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**Lucille Ziesenhenn**

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

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

Interviews conducted by  
Jess Rigelhaupt  
in 2003

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### Audiofile 2

Effects of the war and later years of life—describes the constant need for work and enlisting during the time—Kaiser and the Santa Fe Railroads were examples of industries looking for employees—after the war was over everything was shut down—Richmond now had the terrible problem of unemployment—she did volunteer work for the Richmond Museum—learned much about the shipyard work—describes a typical day at work and the increase in racial diversity as many African Americans came from the South for work—elaborates on the need for war housing as racial groups were dependent on them—talks briefly about the Port Chicago explosion—how after the war the city changed—industries closed and many left the city—continues to live in Richmond with her son though her husband has passed away.

Interview with Lucille Ziesenhenn  
Interviewed by: Jess Rigelhaupt  
Transcriber: Brendan Furey  
[Interview #1: February 12, 2003]  
[Begin Audio File Ziesenhenn1 02-12-03.wav]

00:00:12

**Rigelhaupt**

Okay, so we're here doing an oral history today, and if I could just get you to start with your full name and your date of birth.

00:00:27

**Ziesenhenn**

My name is Lucille Clara Ziesenhenn. My maiden name was Floring. F-L-O-R-I-N-G. I married a German with a strange name. I first met him through the mail at the office where I worked and I said the manager, "This is a very strange name." I just met him by chance and look at this; I married him all of that. I was born October 24, 1924.

00:01:10

**Rigelhaupt**

I think you said that you are not from Richmond. Could you talk a little bit about where you grew up?

00:01:19

**Ziesenhenn**

I was born in a small town about eighteen miles west of Chicago, Illinois, and that was the home town of my mother, and actually my father too. He and his family had moved to this very nice, small town, lots of trees, little quiet streets and that sort of thing, where a lot of the business people from Chicago liked to live there. I happened to be born there and lived there until I was eleven. In 1936, January, following of course the Great Depression, which hit in 1929 primarily, which I don't remember because I was five, my father lost his contracting business. He built brick homes and had people working for him. Brick masonry is very popular back there to keep the homes cool in the summer and warm in the winter. People could not pay him, and he could not pay his men, and then he had to sell his equipment and trucks, and finally our home. There were no social agencies to look after you or help you, if you didn't have savings. It was pretty desperate situation. That brought us to California. Is that what you asked me? Oh, where I grew up. So, I was eleven when I came here. I got off the train with my mother and sister here in Richmond.

00:03:00

My Father had come earlier. It was an interesting story. He always looked at the want ads, and of course there was no building, nobody had money for building. He answered an ad in the Chicago Tribune, he would tell the story. An older man wanted someone to drive him to Los Angeles, because he was afraid of travel in any other way. Dad got the job, and so got a free trip to Los Angeles. From there he hitchhiked to Richmond, where a boy he'd gone to school with had moved, and he was going to look him up to see if he could help him find work. He did and that all worked out. So, after some months, he sent for mother, my sister and me. I grew up the rest of my life right here in Richmond. I haven't moved around.

00:04:02

**Rigelhaupt**

I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about your parents and where they were born.

00:04:09

**Ziesenhenn**

Yes, I'm sorry I didn't really look it up to be positive, but I think I have it all right. Mother and Dad were both born in America. Both of their parents on both sides were born in Germany, and came over on sailing ships mother used to say. Sometimes they would be blown backward and forward and so on. My grandparents all came as sort of young people, because on my paternal side, they married soon after they arrived here with their parents. On my mom's side, they came separately and met when my grandfather found farm work in a little town in Illinois. I don't know what my grandmother did, but I think they met at church. So, that was the beginning of our family. What else did you ask me about my parents?

00:05:25

**Rigelhaupt**

Where they were born?

00:05:29

**Ziesenhenn**

Yeah, as I recall, my father's parents, the ones who had married, because they met on the ship, married and moved to Wisconsin, and I believe dad was born there. I do have it in writing. I've made up a family tree. Then they moved to Chicago and from Chicago to this little town of Hinsdale. My mother was born in Hinsdale, where I was born. Her parents had farmed, and as farmers tried to do in those days, and still do, because a number of my relatives are still farming in the Midwest. They farm and then they retire to the city as they say. Mother's parents retired to this little town of Hinsdale, which wasn't too far, maybe, fifteen, twenty miles from where their farm had been. My mother was the youngest of five children, twenty years younger than the oldest child, so there's all that time. So, her mother was almost like a grandmother to her. She didn't know farm life, because she was born in this little town where they retired, and where my sister and I were born later. We have many roots in this small town.

00:07:13

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk about what a typical day was like for you parents was like, when you were living in Illinois?

00:07:21

**Ziesenhenn**

I don't remember dad's work at all, except I have a fuzzy memory of having a very nice car. I must have been like five or so --a big car. So, that must have been when he had a business, and we had our own home. It was a nice, typical Midwestern home, with a big yard, and hedges. Everybody had hedges in the fences. Dad was a very clever workman with his hands; he could do most anything. He was very good in carpentry, although he had served four years apprenticeship for brick masonry, as a young man. So, he built lots of nice thing for us. My sister and I had a wonderful playhouse that he had built in the backyard, and a swing, a huge swing the people could sit in, and go back and forth, like a bench here and a bench here, and a big swing that would swing up and back, I can remember. All homes had full basements. You know that if

you're from Michigan and full attics. So, when it snowed or the weather was bad, we could play up in the attic where we had dress up clothes and our own little section, and a dollhouse that dad had built. Spare beds were up there, always made up, chairs and things in case visitors came. We didn't have what was called a spare room. It was just two big bedrooms and a full dining room and living room and a big kitchen and a pantry, a bathroom, what we called a sun porch where mother sewed and a big walk-in closet. I recall that between the bathroom and the dining room that held our outerwear clothing. Something dad had built, I'll never forget. You could go in there with the soiled laundry and when mother change beds or whatever. I guess we were trained to use it too. You could walk into this room where we put our outerwear clothes, and just push on this panel and drop all of the soiled laundry and just go downstairs right by her washing machine. It was pretty good. She didn't have to go through the sunroom, down the steps by the back door and then down another steps--lot's of them to get to the basement. In the basement, everybody had-- it was quite comfortable for a basement--cement floors, of course. There was an entry to go outside in emergencies or to come in in an emergency, in case there were tornadoes, things like that. That was in the back of the house. Otherwise, her laundry was down there. There was a half bathroom down there, a big furnace, because we burned coal. That was terrible because you usually dried your hair after you washed it over the registers, which were in every room. Of course, coal is not very clean, and then mother would thoroughly house clean. Usually one of her sisters would come and help with the house cleaning, spring and fall. When I look back on it, it just amazes me, because it's hard to keep a house clean, just working at it when you can, but they would paint and wallpaper. Every inch of everything was cleaned thoroughly, especially because of the burning of the coal. You had to save money. Of course, I came in the depression times, when it was even more difficult. You had to save money all year long, so that you could buy coal in the winter. The people who were in the coal business were very wealthy, because they would bring it in on freight cars to the local towns. There would always be a coal yard near the station. They would deliver the coal, and come into your driveway. Homes did not have attached garages. They had very nice garages in the backyard and a long driveway past the house was the usual thing. We had a wonderful two-car garage. The trucks with the coal would back in, and then you always had a coal shoot into the basement, a special room for the coal. It would be dumped down the shoot, make all of this noise. It was wonderful for the kids to see all of this. Then dear dad, if you had a father in the house, otherwise the mother did. Divorce was really unheard of, so it was usually a family until someone died. He'd get up maybe in the middle of the night in freezing weather to be sure that the small fire he had stoked when he went to bed didn't go out for the morning. Then I supposed he would go down there and shovel coal.

