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Doris Bier

Rosie the Riveter  
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
David Dunham  
in 2015

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Doris Bier, 2015

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## Interview 1: December 27, 2015

Dunham: Okay, take two with Doris Bier—am I pronouncing your name right, Bier? Okay—for the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front Oral History Project on December 27, here in your lovely home in Chehalis, Washington. And would you start at the beginning? So I ask again, what is your full name and date of birth?

01-00:00:20

Bier: Name is Doris Hastings Bier, and I was born December 30, 1927.

01-00:00:28

Dunham: Okay, that's right—you have a birthday coming up. And where were you born?

01-00:00:29

Bier: Here in Chehalis.

01-00:00:31

Dunham: So you've been a long-time resident of Chehalis.

01-00:00:37

Bier: No.

01-00:00:35

Dunham: No? Just back.

01-00:00:36

Bier: I was born here but I wasn't raised here.

01-00:00:40

Dunham: That's right, okay. Well, before we talk about your growing up can we talk a little bit about your family history? Do you know when your family immigrated to the United States and from where?

01-00:00:50

Bier: My mother's folks came from Ireland, and her dad's folks came from Scotland, so I'm Scotch-Irish. And my dad's folks—I'm not sure where they came from, but they were Irish and English, but they were from the South, and my mother's folks were from the North, from Minnesota and New York. In the Civil War they fought each other. There was a battle and they were against each other. I read the history book on it one time. It was very interesting. My grandfather from the North lost his arm, right arm, and so he was wounded in the war. And I have letters that my grandfather from the North wrote to my grandpa when he was five years old. Lots of letters. Letters about the Vicksburg shelling and the battle on the Merrimack—they're all down at the museum down here. I have about twenty letters from the Civil War.

01-00:01:54

Dunham: That's terrific. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

01-00:01:59

Bier:

[laughing] Well, I never knew my dad. He died when I was two, but I knew his parents and his sister Aunt Thelma. My mother's folks were little short guys and they lived with us off and on. I never knew much about any of them because when I was two I had bronchial pneumonia, in California. We were visiting, and so I developed asthma—and so I was sick all my life. In fact, I didn't have a bed until I was nine years old, because I sat in a rocking chair, hanging on. And so they tried everything to cure asthma. Of course boiled liver and rice and that kind of—soy milk didn't help. But I eventually got over it with—when I was eleven I was more or less healed from asthma and I got to go outside. I remember the first time I got to go out and stand in the rain, and it was fabulous!

01-00:03:00

Dunham:

Wow.

01-00:03:00

Bier:

And I got to learn to roller-skate.

01-00:03:02

Dunham:

Were you able to go to school those years?

01-00:03:06

Bier:

Not much. I went to school, in the first grade, probably a couple of months. They took me up in the car because I couldn't walk up the hill. Second grade I didn't do much; third grade I didn't go at all. Fourth grade I didn't go at all; fifth grade I went a few weeks and I spent three years in the sixth grade before I finally learned enough. They didn't send homework home for kids those days, and my neighbors were the teachers at school. So I resent that now. So I didn't know—I was stupid. I didn't know anything. I could read and write because I read everything in the house. I read my dad's police magazines and everything—Zane Grey and all those guys. And so I survived the sixth grade—

01-00:03:55

Dunham:

What, could I ask, all those years you were ill and having to stay home, what was a typical day like for you and/or for your mom?

01-00:04:04

Bier:

[laughing] I would be sitting in a chair in the front room in a big rocking chair with pillow and blankets, and there was a little radio and water. I had water. I couldn't have milk. And I'd sit there in my rocking chair and look out the window, watch kids go outside. I had a dog, and the dog would sit on my lap. I liked him. And they'd come put wood in the stove to keep it going, because it was a wood stove. It was very boring.

01-00:04:29

Dunham:

And where was this?

01-00:04:30

Bier: This was in Adna. It's six miles west of here.

01-00:04:34

Dunham: Okay, and what were your parents doing then?

01-00:04:41

Bier: My mother was a stay-at-home, of course, because I had a brother and a sister. But my dad, my stepdad, was a painter and a carpenter. So he painted bridges and gas stations. When I got better and I got to go outside I'd go with him once in a while, and I got to climb on the bridges and up the silos, so I really explored. My mother was very protective. She didn't want me to do anything. I'd get sick again. But my dad encouraged me to do things, and the doctor said, "Do it." So they bought me roller skates, and I remember roller-skating on the tennis court at the high school, because Adna had gravel streets and gravel sidewalks. And I learned to ride a bike. And then when I was in the seventh and eighth grade some of the kids didn't have bikes, so we would roller-skate from Adna on the highway, which was six miles, here to Chehalis to go to the show on a Sunday afternoon. That took one hour. And if we rode bicycles it took half an hour to go six miles.

01-00:05:46

Dunham: Was that at the Fox Theater? Or where was that, the show?

01-00:05:47

Bier: No, that's Centralia.

01-00:05:49

Dunham: Oh, oh okay. Excuse me, excuse me, yeah.

01-00:05:52

Bier: It was at the Pix Theater, which is not in operation and the St. Helens Theater which is now just a restaurant and hotel. But we never went to Centralia. We were loyal to Chehalis. But it didn't matter if it was raining or snowing—we'd go anyway, come home in the dark. Our roller skates had the steel wheels, so we shot a lot of sparks. [laughter] So I don't know why my mother let me do it, but my dad encouraged me to do—he says, "You can do anything you want to do if it's legal and moral. You go ahead and do it." But he was a carpenter and he had a tool shop in the back, so I learned how to use band saws and lathes and all kinds of tools.

01-00:06:42

Dunham: What type of stuff would you be doing with those?

01-00:06:44

Bier: He got me a hammer, a special little hammer from Sears, and I built doll furniture and sold it. I was always building something. Oh, and I made rubber guns. You take an inner tube tire and cut a strip off of it. You've got one strip, you stretch it on this rubber gun that had a clothes pin on it and you'd shoot people. [laughter]

01-00:07:10  
Dunham: Shoot people with—?

01-00:07:12  
Bier: With a rubber band.

01-00:07:12  
Dunham: Oh, okay.

01-00:07:14  
Fukumoto: Oh, gosh! [laughing]

01-00:07:17  
Bier: And I had the key to the shop, so I made a lot of guns for the kids in town. I still have one.

01-00:07:21  
Dunham: Oh, you do? I would love to see that!

01-00:07:22  
Bier: I don't know where it's at, but I have one somewhere.

01-00:07:25  
Dunham: So those you didn't sell, you just gave to kids?

01-00:07:27  
Bier: Yeah, we gave them to the kids.

01-00:07:30  
Dunham: But the dolls, you sold the—?

01-00:07:34  
Bier: The furniture? Yeah. I sold them.

01-00:07:35  
Dunham: And how did you sell those?

01-00:07:36  
Bier: The neighbors would come ask me to make them. So I'd go down to Palmer Lumber and they'd have the scrap wood in a big barrel, and Dad would go in and they'd dish me out mahogany and oak. Little scraps of stuff.

01-00:07:54  
Dunham: Yeah, so this was during the Depression.

01-00:07:56  
Bier: Yes.

01-00:07:56  
Dunham: So how did the Depression impact your family?

01-00:08:02

Bier:

Well, we didn't know we were poor because everybody was poor. But I was very irritated, because welfare had plaid dresses for the girls, and I didn't get one. All the other girls wore them. My mother made our clothes. She was a beautiful seamstress. She taught me how to sew. So I had dresses that had ruffles and rickrack, but I wanted a plaid dress not flowers.

01-00:08:29

Dunham:

Do you know why you didn't get a plaid dress?

01-00:08:30

Bier:

She said we didn't need it, said we're poor but we have enough to do with. So she wouldn't—

01-00:08:39

Dunham:

So maybe it was your mother's pride?

01-00:08:40

Bier:

Oh yeah, yeah. She was too proud to take—she thought that was charity and she wouldn't do that. We always had enough to eat and drink and we had enough clothes. Of course I didn't have any shoes for a long time. I didn't need them. But after I got well I wore them out good!

01-00:09:02

Dunham:

And so your brother and sister are younger?

01-00:09:06

Bier:

No, they were both older.

01-00:09:09

Dunham:

Older, okay.

01-00:09:09

Bier:

Yeah, but my brother drowned when he was twenty-one.

01-00:09:12

Dunham:

Oh, I'm sorry.

01-00:09:13

Bier:

And my sister died about three years ago of lung cancer.

01-00:09:17

Dunham:

Oh, I'm sorry.

01-00:09:19

Bier:

So I'm the only one left.

01-00:09:20

Dunham:

Yeah, yeah—and how did your father pass when you were two?

01-00:09:25

Bier:

My own father?

