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Ruth Waldroff

Rosie the Riveter  
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2015

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Ruth Waldroff, 2015

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## Interview 1: October 22, 2015

01-00:00:04

Farrell: Okay, this is Shanna Farrell with Ruth Waldroff on Thursday, October 22, 2015. This is an interview for the Rose the Riveter/World War II Homefront Project. Ruth, can you start off by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life?

01-00:00:24

Waldroff: I was born September 1, 1924, in Plattsmouth, Nebraska where my mother had to go because my grandmother was a midwife. Dad got a homestead from being a World War I veteran, and so that was clear out in the middle of practically nowhere in Wyoming. We had train privileges, and so we went back to Plattsmouth, Nebraska for me to be born.

01-00:00:54

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about each of your parents? Their names and a little bit more about what they did as jobs.

01-00:01:04

Waldroff: My dad was Lee Eatherton, E-A-T-H-E-R-T-O-N, and my mother was Agnes. They had met in South Dakota, where my mother went to be a teacher. My dad's folks had a farm there. They met at a dance, and were married January 13, 1921. Like I said, dad had 640 acres that he had to prove up on, as they called it, to fence, from being a World War I veteran.

01-00:01:53

Farrell: What was he doing in World War I?

01-00:01:55

Waldroff: He was a cook. My mother, being a teacher, had worked before and after school, going to high school, and then going to college, as they had for that time, for teachers. So she didn't know how to cook, and so my dad taught her to cook.

01-00:02:18

Farrell: And your mother was a midwife?

01-00:02:21

Waldroff: My grandmother was a midwife.

01-00:02:22

Farrell: Oh, your grandmother was. I see. Did you have any siblings?

01-00:02:28

Waldroff: They're all gone now, but I had a sister, {Floy?}, that was three years older than myself, and I had a brother, Art, who was seven years younger. I'm the only one left.

01-00:02:46

Farrell: So you moved to Eugene. Can you tell me a little bit about moving to Oregon?

- 01-00:02:50  
Waldroff: My folks came out here from Wyoming in 1935, and finally sold the homestead because they were going to have a water project there, and they wanted a dollar an acre for the water privileges for this 640 acres. My dad didn't think he could make a living paying the water rights, and so they sold it and came out here. They settled first at Woodburn, and then they moved to Eugene.
- 01-00:03:21  
Farrell: How old were you when they moved to Eugene?
- 01-00:03:26  
Waldroff: I was eleven years old, but I was in the seventh grade.
- 01-00:03:30  
Farrell: Can you tell me about some of your early memories of Eugene and the community here?
- 01-00:03:36  
Waldroff: Eugene has always been a pretty large town because of the university. Then, along the river, there's a very good growing area. The land is very good. That area is called Santa Clara. It's just outside of Eugene. That's very much agriculture.
- 01-00:04:06  
Farrell: When your parents moved here, what were they doing for work?
- 01-00:04:10  
Waldroff: They had a farm.
- 01-00:04:12  
Farrell: So they continued farming. Did you work on the farm when you were growing up at all, or any of your siblings?
- 01-00:04:19  
Waldroff: I worked in the house and did all the cooking, because I wasn't big enough to be out in the fields. I learned to cook at a very early age. In fact, I cooked for harvest crews when I was only eleven and twelve years old.
- 01-00:04:38  
Farrell: Do you remember some of your favorite meals to make at that point?
- 01-00:04:41  
Waldroff: Of course, fried chicken was always good. You could brown it and then put it in the oven and finish it in the oven. Everybody liked fried chicken. I learned to bake. That was in the days before baking mix, so everything was from scratch. I learned to cook pretty early.
- 01-00:05:02  
Farrell: Did that become a big part of your life? Is that something you continued to enjoy?

- 01-00:05:08  
Waldroff: Up until the two years that I've been here, I did all my own cooking. I have several food allergies and so forth that I have to fix my own food. So that came in handy.
- 01-00:05:30  
Farrell: When you were living in Nebraska, it was part of the Depression era. What effect did that have on your family?
- 01-00:05:43  
Waldroff: We finally moved to Casper, Wyoming. My dad worked in a refinery, and then was partnership in a dairy. He would get up real early in the morning and work at the dairy, and then go in and work at the refinery in Casper. That was mainly how they got along for quite a few years.
- 01-00:06:08  
Farrell: Do you remember having to ration at that point at all?
- 01-00:06:12  
Waldroff: Rationing didn't start until just about World War II time. Earlier, we did our own rationing because of the Depression.
- 01-00:06:21  
Farrell: That's sort of what I was wondering, how you had to ration amongst your family.
- 01-00:06:25  
Waldroff: We ate a lot of beans. We had just enough acreage that we could have animals. We raised a big garden and did canning. Then we dried corn. It was hot enough in the summertime that it would only take about three or four days to dry it into crumbly, and then, in the wintertime, you could put that down in what they called the cave, which was also a double for if we had a thunderstorm. Mother would take a cup of dried corn and soak it overnight, and then she could cook it and make corn cakes and that type of thing from it.
- 01-00:07:16  
Farrell: So you did your grade school education mostly in Eugene?
- 01-00:07:20  
Waldroff: Oh, no. No, I was in the seventh grade when we moved out here from Wyoming.
- 01-00:07:25  
Farrell: So your earlier was in Wyoming, and then here?
- 01-00:07:30  
Waldroff: Mm-hmm.
- 01-00:07:33  
Farrell: Did you graduate from high school in Eugene?

