, sometimes you'd been able to switch stations?

02-00:27:39

Samson: Yeah, in the engines, I could move about, but with the aircraft, you usually stayed in one place.

Dunham: So it was boring.

02-00:27:44

Samson: Yeah, it was boring. So anyway, I took a reduction in pay and transferred back to engine repair. But I didn't go back to engines; I went to cylinders. It's dirty, heavy work, and I just was tired. I guess I was probably tired of working. The long trip and a child at home. I just decided to quit.

Dunham: How long was the commute? I know you had to drive a ways, but—

02-00:28:14

Samson: What is it? About thirty-five miles, something like that, thirty miles, yeah.

Dunham: But not traffic like today.

02-00:28:23

Samson: Well, of course, we didn't have I-80. We only had 40. Yeah.

Dunham: Was there anything else about the base during those years that was particularly of interest, that you wanted to share?

02-00:28:35

Samson: Well, I can't think of anything. It's pretty routine.

Dunham: Were there more or less women, at this point? What was the ratio of women to men like?

02-00:28:46

Samson: I'd probably say less. A lot of the women never came back. Had I been a housewife with children, I'd probably never have done it again either.

Dunham: Were any of those women that were doing mechanical work—I know we talked, and you said you didn't know of any who did between the wars, but—did any of them continue after the Korean War that you knew, or kept in contact with, maybe doing mechanical work elsewhere?

02-00:29:17

Samson: Well, after the Korean—they could keep their jobs.

Dunham: Oh, really?

02-00:29:20

Samson: Yeah. Oh, yeah. A lot of them did stay on, and probably retired. If worse got to worst, you could transfer to another department. You were civil service then; they couldn't just dump you.

Dunham: Did you end up with a retirement, out of the years you went back—?

02-00:29:40

Samson: No, I don't have enough time. See, my first years were nothing.

Dunham: Oh, they didn't count?

02-00:29:45

Samson: They didn't count at all.

Dunham: So you became a permanent employee during the Korean War years.

02-00:29:50

Samson: Yeah, from '51 to '57.

Dunham: But you would've had to have worked a minimum of fifteen or twenty years, probably?

02-00:29:52

Samson: Yeah. Yeah.

Dunham: What was the transition to full-time ranching life like?

02-00:30:00

Samson: Oh, it was good. I liked it.

Dunham: What was an average day as a rancher like for you? You were raising a child, too, of course.

02-00:30:07

Samson: Yeah. Well, and with a disability and stuff, I took her back and forth rather than have her try to take the school bus and do that. Although at that point she wasn't as handicapped. As she got older that one surgery didn't work as well as the other ones, so that's why—

Dunham: Do you want to describe the disability?

02-00:30:25

Samson: So I just took her back and forth to school. She went clear to town, too.

Dunham: Okay. And what is Karri's disability? Since we're talking about it.

02-00:30:37

Samson: Well, she was born with no hip sockets. No, it wasn't like stuffing it back in place or anything; they had to build new sockets. So during all this period, why, we had her to Salt Lake City for two surgeries. Like I say, if both of them had worked out like the one, why, we'd have been all right. But it didn't, so that's left her with a built-up shoe. That's just transpired in the last fifteen years or so.

Dunham: You mentioned driving to and from the school. Was the school very far, in those days?

02-00:31:12

Samson: Yeah, it's about five miles into town. Sometimes in kindergarten, I'd just stay there. Friends had a restaurant across the street; I'd go have a cup of coffee. By the time I'd get done—sometimes I'd help in the restaurant, just to be doing something until she got out of school. Or I'd just come home.

Dunham: As far as working on the ranch, what was your husband and/or what were you doing then, on the ranch?

02-00:31:47

Samson: Well, I did a little bit of everything. Like I say, we had quite a big herd of goats. We raised them for meat goats. We'd sell them at the Roseville Auction sometimes, but I had a man that came with a big truck every year and just gave us a price and took them and that kind of thing. Then with the cows, of course, there were sprinklers to change. I didn't do that often; Jim usually [did that]. But by that time, he was working at Dewitt Mental Hospital. So he'd come home and change sprinklers.