01-00:09:26

Dunham: Yeah.

01-00:09:26

Bier: He was gassed during World War I, and bad food and he had part of his stomach, and so he was very unhealthy. He died of a heart attack when I was two.

01-00:09:43

Dunham: Oh, sorry. When you did get into school what was it like then, when you were able to go full-time?

01-00:09:49

Bier: I hated to go to school because if you are held back you're a dummy. Kids will tease you terribly. And I started school with Toshiko Sato and I flunked, flunked, flunked. In the sixth grade I was in with her brother and then I was with her sister, and so I'd go down three steps of kids. So I was always older than anybody else, and I was tall and skinny and I was the only one in school that wore glasses. And my name was Hastings, so they called me haystack, haystring—all kinds of crazy names. And then all of a sudden I decided I'm just as good as you are and better than some. But my home life wasn't that great. I'm not going to talk about that. But I decided I was just as good as anybody else, and I got my Irish up and told my mother I was going to go pick strawberries. She didn't want me to, but the neighbor said, "I'm going to pick strawberries. I'll take her." So we walked about a mile and a half in the rain, and I got to go pick strawberries when I was twelve.

01-00:11:04

Dunham: This is during the summer or after school?

01-00:11:05

Bier: It was during the summer. Strawberries come out in June. And it was raining and cold and I never got to play in the mud before—I had a ball! I made \$26 in a week—it was a lot of money.

01-00:11:21

Dunham: So where were you doing that? Whose farm was that?

01-00:11:26

Bier: Gorzalongzic Farm up on Ceres Hill off of Highway 6. But we walked—it was probably a mile/mile and a half from home up a steep hill.

01-00:11:39

Dunham: So what did you do with your income?

01-00:11:41

Bier: My money? I bought—my mother said, "I'll buy your clothes, you buy your glasses." So I paid for my glasses. I've always worn glasses. So I bought my pair of glasses with it.

- 01-00:11:57  
Dunham: Once you were able to go to school did you continue to be an avid reader?
- 01-00:12:01  
Bier: Oh yes! I read a book a day yet. I just read, read, read, read.
- 01-00:12:06  
Dunham: So what other types of things were you reading at that time?
- 01-00:12:09  
Bier: Well, the neighbors would give me all their books. They'd bring in books—of course we didn't have a library here in town, but we didn't do that—so I just read everything everybody in town had—magazines, books.
- 01-00:12:22  
Dunham: And did you follow the news of the world? Did you know of the war going on before the US became involved, through newspaper, radio, or other?
- 01-00:12:32  
Bier: Oh yes, because everybody in town was—the high school kids, they didn't want to go to war, and the mothers and dads didn't want them to go, but they were going to be drafted. And we had boys from home that were at Pearl Harbor on the Arizona, and different ones. Oh yeah, we were very aware of the war. We lost one boy at Normandy. We went to school with him.
- 01-00:12:56  
Dunham: Did you have a radio?
- 01-00:12:59  
Bier: Oh yes! My dad had a Philco radio, and we listened to the radio all the time.
- 01-00:13:04  
Dunham: What would you listen to?
- 01-00:13:04  
Bier: Anything I wanted to. I had all day to listen to it! At night it was Dad's, but in the daytime it was mine.
- 01-00:13:10  
Dunham: Okay, so what types of things were on the radio in those days?
- 01-00:13:15  
Bier: Oh—the Canadian Royal Mountie guy and—
- 01-00:13:21  
Dunham: What's that?
- 01-00:13:21  
Bier: He was a Mountie cop in Canada, in the red coat.
- 01-00:13:30  
Dunham: Was it comedy?

- 01-00:13:31  
Bier: No, it was a story. It was an hour-long show every day on the radio. Renfrew the Canadian Mountie. [*Renfrew of the Mounted*] I remember that. I could just see him and his red coat.
- 01-00:13:43  
Dunham: Would you listen to FDR's fireside chats when they were broadcast? No?  
Okay.
- 01-00:13:48  
Bier: No, he wasn't interesting. [laughter] My dad would listen to him, but I didn't.
- 01-00:13:55  
Dunham: Did the New Deal or the WPA impact your family or other folks around that you knew of?
- 01-00:13:58  
Bier: Yeah, my dad worked for them. Yeah, when he didn't have a painting job he would work with them, yeah.
- 01-00:14:04  
Dunham: What types of things would he do then?
- 01-00:14:07  
Bier: Carpenter work and painting.
- 01-00:14:12  
Dunham: Did you, were you—as a child did you think of seriously pursuing carpentry work then?
- 01-00:14:19  
Bier: That's funny, because in high school our superintendent decided that we needed to learn more about government and how to get issues through the Congress and all this and that. So we had to get out a petition, had to get it signed, legal, had to go through the House and everything, everything to do with government. And he decided that if somebody came up with a good solution and it went through the government and Congress and everything, legislature, that we would do it! He thought we were going to do a picnic maybe, a half a day off from school.
- Well, I knew that the boys had an ag shop and a workshop that was empty, because there were no boys at school anymore. And I knew what they had in the woodshop and I knew how to use it. And so I said, "I want to start a girls' woodshop." And I did! And he didn't like it, because I did it and we didn't have a teacher for it. So the teacher that was going to do the girls' woodshop was Mr. Roundtree, and he was our history teacher. But he knew my dad. He called my dad up and says, "Does she know what she's doing?" He said, "Yeah." Well, then just—he said, "If she has trouble, just give me a call." So we started a girls' woodshop and we decided to make cedar chests. That's when I was a junior. And Mr. Bolton says, "You can't do it." And I said,

“Why not?” And so he ordered the lumber—and it was gumwood. He ordered it with the bark and stuff on it, rough cut; thought he’d put a kink in it. He and I didn’t get along.

01-00:16:04

Dunham: I would guess not.

01-00:16:05

Bier: A terrible—that’s another story. And so I called my dad and he said, “Well, you’ve got a planer.” I said, “Yeah.” “Well, run them through the planer!” So there were twelve of us girls, and so we ran it through the planer and got our lumber. We put it together and we just made a big box. How are you going to cut the top off? So we took four boxes on each side of the big bench saw, set the bar where we wanted it, and four girls stood on the boxes and one on each side of the saw and we put it through, tipped it over and over and over, and cut the top off. And we made cedar chests. So we had a good time. And it was so good, in fact, that the photographer from here in town came out and took pictures in our senior year of the stuff that the girls—and the boys finally ended up going to woodshop. And so I have a picture of all the cedar chests and furniture that we made.

01-00:17:14

Dunham: So were you kind of the teacher?

01-00:17:17

Bier: Yeah, I was. They didn’t know—Mr. Roundtree didn’t know a screwdriver from a hammer! [laughter] And he knew it. He was a nice guy. We called him Squarebush. [laughter] We locked him in a cedar chest one day and put the lid on it.

01-00:17:34

Dunham: Didn’t get in trouble for that?

01-00:17:33

Bier: No, no, no. He was proud of me, because he knew my history.

One day at school—I was a junior, maybe a sophomore—and I’d missed a lot of school. My asthma was flaring up again. And we were—the boys were all at a baseball game somewhere, and so the rest of the kids were in the study hall. And I was back in the [class]room reading a book, of course, and I heard Mr. Bolton talking to somebody else and he says, “Well, if I had my way, Doris Hastings would be kicked out of school.” And I looked at him and he looked right at me. He was about as far away as that wall, and he was sitting in the teacher’s chair, tipped back, with a blackboard behind him and the chalkboard with erasers on it. And he said, “She’s missed more school, the poorest attendance of any kid I’ve ever seen and they keep taking her back.” And I stood up and I felt like—you don’t know how much I hated to come back to school. My brother and sister quit school. I wasn’t about to. And I, just like somebody had kicked me in the stomach, I was just sick. And I

looked at him and I did something I've never done since. I whacked him across the face. He slipped, his chair went back, his feet came up, his head hit the chalkboard, and I ran down the hill and I ran home. And my mother called him and said, "You *will* apologize to her." "Yeah, put her on the phone. I'll apologize to her." "No. You will apologize to her in front of the whole school."

They called a student-body meeting the next day in the auditorium, and everybody, seventh and eighth grade, junior high. All the high school kids were there. And he had to apologize to me. "I had no idea that it was not your fault," and he went on and on and on. But I embarrassed him so bad that every time I tried to do something he would stick his oar in and that's why the lumber came with bark on it. But we fooled him and did our job. I graduated. I stayed and I graduated. He said you're too—I was nineteen when I graduated—and he says, "You're too old. Just leave. You have a job." And I said, "You can't make me quit." So that's when I got my dander up and I decided I was just as good as anybody else.

01-00:20:10  
Fukumoto:

Wow, that's a great story.