00:13:19

Oh, they had lots of parties in the basement. That's where they partied. My folks were great card players. They did that up in the dinning room. They had friends in regularly and they went to friends' homes regularly to play pinochle primarily. Although, they also played 500. They liked both of them. It depended on the friends with whom they were playing what they played. It was a social activity. The radios were just coming out. There certainly was no television to keep you from visiting the family and friends. They'd make a big thing of this, and as a little girl, I would go with them to friends' homes when they'd play cards there. Usually, three or four couples would get together regularly, maybe every other week or something. The hostess would always bake homemade cake and stuff like that. Kids just love to have ice cream, so when the cards were over. But the parties would be down in the basement of the homes. If somebody had a birthday, or just getting together with friends. I can't remember reasons. My father played the

concertina, a beautiful concertina. All his life he played. I have a picture of him in the room downstairs, when he studied concertina in Chicago in the concertina class. He was a wonderful player, and that's what they danced to. They loved to dance, the parents. They could bring their kids and we'd sit around and have fun and all of that. The trouble was, my mother never got to dance with my dad, because he played the concertina. Everybody always wanted Will to be there to play, even if it wasn't a dancing party; they would like him to bring his concertina and play. We had the snow and the winter, and that was fun. The heat in the summer-- oh, my goodness. The first day you could wear anklets was such a big day. In the winter it was long underwear of course. What did they call the pants that you wore for the-- we walked to school of course. Twelve long black, something like that no matter what the weather. They didn't call them leggings, it was something else, and then galoshes, they called them, the things you put over your shoes to walk in the snow, that came up above your ankles. They didn't have what are known as boots today. Really, really warm clothes and poor mother who made all of our clothes. Fortunately, she was an excellent seamstress. In the wintertime, she would pack away all of the summer clothes, and in the summer she'd have to clean up everything and get it all ready to be packed away. The winter clothes, so that you had complete change in everything from the bottom up-- under clothes, and outer clothes, and warm clothes, and then sleeveless things for the terribly hot weather, and so on. It was very interesting, and had beautiful springs and falls when the leaves turn. Because of the many trees there, there were lots of games involving leaves. You'd make cars in the yards with leave and sit in them and pretend you were driving and things like that. So is that about enough on my childhood?

00:17:08

**Rigelhaupt**

That's wonderful.

00:17:10

**Ziesenhenn**

Oh, we went to a Lutheran school, by the way. That happens to be the denomination of Christianity I belong to. We'd walk to school and I never missed a day of school. The first day that I ever missed of school was out here in California, and it was in high school. I contracted some disease like measles or something like that. I haven't thought of this for so long. I was crazy enough to call the school and see if they would let me come and just sit in the back of the room, because it meant so much to me not to miss school. [laughs]

00:18:04

**Rigelhaupt**

You said you have a lot of family in Hinsdale. Could you talk a little bit about the extended family you had in Illinois?

00:18:15

**Ziesenhenn**

My mother had an older sister who lived in Hinsdale all of her life. She had been born out on this farm about twenty miles away. She had one child; two had died soon after birth as I've been told. So that cousin was very dear to us. We only lived about six blocks away and the aunt was very dear to us. We were back and forth. My mother and her older sister were very close. The next sister, Martha, who came after Aunt Lina, had married a man from Wisconsin, Milwaukee. So, she moved there after her wedding and all of the weddings were held in home. That was the

usual thing to do, to have a home big enough for your wedding. Although it was a formal wedding, and then she moved to Milwaukee and she had seven or eight children, and they were all our cousins. They just loved my folks, and Milwaukee isn't that far from Chicago. You could drive it. I forgotten, four or five hours or something like that. They would come often, sometimes individually; sometimes several would come with their families, so that was a big tribe of people, wonderful people. I still have cousins in Milwaukee. Then, oh yes, there were the two boys: Will and Louis. They wanted to be farmers like their father was. One moved to Iowa and one moved to Minnesota. They had their families. One had three children, but the youngest died early on. The other had two children. They each had a boy and a girl so they were our cousins. Then another sister of my mother married a farmer and lived in the little town, York Center, where my mother's folks had farmed. The daughter Annie married a local farmer. So, she stayed on the farm out there, and they had four girls and a boy who were my cousins. That was a close farm, just ten to fifteen miles away, so we had wonderful times going out to the farm, seeing them milk the cows. They were something. It's a great talent, which my father had, because he grew up on a farm in Wisconsin. If you were milking the cows, the cats would always come in. There were always cats on farms, because they wanted milk. I can remember my dad, he would be pulling on an udder and all of the sudden he'd just bend in such a way that it would go right to the cat's face and the cat would just sit there drinking that milk, warm milk like that. Funny what you remember. I thought that was marvelous. So, anyway that was a lot of cousins, and I still correspond with those who live. Oh, and on my father's side, he had two sisters and one brother. Interestingly enough, my father and his brother, Uncle Arnold, married two best girlfriends: my mother and Pam. My dad had two girls, and his brother, Uncle Arnold, had two boys. So, we were cousins. We lived maybe ten blocks apart in Hinsdale, and we were always close and had fun with them when we would go see Grandma, because they lived near my Grandma Floring, a couple of houses away. One sister lived on that same block, and she had three children, twin girls and a boy who were our cousins. My aunt Marge and her husband, uncle Arnold-- another Arnold-- they owned a cleaners and dyers in La Grange, which was quite a nice town between Hinsdale and Chicago, and it was a very good cleaners, so that was interesting. Once in a while I could go with them to the cleaners, and for some reason or another I can't remember and see the process of cleaning clothes and waiting on the customers, that sort of thing. They had it all their life. They became very, very wealthy people. The business was sold after the parents, my aunt and uncle died, for over a million dollars. It was not little, but it was considered the best one in town. It was family owned. So that was a wonderful educating experience, to understand about the cleaning and dyeing.

00:24:21

Because all those people I've told you about and others, the cousins in Iowa and Minnesota, I didn't see very often, but they would come. All of those people, when they finally had relatives—my family—living in California, you can bet that they all tried to save their money, so they could travel to California. Where would they stay? Because after all, they spent the money to come, so they shouldn't have to spend money to stay some place, and it was unheard of that you wouldn't be hospitable. My poor folks, they had so many visitors over the years, and you'd find some place for them to sleep. Then food all the time. Some would stay a week; some would stay a month. That's the way it was.

00:25:09

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk a little bit about moving out to California?