01-00:07:35  
Waldroff:

In Junction City, which is a little town that's just attached to Eugene. In my senior year, they divided the district, and half went to Junction City and half went to Eugene. So I graduated from Junction City.

01-00:07:54  
Farrell:

When you were in school, at any point, did you have a favorite subject, something that you were really interested in?

01-00:08:02  
Waldroff:

I did a lot of English, and then in my high school years, I had a speech class that had a very good teacher. We put on plays and that type of thing, although it was a small school.

01-00:08:22  
Farrell:

Were there any teachers that you really liked or were kind of mentors?

01-00:08:28  
Waldroff:

My business administration teacher was really good. I took shorthand and typing from her. That came in handy when I was in the service.

01-00:08:45  
Farrell:

Moving into the war years a little bit, can you tell me about your early memories of when the war started? Did you know that it was coming? Did you sense that?

01-00:09:01  
Waldroff:

We knew there was problems, especially in Europe, but I was at home on Sunday afternoon when President Roosevelt came on the radio and announced that Pearl Harbor had happened. I was getting ready to go to college, and instead of that, I decided, well, if I went to beauty school, I could work part-time and still be able to maybe use my scholarship. So I went to Eugene, to beauty school, and then when Pearl Harbor happened, I transferred over to the vocational school and learned welding.

01-00:09:52  
Farrell:

Kind of backing up a little bit and talking about parts of that, when you were at beauty school and Pearl Harbor happened, can you tell me about your choice to move to vocational school? What it was about that that made you want to participate in the war effort?

01-00:10:13  
Waldroff:

I think probably the fact that my dad had been in the service, and my brother was too young to be in the service, but I thought somebody ought to do something. I thought, well, okay, if I learn welding, I can get a job in—because at that time, the shipyards had just started, but there were several things. I was in the service. First of all, they sent me up to Geiger Field in Spokane, and I was repairing B-17s.

- 01-00:10:50  
Farrell: When you were in vocational school, were you there specifically to learn welding?
- 01-00:10:55  
Waldroff: Yes.
- 01-00:10:57  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences in learning welding, what that training was like?
- 01-00:11:02  
Waldroff: It was very rewarding, because when you had two pieces of metal, and then you could weld it and put it together, it gave you a feeling of satisfaction that you could do something. Then, when I got sent up to Spokane, it came in handy that I was a small person, because I could get into the insides of the B-17s.
- 01-00:11:41  
Farrell: When you were in vocational school learning welding, were there a lot of other women there? Was it just men?
- 01-00:11:48  
Waldroff: No, I was the only woman in my class. It wasn't too popular at first. I wasn't a headliner, but I was one of the only women in a lot of the classes.
- 01-00:12:10  
Farrell: Did you find that people accepted you as a woman in the class, or was there a bit of an adjustment period for them or for you?
- 01-00:12:20  
Waldroff: Everybody treated me like their little sister. It was okay, because nobody bothered me or anything, but it was a little disgusting, because I was about seventeen by that time, and I wanted to be treated otherwise than just somebody's little sister.
- 01-00:12:48  
Farrell: I'm curious about what types of things they were teaching you how to do in vocational school.
- 01-00:12:55  
Waldroff: Mostly it was the welding.
- 01-00:12:57  
Farrell: But I guess more specifically. Were they teaching you how to use the tools, or how to line things up?
- 01-00:12:03  
Waldroff: How to take care of the tools. How to check them in and out and so forth. Then I did some heat treating of material. They could take a piece of one metal and put it with another metal, and then put it in a big oven, and it would

make a different metal out of it. I did a lot of that, although it was mostly timing and knowing what was supposed to go together. That was one of the classes I took.

01-00:13:36

Farrell: How long did school last for?