Dunham: They didn't require that much labor?

02-00:32:25

Samson:

Well, it usually took an hour or so, after an eight-hour day of work. But he was in the Navy Reserve by that time, too. So when he'd be gone, I'd go change the [sprinklers]. There wasn't much I could not do. Until this year, I was still driving our big farm tractor and mowing these fields; but I finally had a young man come and do it this time. I finally gave up.

Dunham:

Well, yeah, I would like to see you on the tractor. Wow. Well, were there any particular challenges or things you hadn't expected, about owning a property this size? How many acres, again, is it?

02-00:33:01

Samson:

One hundred twenty, but—well, like everyplace else, water prices go up, and taxes go up. That's challenging in itself. Especially the water. They've raised it quite a lot in the last few years.

Dunham:

Were there aspects of your work that started during the wartime, getting that training and your mechanic work, that helped you for being here?

02-00:33:32

Samson:

Sure. I got the tractor out of the garage the other day, and then it quit on me and it wouldn't start. So I take the gas filter bowl off and clean it out and put it back on. How many eighty-nine-year-old women do you know that—?

Dunham:

Not too many. Do you think without the opportunity during the war years, you still would've followed that path? Your father was a mechanic; you had that aptitude, but—

02-00:33:59

Samson:

Well, I'd have probably stayed at McClellan Field, if it hadn't been that we lived so far away and were starting a family and everything.

Dunham:

But I meant without the happening of the war and how it kind of opened up the opportunity—

02-00:34:12

Samson:

Oh, probably not.

Karri Samson:

She wanted to get a job at the Gladding McBean Pottery here in Lincoln.

Samson:

Yeah.

Karri Samson:

She was interested in art and pottery.

02-00:34:24

Samson:

Yeah, to show you what kind of a student I was, I majored in art and pottery. [laughs]

Dunham: I don't see anything wrong with that. Well, you have some paintings that you've done here, yes?

02-00:34:35

Samson: No.

Dunham: In the bathroom, did I see, maybe?

02-00:34:37

Samson: No, that's my daughter. That's my little one. Yeah. I got a couple over at the old house, but I don't have any here. Anything I have on the walls are by friends.

Dunham: Well, Karri, is there anything else you thought we may have neglected to cover?

02-00:34:55

Karri Samson: I think you've covered all [of it].

Dunham: Well, we've tried. I guess I'll just ask, sort of looking back on the war years especially, and your experience working at McClellan, are there any reflections you have back, of the feeling of that time, the opportunity and the type of work you did there, how it's informed your life, perhaps?

02-00:35:28

Samson: Well, beating other employees to the time clock was one of the big moments of my life. But the rest of them were pretty great. I loved the experience. It was a good experience, and I met a lot of really great people. Some of them became lifetime friends. Especially some of the guys. The man that taught me at Grant Union—well, he's passed away now, but I knew him all of his life and he's truly—Christy Bugnuda. He was my foreman, when I went to work in engines.

Dunham: Was there a Roland P Adams? Did you know? A trainer, too. No? That's okay; I was just curious. Well, is there anything else you'd like to add?

02-00:36:23

Samson: I really can't think of anything, David. I've probably worn you out by now, anyway.

Dunham: We've probably all worn each out a little bit. But let me just ask one more thing, because I know you've been involved, you said, with the Rosie the Riveter Park, sort of before it was even a park [Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park]. Can you just tell us a little bit about the efforts you've made there and your involvement in the Veterans Day parades, and how you've kept the word out to make sure that the women's—that your role in that time and beyond is not forgotten?