00:25:13

**Ziesenhenn**

Uh-huh. My mother never told anyone but her sisters that we were moving. I was eleven and my sister was four years older, so say she was fifteen. We weren't really told. We knew dad had left, and I can't recall how my mother ever could have—she must have left everything in the house except our clothes 'cause that we came with. I don't know how she ever went through all of this. I suppose she felt she couldn't stand to say good bye to anybody and she didn't tell us until very late on and we were not going to tell anybody. Maybe four days before we left, something like that, we were told. My aunt, Lena who lived not too far away as I told you, she came over that night in a taxicab. It was winter. We arrived here the last day of January, '36, and there was a cab out there, which of course we never used; that was very expensive, and beside we had no need to have a cab. And we drove to the railroad station. So, mother must have packed what clothes she could have. I don't remember taking apart in anything like that. Maybe I did. My sister crying, because she had fallen in love and was leaving a boyfriend. She never got over it all of her life. I know she didn't; I just know, because I was her sister. We drove to the railroad station in town, and the taxi let us off, and then I remember being on a train. We pulled out of Hinsdale. We went to Chicago, because we had the Burlington Railroad, running through our town. We went to Chicago. I guess it's Union Station, and there got on a train that took us all the way from Chicago all the way to Richmond, California. It was three days and two nights. We sat in seats and we had taken some food with us. I don't remember if we used the dining car. I can remember there was at least one private car. That was an amazing thing to see. You'd see it, if you go up to - I don't know, I can't really remember, maybe to use a restroom or just to walk to get exercise. You'd have to go between the cars. It was all quite an adventure. My sister was crying most of the time. My poor mother, I don't know how she ever stood it all. But anyway, the door to this private car-- there would be two doors, about half as big as a regular door. I don't know if you've ever seen one, and maybe they changed. They usually would be open. There was a man in there alone. Sometimes it was very fancy. It must have been his own private railroad car, but sometimes he'd be lying on the bed asleep sort of, in his clothes, bed made, daytime. Sometimes he'd be working at a desk, and I just loved to go by there and look in and see all of that. So, anyway, dad met us there at the station here in Richmond. He had a car he had bought and he drove us up to the hills. If the house were not there across the street, you could see them. They were very nice hills. There weren't many homes up there then, and they were all covered with California poppies. I can't say *all*, but I mean it was orange. They were beautiful. You see them in the wild, when you drive around. I have some on my property. Anyway, he drove us around the bay, and he had rented on this side of the bay, I mean. There were not freeways. It was just San Pablo Avenue-- you've driven on San Pablo Avenue-- that was the artery between Richmond and Berkeley and Oakland. The bridge was not built then. Neither bridge was built then; we took ferries. Not that day that I arrived, of course, but he did that for us when we went to San Francisco, very soon after. Then he had rented the flat. The house still stands on 21<sup>st</sup> and Nevin. We had the lower flat, and the owner of the house had the upper flat. It was a one bedroom, and we, my sister and I, slept together in a folding bed of some kind, in the dining room. She didn't have a dining room. She made it into a bedroom for us. That was our first day. He took us there then. I don't remember. I suppose mom made supper or something. We lived

there a few years, and they saved money. Dad was working, making twenty-five dollars a week, which was considered pretty good. Bread was ten cents. Very good bakery bread. I would walk to the bakery many times on school day mornings to buy bread-- mother would send me. So, everything is relative, the way you deal with the price of things always constantly go up. Finally, they were able to rent a little house a few blocks over. That was 21<sup>st</sup> and we rented a little house on 20<sup>th</sup>, one block over. Some years after that, after saving the money, they bought their first home, here on 18<sup>th</sup> Street. So, we were always in this kind of same neighborhood, with the same friends and schools. At that time, California was number one in quality of schools in the United States. Hard to believe when I read about the schools today here. We had excellent schools, and teachers, and I loved school. I was very involved in school and in the church. We had a neighborhood church there. It was excellent. I'm so glad that we did. I think you wanted to know something about my arriving here.

00:32:52

**Rigelhaupt**

Okay, so you were talking about arriving in Richmond in 1936.

00:32:57

**Ziesenhenn**

The end of January 1936. It was just a sleepy kind of town, 23,000 in population and one main street, two theatres. Very wonderful high school, which I later went to after junior high, not far from my home. That was the hub school for the whole area. There was no high school. The nearest high school in the south was Berkeley, and I don't even know where the nearest high school was north, because they were all bused in. All the high school students from all around came to Richmond High, and it was a beautiful, beautiful school, and a wonderful school. My father being a brickmason, when he saw it, he just couldn't get over the beauty of it. It was built of red brick. When people would visit us from the east, that's one place that he would take them, was to see this example of wonderful masonry. That school was torn down completely after an earthquake in this area, oh, I don't know now how long ago, maybe thirty years ago, because they felt it wasn't built to be earthquake proof. Everybody felt so bad, we still get together for our class reunions together from Richmond High, and everybody feels so bad, because it was just destroyed. It was a lovely school. But the one they replaced it with is now earthquake proof, but it sort of looks like a penitentiary, protected and all.

00:34:48

**Rigelhaupt**

When you talked about moving to California because of the Depression, what were your impressions of Richmond when you first got here? Was it affected by the Depression or was it different than in Illinois?

00:35:04

**Ziesenhenn**

No, it was a lot of people like us. Everybody counted their pennies. I guess they must have been affected as we were. We fortunately had the church as a binding force in our lives, because we went there the first Sunday and met people, and they became life long friends. Most of them that we met had come here from the Midwest too. Farmers who couldn't sell their food, and all of that stuff. Some were local people, but everybody was very frugal. Nobody did anything that cost a lot of money. To go to movie on a Saturday was a wonderful treat, and that was ten cents. I

suppose that was for children. That was really a treat, and you'd see maybe about two feature films and a Western, and a cartoon, just lot's of good things like that for special times you get to do that. But anyway, the people were all nice people, good citizens. The police would walk their beat downtown and smile and talk and if you rode a bicycle-- I never had a bicycle, but I knew how to ride. I would ride other people's. If you dared ride on the wrong side of the street, a policeman would stop you and lecture you for breaking the law. It was good. The businesses were family owned a lot of them, very nice shops. People took pride in their work. Meat markets, and food markets, dress shops, and men's clothing stores. Shoe repair shop. Barber shops. A wonderful store that I thought, oh my, just to spend time in it, was called Kress's. It was a five and ten. It was a wonderful big store that was here for years and years, and it was a five and dime, and things were actually five and ten. It had everything. It was so enjoyable. Everybody walked downtown. It was a big day to go downtown and see the shops and wave to people. So, it was all kind of friendly and nice. The neighbors were nice. The neighborhood grocery store was not far from us. We didn't always have to go downtown. So, I would say that we were all of the same kind of people. There were few people of other races here. I don't remember any, except a few Chinese in junior high, none in the grammar school. When I arrived, I went right into the sixth grade at a grammar school here. I don't remember anybody other than Caucasian students. But in junior high, seventh, eighth and ninth, I remember Chinese, just boys and there was a Chinese orphanage up in El Cerrito. It looked like a very nice place. We would often drive by it, never went in it. Apparently, these must have been orphan boys from China. I just don't know. They always wore a uniform of some kind. It was called the Chung May home, where they lived, and they would be brought in by bus. Those same boys went with us as we grew older on up to high school and they were all very nice people. But in high school, I met some black students. We called them Negro, I think, then, because they were settled out in what was called—may still be called—North Richmond. I had a good friend in high school, Lillian something—Ellison, I think, and her brother became a policeman here in town, was a very nice family. That was, I think, the first association I had ever had of anyone of other races. In the little town where I grew up, there was one black family, so it just wasn't part of our life. That family, I think she did housework, and I don't know what the man did. He must have had a job, because they had children. I'd go by their home now and then, as I recall, walking from school home. So, anyway, in the schools, we had very good teachers, and we had certainly physical education and music appreciation and penmanship and all of those things that were very important in later life that I don't think a lot of schools teach now. We were graded on citizenship and that sort of thing, besides the courses that we studied.

00:41:15

**Rigelhaupt**

Do you remember what year you started high school?

00:41:18

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, I graduated in June of '42, so it must have been September of '39.

00:41:25

**Rigelhaupt**

So, you're senior year of high school the war started?