01-00:20:10  
Dunham:

Yeah, wow. Well, so tell us about how you came to get—you'd been doing the farming, but how you came to get your job as a mechanic?

01-00:20:22  
Bier:

When I was in the seventh and eighth grade I worked in the victory garden with the kids. We hoed corn and all that kind of stuff. And I got to drive the trucks. I knew how to drive—in the field. And I was only sixteen, and the other kids, the seniors were eighteen, so they could go to work for Boeing here in town. They had a Boeing plant here in town.

01-00:20:41  
Dunham:

Are you back in Chehalis at this time?

01-00:20:43  
Bier:

Here in Chehalis, yeah. Now it's the PUD building now. And they would go to school till three o'clock and get out, and go down to work the swing shift. Well, I couldn't do that. I wasn't old enough.

01-00:20:54  
Dunham:

How old did you have to be?

01-00:20:57  
Bier:

Eighteen.

01-00:20:57  
Dunham:

Eighteen, okay.

01-00:20:57  
Bier:

Because there's machinery. And so another girl that was a senior had a sister living in Tacoma working at Fort Lewis, and Tootie said—"Well, let's go up to Fort Lewis and get a job." I said, "They won't hire me. I'm too young." "Well, go anyway. Go with me." So I went with her and we put in an application at Fort Lewis and they gave us a whole bunch of papers to fill out, and I thought they were rather strange for a job application. And it was an aptitude test, and they hired me and said, "Come back tomorrow, nine o'clock." Tootie didn't get hired, but I did, so they sent me to mechanic school over at Lakewood in Tacoma. I got in a great big old army truck that you had to get on a ladder to get in. It had canvas over the top and benches along the sides. There were six of us who went over, and we were there six weeks and we had paperwork and we had hands on motors. To graduate you had to take this big washtub full of a Diamond T motor—it was completely apart except for a carburetor—and make it run. And I did. I had two tries and I turned my key on and it ran. So I went to work the next day.

But I got to the motor base, walked in, and I was—the women were part of an experiment to see whether women could do the job that men did, because they needed all these guys. And so the men that I was going to work with knew women were coming. A woman anyway—but not a sixteen-year-old with long red fingernails. [laughter] We wore steel-toed shoes and a bandana, no hair, no rings, no jewelry. I walked in and I looked at all these guys and they looked at me. My station was the first one here, and the steam room was way over there, and everything came overhead on a basket on an overhead thing. And here came an *axle* for a Diamond T truck. Great big thing. And I looked at the foreman and I said, "I don't know how to do an axle." So they showed me how. So I did them for a week, and there was probably twenty guys on the line down that way. And some of them were grumbling. They knew we were coming, but they didn't want us to work. They thought we were a nuisance.

Well, Bill was probably number six down the road, and he went to school with my dad, and as soon as I saw him I knew I was in trouble because he was a grump. He just—he just complained about everything, and he yelled at me and he says, "What are you doing here?" He recognized me. And I says, "I'm working!" And so he called my dad and said, "Swede?—get your kid home. She has no business being up here. Let her go home." And he says, "She should be playing with dolls." That's where this came from. [pointing to a doll in the room] That story to this. So I did—then they came to Jeep axles, and they had to help me with that because I didn't know how to do it. When we walked into the big door, we went by the shop and got our tools. The tool box was heavy. I couldn't carry it, so I had to have help carrying it. So I had to have too much help. Bill thought I was a problem. Well, nobody else did. Everybody was very nice. Most of the men were nice. Some of them grumbled but they didn't say anything. And he kept saying—he kept calling my dad. And dad said, "You'd better watch out, Bill. She'll have your job." Of course that didn't help do any—and Bill was doing like five axles a day

and I did four by noon. So he called the foreman over and said, “Tear it down. She’s got grease on the brake shoes. She’s got paint on it.” So the foreman tore it down and it was fine. He had inspected three different ones on three different days and they were fine. Well, Bill didn’t like that.

And then one day the foreman tapped me on the shoulder again. And he says—he took me out the big door and there was a Jeep outside. And he said, “This guy’s going to take you over to Gray’s Field. Just go with him and be quiet.” And I thought okay. I didn’t know what was going on. I got over there and there was a big platform and some benches and chairs in front. The guy that drove me over, said, “Go over there and sit in the front row.” Well, that’s where I got my E flag pin. I got this pin when I graduated from mechanic school. [showing pin] I looked up and that guy called my name, and I walked up there and it was a general! I don’t know his name. I wish I had a picture. We couldn’t have cameras up there. And he said, he looked at me and he patted me on the head because I was down lower, and he goes, “Come up here.” And he said, “I’m pleased to reward you with an E pin for efficiency. You’re the best and the youngest mechanic that’s ever been on Fort Lewis.” And so I got my E pin! And I still have it. It’s a wonder I didn’t lose it somewhere, but I never did. And so I’m real proud of that pin.

01-00:26:43  
Dunham:

Were you the only woman on that axle crew?

01-00:26:44  
Bier:

Yes, I was the only one on that one. And I got back and they were just coming off break. And Bill, when they saw me going out with the foreman he said, “Oh, she’s getting fired! She’s getting fired.” And he was just so happy. And he came back in and he said, “You didn’t get fired?” And they had given me a long-stem red carnation. [laughter] I stuck it between my teeth and waltzed in. And he was so mad he was crying! And so they all gave me a hoop and a holler.

The next day I came to work, went by the tool shop to get my tools, and they gave me a pushing tool cart. And I have one very similar to it in my bedroom. My son-in-law a few years ago, he gave me one for my birthday, a Craftsman red tool box with a tool box on top. So that’s my pride and joy. And Bill, when he told my dad, “She should be home playing with dolls”—when I got back, the next day, this little doll, without the clothes, was sitting on my workstand. The guys had given me a little doll to play with. And so when I had kids I crocheted some clothes and they played with it for a long time. But I still have my doll, and Bill has been gone for years, because of course he was my dad’s age.

01-00:28:22  
Dunham:

So this was in Tacoma?

01-00:28:21

Bier:

Up at Fort Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington

01-00:28:24

Dunham:

So where—were you living there then?

01-00:28:27

Bier:

I was living in Tacoma. I boarded with a lady out—way, way out by the park. And it was funny, because when I went with Tootie we were going to live with her sister. Well, her sister didn't know that Tootie invited me to live with them. And so she said, "My apartment's not big enough. No." So I had a job and no place to go. My dad built houses in Tacoma and his foreman lived up there. So I went to Ray's house and cried on their shoulder and she says, "Well, call the YWCA." Of course they were full, but they said, "Come down, because we have people that will take boarders." And she said, "We are careful about who we take. We don't take everybody's name." So I ended up out on Sixteenth and Stevens with a widow lady, and I boarded with her. Her two nieces worked out at the base, so I had a ride with them. So it worked out great, and so I just shared the ride.

Up at Milepost 124, going north towards—just past Fort Lewis, there's a cobblestone arch on the right, and that's where I drove through every day to go to work. But the field is full of trees now, but it used to be full of Jeeps and trucks. And I did so many axles we got ahead of them and they ran out of axles. So they said, "Go tag some." So another guy would drive a Jeep and we'd go out and tag axles and tag Jeeps to bring them in.

01-00:30:11

Dunham:

What does that mean? You'd review them to—?

01-00:30:13

Bier:

We'd go out and they had Jeeps and tanks and trucks, pick-ups out there. And all they wanted were Jeeps to work on, because they'd been up in the Aleutians and they had gunk all over them. I don't know where they were from, but they had to be torn apart and put through the steam room. So I would go out with this one guy in a Jeep. We'd go out and find certain Jeeps in the field and put a flag on them, so that they could haul them in and tear them down. So when they ran out of Jeep axles I'd go out and find some more.

01-00:30:49

Fukumoto:

That was fun.

01-00:30:50

Bier:

I had fun.

01-00:30:52

Dunham:

And when you were working on the axles can you describe the process of some of it? What it was like, what you—?

01-00:30:57

Bier:

Well, the Diamond T was scary, because the differential was this big! We didn't have anything to do with that, but we had to put the brake shoes on and the cylinders and everything, and then put them together and I had to torque them down. But we had to take turns with the torque because there was only one great big long thing, and I had to have help with it. So I'd have to take my turn with that. But they would come in from the steam room overhead on a big crane and they would come down, so we didn't have to lift anything because it would swing in and I'd poke a button and they'd put the axle right down on this frame. And so like I say, the differential was already there. So we assembled the brake shoes and all that kind of stuff, put the hubs on and cinched them down and painted them. We had a stamp. We'd put a number and initials on so they'd know who did it and what day.

01-00:32:06

Dunham:

And what was your salary there, do you recall?