01-00:13:42

Waldroff: About three months.

01-00:13:46

Farrell: From there, were you able to move into civil service?

01-00:13:51

Waldroff: That was civil service that was doing the training. Then they sent me to Spokane.

01-00:14:02

Farrell: Do you remember what the application process was like to join civil service at that time?

01-00:14:07

Waldroff: It was about five pages of which I still have in my scrapbook.

01-00:14:13

Farrell: Was there a waiting period after you submitted all that paperwork? Do you have to wait a certain period of time?

01-00:14:20

Waldroff: No, because they needed people by that time.

01-00:14:24

Farrell: At what point during that three months of training did you realize that they were going to send you to Spokane?

01-00:14:30

Waldroff: Not until the end.

01-00:14:34

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your reaction to finding out that you were going to be sent to Spokane to work on B-17s?

01-00:14:42

Waldroff: It was okay, because I always wanted to see different places. The only trouble of it was, Farragut Navy Station was just across the river from Spokane, and then they had a couple of air bases up there, and so it was hard to find housing. I started out at a big boarding place. There was a lot of the workers from out at the base that were there, and we paid room and board, and then we had to turn in our ration books to the lady that ran the place.

01-00:15:23

Farrell: So they weren't helping you find housing initially?

- 01-00:15:27  
Waldroff: No, civil service didn't do anything.
- 01-00:15:31  
Farrell: They kind of just said, report to Spokane?
- 01-00:15:36  
Waldroff: They did finally kind of help us to be sure that we were in proper housing.
- 01-00:15:44  
Farrell: What was that like living in a dormitory? Was that the first time you had lived away from home?
- 01-00:15:47  
Waldroff: It wasn't really a dormitory. It was a big house that originally was a mansion up on the hill in Spokane. They just had the people there, and they had a big dining room, and then they served the meals there. You just paid for the room and board, but the only thing you had to do was give them your ration books.
- 01-00:16:14  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about the rationing and the ration books that you had to use?
- 01-00:16:18  
Waldroff: The red stamps were the meat stamps, and the blue stamps were the canned goods. You were allowed so many red stamps and so many blue stamps a week. Then they gave you the book, and then as soon as that was over, at a timeframe—sometimes a week, sometimes two weeks—then you applied and got more stamps.
- 01-00:16:48  
Farrell: What was it like turning in the book? Did you have to stand in a line kind of thing?
- 01-00:16:53  
Waldroff: No, there weren't that many at each place.
- 01-00:16:59  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about your work with the B-17s? I know you said you were small enough to fit in, but doing welding or repair work, can you just tell me about your role at that point?
- 01-00:17:14  
Waldroff: Yes. By that time, they had made a portable welder, and so I could go inside. These were the B-17s at the beginning of European war that had been shot at or something, and so we were replacing parts of the wings and that type of thing. Sheet metal was very hard to weld. They did mostly riveting on it.
- 01-00:17:47  
Farrell: Had you learned how to rivet while you were in school?

01-00:17:50  
Waldroff: No, I didn't do any riveting. I did all welding. Then, also, all of the tubes that went to the walk-around oxygen models were copper tubing. That had to be silver soldered, which was a very tiny thing, and you had to keep the tube so that it could get air through, of course. That was what they called silver soldering.

01-00:18:17  
Farrell: And you were responsible for that as well?

01-00:18:19  
Waldroff: Yeah.

01-00:18:21  
Farrell: Why was the sheet metal hard to weld?

01-00:18:25  
Waldroff: It's just the wrong components.

01-00:18:29  
Farrell: What do you mean by that?

01-00:18:31  
Waldroff: Some metals can be welded, and some metals can't. Some metals won't meld enough to melt together.

01-00:18:40  
Farrell: But they were still having you try to weld the sheet metal?

01-00:18:43  
Waldroff: Well, the ones that they could.

01-00:18:49  
Farrell: What was it like working in Spokane? Were there a lot of other women there? Were your bosses helpful?

01-00:19:02  
Waldroff: Yes, they acknowledged us, but at the base, they finally got a colonel in the Spokane Geiger Field base that didn't want women on the base. So he wasn't going to give us any raises. We were only making \$125 a month on civil service. So I quit and came down here and went to work at the shipyards.

01-00:19:27  
Farrell: Was it a hard decision for you to make to leave Spokane?

01-00:19:30  
Waldroff: Not really, because the shipyard were paying a lot more wages, and I could stay with my sister down at Hubbard until I found housing. They finally made a barracks right on the shipyard compound that I stayed in until I got acquainted with a lady from California, and we got an apartment across the

street from the stadium. The only trouble of it was, in those days, you had to get five references in order for women to get an apartment.