00:41:28

**Ziesenhenn**

Pearl Harbor, December 6 of '41.

00:41:33

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk about your memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

00:41:36

**Ziesenhenn**

It was a Sunday, and for some reason we didn't go to church. I think my mother was ill. Maybe I was ill. I'm not sure. We were both home and were listening to the Lutheran hour. I don't remember dad being there. Maybe he was a church with my sister. We had the radio on to listen to that, the Lutheran hour. It still was broadcast on Sunday morning, and it must have been around church time, ten or eleven, something like that. We were listening to the sermon, and all of the sudden there was this news release, and it just astounded us that such a program would be interrupted. It was to tell us that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor that morning. We didn't even know what Pearl Harbor was at that time. We had no idea, we had never been to Hawaii, but they said it was in Hawaii. They didn't know too much, but that the Japanese had bombed us and ships had been hit. It was just shocking and almost unbelievable. I can't remember much of that day, and I was in high school and I was a senior. The next morning, Monday, of course, was a school day, and we got to our first period class, and an announcement came over the loud speakers, I guess, or maybe the teachers got a phone call that we were all to report to the auditorium, the entire student body. There everybody was just sort of in a trance almost. It was such a shock and we could hardly believe it and really didn't know what had happened. All we had to listen to was the radio and they didn't know much. But gradually the news got worse. But, at any rate, we all reported to the auditorium, and there we listened to President Roosevelt declare war on Japan. That was really an amazing thing, and we had hardly any conception of what that meant naturally at our age, sixteen, seventeen. So we were to graduate the following June. Well, for that moment on, our lives were affected immensely, because a lot of the boys made up their minds, to as soon as we graduated, to enlist. Fellas we knew like the young men at our church, for instance, or in our neighborhood, things like that, many of them went right away that week and enlisted. They would have to find where the offices were, because there were no recruiters out. They just weren't trying to get people into the services that much, although the war in Europe was going on. But still it hadn't yet affected us very much.

00:45:07

Then I can remember I was a commencement speaker and I can remember the four of us were to speak on something relative to the war. We were assigned subjects to write our speech on. Mine was women in the war effort. So, anyway, then the president of our class enlisted immediately. Lots of us had plans to go to college. That changed it all, because the men wanted to enlist for the most part, and they were sort of expected to, and the women to work in war industry, which by June things had happened very rapidly here in Richmond. Right on the Pacific Ocean and we had quite a few Japanese living in the area. That's right, I went to school with a Japanese girl in high school, and she just disappeared from class soon after, and they were sent inland, because the government didn't trust them. We had been stabbed in the back at Pearl Harbor, and that was just the atmosphere, but she never had a chance to say good bye to us or anything. Actually, the Germans, although I didn't realize it so much at the time, because a German looks like an Italian

or anybody else you go to school with, but the Germans, the same thing, they were sent inland. Of course, I knew a lot of them, especially from church, and as friends and things, sent away from the coast. Anyway, the girls, they were expected to support the war effort, and give up their dreams of college, and that, I think affected many, many people. It must have been a great drop in enlistment at the schools. So, that's how, after the folks sent me back east to my hometown, as a graduation gift, and when I came back, then I started looking for work.

00:47:36

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk a little bit about what you remember about your speech at the commencement, and women in the war industry? Sounds like a fascinating speech.

00:47:43

**Ziesenhenn**

You know what? They recorded it, and I probably have it somewhere. You know it's one of those discs like this that would peel off as the needle recorded your voice. I remember that so well. Well, I can't remember too well, but I know spoke about the Red Cross, and about the military opportunities for women and learning first aid, which is another thing. All of us, right away in first aid classes were set up at school, and everybody was expected to take first aid, and learn how to deal with the wounded. You we were right here-- Standard Oil, it was called then-- right here in Richmond, and the Santa Fe Railroad. Even though the shipyards weren't built yet, they were in the throes of building them. It was a dangerous place to live. The blackouts came quickly, and things had to be organized so fast, and the sirens. Even driving was affected. Things got worse and worse and worse. Gas was rationed and you couldn't buy cars, because they stopped making cars. We had a Ford plant here in Richmond that made cars, and a lot of the local men worked there. Well, that was changed. All the companies could only produce what the war effort needed. So, at Ford they made Jeeps and trucks for the army. Standard Oil, of course, was producing oil and gas for the military vehicles in the airplanes and so on. But railroads-- Santa Fe and Southern Pacific that come through Richmond were transporting troops and supplies and the ships as the shipyards got built. First Shipyard One, then Two, then Three, then Four. They worked twenty-four hours a day, and the government took over all power, as far as employment goes. You couldn't say, "Well, I want to be a photographer or something like that." But the War Manpower Commission was formed. That was the federal government taking over the state employment offices. All states ran their own employment office system to help employ people. It was hardly ever heard of, private employment agencies, it was the state, that's where you'd go. Unemployment insurance had just been formed to help the unemployed, because of the Depression. That was part of the employment service operation. The federal government took over after Pearl Harbor and somehow got it all organized, and it became the War Manpower Commission. That's where I ended up working. When I went to look for work, I went there looking for work, and then was offered work, but I still applied in other places, because, you know it was my first job out of high school. I came back to the War Manpower Commission to be trained and to work, because it made sense in talking to older people for advice. To work for the state-- it was federal now during the war-- but there might be a future there, rather than some of these other places who were hiring women for the first time in most cases. I mean other than office work. But many more women than they could possibly absorb, when they lost their war contracts, if we won the war, and if things went back to peace. So, I thought it would be best to work for the state, although it paid less than all the other industries. So, that's what I did, and

that's how I happened to work for them all my working life. I met my husband there in later years.

00:52:30

**Rigelhaupt**

I would like to get to the War Manpower Commission in just a moment, but if you could talk about how when the war broke out in Richmond, how it affected your family life and how it affected maybe your neighborhood and if you remember changes in your church-- broader-- just your community.

00:52:51

**Ziesenhenn**

I'll try to keep on the subject. I think of something--

00:52:53

**Rigelhaupt**

No, I do want to get to the Manpower Commission. I have a whole set of questions.

00:53:03

**Ziesenhenn**

You just remind me if I get off. Let's take the church first. So many people came to Richmond to work in the shipyards that it was just overpowering in a sense, because this was just a quite, sleepy town. Most people didn't even have a car. You'd walk wherever you could, but still more and more people had a car. The first place that people would go, when they hit town if they were religious people was to go to church, because that's where they could meet people. They were strangers here. Our little church, which still stands, was small and suddenly we were having a hall full of little children, coming for Sunday School. If you're a church member, that's a great blessing. There are families coming. It seems like that the war had done something to people to make them more anxious to learn about God, and so on. Then they set up two services to hold in the church. Then the church wasn't big enough anyway. I don't know people gave money, whatever they did, and they enlarged the church and pushed out walls and added. It was a marvelous time for the churches, all of them, because of this, and many of these people stayed on and still live here, and their heirs live here, today. So, it was a great missionary effort really. There were so many people to deal with.

00:54:52

Then in the home, well, of course, so many things were rationed: shoes, nylon hose, food, especially meat, butter, sugar, gasoline.

00:55:07

**Rigelhaupt**

If we could just pause right there. I have to change the tapes.

00:55:07

**Ziesenhenn**

Sure, sure.

[End Audio File Ziesenhennel1 02-12-03.wav]

[Begin Audio File Ziesenhennel2 02-12-03.wav]

00:00:02

**Rigelhaupt**

Okay let's start that one. So the audio's going.