01-00:32:09

Bier:

Well, it was either a dollar and a half or a dollar sixty-something. And that was something else that upset Bill. I was making the same wage he was. And some of the other guys were—there were a few young guys, but they were mostly older people, older guys, and they didn't complain. They probably thought it was a little ridiculous that a kid could get as much as they did, but we didn't talk about wages, except Bill complained about it. And I don't know how he found out how much I was getting. Maybe somebody told him. I don't know. I didn't talk about it. So I didn't—I was just doing the job and I was getting paid for it, and I was having so much fun teasing Bill that—but he thought it was terrible that I was getting paid a wage that he, at his age, he had to work that many years to get.

01-00:33:10

Dunham:

Well, but you had said that you were able to do more axles per day?

01-00:33:14

Bier:

I could do four before noon.

01-00:33:16

Dunham:

So if you—[laughing]

01-00:33:17

Bier:

He did four or five a day! [laughing]

01-00:33:21

Dunham:

If you were doing the same quality and higher quantity, then—?

01-00:33:23

Bier:

Yeah, but he didn't like the idea.

01-00:33:27

Dunham:

Sure, I understand.

01-00:33:28

Bier:

He just didn't think women should be—they should be home doing dishes. They shouldn't be working in a man's field. And a lot of the guys felt that way but they weren't vocal about it. But most of them had sons or nephews in the service, and they were glad that we were there to help. So at the time I didn't realize—what we were doing was just a job. And it was fun to tease Bill.

01-00:33:57

Dunham:

What were your roommates—what kind of work were they doing, the two girls you rode in with?

01-00:34:03

Bier:

No, I was just living with a widowed lady. My ride was her niece.

01-00:34:05

Dunham:

Oh, okay sorry. Oh okay, they weren't roommates.

01-00:34:08

Bier:

No. Margaret—I worked with at the school, she didn't make it, so she went to work in the steam room. So she—I don't know what she did. I lost touch with her after that, at work, because it was a big place and I never saw her at work. But we'd go through the gate, we had to get out of the car and park. We had to go in line, we had to be inspected as we went in, and they had to look in our lunchbox, and when we left the same thing—they'd pat you down in the pockets because people were stealing things. I don't know what they were taking. But you couldn't have a camera—I wish I could have had some pictures, but they wouldn't let you have a camera. I couldn't have a camera at the school either.

01-00:35:07

Dunham:

Do you think they were worried about people taking tools?

01-00:35:10

Bier:

Apparently. But the toolboxes were completely full of tools that I only used maybe one or two pieces. So it was kind of ridiculous. It was an overload of tools.

01-00:35:22

Dunham:

Oh yeah, especially since you had to lug it so far every day.

01-00:35:27

Bier:

Yeah, yeah.

01-00:35:30

Dunham:

How were injuries handled and what was the healthcare situation like?

01-00:35:36

Bier:

I got hit in the head. I was standing there working way—oh, it is an enormous building, way, way over. I don't know whether they're taking an engine apart or what it was, but a bolt about that long, as big as my thumb hit me right

here. Yeah, this side because I was facing that way. And I went down. And so they called and took me in to the emergency room. Boy, that hurt. It didn't do any damage, but it just—I have a hard head. But they sent me home. I didn't work that day or the next day.

01-00:36:13

Dunham: Was that—was the emergency room on-site at the—?

01-00:36:14

Bier: Yes.

01-00:36:16

Dunham: They had their own healthcare?

01-00:36:16

Bier: Yes.

01-00:36:17

Dunham: Okay. And so what was the mix of—was there active military and civilian both then at Fort Lewis?

01-00:36:26

Bier: Yeah, oh—that's interesting too. I was working one day, and you know when you feel somebody behind you and you don't see them coming or hear them? And I looked and there were four Italian prisoners from Fort Lewis. The German prisoners there were behind guards, but the Italians could run free. And they were over there, and they couldn't believe a woman was working with tools. And they wanted cigarettes. They kept tapping me on the shoulder. I didn't smoke. So they went down the hall and some of the other guys gave them cigarettes and they left. But yeah, that was kind of spooky.

01-00:37:08

Dunham: Did you have any other interactions with the prisoners of war, Italian or German?

01-00:37:10

Bier: No.

01-00:37:11

Dunham: But you knew they were there.

01-00:37:14

Bier: Yeah, we knew they were there.

01-00:37:15

Dunham: So the Italians who had more freedom of movement, were they working? Or what were they—?

01-00:37:18  
Bier: They were just wandering around looking for—they probably should have been working somewhere but they were looking for cigarettes. And so Bill wouldn't give them one, but some of the other guys did, and so then they left.

01-00:37:31  
Dunham: After you got hit in the head did Bill heckle you anew?

01-00:37:33  
Bier: Oh yeah, always did. He said you deserve it. That type of thing.

01-00:37:39  
Dunham: But you had no doubt about coming back?

01-00:37:39  
Bier: Oh no!

01-00:37:40  
Dunham: How about your mom and dad? Were they supportive, both of them, of your—?

01-00:37:43  
Bier: Oh yes! My mother just gave up on me if I wanted to do something. Dad would encourage me to do it. Like when he was painting bridges, I could climb up on the bridge with him. If he was painting silos I could climb up the silos. My mother never knew it.

01-00:38:06  
Dunham: Did anyone he was working for ever object or voice any concern around it? No?

01-00:38:09  
Bier: No.

01-00:38:12  
Dunham: So did you enjoy this work?

01-00:38:15  
Bier: Yes, I did. I like to do things. I learned to drive when I was eleven. My dad put me behind the wheel and says go home. [laughter] And so I learned to drive when I was eleven. And I could change a tire. He made sure I knew how to change a tire if we had a flat tire. We had a '36 Ford that didn't have any brakes on it, so I had to be sure and drive it right.

01-00:38:35  
Dunham: How do you drive a car with no brakes? [laughter]

01-00:38:36  
Bier: They would work sometimes, sometimes they didn't. They were very touchy breaks. You'd shift down and go slow.

01-00:38:44  
Dunham:

Right, okay.

01-00:38:44  
Bier:

And you didn't speed anywhere.

01-00:38:46  
Dunham:

Yeah, and hills, I guess—did you have hills around?

01-00:38:51  
Bier:

Oh, we had hills! I'd go up Crego Hill, but I'd go over clear down Brown Road and I'd come down East Crego. I would never go down the hill. I never trusted that car.

01-00:39:04  
Dunham:

Would you call yourself a tomboy? Was that an expression used at the time?

01-00:39:11  
Bier:

Not really. I liked dresses and ruffles and dolls and stuff, but I still climbed the cherry tree so I could eat cherries, climbed the apple tree to get apples, simply because it was there and my mother didn't want me to ever do it.

01-00:39:32  
Dunham:

For the job did you join a union?

01-00:39:33  
Bier:

No.

01-00:39:33  
Dunham:

No, okay.

01-00:39:34  
Bier:

Although one summer I worked as a waitress at a restaurant in Centralia. It's not there anymore. And I was—they wanted me to join the union. I was seventeen and I was in school, and I knew the union lady because she was from Adna. And whenever she came, started coming—I was only working part-time. And the other waitresses said, "You don't have to join the union. Don't do it, because they take your wages. You have to pay, and you're only part-time." And so whenever she came around they shooed me into the bathroom. [laughing] So I never joined the union. And then one—the following fall I went in there to eat at the restaurant and they had a check for me because they got a raise from the union and I got an increase in salary, so I didn't join the union but I got a raise from them.

01-00:40:41  
Dunham:

Did you enjoy that kind of work, waiting tables?

01-00:40:43  
Bier:

Yeah, it was kind of fun. I worked from ten at night to six in the morning. And during the fair time that place was so packed you couldn't walk through. And I had the booths in the back on the right-hand side, and I'd stack the coffee

cups up about four tall and try to get through the people. The roustabouts, the guys from the circus, from the fair were there. They were pretty rowdy. But they were—yeah, I enjoyed it. I had good tips.

01-00:41:19

Dunham: Was this during the war still?

01-00:41:21

Bier: Yeah.

01-00:41:21

Dunham: So that was part of it—so did the Boeing factory, was it a twenty-four hour operation?

01-00:41:28

Bier: They worked swing shift. I don't know, because I didn't—

01-00:41:31

Dunham: Graveyard, okay. So how did that affect, and how else did Chehali[s] change during the war years, but especially around the wartime?

01-00:41:40

Bier: Well, we had blackouts. You couldn't have any lights. You couldn't be on the street with flashlights. And the bridge at Adna was over the Chehalis River, and they had an armed guard on the bridge. I don't know why, but it was the main highway to the coast. They had an air raid warden, and he sat up—the school was on top of a hill and he'd be up there with his little blinkers and catch airplanes going across. But we didn't pay too much attention to it, because—had rationing. You couldn't—meat was rationed, shoes were rationed, sugar of course.