01-00:20:10

Farrell: Do you remember who your references were?

01-00:20:14

Waldroff: It couldn't be relatives. They had to be friends or former teachers or something. I had to write letters to people and ask them if they would write me a letter.

01-00:20:29

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about, in Spokane, some of the gender discrimination and why the colonel didn't want women working there?

01-00:20:41

Waldroff: There was a lot of animosity in those days against women working. They just thought they were not to be in the workforce. The women's jobs were supposed to be hotels or something like that, making beds and that type of thing, and we weren't supposed to be out doing what they called "men's work."

01-00:21:07

Farrell: How did they make that known while you were on the job?

01-00:21:11

Waldroff: By not giving us a raise when a fellow got a raise that was not doing as much of a job as I was.

01-00:21:20

Farrell: Were there a lot of other women who were working there then?

01-00:21:22

Waldroff: No, not that many.

01-00:21:25

Farrell: How did the other workers treat you—the other welders or the other people doing similar jobs to you?

01-00:21:32

Waldroff: They all treated me really, really well and were very helpful. It just was one of those things that was difficult to get started. Women just weren't supposed to work out in the workplace.

01-00:21:48

Farrell: How long were you in Spokane for, total? Do you remember?

01-00:21:52

Waldroff: Probably about a year and a half.

- 01-00:21:57  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit more about your transition from Spokane, after you had left that factory, moving to Hubbard and Portland to work in the shipyards?
- 01-00:22:11  
Waldroff: I signed up one day and went to work the next night on swing shift. They had a bus that went from Woodburn up to the shipyards that I caught. Like I say, they built those barracks on the shipyard's yard, and I met this lady from California and we got an apartment.
- 01-00:22:40  
Farrell: At that point, was it hard to get a job in Portland in the shipyards?
- 01-00:22:45  
Waldroff: No, they were actively recruiting, and as long as I knew how to both gas weld and arc weld, I didn't have any trouble. I signed up one day and went to work the next night.
- 01-00:22:59  
Farrell: How long between you leaving Spokane and starting—how long was that time period between leaving?
- 01-00:23:05  
Waldroff: Just a couple of weeks.
- 01-00:23:06  
Farrell: Oh, okay. That's quick. How did you learn of the jobs in the shipyards? Were there advertisements places?
- 01-00:23:15  
Waldroff: No, my brother-in-law was working there.
- 01-00:23:23  
Farrell: How did he describe his time there that helped convince you to move down?
- 01-00:23:27  
Waldroff: He was an arc welder, electric welder, on building the sides of the ships, and I was a pipe welder, gas welder, putting the pipes in the engine room and that type of thing.
- 01-00:23:46  
Farrell: When you got to Portland, was there training? You had been working and doing welding. You had gone to school and then you spent—for almost two years, really, with three months in school, and then about a year and a half in Spokane. Was there training that they made you go through or sort of a process—
- 01-00:24:06  
Waldroff: No.

01-00:24:07  
Farrell: —to prove that you knew what you were doing? They just kind of let you—

01-00:24:10  
Waldroff: Oh, well, yeah, we took a welding test. I had flying colors.

01-00:24:20  
Farrell: What were the things on the test? What did they test you on?

01-00:24:23  
Waldroff: We had to put a piece of pipe together in what they called a sleeve, which was a bigger piece of pipe that you welded both sides to it in order to be able to put the inside pipe together.

01-00:24:38  
Farrell: How long did that test take?

01-00:24:40  
Waldroff: It was just about a half a day.

01-00:24:45  
Farrell: Do you remember what you were getting paid then at that point?

01-00:24:47  
Waldroff: \$.75 ½ an hour.

01-00:24:52  
Farrell: Was that the same pay as men?

01-00:24:54  
Waldroff: Yes, at that time, if that's what you did, that's what you got paid.

01-00:25:00  
Farrell: Was there ever opportunity for you to get a raise?

01-00:25:05  
Waldroff: No, not unless the union got a raise. It was union.

01-00:25:09  
Farrell: Were you a union member? I've heard varying things. I've heard that sometimes, mostly in California, you had to be a union member, but you never went to any union meetings or anything. But I've heard in New York, from some union members, that the union had a very strong presence. If you were a union member, you of course went to meetings. Can you tell me a little bit about your union experience?

01-00:25:35  
Waldroff: As long as you paid your dues, you didn't have to go to the meetings, but you could go. About once a month, I'd go, just to find out what was going on or anything. But other than that, I wasn't that active.

01-00:25:53  
Farrell: Where were the union meetings held? In the union hall?