00:00:09

**Ziesenhenne**

I guess it was how the war was affected family life and the church and the town and everything.

00:00:15

**Rigelhaupt**

So, before I changed tapes you were talking a little bit about how the start of World War II changed life in your church, and you just started talking about rationing. If you could continue with that.

00:00:30

**Ziesenhenne**

Uh-huh. Well, I think we each got a ration stamp book of each child and parents or whoever lived in the house. That had to last you for a certain length of time, so I think it averaged out to like-- you might be able to buy two pair of shoes a year or something like that. Nylons-- of course I was at the age now, eighteen, sort of, seventeen, eighteen. I graduated at seventeen. You just ended up using-- what did they call it? Well, it was a brown kind of lotion you rubbed on your legs and you bought it in the bottle, because you just couldn't get nylons, you just couldn't. They were using them for parachutes, things like that. I tell you the nylons that we had then, back in '42 were really nylons. They did not run. Now you will not find a pair of stockings like that today, because if they still manufactured them, those were the first nylons after silk stockings. They'd never sell any, because they wouldn't run, you see. So they could not produce, and still don't today what we had then. It was marvelous nylon. That went to war too. Well, that's right Lucky Stripe went to war. That's another funny thing that happened. Cigarettes were rationed, and everybody smoked. You'd go to the doctor; the doctor would be interviewing you and smoking. In the high school, the teacher's lounge, smoke just poured out of the door, because all the teachers smoked. Of course, all the teachers smoked. Of course, it's an exaggeration. I'm sure there were some that didn't. It was just part of life to smoke. People who didn't smoke seemed odd, once they were high school or older. Now, it's just the opposite, which is good. I gave up smoking years ago thanks goodness, but I was certainly part of the crowd, because cigarettes were {\_\_}. No, I don't think they rationed them, but they all went to war, and the stores couldn't get them. I think they thought it would just be too much to ration them and handle stamps for cigarettes, because someone had to buy cartons and some just could afford packages. The servicemen they all smoked. Well, anyway, in the office where I worked here in town we were one of the busiest of any place, because of the shipyards. All of the war industries here. Everybody had to get a clearance from us who wanted to work. You could not work unless you had a War Manpower clearance to prove you could, that you were free to take that job. It was really amazing how people cooperated. You'd come in looking for work, and everybody had to do that. They had to clear through us. The law was there, and they obeyed it. If you wanted to be a bartender, or something that did not have to do with the war effort, you could as a second job. That's how they were able to fill these jobs like waitress, and so on, but your

main job had to be in the war industry. Well, anyway these people would fill our office. The line is out the street and somebody would yell in the side door, "Cigarettes at Safeway." There was a Safeway Store a block away. Everybody ran. This would only happen maybe once every two months or something. I tell you, it was just a stampede of people, workers and the public running down to Safeway. Of course the supply would be exhausted in no time. This went on all over I'm sure. Of course, because the military could get cigarettes, it was nice to have friends who were in the military. Likewise with other things. So, anyway, that affected our life. At night, everybody had to have blackout curtains, so that no light could be seen coming from your windows. Every block had a warden in charge. One of the people who lived there, one of your neighbors was appointed a warden. They would be out inspecting. No light could be seen. If you were going to open the front door and you had lights on, you better turn off those light before you opened the door. Of course there were not porch lights. There were no street lights. It could have been a very dangerous time, because you didn't want to give any enemy bombers probably a look at what was below if you could help it. So, if you were driving in a car, which you did very seldom because of the gasoline going to war. When the sirens blew, you had to pull over, because you had to turn off the car lights. They did allow you to drive with your lights on, but they preferred you just stay off of the streets anyway at night. If you were out, you had to pull over and wait until the all clear sounded. So that was quite an impact on people. Naturally, your menu changed and your clothing changed. I was telling you about this liquid that you rubbed on your legs instead of stockings. Well, even though there was a war effort and women worked actually doing men's work in the shipyards. Also some of the other firms hired them in industry like operators for Standard Oil and so on. Still in office work, you wouldn't think of wearing slacks. We wore suits and tailored dresses and heels, hose. They would wear out and you couldn't really get anymore. Then we'd have to paint our legs and that was such a mess, because, you know, every morning you'd have to put your leg up on a stool and get this stuff, pour it in your hands, rub it all over your legs, be careful not to get it on your clothes until it dried, and then wash you hands, you know. But we lived through that. Some gals were so careful that they'd even had a special pencil. They'd draw a line up the back of their legs and make it look as if it was a seam, because we never, never wore slacks in the office. But out of the war I think came, afterwards-- you know a lot of women had worn slacks in their work, in the industrial type of work, and it just affected the styles of people. They wore them to church and even weddings. Pant suits; you see them all over.

00:08:32

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk about when you started working for the War Manpower Commission and talk about how you got the job?

00:08:36

**Ziesenhenn**

Well I went in to place an application just for work, to give your general application to fill out, and I filled it out, and then was interviewed by someone there. It still wasn't just filled with people. This would have been about October of '42. The Shipyards had to be built. Now that was a big, big excavation job, especially in the bay down here, to make it deep enough for the ships to be launched. It wasn't just a matter of putting up buildings. So, we didn't quite have the great crowds of people coming in to that office, when I went into apply, as perhaps six months later, when they'd been able to get the things ready in the shipyards. The other buildings for the most

part were here. We had some good industries in Richmond. They didn't have to be built. They just had to change what they were doing, to make it related to the war effort. But the shipyards had to be built on marshlands, and everything out there had to be built. So, it took longer, and then recruiting the people, because they never closed, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day and the other firms also. Well, I went in then to look for work and I was interviewed and think I was called at home to say that they would like to have me to start there and so on. I think I explained to them that I appreciated that and that I would think about it, because I wanted to apply at some other places too, which I did. Then I finally decided, although I was offered other jobs, as a trainee-- this would be my first job-- but I just decided to work there.

00:10:57

I started there. At a certain point, people were coming in for their War Manpower clearances. I probably just started in reception or something like that. I hadn't had much training yet, but I did get lots of training, both on the job special classes, sometimes going to San Francisco. I did a lot of reading and all of that. Kaiser was recruiting primarily in the Deep South, where there was never much employment, and a lot of very poor people. Now, that's not to say that people didn't come from all over the United States to work in the shipyards. Farmers left the farming, and that was a real impact on the food market, because farmers are vital to our economy and to the health of the nation. But especially the young men, like a lot of my cousins gave up farming at that point, never went back to it. I'm sure they were typical. They came seeking money, and they shipyards of all things, for somebody who had never worked, had no skills--what I mean is like say if, coming off the farm, or coming from unemployed areas. Still coming out of the Depression in a sense, could start at like seventy-five cents an hour. Most laboring jobs, unskilled and some of them, they helper jobs like boilermaker helper, welder helper, sheet metal helper. All the trades had helper jobs. And ninety-five cents an hour. Now, that was really something. The shipyards probably paid more than any of the other industries. It was difficult to get people accept jobs in other industries. It was our responsibility to try to man all of the war-related industries. Like I say, the Santa Fe Railroad, which probably paid the least. [sirens in background] Of course, I'm going back many years in my memory. Naturally, the people wanted to-- is that going to bother your-- you don't know? That's my friends the fireman. They always go by my home. Santa Fe needed people desperately. A lot of their people had gone off to war, and had been drafted. It was a constant cycle of need for people to work, but also need for people to go into the military. If you could almost just breath, there was something for you to do. Kaiser was very good about that. But, I must finish what I was saying about Santa Fe. We could offer three jobs to a person looking for work-- or they could be offered one, two or three. That was all you could offer them. Then you could send them any place on that interview, if they would not take one of the top three, and we constantly would be getting information from the War Manpower Commission head offices as to which industry, which firm in the Richmond area needed people most. We had to try to fill those top slots. Sometimes it wasn't what the people wanted. So, it was not easy dealing with that problem, but they had to be staffed. The railroads especially are known for their low pay, really needed people in transportation. There were constant problems. Employers, in order to do as much as they could to hire people, asked for room in our offices-- a desk so that they could be right there and the people didn't have to come to them, to waste time and effort. Some employers actually rented trailers or bought trailers and had them parked out on the street so that they would just interview right there. The shipyards, Kaiser, of course, who had the money to do it all along had their own huge building in Richmond where they did their hiring. So, if we were referring to them with a clearance, they just had to