01-00:42:22

Dunham: Did you drive to and from Tacoma or did you come home for the weekends?

01-00:42:24

Bier: I'd come home—sometimes I'd come home on the weekend on a bus. Dad took me up and I stayed up there and I'd come home on the bus. Then he'd pick me up here in town.

01-00:42:42

Dunham: So what was it like being away from home at sixteen?

01-00:42:43

Bier: I liked it! My mother was a grump. My dad said, "You'd complain if you were hung with a new rope." She complained about everything, and of course my brother and sister were gone from home. And I think my mother was glad I was away from home for a while, because she was—I didn't like grumpy people. You know I—she had a hard life. I shouldn't complain about her.

01-00:43:15  
Dunham:

Did you have the opportunity to socialize up in Tacoma? Were there dances and things?

01-00:43:20  
Bier:

Oh yeah. [laughing] I met a girl and she lived near where I was. So we'd go rent bicycles, ride all over Tacoma. Eleventh Street in Tacoma goes straight down a hill, you go down far enough it goes across a bridge. My bicycle chain broke on Eleventh Street. I hit the curb. I had to walk my bike home. We got a tandem bike one time, rode out to the park, rode all over the park. They're fun if you have somebody that knows how to ride a bike. But no, we rode all over Tacoma. Of course I knew Tacoma because my dad built houses up there. And he'd be up there—he'd board up there during the week and then he'd come home on weekends, and we'd get back in the car and go back up on Saturday morning so he could order lumber and whatnot he needed for the next week. And so—in South Tacoma, so us kids had the free—we could walk all over town. We learned a lot.

01-00:44:24  
Dunham:

While you were working—so were you called the Women Ordnance Workers, or WOWs? Was that a name that was described then? No, okay.

01-00:44:31  
Bier:

We weren't called anything.

01-00:44:33  
Dunham:

Okay, I just had read about that.

01-00:44:33  
Bier:

Those *females*. No.

01-00:44:38  
Dunham:

Were there USO dances or other activities like that?

01-00:44:40  
Bier:

I wasn't old enough to be able to go.

01-00:44:42  
Dunham:

That's right. I wasn't sure if you were old enough.

01-00:44:44  
Bier:

Couldn't go.

01-00:44:44  
Dunham:

Okay, did you know of them or did you want to?

01-00:44:47  
Bier:

Sure! Because we danced at school, and I could go to dances when I was home. My mother let me go with the other kids to the dance. And so—but I couldn't go to the USO because I wasn't old enough.

01-00:45:02  
Dunham:

Were you dating at all at this time? Or what was dating like then?

01-00:45:06  
Bier:

Yeah. I had a friend that went in the navy. He was more serious than I was, but he was a serious guy. But I wasn't that interested in him. But the girl that I went to school with, Margaret, her boyfriend owned a dairy farm and had a guy working for him who was in a farm deferment. Couldn't go—he tried to join the coast guard or army or something and he was on a farm deferment. And she said, "You want to go on a blind date?" And I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, this guy is six feet tall and he's got curly hair." And I was five seven and a quarter, so I was tall. I've shrunk four inches. And I was taller than anybody—and I said, "Six feet? Who is he?" So she told me who he was and I said yeah, sure.

So we were going to go to the movie down here in Centralia. Well, they came to pick me up in a pick-up, and so I had to sit on his knees all the way down here. And he thought they were taking me to Adna, to home. He knew I was from Adna, which was six miles from here. We turned into the fairgrounds. There's a rodeo. I never was so miserable in my life! I stayed away from horses and hay, cut lawn, because of asthma. We were in the front row and it was summertime, and it was a rodeo with dust. I sneezed, I wheezed. My nose ran. I had one Kleenex with me. It was miserable, just horrible. And we got—finally got home, back to Olympia. Margaret said, "Did he ask you for a date?" And I said, "Who is the world would date somebody with a snotty nose and eyes running and sneezing?" He and Delbert were there the next morning to take us to church, and that was the beginning.

I met him when I was sixteen and we got married after I graduated from high school. I had my diamond ring for two years at school. Mr. Bolton said, "You can't wear a diamond ring to school." I says, "Why not?" So I got to wear my ring. [laughter] And in the junior play I was a hillbilly and had my diamond ring on. And one of the girls said, "You can't wear that." And Mr. Rider said, "I didn't put it on her finger and I'm not taking it off." So I wore it all through high school, and we got married ten days after I graduated, because a girl could get married at eighteen, but a boy had to be twenty-one in those days. And Clayton said, "I'm not having my dad sign for me." His birthday was June 10. So he got a license on June 10 and we got married on Friday, June 13.

01-00:48:17  
Dunham:

Was that a state law, do you know, that men had to be twenty-one?

01-00:48:20  
Bier:

Yeah.

01-00:48:23  
Dunham:

Okay, interesting.

01-00:48:24

Bier:

You had to be twenty-one, so we got married on Friday the thirteenth and his father was furious, because that was a Masonic lodge night and he never missed a meeting. Anyway, so we were married on Friday the thirteenth. 1947.

01-00:48:45

Dunham:

And what was your husband doing then?

01-00:48:49

Bier:

He was working for the railroad at the time. He was a hostler. Do you know what that is?

01-00:48:52

Dunham:

No.

01-00:48:55

Bier:

They had a roundhouse down in Centralia, which they don't have anymore. And the engines would come in, the coal-burning engines would come in, and he'd have to either bank the fires or start them for another trip—or come back to Chehalis and get an engine and take it back. And so that's what he was doing then. He was doing that in the evening, and he had a truck and he was hauling lumber and ties in the daytime. So he was always—he drove truck for a long time, then he was twenty-one. Twenty-two he had a sawmill with a partner, and the dumb thing burned down on Easter Sunday.

01-00:49:37

Dunham:

Oh no!

01-00:49:38

Bier:

And so then he worked different places. Truck driver for a meat-packing company. I worked in the office as bookkeeper and he drove truck. He built houses. He was a shareholder in Centralia Plywood. He sold that share and ten of them built Cardinal Doors, which was a door plant. And he was the last survivor. We lost him in November. But there were ten of them, who built the door plant. Then he went down to Oregon. We were down there for four years into plywood. He liked plywood. He was a superintendent down there, but then they started building houses up here for Cardinal Doors, so he came back. His folks were old. My age now. So we came back up here and he ended up at the hospital. The last fourteen years of his life he was the chief engineer they called it, head of maintenance. And all he did was sit at his desk with his phone and tell everybody what to do. He worked till he was seventy, and then he wished he hadn't quit. Before he was doing that he was up in Alaska at Prudhoe Bay, clear at the tippy top, and he was an electrician. He'd work two weeks and be off for a month, go back and work for two weeks and be off for six weeks. He had a ball! That was two years.

01-00:51:16  
Dunham:

You mentioned you did bookkeeping in those early years. Did you have a desire to go back and do physical work again, or did you have opportunity to do that ever?

01-00:51:26  
Bier:

I've done a lot. I've done bookkeeping several times, and at the door plant I ran a little rip [saw]. It had five blades and it cut the two by four. You'd put it through and they would cut ribs off of it. It had five blades. You'd poke them through; they were about that long. Clayton was superintendent. And he said, "We need you to come in and go to work." I made \$3.10 an hour, and he wouldn't give me a raise. I was the boss's wife. So there were men that didn't like me in there either. There were different women working there because the shareholders' wives would work if they wanted to, and so there were four of us working.

01-00:52:08  
Dunham:

Doing similar work?

01-00:52:09  
Bier:

Yeah, doing similar work. In fact, one of them worked for my dad, and he was over assembling the stiles. And so I would stand there at the little rip—he didn't tell me how to work it or anything. So I figured out how to do it and had this big pallet of these, and it was this tall and this big. And I'd stand there and poke them through. And Ray and this other guy Tomascher says, "She's not doing her work." And he says, "What do you mean?" He says, "Well, she's just leaning on her elbow and she's just doing this. She's not getting anything done." He says, "Go talk to the jitney driver." The lift driver couldn't keep me in lumber. I would do four boxes to the other guy's two boxes. So then I was on the tenoner, which put ends on the stiles, on the things, and I'd do the same thing. So yeah, I like to work. Anything to do with machines I liked.

01-00:53:20  
Dunham:

Were there other types of machine work you were able to do through the years then?

01-00:53:24  
Bier:

Not there, no. The easy money was I was a seamstress, and so I did a lot of sewing. Paid for a lot of trips to Texas and Mexico. Yeah, I made good money sewing.