01-00:25:56  
Waldroff: Yes.

01-00:25:57  
Farrell: Was that close to the shipyards?

01-00:26:23  
Waldroff: It was here in Portland. How did we get down there? I think we took a cab, because it was too many bus lines from where we lived.

01-00:26:15  
Farrell: Do you remember some of the issues that were discussed during the union meetings?

01-00:26:19  
Waldroff: It was usually for a raise.

01-00:26:23  
Farrell: And that never happened?

01-00:26:26  
Waldroff: I think all the time I worked, we got one or two raises was all.

01-00:26:37  
Farrell: When you were on the job, both in Spokane and in Portland, how did you feel about job safety? Did you feel like you were pretty secure working there?

01-00:26:50  
Waldroff: For the one time that I wasn't, I was working down in a thirty-foot tank, and we had the air blower set on the deck above. At dinner, which was midnight, I started to eat my lunch, and they turned off all of the air machines, and then they didn't turn them back on, and I burned the oxygen out of my tank. I had sense enough to realize that I was getting woozy, and I climbed that thirty-foot ladder up out of the tank and passed out on the deck. I was in the oxygen tent for two days in the hospital.

01-00:27:41  
Farrell: Do you remember who found you or how—

01-00:27:47  
Waldroff: I guess as soon as I passed out, somebody that was working right close saw me heading on up there and—

01-00:27:58  
Farrell: Took you to the oxygen tent?

01-00:28:00  
Waldroff: They took me to the hospital. Made a big deal out of it.

01-00:28:04  
Farrell: What was the recovery like for you, besides those two days?

01-00:28:10  
Waldroff: After they had me in the oxygen tent and stuff, then I was all right, but I had damage from it.

01-00:28:19  
Farrell: Since?

01-00:28:20  
Waldroff: I've had lung problems all my life.

01-00:28:22  
Farrell: Really? And they started after that? Was there any sort of compensation, or did any of the safety measures change?

01-00:28:30  
Waldroff: They paid my hospital bill, of course. There's a class action suit that was started about a year ago. I thought, as long as it takes for class action suits, I'm not going to bother trying to get in on it, because it will be after I'm gone that it probably gets settled.

01-00:29:00  
Farrell: Did you witness any other accidents on the job?

01-00:29:03  
Waldroff: Once in a while, somebody would have a problem, but—

01-00:29:07  
Farrell: What kind of accidents did you see every once in a while?

01-00:29:11  
Waldroff: Mainly, the riveters that were working on the outside of the ship, they made it so you could hardly hear anything. I imagine probably some of it happened because of that.

01-00:29:26  
Farrell: Were there headphones or anything that they gave you?

01-00:29:29  
Waldroff: We didn't have headphones.

01-00:29:30  
Farrell: Any goggles or hoods?

01-00:29:32  
Waldroff: Goggles and a hard hat.

01-00:29:36  
Farrell: What about your boots?

01-00:29:38  
Waldroff: Yeah, we wore logging boots. That was when Mt. Hood had the old-style ski boots. That was what we used for our hard-toed boots.

01-00:29:54  
Farrell: At the union meetings, there were no conversations about safety, job-place safety?

01-00:29:59  
Waldroff: Once in a while, yeah.

01-00:30:01  
Farrell: But nothing ever really changed?

01-00:30:03  
Waldroff: No.

01-00:30:05  
Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about Portland and the community at that period of time, during the war?

01-00:30:11  
Waldroff: Of course it wasn't as big a town, but where we had our apartment, we could walk downtown. All of the big stores were within walking distance. In those days, you wore high heels, and either nylons or silk stockings that you had stood in line to get. To be able to go downtown, you had a hat and purse and gloves. Mainly it was just shopping.

01-00:30:41  
Farrell: How often did you do that?

01-00:30:42  
Waldroff: About once a week, at least. We had the greyhound track across the street from us, but we didn't go over to any of the races.

01-00:30:53  
Farrell: At that period of time, especially because they were taking women and there were a lot of jobs available, did you see an influx of people moving to Portland?

01-00:31:01  
Waldroff: Oh, yes.

01-00:31:03  
Farrell: How did that affect the city?

01-00:31:05  
Waldroff: They had a whole little community that later flooded out one Memorial Day, probably twenty years ago. That was a whole community of people that had come to Portland to work in the shipyards.