walk three blocks and there would be the Kaiser hiring hall. The unions became very powerful through the shipyards coming here. The unions had a great deal to say about who would be taken in. My memories of Kaiser generally, have never been very good because he made a great deal of money and gave many people employment, but when the war was over, everything was shut down, and he left, and left Richmond with the terrible, terrible problem of unemployment. We grew from twenty-three thousand to a hundred thousand people in this little town. Just almost, to exaggerate, overnight, they started coming right after Pearl Harbor actually. The word would get out that Kaiser was going to build shipyards or there were other shipyards up the coast and down in Los Angeles and on the East Coast and so on. It was a terrible thing that happened to Richmond. Of course, I've jumped ahead an awful lot.

00:17:24

**Rigelhaupt**

I would like to get there, but we'll just stay with the War Manpower Commission for a couple of moments.

00:17:34

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, another thing that I admired Kaiser, who did so much in the area, was that he said he would hire any handicap person. He told us that. His representatives told us that. That was almost unheard of. It was very difficult prior to the war to find work for physically or mentally handicapped people. I think they call them something else now. We had specialists in every one of our offices who dealt with handicap people prior to the war, and made great efforts to help them but employers were always resistant, lot's of times for insurance purposes. It was just very difficult for anybody who was disadvantaged, because of their disability. With Kaiser, any handicap would be hired. He'd find something. There was never a problem. I give him so much credit; well, of course, those very same people were here when it was all over too. Anyway, that was wonderful. He was recruiting now all over the United States, but mostly in the Deep South. His special recruiting trains would take him and he'd fill that whole train and then come back to Richmond. That was a Sixteenth and Macdonald. Our office was down at Sixth and Nevin, one block off of Macdonald, our main street still today. We were in the old post office. We'd finally taken that over. His men would walk all of those hundred of people--everyday a train would come in-- down from the station, down Nevin, to our office, before they went any place. They still didn't have a place to live, all of those problems. A lot of them had children. Many sent for them later to come on in to us to be interviewed. Many couldn't write. Many couldn't read. Many had never been away from their little bitsy town wherever they lived, and probably didn't go to school. Some [had] very serious health problems and so on. They had to see us for this War Manpower clearance. Now, they already had a job promised them. All they needed was the clearance and that was to the shipyards. Those people really recruited, and those were the parents of the people who-- most of them who stayed here, lived here and worked here, the citizens of our city. That was a tremendous pressure on us. We'd work hours and hours, and through the weekend sometimes, because they needed these bodies to get those ships done. Now, one of the places—oh, yes, I forgot about that. One of the places I do volunteer work is the Richmond Museum and I know quite a bit about shipyard work even though I never worked there, because of the displays they have. Some of those big ships were from the very beginning to the day they went out into the water, was three days. I think of that. It's beyond conception. Huge, huge ships that carried supplies primarily to the military. So, we worked with people to the point of

exhaustion. We ourselves had our difficulty getting workers to help us. So, we met many people, had lots of experiences and tried to help them the best we could. Of course, all those people think what it did to our schools. They had no place to sleep many of them. It was nothing to have strangers ring your doorbell and see if you had a bedroom you'd be willing to rent out. Some would rent a bedroom and three different people would rent it, and they'd work different shifts and that bed would always be used. That sort of thing you know. Odd looking little sheds went up in many yards. Just a room for a man to sleep so that he could get back to work. Restaurants somehow they would come from here and there and the little sleepy town that had maybe two little restaurants—you needed to feed these people. The kids needed to go to school and there were just these few schools. The housing authority built places as fast as they could, a lot of them not built so well. Just a place where people could live. All of it has been destroyed except one that's down at the end of Macdonald Avenue that was well built and still was used to today. But, I don't know how they lived through it with the schools and not enough teachers and supplies and the things that they did. Of course, personally we had relatives that came out here to work here in the shipyards. I can't even remember them all. Of course, they all wanted to stay with us. We had couches; we couldn't take them all. Mother and Dad, I don't know how they managed it all, but we did what we could, and so did everybody else to help the war effort.

00:23:39

**Rigelhaupt**

I was wondering if you could talk about a typical day at the War Manpower Commission for you. What was it like?

00:23:51

**Ziesenhenn**

A lot would depend upon what you were assigned to do. Usually there would be promotions along the way, or transfers along the way and so on, but for the most part, the heavy part of the war was speaking to people. We had got so busy that finally you could almost have nobody at a desk. They'd make the counters with spaces and a tall stool with the backrest. Most of us all had to work there, because these lines never ended until we locked the doors and just finished who was there, and the rest would have to come back the next day. You'd have your file of jobs and classifications and you'd have to do interviewing and offering of employment. When I reached that kind of work, I started out doing just reception and then learning other things, training of other people who had been in employment prior to the war. You'd get a break maybe for fifteen minutes in the morning, ten minutes in the afternoon, and your lunch hour. Otherwise, just this pressure. We didn't even have telephones at the counters. They would have to be handled by somebody who just handled phone calls, so that we could just wait on the people. Sometimes there would be difficulties with the people, because this was their life and work. Also we had returning veterans coming back, who many had been injured by this time. They needed employment too. They were out to the service. We had a veteran representative in each office. Those people would always be seen as a desk—anybody just out the service. They of course had precedence on any job. We met lots and lots of interesting people, and I think, did a remarkable job considering the difficulty of it all.

00:26:06

**Rigelhaupt**

Could I follow up a little bit on-- you said interesting people. A lot of the people were coming from the South, you say. Was this a racially diverse group?

00:26:19

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, that's a good point. I should have thought of that. Oh my yes. Especially black people from the South came, and they were so eager to work, and there was no problem with the shipyards. Now, there was no obligatory rule that minorities had to be employed as there is now, so there would be companies in town who would not say so, but you knew that black people or maybe other people too-- I should say minorities, I guess, would not be employed if they did go there. But, still, you would try to fill these positions and send people. It was all part of the problem. We went through a lot of new things that were brought to us. Originally, employers could say very openly, "white only" on their job orders. That was perfectly all right. I remember one especially well known company that just were adamant about that even in the war effort, because that was the life at that time.

00:27:34

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you say which company that was?