01-00:53:41  
Dunham:

Since most—a lot of men were resistant to women doing that type of work, you were fortunate to have your stepfather and your husband, it sounds like, were supportive. But do you feel like you could have had more opportunities or would have liked more opportunities?

01-00:53:52

Bier:

If I wanted to work more I could have. Yeah. I would have, but I ended up with five kids, so we decided I would stay home. I did some work after the kids were half grown, but yeah, when Peggy was little I worked a lot. That's when I was working at the door plant. But the bigger kids were home. We lived on a farm. The kids had the creek and a cow and a horse and a big dog and the cat, and so they had the life of Riley.

01-00:54:25

Dunham:

Where was that? Was that here in—?

01-00:54:25

Bier:

That was at Rochester. That's where Clayton grew up. He was born in California and they moved up here when he was three. He was born in Clovis, California and they moved up here when he was three, and he went to school, graduated from Rochester.

When we were first married I worked in the school office as a secretary, and so that was funny, because it was upstairs in the old building. (That school had burned.) And a big broad hallway outside the office and they had two ping-pong tables. Well, kids played ping-pong out there, and this one kid, nobody played with him because he was a crybaby. If he didn't win he'd just—a spoilsport. His name was Bud. And so I says, "I'll play with you!" And he got up, "Well, I can beat *her*." I was ping-pong champion at home in the school. So I played ping-pong until the superintendent decided it wasn't very ladylike to be playing ping-pong.

01-00:55:30

Dunham:

So back at school you were beating all the boys.

01-00:55:31

Bier:

Yeah.

01-00:55:32

Dunham:

Were any other girls playing?

01-00:55:33

Bier:

Not too many.

01-00:55:38

Dunham:

Yeah, okay. And so that was another clash with the superintendent. I'm sure he gave you a letter of recommendation to be secretary at the other school, right? [laughter]

01-00:55:45

Bier:

Yeah, but I stayed there quite a while. I did the school year over there, but I didn't go back, because I didn't like the way they were talking. "You can't play ping-pong. You have to wear a skirt a certain length. You can't wear pants to school. Even in the office, you can't wear pants." So I did something else.

- 01-00:56:09  
Dunham: Did you see, aside from your own personal fashion, did you see fashion change for women during the war years some? Or was that more just at work?
- 01-00:56:18  
Bier: Oh yeah, when I was in school you couldn't wear pants to school. I did. Doctor's orders, because I was too cold and I'd get sick and get pneumonia again. And we lived in Adna, in town, but we had to walk to school, which was less than a mile, straight here then we went up a big hill. I couldn't go up the hill. I couldn't breathe. I had a bad heart, which I still do. And so I had to ride the bus, with the doctor's prescription. And then I wore pants. And of course then I'd wear them with white ribbons. They didn't have blue jeans for girls then. And so I made my pants and I made sure I wore ribbons. So I didn't realize I was a rebel, but I got along.
- 01-00:57:11  
Dunham: Yeah. Well, I wanted to ask you about the family—when you were at school you were classmates with the Sato family, was it? And was there one other Japanese family or more in town?
- 01-00:57:21  
Bier: Nakamuras. And they were—Yoshio, Masuo, Fumiko, and Miyoko. And these two were my brother and my sister's age, and Masuo was my age. They didn't come home. They were deported to Japan. Miyoko stabbed a guard, so they didn't come home.
- 01-00:57:52  
Dunham: At Tule Lake?
- 01-00:57:53  
Bier: Yes.
- 01-00:57:53  
Dunham: Wow. How did you learn of what happened there?
- 01-00:57:57  
Bier: The Satos. They came home. [laughing]
- 01-00:57:59  
Dunham: They were at Tule Lake also?
- 01-00:58:02  
Bier: They were at Tule Lake. The Satos lived next door to my uncle, there at Littel. And they had a truck garden with irrigation. Successful farmers. And Mrs. Sato was born on that farm. She was an Ohi. And they couldn't own property because Tom was born in Japan. So her brother bought the property for them. And when they were in camp, my uncle paid the taxes and tried to keep the place together. But people came in and stripped the house, took everything, and by the time they got back, his irrigation system was all rusted out and nothing would work. Mrs. Sato died when Janie was ten days old. And

Toshiko—she was my age—raised her and they came home and they had Mrs. Sato’s ashes with them. And then when Tom finally died here they took the two ashes and buried them at Claquato [Cemetery] right near my folks’ burial plot, so they’re together there.

But they had a hard time. A lot of people around Adna didn’t want them coming home. I belonged to the grange, the junior grange, and I was one of the graces up front. And I remember they were getting up a petition to keep the Satos from coming home. It’s in that book. Uncle Antoine had been a school teacher turned farmer. And he stood up—and he was a tall Englishman, very proper—I never ever saw him break down and cry. Tears were going down his face and he was just so upset. He said, “You people, talking about the Satos, the finest people on earth.” And anyway, he kept going on and on and people were booing him. I was ornery to myself, but I was bashful in those days. When he finally sat down he just sat down and put his head down, and I stood up at the end of that grange hall and I told them what for.

Mr. Sato would come every Christmas eve and put oranges on the kids’ porches. And when he had new celery or new stuff he’d bring it to town and give it to people. He was just a marvelous guy. Mrs. Sato never came around, but I’d eaten dinner with them. They had fresh corn. We’d gone under the big oak tree and we had corn on the cob. And then when I drove I’d go and pick the kids up for Sunday school. And so I told them what I thought of them, and then I sat down and realized I was screaming and yelling at grownups and I was kind of embarrassed. But I stood up for them, I really—and when they did come home—they left on the train. We couldn’t go see them off. But when my friend and I were in Chehalis and we were crossing the street where the old bus station used to be, down by the railroad depot, I was crossing here and here came Mr. Sato. A little short guy, Tom. I never called him Tom in my life, until that day, and I says, “Tom?” And he looked at me and I looked at him, and Dolores walked on by. She wouldn’t talk to him. She knew the kids. She wouldn’t talk to him. And I had to go home with her, or I wouldn’t have got home, but I should have gone to the depot, because the kids were over there waiting for me. He went to the bus station and called Uncle Anton. So we made up for it. They were nice people.

And then when we got married, Janie and Irene were three and four, and of course Toshiko said, “Of course they can be your flower girls.” The church I grew up in and the church Clayton grew up in said no. If those kids are in it, no. I says, “Fine. We’ll find one that will.” People said, “If those so-and-so’s are in it—.” I said, “We don’t want you anyway.” But so we found a church and Mr. Sato—they were little bitty kids, and they were so cute. Toshiko had them dressed in white satin, and Clayton’s mother and I crocheted little baskets and they had roses in them, and they’ve never forgotten it.

- 01-01:02:46  
Dunham: Was it—what kind of church, or what was the church that you found that would do it?
- 01-01:02:49  
Bier: Presbyterian.
- 01-01:02:49  
Dunham: Was that what your churches were as well? No. What were your churches?
- 01-01:02:54  
Bier: Evangelical. And Clayton's was a Methodist.
- 01-01:03:03  
Dunham: Did you face other prejudice yourself for being friends with the Satos?
- 01-01:03:08  
Bier: No, no, because most people liked them; they welcomed them back. But there were a few that didn't. But it was funny—my daughter lived in Anchorage and I was up there one time. And this Hawaiian came in, big guy. And I was sitting on the floor crocheting in the corner with the kids, and he said something about those nasty niggers. And when I looked up at him I said, "You know something? You sound kind of prejudiced." "Well, aren't you?" I says, "Yeah, I am—for them. I have a black son-in-law; I have a son-in-law who's part Cherokee. I'm Scotch-Irish and Clayton's German. We have Norwegian, Mexican, Puerto Rican—Carol's Puerto Rican. Now we have a Korean daughter-in-law," what else have we got? Everything! And so when I had ten of the grandkids together one time, took them in for a picture, and they thought I had a daycare because I had so many different nationalities. And one boy was from California, Addison. He's a grown-up man now. I was over at Sears and I agreed on the background. I think it was light blue or light green, and the kids were gone before I got my pictures back. You can't see Addison. They changed the background. You can't see him. He was standing in the corner. Oh, I was mad. But he didn't like that black kid.
- 01-01:04:47  
Dunham: What, so he just cropped him out?
- 01-01:04:51  
Bier: He faded him out with the background.
- 01-01:04:57  
Dunham: Wow. What did you—?
- 01-01:04:58  
Bier: Oh, I objected. They gave us the pictures free, and I says, "That doesn't do any good. That kid's in California." I still have the picture, but—
- 01-01:05:09  
Dunham: This is recently? Or how long ago was this?