- 01-00:31:23  
Farrell: Did that change the way that the city was structured or organized?
- 01-00:31:29  
Waldroff: To a certain degree, but there was always TriMet. There's always been the buses. We caught a bus to go out to the shipyards. At that time, you weren't afraid to go out and stand on the street corner to wait for your bus.
- 01-00:31:44  
Farrell: What about housing? Did that affect the amount of available housing?
- 01-00:31:48  
Waldroff: Oh, yes. Yeah. But we were lucky we got a nice apartment. In fact, it was state-of-the-art for the time, because it had a call thing that you had to call to get into the building, and then one to get into the room.
- 01-00:32:19  
Farrell: You were seventeen when you started working, and then you had to wait until you were twenty years old to join the Marine Corps. I know you had mentioned that you wanted to do something and you felt like you should, and especially because of your father, but what was it about specifically the Marine Corps that drew you to it?
- 01-00:32:39  
Waldroff: Because they were special in my mind. There could only be so many of them, and you had to be a certain way of person. I was just barely tall enough to get into the Marines.
- 01-00:32:56  
Farrell: Was it during World War II that you joined?
- 01-00:32:59  
Waldroff: Yes.
- 01-00:32:59  
Farrell: What was the enlistment process like to join the Marine Corps then?
- 01-00:33:03  
Waldroff: They checked out your background and your birth certificate and what you could provide for them. I went in as a welder. Ended up being a secretary to a commanding officer and using my typing and shorthand in Navy Marine courts.
- 01-00:33:39  
Farrell: Did you have to go through boot camp?
- 01-00:33:42  
Waldroff: Yes, at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

01-00:33:45

Farrell:

My dad was actually stationed there for a while. I'm really interested in what your early experiences were joining the Marine Corps, particularly during World War II and as a woman, and having had this welding experience. Was your experience like what you thought it would be? Did it meet your expectations?

01-00:34:10

Waldroff:

Not at all, because I thought since I was a welder, I'd probably go into Marine Corp. or someplace like that, and instead of that, they took my typing and shorthand and put me in the secretarial part. When I went to Camp Pendleton in California, I was secretary to the commanding officer. Then I was a legal secretary for the Navy courts.

01-00:34:40

Farrell:

Were you interested in being on the front lines?

01-00:34:45

Waldroff:

The only place we went out of the country, as women Marines, was to Hawaii.

01-00:34:53

Farrell:

And you knew that going in, and you were—

01-00:34:54

Waldroff:

Yeah.

01-00:34:57

Farrell:

Ideally, when you were thinking about enlisting, what had you wanted to do?

01-00:35:05

Waldroff:

I figured they could use my welding and that type of thing to keep up the equipment, but when they said, "Well, we have this for you," after I got through boot camp, I thought, well, okay, if that's what they need, then that's what I'll do.

01-00:35:30

Farrell:

What was that like, being secretary and using your typing and your shorthand that you had learned back in high school?

01-00:35:35

Waldroff:

It was manual typewriters, and shorthand in the book. It was the old-fashioned way. It was a job. I was stationed at Camp Pendleton, California. We lived in the barracks there. Then we took the bus to what is now the {Merge?} down in San Diego. That's where the Amtrak division was that I worked for the commanding officer of that division.

01-00:36:17

Farrell:

What was it like working for the Commanding Officer?

01-00:36:21

Waldroff:

He was a genial person. It was busy a lot of the time. He'd give me an outline and say, "Type this to this person and do this and this and this." He didn't dictate to me. He'd give me an outline, so then I'd give him a copy of what I had figured out, and then he'd make a couple of corrections on it to show me that, yeah, he had read it. Then type six carbon copies on a manual typewriter.

01-00:37:05

Farrell:

You also worked in the Navy Marine courts as a stenographer, is that what you had said?

01-00:37:08

Waldroff:

Yes.

01-00:37:09

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what that was like?

01-00:37:11

Waldroff:

It was very one-way, because what we were getting was a lot of the fellows that had, by that time, been overseas quite a while. They'd bring them back. They'd make them wait two weeks, be sure that they didn't have malaria. Being Marines and being fellows, they would break out and go to LA and have a good time. The NPs would pick them up, bring them back for court martial. A lot of them would have worked real hard to try to get sergeant stripes, and then they'd cut them back to being a PFC or being a corporal. I used to just get so angry. I'd think all they did was just go have a good time. But you still had to take it down the way that the JAG officer, the judge advocate general, had said that they—so a lot of times, they lost a rank that they'd worked pretty hard for.

01-00:38:18

Farrell:

How long were you in that position for with the courts?