02-00:36:51

Samson:

Well, this is one of the things that I really like to do, and I try to convince some local people to do, attend the museum down there, now that it's open and everything. But I'm trying to figure out, how did I know about it to begin with? Was it in the paper? Did we read something? Well, anyway, as soon as I found out about it I got in contact and turned in all my material. What am I, Rosie—what's my number? I don't know. Rosie 2062 or something. Anyway, I turned all my stuff in at the archives. My daughter Betsy and her husband and I went down several times. Even after they got the stuff in the archives, we went down and looked at it. Then we went to the very first party. What was it? There were three really nice parties. Then it began to kind of fall apart. I guess the government kind of lost interest in us. I really don't think they were getting the funding they—

Dunham:

So this is in the nineties? When would this have been?

02-00:38:00

Samson:

Oh, the first one was in '09, I think.

Dunham:

After the park had opened, before the Visitor Center.

02-00:38:08

Samson:

Yeah, yeah.

Dunham:

The Home Front Festival? Do you mean that?

02-00:38:13

Karri Samson:

Yeah, that's it.

Samson:

Yeah.

Dunham:

This last year, of course, was a real aberration, because of the federal shutdown.

02-00:38:20

Karri Samson:

Yeah.

Samson:

Yeah. I didn't even try to go down. But the first time I went, God, there were a lot of us, David. The last time I went, it was cut in half. I don't think they all died, but they were getting too old to come or—

Dunham:

I think that's part of the equation.

02-00:38:44

Samson:

Well, the last one, they started having just plain workers. Not just Rosies, but the guys.

Dunham: We document men and women, too. But also the men skew towards being older, as you know from your work, because more of the younger men were serving—

02-00:38:59

Samson: Yeah. Because I know the last time, I'm sitting there, I'm talking to this nice Chinese man, who had started working there as a young man. I think he went into the service and then came back.

Dunham: I think he was a prisoner of war, too.

02-00:39:14

Samson: Yeah. Gosh, a lot of the girls were—I did meet one lady the first time, and we remain friends. But she got into a rest home, and she wasn't well the last time we were down there. So I don't know what's happened. She can't write very good or correspond.

Dunham: Well, I do think it's age and disability. I do think the park's reach is actually as strong as it's ever been. I think the visitorship is way up.

02-00:39:48

Samson: Yeah. Well, that's a good thing.

Dunham: Betty Reid Soskin. Actually, during that closure, she got in the news a bunch. So I think the park is alive and well, and I think it's going to be partly because we have now your story and all these others; that your stories will speak to future generations, long after we're all gone.

02-00:40:04

Samson: Yeah. Well, they got this foundation going now. I got an invitation the other day to join the foundation and come to the—

Dunham: The reopening of the visitors center?

02-00:40:13

Samson: To the opening. But I have not done that.

Dunham: That'll be later maybe. I just wanted to add, too, that you've also participated in the Veterans Day parades here. Those are in Sacramento, or Auburn?

02-00:40:29

Karri Samson: No, Auburn.

Samson: No, just here. It's in Auburn. Yeah. Yeah, we really have quite a grand parade.

Dunham: Do you get other women or home front workers to participate with you?

02-00:40:41

Samson: I haven't been able to find any.

Dunham: You're the lone representative for that.

02-00:40:44

Samson: Rosie the Riveter 2015 will be my fifth parade.

Dunham: I'm going to stop in just a second, yeah. We're talking about the age. I think it is a reality that there are fewer and fewer who'd worked during your time, who are still, certainly, as healthy and physically and mentally active as you are at eighty-eight. Right? I've got that right?

02-00:41:18

Samson: Eighty-eight and three-quarters.

Dunham: You're certainly very inspirational. To me, I have no doubt that it's that you have been so physically active—

02-00:41:28

Samson: Yeah, I'm sure.

Dunham: —during the war and all your life. Anyway, I just want to thank you for sharing your story today and for what an inspiration you've been. I'm glad that we finally caught up with you and recorded your story.

02-00:41:39

Samson: Yeah. Well, I'm thankful you made the trip way up here.

Dunham: I was happy to do it. It's beautiful country. So if there's nothing else you'd like to add, I just want to thank you and Karri both for having us here today.

02-00:41:53

Samson: Yeah, well, thank you both for coming. It's a pleasure to meet you.

[End of interview]