- 01-01:05:12  
Bier: No, Addison is now forty, so he was probably twelve at the time.
- 01-01:05:15  
Dunham: Okay, but this is the eighties or something?
- 01-01:05:16  
Bier: Yeah, it's still—our son-in-law was very hesitant to come up here, because we don't have blacks up here.
- 01-01:05:25  
Dunham: I was going to ask during the Boeing time, I know it was a relatively small factory here, lots of other places there was a tremendous migration of whites and blacks from the South. Were there any that came here?
- 01-01:05:37  
Bier: No, but there was a black boy, a black family that lived at Rochester. Grandma Coggswell and her grandson from Seattle came down and went to school. He was a good-looking boy, quite an athlete, a star athlete, married a white girl, and the father never forgave her and he died never forgiving her. It was a terrible situation.
- 01-01:06:05  
Dunham: About when would that have been that they married, do you know?
- 01-01:06:07  
Bier: Yeah, it was probably in—probably 1950, '52 maybe.
- 01-01:06:13  
Dunham: Yeah, because I know some people—California still had anti-miscegenation laws and Washington did not, that prevented mixed race—so I know some people who came up here to get married.
- 01-01:06:24  
Bier: Clayton's father was on the school board, chairman of the school board. Stubborn German. And he hired a PE teacher that was a black lady. A tall, slender black lady—they called her Freddie. And she was fine. Everybody accepted her. But then Bob came home. He was in the army. And he came home and it all changed. "We don't want a black family in town." And Grandpa Ben Bier was a weird guy, but he stood up for Freddie, and then she got pregnant and they named their son Golden Eric. Eric after the president of the University of Washington where she got her master's degree. His name was Eric something. I had a guy come to my door one day, Jay, and he said, Jay Hillis, with a petition. He says, "Here's a petition I want you to sign. We're trying to run that so-and-so, Freddie and Bob out of town." I says, "Jay, you're a little late. I'm giving her a baby shower tonight." [laughter] So—and so she goes to all the class reunions out at Rochester. She missed this last one. She's very feeble now. And I went up to her one day and I said, "Freddie, do you remember me?" And her son Golden was with her. And she said, "How

could I forget the lady who gave me the biggest baby shower in the world?"  
And so I got a picture of her and Eric. So—I like people.

01-01:08:15

Dunham: Yeah, but that prejudice clearly existed here. So a petition—like what kind of petition would that be?

01-01:08:23

Bier: To run her out of town!

01-01:08:23

Dunham: So a legal petition of some kind?

01-01:08:25

Bier: Well, it was probably legal to *him*.

01-01:08:29

Dunham: Yeah.

01-01:08:32

Bier: He just didn't like black people and he thought they shouldn't be in the school business teaching his kids. And she was a PE teacher. I said, "She's smarter than you are." I said, "She has a master's degree and you're out selling eggs." [laughter]

01-01:08:50

Dunham: Did you—you said before you didn't get a backlash for being friends with the Satos, but like in that case was there any backlash against you for sticking up for Freddie?

01-01:09:01

Bier: Some people. "Oh, that's just that Hastings girl. She's got a big mouth." I'd stick up for anybody that was getting bad mouthed.

01-01:09:09

Dunham: Sometimes people can be cruel and maybe take it out on kids, your kids or something?

01-01:09:13

Bier: Oh no, no, no.

01-01:09:16

Dunham: You didn't have any problem with that? Good, okay.

01-01:09:20

Bier: No, we didn't have any of that.

01-01:09:22

Dunham: And did you continue in the church? Or what church—

01-01:09:25

Bier:

Well, after—no, I never went back. Never went back to that church. They were just some very narrow-minded people. But my mother and dad had trouble with my black son-in-law. My father-in-law really had trouble with him. In fact, they sent Linda a check for Christmas, two years after they were married, to Linda Bier, not Linda Blackman. But after they had a little girl then he broke down and accepted them. But John knew what Ben felt like, so he was never comfortable around him. But he was the best son-in-law we ever had. But we lost him when he was fifty-four to cancer.

01-01:10:14

Dunham:

I'm sorry.

01-01:10:20

Bier:

So we have quite a mixed-up family, for nationalities.

01-01:10:23

Dunham:

Diverse, a diverse family.

01-01:10:26

Bier:

Yeah, I don't think there are many that we've missed. We even had Welsh and Hawaiian mixed in.

01-01:10:35

Dunham:

Let's see—we wanted to—maybe we could take a break and take a look at some of your photos? [interruption in recording]

01-01:10:44

Bier:

I can't think of anything.

01-01:10:45

Dunham:

Okay, well back with Doris. You were just starting to say—we weren't recording then—but about the military men who camped—or what was it?

01-01:10:53

Bier:

They were bivouacked up on Crego Hill. There was a big forest, a lot of timber up there, and they were bivouacked out at Grand Mound. In fact, they drilled wells for them out there, so they'd have water out on the prairie. I didn't see those, but we had a lot of Jeeps around town, and my sister liked to ride in the Jeep. So she had this boyfriend she'd made and so she—they were going to go to the show. And I said, "Well, I want to ride in the Jeep too." So he took me for a ride in the Jeep, went up over curbs and off of curbs, you know, and then he took me home and then they went to the show.

01-01:11:32

Dunham:

Okay, so a little adventure.

01-01:11:32

Bier:

So I got to ride in the Jeep then.

01-01:11:35  
Dunham: So bivouacked is the expression? I'm not familiar with that expression.

01-01:11:41  
Bier: Oh! Well, yeah. That's what they call it—camping and training.

01-01:11:41  
Dunham: That's just the word. [laughing]

01-01:11:42  
Bier: Camping out. Yeah, but they had tents and they lived up there.

01-01:11:50  
Dunham: This is while they were active in the military?

01-01:11:52  
Bier: Yes, they were soldiers up there. We didn't see them, but they were there. We knew—because the road was closed.

01-01:11:59  
Dunham: Okay, so what about housing—I know you had a hard time getting housing. Was there—there were quite a lot of people coming to Fort Lewis. How did other people find places to live? If soldiers were camping, then maybe it was challenging?

01-01:12:11  
Bier: But they were—they were on maneuvers.

01-01:12:12  
Dunham: Oh, they were training. Okay, training, okay sorry.

01-01:12:14  
Bier: They were training, yeah. Training campers.

01-01:12:17  
Dunham: Okay, but how about all the workers there? Did they build temporary housing at all up there? And did they have to here in Chehalis?

01-01:12:24  
Bier: No, they just got local people. They just took—

01-01:12:27  
Dunham: Okay, they just boarded with people? Oh they just—oh, the workers were all local people.

01-01:12:31  
Bier: Local people worked. The men had jobs already, but the women went to work. So most of the workers there were women.

01-01:12:37  
Dunham: Yeah, that's what I thought.

01-01:12:41  
Bier: Older women and kids that were old enough. I have no idea how many worked there, but I know they had two shifts.

01-01:12:48  
Dunham: Right, okay.

01-01:12:48  
Bier: But yeah, there were women working there that—I was surprised later that—  
“Yeah, we worked at Boeing.”

01-01:12:58  
Dunham: So they didn’t have the tremendous migration from the South, but other parts of Oregon and Washington did with the Kaiser shipyards.

01-01:13:04  
Bier: No. No. They probably did, but we didn’t.

01-01:13:07  
Dunham: Did you ever hear of Vanport down in Oregon?

01-01:13:07  
Bier: Oh yes.

01-01:13:08  
Dunham: What did you—

01-01:13:09  
Bier: Yes. We knew about Vanport.

01-01:13:11  
Dunham: Okay, so what did you hear about Vanport? I know there was a big—?

01-01:13:12  
Bier: That it flooded out and killed people. We went to Portland a lot, so I knew where Vanport was. We went right by it all the time. So we knew where it was and we knew what had happened.

01-01:13:26  
Dunham: And did you know about its ethnic makeup?

01-01:13:28  
Bier: No.

01-01:13:30  
Dunham: Okay, because it had a significant African American population.

01-01:13:33  
Bier: It was—yes, it was—like trailer houses and cheap housing.

01-01:13:36  
Dunham: Yeah, it had been the wartime housing constructed for the shipyards and never really made permanent.