01-00:38:26

Waldroff:

I went on furlough right after Christmas in '45, and by that time, the fellow that had been my boss at the shipyards had followed me and had wanted me to marry him. He was six years older than I was, so I thought, okay, I'm going to make sure this is the one that I'm supposed to be. He came down and picked me up for my furlough, and we went to my folks' place in mid-county, down by Albany. He was supposed to go back to work the next week. He said, "Let's go get married in Vancouver, and you can still go back to the service, but then we'll get together back and forth." I thought, well, I hadn't met anybody else by that time, so okay. We were married in Vancouver. Then I went with him the next week. Got the commanding officer to let me wear civilian clothes, and she gave me an extra ten days on my furlough, which gave me enough time to get pregnant. Then I went back and I got out on the twenty-eighth of February. My oldest son ended up in Vietnam. He's a colonel.

01-00:40:03  
Farrell: Was he in the Marine Corps?

01-00:40:05  
Waldroff: No, he was in the Army. He took ROTC at Corvallis. He was a Beaver.

01-00:40:17  
Farrell: Were you still in the Marine Corps when the war ended?

01-00:40:21  
Waldroff: No.

01-00:40:23  
Farrell: You were pregnant at that point.

01-00:40:24  
Waldroff: So then they let me out. I had a good discharge. Wasn't anything bad. If I hadn't been married, I would have gotten a dishonorable discharge.

01-00:40:39  
Farrell: Did you work after that, after you left the Marine Corps?

01-00:40:43  
Waldroff: Of course I had my family. I had two boys. I had Terry first, and then three years later, I had Wayne. After they were in school, then I went back to work.

01-00:41:04  
Farrell: Can you tell me, your husband at that time, he had gone back to work and continued working in the Marines?

01-00:41:13  
Waldroff: No.

01-00:41:14  
Farrell: Did he leave as well?

01-00:41:16  
Waldroff: He wasn't in the Marine Corps. He was a civilian.

01-00:41:19  
Farrell: Oh, okay. I got that part confused.

01-00:41:23  
Waldroff: Otherwise, I would have been out of the Marine Corps as soon as I got married. But as long as I married a civilian, I didn't get out until I was pregnant.

01-00:41:33  
Farrell: I was curious about that. I was like, that must have been a little bit controversial, but never mind. What was he doing for work at that point?

01-00:41:41  
Waldroff: He repaired service station equipment.

01-00:41:44  
Farrell: Was he living in San Diego with you, or did you move back up here?

01-00:41:47  
Waldroff: No, he was from Portland.

01-00:41:50  
Farrell: After you were discharged, did you move back to Portland?

01-00:41:52  
Waldroff: Yes.

01-00:42:00  
Farrell: Can you tell me about what you remember about the ending of the war?

01-00:42:04  
Waldroff: It was a big celebration, of course. But by that time, I had been out a while. I didn't go to work until my youngest one was in kindergarten.

01-00:42:26  
Farrell: Do you remember any of the celebrations? Did you participate in any of those?

01-00:42:31  
Waldroff: I didn't, because the fact that my husband had been a civilian.

01-00:42:38  
Farrell: What were your feelings? Were you happy that the war had ended?

01-00:42:42  
Waldroff: Oh, yeah.

01-00:42:45  
Farrell: How did you see Portland change after the end of the war?

01-00:42:50  
Waldroff: A lot of the people that were in this little burg that they had built for the shipyard workers. Unfortunately, there was a lot of unemployment there for a while. Then we had a flood on Memorial Day. It's been probably twenty-five years ago. It wiped that little town out.

01-00:43:18  
Farrell: When was the flood? Was the flood during that period of time?

01-00:43:23  
Waldroff: Yes.

01-00:43:24  
Farrell: And it wiped the whole town out?

01-00:43:25  
Waldroff: Yes.

- 01-00:43:31  
Farrell: What happened, and how did the town recover?
- 01-00:43:34  
Waldroff: The dike broke. The railroad bridge. The dike broke and let the water all come into this little—because it was kind of down in the slope anyway. They were built for housing during the war. Weren't very heavy built. So it just destroyed the town.
- 01-00:43:59  
Farrell: What happened to those people? They were displaced—
- 01-00:44:02  
Waldroff: There weren't that many in it at that time, but most of them got out. I think they lost ten people or something like that. But not as much as they could have.
- 01-00:44:18  
Farrell: Did the shipyard close after the war had ended?
- 01-00:44:24  
Waldroff: It was down to one of them. There's one that's still going on, Swan Island, as they call it. It's just outside. They're still building, but now they're building commercial ships.
- 01-00:44:43  
Farrell: When the shipyards started to close, what were those people who were working there—you had had an influx of people move to Portland. Did people start to leave Portland and move—
- 01-00:44:54  
Waldroff: Quite a few of them, especially the ones from the Midwest.
- 01-00:44:59  
Farrell: How did that change Portland?
- 01-00:45:02  
Waldroff: Not that much, I don't think. They hadn't relied on them that much for the growth of the city.
- 01-00:45:16  
Farrell: During that period of time, what were some of the big industries that were here?
- 01-00:45:21  
Waldroff: That's when the Silicon Valley came up in between here and Beaverton, when they started to make those chips and stuff. That kind of took the place of some of the wartime work.