00:27:33

**Ziesenhenn**

That was the Oakland Tribune. I remember that, because you see after the war, I married someone I worked with, and we couldn't work together, because money was handled for unemployment insurance. That was the rule. We were back to the state by that time, and I finished my working years at the Oakland office. I know there were other companies. I shouldn't just single the Tribune out, but I remember the personnel person so well, because she was so difficult about that. Now, they'd be shocked to even hear that. Of course, it affected the lives of all people, because for the first time, many people were dealing with people of other races. You know that's been a learning experience for everybody who lived here, in the schools and all that. It helped them to improve their lives and so on. The war had so many effects, I guess you couldn't stop talking about it and think of everything that went on. Richmond had many servicemen stationed here to protect us and to protect this area. We had three, I believe, batteries of army men stationed here. One at a school in Point Richmond, one up toward Pinole, on the hill there, and oh, one on Macdonald Avenue in our Memorial Hall. That was there home; that's where they were stationed. Golden Gate Fields, which is a race track out here, that was taken over by the Navy, and the sailors were stationed out there all during the war. Marines were never stationed here, but on Treasure Island. We would see a lot of them too. Servicemen could work on their off hours if they wanted to also, and earn extra money. So, we'd see quite a few of them. Then, of course the USO was a very integral part of life for people in the service, and for the single women in the area, of which I was one.

00:30:11

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk about where you were living during the war and the broader—I understand there housing shortages.

00:30:16

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, I still lived with my folks. I was working and I lived at home. We had bought the home on Eighteenth Street. Well you don't know the city, but it's sort of in the area where we started. Just maybe six, seven blocks away, they had found a home they could afford [where] I lived when I

went to high school and I started working at seventeen-- eighteen I guess, when I started working. I didn't marry until I was twenty-three, so I was home six years, and that was all during the war. So, I didn't go through any of this living in war housing like so many did.

00:31:01

**Rigelhaupt**

Did your office help people with housing at all?

00:31:09

**Ziesenhenn**

No, maybe the employers did, because they would do anything to get people to work for them. Maybe they did in their own way. Perhaps I've forgotten. You can imagine the problems with a woman, who let's say who had children. Maybe even her husband had gone in the service. Lots of them did, even with children, because we were fighting two wars at the same time. She wanted to help the war effort, but more importantly to make money too. She needed someone to look after her children. It was almost impossible to hire a woman to look after children or to do housework, or even men to work in the yard or anything like that, for somebody who really needed someone, because they could all get these war jobs that paid so much more.

00:32:15

**Rigelhaupt**

You mentioned that the city grew a lot in population. Could you talk a little bit about what you think the city did well to handle all of the new people coming and what they had problems with?

00:32:29

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, not having worked for the city, I didn't have firsthand knowledge, just really what I observed and people I knew, and so on. I really think they did a fabulous job, considering everything. It must have been a tremendous thing to try to absorb those people. Like I said, they needed a place to sleep, and they needed a place to eat, and they had to have their personal things cared for like laundry done. They didn't bring anything like that with them. Most of them seemed to just come with a suitcase. They didn't bring furniture or anything. Maybe they had it shipped in later, but we had one transfer and storage company. They were neighbors of ours when we lived on Twentieth Street. The father and his two sons, who were a little older than we were, had started this moving and storage firm. He had two trucks before the war. Suddenly this happens, and then he did the moving for people, just odds and ends and made a decent living. They had a little house near us, and a big corner to park his trucks in. He finally built a little building for them. Here comes this deluge of thousands and thousands of people, and I guess many did send for their furniture or what they wanted out here. They could hardly buy anything anyway. He was so busy and his two sons, they moved things even at night. He made money so fast that he somehow got other trucks. If you weren't in the military, you really couldn't buy anything. How he did it, I don't know. Maybe he bought second hand things, I don't recall. He did get other trucks. He was the only company moving things for a long, long time. They became so wealthy. That's another private story of the war. Those two sons became millionaires in their lifetime. That company is still there, Richmond Transfer and Storage. And then, of course, other companies came in. Kaiser was maybe responsible for that, because his people had to have things. I just happened to think of them, the Johnson's. Did I get off the track there?

00:35:29

**Rigelhaupt**

No that was great. With all of those new people coming into the city, do you remember if people lived in different neighborhoods? Were there neighborhoods that were predominantly African American or predominantly, say, Italian? Do you remember how people settled?

00:35:42

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, of course, I was always in the same place. There were no black people in our neighborhood and never had been. This is a reasonably new development, the City of Richmond. By reasonable, I mean like from the twenties probably. There are just comfortable family homes, like maybe some that you see around here. The black people, that I mentioned that I met in high school, lived in what we call North Richmond. I imagine that most of them lived in the war housing, because most of them came in at this time. The federal government built that war housing, not the city. I think they had to get on lists. I don't know where people lived before they got into war housing. I have friends today that actually lived in war housing, because they lived with their family at that age. There was a lot of it throughout the city. Wherever there were vacant lots, they'd try to build something. So, I would say, where the war housing was, there were just mixtures of people. Never was there anything all black or all white, but as blacks or other groups of people came in, they'd get on the list and live in the war housing I would suppose, until the war was over, and then they had to find their own place to live, because most of them were torn down.

00:37:24

**Rigelhaupt**

You mentioned housing at the end of Macdonald.

00:37:29

**Ziesenhenn**

That's still there. It's called Atchison Village. Macdonald is a main street. If you get on Macdonald, which is about five blocks over and take it to the very end, you'll see it. The very end is the Santa Fe Railroad. You can't go any further. You can just turn left and go to Point Richmond, a lovely place. Have you ever been to Point Richmond? Hotel Mac and all that. I went to school with the Mac boys. So, anyway, Atchison Village is on your left-hand side, and those housing units still stand, and I think each unit had maybe two flats here, and two flats here. They're owned by the people who live in them now. Whatever they are living in. They were federal housing. Only one is left in the Richmond area.

00:38:33

**Rigelhaupt**

I was wondering if you remember the Port Chicago explosion?

00:38:36

**Ziesenhenn**

Yes, I was lying in my bed, and I think it too was a Sunday, and I had my own bedroom there on Eighteenth Street. My sister had married and moved out, so I had her room. I hadn't fallen asleep yet, and suddenly there was this great jarring movement, and the bed moved. It seemed like everything in the room moved. I don't know if I heard anything, but something terrible had happened. You just knew that, like if maybe the house next door had exploded or something. It

was hard to believe when we heard the news, probably the next day. I don't recall whether I got out of bed, talk to my parents or what. It was that far away at Port Chicago, and I felt this terrible explosion through the foundation of the house.

00:39:52

**Rigelhaupt**

What do you remember what it was like at the end of the war? Do you remember where you were, what you were doing when you heard the war was over?

00:40:00

**Ziesenhenn**

Uh-huh. I was at work. Somebody must have yelled or opened the door, or somebody was maybe out on their break. We had a lot of newspaper boys in those days who would go out during the war, yelling "Extra, extra!" and had their newspapers in their hand. They'd go into the residential areas and everything. You don't even have paperboys on bikes anymore. These would be walking, and I think maybe that's how we got the news, although somebody could have had a radio on. Anyway, suddenly everybody was just yelling, "The war is over! The war is over!" We just tumbled out of the building on to the street. It was like party time. That night I went to San Francisco with girl friends--you could do it in those days and know you'd get home safely-- to walk up and down Market Street celebrating because the war was over, blowing horns and things. Just what they always used to do on New Year's Eve. You'd go to San Francisco and walk up and down Market Street, and then go home [laughs], but that was the way to celebrate. That's how we celebrated the end of the war. Of course, there was the terrible news about the bomb that had been dropped and the people who were killed and suffered and all of that. It's all a part of war.

00:41:41

**Rigelhaupt**

Could you talk about how the city changed after the war?