- 01-01:13:41  
Bier: Yes, that was Vanport. And it was a low—down by the river. Yeah, we saw lots of pictures of Vanport.
- 01-01:13:49  
Dunham: Did you have friends, older friends, who worked at Boeing? Or did you—?
- 01-01:13:54  
Bier: Neighbors did. Yeah, neighbors did.
- 01-01:13:59  
Dunham: So you—we didn't cover how you left your time being a mechanic, because I know you were there through the summer and then into the early fall?
- 01-01:14:11  
Bier: October—I was going to quit school and stay working. And I thought—Clayton takes credit for me not quitting—but I decided my brother and sister both quit school, and I—Mr. Bolton tried to get me to quit school. And I told the guy up there, I said, "I'm going back to school." He didn't want to let me go and he says, "Well, I can't stop you." And so I said, "Bye!" And so I went back to school. I started late, but—
- 01-01:14:44  
Dunham: And why was that decision made?
- 01-01:14:47  
Bier: My brother and sister quit school, and I'm not a quitter. And Mr. Bolton tried to get me to quit and he'd run me down all the time, and I had to go back and keep him company. [laughter]
- 01-01:14:59  
Dunham: This was your sophomore or junior year?
- 01-01:14:59  
Bier: Junior year.
- 01-01:15:00  
Dunham: Junior year, okay.
- 01-01:15:01  
Bier: Junior and senior year.
- 01-01:15:02  
Dunham: So was it hard to transition back to school after doing that work, or had you had enough?
- 01-01:15:09  
Bier: Yes, because I enjoyed the freedom up there. Friendly people, not grumpy people. Some of the teachers were grumpy. The kids were fine. Then the Satos came back, so that made it nice.

- 01-01:15:27  
Dunham: And we talked about when they came back, but I don't know if we talked about when they left, when they were taken to camps. Can you describe what you know of that?
- 01-01:15:33  
Bier: It was terrible. They were allowed one suitcase apiece. And if they couldn't sell something, they had to leave it. And they came home to nothing. But yeah, they got on the train and they were sent to Puyallup, and they were in the horse barns in Puyallup, and they weren't even clean. They don't talk about it much. But Eddie would never have his picture taken for a long time. Johnny would never have his picture taken, but the girls always did. But when they came home it was very hard. Mr. Sato did everything. He worked on the railroad, he laid ties—he did everything he could to make a living.
- 01-01:16:25  
Dunham: They couldn't recreate the farm? No.
- 01-01:16:30  
Bier: Everything was rusty and not working right at all. And so—but the kids all worked and did something. I never realized how bad it was because they never said anything.
- 01-01:16:47  
Dunham: Were the kids that were your and your siblings' age, did they—?
- 01-01:16:49  
Bier: Toshiko was my age. And she was the one who was raising the family, because Mama had died. And so she would have graduated two years before me, so she was out of school. Because I started school with her and I spent all those years in the sixth grade, so she was out of—
- 01-01:17:08  
Dunham: Did she finish school in camp, do you know, or did she—?
- 01-01:17:09  
Bier: No, she graduated in Adna—I think. No, she didn't! No. Kids went to school down there, because there's pictures of the—no.
- 01-01:17:21  
Dunham: In the camp, maybe, she would have been old enough.
- 01-01:17:22  
Bier: Yeah, I don't know whether she finished school or not. I don't remember. I don't think we ever talked about it. But Eddie came back to school when he was a junior. And Amy and Johnny were younger.
- 01-01:17:44  
Dunham: I'm just grabbing that, sorry, it's just making a little noise, the book.

01-01:17:44  
Bier: Oh, I'm sorry!

01-01:17:45  
Dunham: That's okay. Now that our real mic is working.

01-01:17:49  
Bier: My fingers wiggle.

01-01:17:52  
Dunham: Yeah, no problem.

01-01:17:55  
Bier: No, the kids were—they accepted back in school, because everybody liked them. But Toshiko, she had a hard life. It was tough, but she was a good person.

01-01:18:11  
Dunham: Do you remember where you were on V-E Day or V-J Day?

01-01:18:16  
Bier: Yeah. My sister and I and her girlfriend were walking down the railroad track, cold, and I had on a beautiful cameo ring, no mittens on, and I lost my ring. I'll never forget that. I went back to look for it and I couldn't find it. Dad was out on the highway tooting the horn and yelling at us, and we thought it was just somebody—didn't realize who it was. And he told us what had happened. No, no! That was Pearl Harbor Day.

01-01:18:45  
Dunham: Oh, okay—well, I didn't ask specifically about that.

01-01:18:46  
Bier: Yeah, that was Pearl Harbor Day.

01-01:18:47  
Dunham: So go ahead and tell me that too, because I'm jumping—

01-01:18:48  
Bier: Yeah, that was Pearl Harbor Day. Yeah, we were walking down the railroad track. We were going up to her house, and cold—it was December 7. Yeah, I remember that. But the other day—I don't remember much about it. I don't know what I was doing. I don't remember. I don't even know what day it was now.

01-01:19:09  
Dunham: V-E Day—well, let's see. I should recall. It's summer of '45, I know that. And some places there were tremendous celebrations. Most towns and cities.

01-01:19:19

Bier:

Adna didn't do much. They were all older people. And we lost two boys from Adna, so and I know Mrs. Arzo got John's insurance check and she would never cash it, never—she just couldn't—he was on the Normandy.

01-01:19:50

Dunham:

Wow. Well, I wanted to ask you, reflecting back, how do you feel that your wartime work and that opportunity to do so-called men's work during that time influenced your life?

01-01:20:06

Bier:

Well, it made me aware that I could do anything that I wanted to do. I did anyway, but at the time I didn't realize that I was doing something different, because I always was doing the unexpected. I could paint, I could change a tire, I could do all kinds of things. Dad encouraged us to do things. Don't just sit in a chair and read a book. So it made me more confident, and yeah.

01-01:20:41

Dunham:

Yeah. And how do you think it influenced future generations in opportunities for women, or what would you like those future generations to know about it?

01-01:20:52

Bier:

Well, in all the meetings we've been to, being interviewed for this and that, and they'll come up and they'll shake my hand and say, "Thank you for breaking the mold so we could do things that we could do in jobs." Because up at this trade fair at Puyallup that we went to, one girl was the only welder in her class. And another one was working in steel, a steelworker, and she's very confident. And she said there were a lot of prejudiced [people] against her working. I said, "Don't pay any attention to them. If you can do the job—I don't recommend taking on a job that you're not physically able to do. That's ridiculous. You're putting yourself in danger and other people. But if you're able to do the job physically and mentally, go for it!" But so many people say—I say I didn't realize I was doing anything different at the time. It was a job and it was somebody saying you can't do it, so I don't know the word can't. They say you can't do it, then I'll try it.

01-01:21:58

Dunham:

Yeah. Was there a strong sense of patriotism as well, at the time?

01-01:22:04

Bier:

No.

01-01:22:04

Dunham:

No? It was more the excitement of doing it, yeah.

01-01:22:05

Bier:

I was just a dumb sixteen-year-old.

01-01:22:07

Dunham:

Yeah, sure. Like a lot of folks.

01-01:22:10

Bier:

My future brother-in-law was at Fort Lewis and he was a ranger in the Philippines. He was on Bataan. So when he came home I really realized then what war meant. But before that we knew the kids were gone and we'd get letters from them and whatnot, and we'd see all the newsreels, but it didn't register.

01-01:22:38

Dunham:

Well, before we close, is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything else you'd like to share with us today?

01-01:22:45

Bier:

I can talk and talk and talk. [laughter] Oh, it has been an experience. I didn't realize that we'd be remembered in history for doing such a thing, but I'd do it again!

01-01:23:00

Dunham:

Have you followed the Rosies going to Washington, DC and that type of thing? And that recognition?

01-01:23:08

Bier:

I go to visit cousins in Washington, DC, but I didn't know Rosies were there. But we've got this lady who came to the meeting—oh, about a month ago—and gave us the bulletin from Richmond. I don't remember when it's going to be, what month—what month do they have that?

01-01:23:23

Dunham:

Oh, the Home Front Festival?

01-01:23:24

Bier:

Yeah.

01-01:23:27

Dunham:

That's usually in October.

01-01:23:28

Bier:

Oh, that's good.

01-01:23:28

Dunham:

That's one big event they have in October.

01-01:23:32

Bier:

But they said there were hundreds of people there.

01-01:23:33

Dunham:

Yeah—oh, they had a Rosie dress [up] where everyone—they had women, to try to set the record—or I think they did set the record, for dressing up as Rosie.

01-01:23:40

Bier:

Yes.

01-01:23:41

Dunham:

Yeah, I think that was in the summer actually. I stand corrected, yeah. So that was quite an event.

01-01:23:47

Bier:

But if it's in the summer I'll make an effort to go, because I won't be here in May, but yeah, I thought—I know Robin, the lady that did the book, she and Cynthia went. And I thought—well, Helen won't go and Margaret won't go, but I'm going to try and go.

01-01:24:09

Dunham:

That would be great! And we'll have your oral history here finished and there in the park by then. Okay, great! Well, I just want to thank you again, Doris, for inviting us here to today—

01-01:24:23

Bier:

Oh, you're welcome.

01-01:24:24

Dunham:

—and sharing your rich stories. It has been quite an experience to get to know you. So thank you.

01-01:24:29

Bier:

You're welcome.

[End of Interview]