- 01-00:45:38  
Farrell: But in general, what would most people do? You have people working in the shipyards, and you have people making the chips in Silicon Valley. Were there other big industries up here?
- 01-00:45:51  
Waldroff: Pendleton Woolen Mills.
- 01-00:45:55  
Farrell: How about women? When women worked, what were mostly they doing?
- 01-00:46:00  
Waldroff: Mostly commercial retail. They were clerks at the stores and so forth.
- 01-00:46:12  
Farrell: During that period of time, I know you said that when you were working in the shipyards, you would go downtown and you'd go shopping and you'd get dressed up. What were some of the other things that you did for leisure or entertainment during that period of time?
- 01-00:46:25  
Waldroff: They had a big USO club that was downtown that the fellows would come in on their ships and stuff, and then other times we'd go down there and go dancing. Then we always just went home. It was USO-sponsored. Of course, I loved hockey. The hockey team that was here was really good. So I went to a lot of hockey games.
- 01-00:46:59  
Farrell: Did you have a favorite player at that point?
- 01-00:47:03  
Waldroff: They were called the Buckaroos. There were a couple of them. There's one set of brothers that are here in town that own a roofing company, and they're called Buckaroo Roofing. There's a couple of them that are still around. Most of them were from Canada, so they went back.
- 01-00:47:31  
Farrell: At that point as well, where were you living?
- 01-00:47:35  
Waldroff: I was on 81<sup>st</sup> and Burnside. Burnside is the main street dividing the town, north and south. It was on 82<sup>nd</sup>, which also, at that time, was a state highway. That was about the city limits. Now the city limits is Gresham.
- 01-00:48:04  
Farrell: You weren't working when the war ended, but you started working a couple years later?
- 01-00:48:10  
Waldroff: Well, a few years later.

- 01-00:48:11  
Farrell: What were you doing when you started working again?
- 01-00:48:16  
Waldroff: I was working retail. Then I went to work for a manufacturing place. Well, it wasn't really manufacturing. They had stores out in the area, and then they had racks on them, and had products on those racks. Then they had the sales, and they would redo the racks every week. I was in the cash department, the accounts receivable, in that company.
- 01-00:48:51  
Farrell: Did you find that it was hard to find a job at that point?
- 01-00:48:54  
Waldroff: No, because I had pretty good bookkeeping skills.
- 01-00:48:59  
Farrell: Were you able to take any of the things that you had learned from your time being a welder in Spokane, in Portland, and then in the Marines, were you able to take any of those skills and apply them to your jobs later on?
- 01-00:49:14  
Waldroff: Mostly mathematics, because I was a bookkeeper.
- 01-00:49:21  
Farrell: What were some of the things, some of the big sort of life lessons, that you learned from that period of time, if there were any?
- 01-00:49:31  
Waldroff: Of course, how to work full-time and still have your children, and still do fourteen Cub Scouts, and all that sort of thing, and be PTA president.
- 01-00:49:44  
Farrell: How to strike that work-life balance.
- 01-00:49:47  
Waldroff: Right.
- 01-00:49:49  
Farrell: What are some of the things, for future generations and people that will watch this maybe in years to come—what do you hope that they remember about your generation and the time that you spent working during World War II?
- 01-00:50:04  
Waldroff: The fact that they went without so much, to make sure that we still have a country. Because with the rationing and with the people joining the service that had not had that type of work before, I think that that generation held this country together. I hope that the future generations will acknowledge that.

01-00:50:37

Farrell:

I know that you wrote something. I don't know if you want to read that, or is there anything else that you want to add to the interview?

01-00:50:43

Waldroff:

I don't think so. I think we pretty well covered the area. I think pretty much what I've already gone through. As a matter of fact, my son was down in San Diego, vacationing, and they went in to Camp Pendleton, and he wanted to know if there was any of the archives there. They found my name in the way back when, and so he got me a Marine Corps medal, the one that I left when I sold my house and moved here. I left my Good Conduct Medal, and so he got me a Marine Corps medal and said, "Yeah, mom, that's your Good Conduct."

01-00:51:59

Farrell:

Thank you so much. I appreciate your time.

01-00:52:03

Waldroff:

I hope that I made myself clear.

01-00:52:05

Farrell:

This is great, yeah. This is great.

[End of Interview]