00:41:47

**Ziesenhenn**

I suppose just in dribs and drabs, because everybody it seemed was looking for work, and finally some would give up and go elsewhere to find it, or maybe go back home. These war industries had shut down, and those who could went back to what they were doing before, and not all of them did that. They couldn't use all the people they had used to fill their war contracts, because the government wasn't helping them pay the wages anymore in getting them the contracts. For instance, we had one of the finest companies in Richmond. They were here when we moved here in '36, until the war effort when they were switched, but they made bathtubs and toilets and sinks. American Radiator and Standard Sanitary, a very fine company. I toured it. We used to visit local companies to get firsthand knowledge of the jobs and so on. I've forgotten what they made for the war effort. They didn't go back into business after the war. I don't know what happened to them. I know that's not the only company. We lost lots of jobs, of course. With the closure of the shipyards, the contracts being cancelled for the war effort, it was pretty tough. The city had really rough times. Places that had been built to serve the people, they either didn't have the money or they weren't here any longer. Although we still maintained, I think, around ninety thousand here in this area. I imagine the city did what they could. I wasn't involved in it then. I have one son and he was a city councilman here for twelve years, and I learned a lot about city

government from him. I'm sure that this is a city council form of government, and I'm sure that the city council had their hands full, trying to deal with all of these problems, and of course, they built schools. The federal government had built schools here, and all of those needs, and now people had to be transferred out, because they didn't have as many children, because people had to work, and if they couldn't find it here, many left. There was a lot of unrest too. I don't know if you are aware of that, but at sometime—let's see, maybe thirty years ago, there was a riot here in Richmond. It was a terrible thing on Macdonald Avenue. Storefronts were broken into. Many things were damaged, terrible things done. I believe it was all based on unemployment and unrest. People just couldn't take it anymore. Where it had been good times, it wasn't. Maybe their unemployment had run out. But anyway, crowd after crowd, lots of black people involved. I wasn't there so I can't tell you first hand. Far from it, everybody was very frightened. I knew business people who just left town then. They just would not stay. Some of our best stores closed and took off. Actually what happened was, it destroyed our downtown. We've never come back from it. What the city did was to build—or whoever, I shouldn't say the city, but they had to give licenses for it-- what is called Hilltop Shopping Center. You ever been out there? That's what grew up then. So, if you want to shop anyplace in Richmond, you really don't go to downtown Richmond you have to go outside of the city. It was really a tragedy. Our library was down on Fourth and Nevin, where we would walk at night, when we were in school, to study. Now, you could never do that. Just too many people, and too many problems. It sounds like we have another garbage man friend. We would pick Wednesday for this area.

00:47:02

**Rigelhaupt**

I was wondering how you see Richmond today: positives and negatives.

00:47:04

**Ziesenhenn**

Well, I've never moved out. My husband and I decided. A lot of people moved out because the high crime rate, the high murder rate. There are a lot of negatives. One is the shopping, because that is not convenient any more. I've reached the point where I won't even drive freeways, and I don't like to go up to Hill Top, or have to get out and go that far to do my shopping. There's nothing for me downtown. Even the banks and things are gone. From Sixteenth Street on down. So, my feeling about the city: it's my home, I have my church here, I have family and friends here, lots of good old friends still are here, but not necessarily in Richmond. A lot of them have moved to the outskirts, like El Cerrito or El Sobrante or Pinole, even further away. Those that I see, I keep in touch with quite a few. It's just my home, and I've gotten to know many, many people. My son lives here, and through him also, I've widened my circles. When you say you are from Richmond, you can always sort of sense a pause or some thought that they are kind of surprised, because Richmond is kind of low on the social scale, as far as reputation goes. It has wonderful people of all races, and I've met many. For instance, I'm just in an average kind of neighborhood. We are all close neighbors, especially this block right here. There have been some new ones over here, but some of them have been here a long time. I've live here in this house about forty-five years. Across the street there's a wonderful Chinese family. He teaches Chinese and English in Chinatown, and she works as a maid in one of the big hotels in San Francisco, has for years. She gets up at the crack of dawn, get home at six o'clock at night. They've raised three children, put them all through college. The oldest is a man. He is now in his first year as an attorney in Washington D.C. with the FBI, hoping to get transferred here. He's not married. The

two girls both now college graduates and into their further training-- One to be a pharmacist, one to be a gynecologist. She'll finish in June, her internship. Isn't that marvelous? Then we have a Caucasian, divorced mother with two grown daughters. Then we have a black, I think divorced man, with a grown son. Then we have a black couple, man and woman. She's a retired teacher, and he's retired from something. Up at this corner we have a black widow living. Next door, a Caucasian couple with their son. They are good neighbors. They are all good neighbors. We're all friends. Here we have rather new homeowners, Caucasians. Just for a few more, let's see. Diagonal from them is a black family. She takes care of children, so she has a lot of black children coming and going. Caucasian couple. These are students, like maybe at Cal or something, a group over here right across from me. A Spanish family in the next house. He's a chef at a German restaurant in San Francisco. In the next house, there's an interesting group. They haven't been there too long. They all paint, the men, and there seems to be a crowd of them. They go out in their painting clothes and trucks in the morning. I don't really know them. So, that's just my typical neighborhood. It's home. You just adjust with what you have to do. I just wanted to stay here, and we did that. My son is happy here, and his wife is just from El Cerrito, so her family is here. You can't change the world, but I just felt a responsibility to stay here. If all good citizens move, what happens to the city?

00:52:28

**Rigelhaupt**

That's the last question I have. Is there anything you'd like to add?

00:52:34

**Ziesenhenn**

I wonder what time it is. How long have I been talking? [laughs] Is it one o'clock?

00:52:39

**Rigelhaupt**

Five 'til.

00:52:39

**Ziesenhenn**

Oh, my gosh. One thing I want to add? Let me think. Well, let's see. I told you worked for the Richmond Museum, which I find very interesting, because it's all the history of Richmond. Because it's so far down at the end of town, where people don't care to go, because of problems that develop. But they don't get many people to come and see this wonderful museum that tells the history of Richmond in actual room layout, in wonderful photographs and displays. I wish more people were aware of that. If you ever have time to come into Richmond, you'd really profit by seeing it. Seeing the shipyards and pictures of the ships that were built. Gosh, amazing things. The first Ford that was ever built at the Ford Motor Company we had down there. There were some great things. Well, later in life, I finally got back to college. I could tell you that. My son was his senior year at Cal and I was still going there. I went to Junior College two years, and then finished at Cal and got a B.A. in English in '79. It took me a while to get through junior college, because I took minimum hours and worked at the same time. I stopped that when I started as a junior at Cal, because I couldn't handle it, so I took full time units up there. That was an enjoyable experience. It meant more to me, because I waited so long to go back to school. Once you start working, it's easy enough to go back. So, I had to finally go, when my son was about ready to go. It was fun. We'd wave to each other. I think that is about it. I've been

widowed for--it's going on twenty years. I live here in this house alone. I enjoy it; I enjoy taking care of it. I do a lot of things. I'm a busy person. That's probably good. I amazed the phone hasn't rung. I'm very thankful. We had garbage trucks, but no phone ringing. I've had some interesting experiences and enjoyed it all. I lost a lot of friends in the war. The president of our class was killed in action. Lots of boys from our church. It has a very tragic side. When I hear them talking today about the situation, you think on both sides when you are older and have been through those things, because maybe war is the answer, but on the other hand, it has terrible sides to it. It could be worse this time than last.

00:56:10

**Rigelhaupt**

We'll stop right there.