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Beth McCain

Rosie the Riveter
World War II Home Front Oral History Project

*This interview series was funded in part by a contract with the
National Park Service, and with the support of individual donors.*

Interview conducted by
David Dunham
in 2011

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Beth McCain, "Rosie the Riveter, World War II Home Front Oral History Project" conducted by David Dunham in 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



Beth Murray, 1941



1945

Beth Murray, 1945



Beth Murray, circa 1929



Beth McCain, 2011

Table of Contents—Beth McCain

Interview 1: June 23, 2011

Tape 1

Recalls Mormon pioneer ancestors and life on grandfather's farm—Views on religion—Memories of grade school—Dating and socializing in the 1940s in the Salt Lake area—Marriage and move to Connecticut for Officers Candidate School—Working in the beet fields growing up—Health care experience before the war in Utah—Brother's experience in Korean War

Tape 2

First impressions of California, 1943—Move to Alameda, California for husband's navigation school—Taking classes in machine shop—Working at Alameda Naval Air Station making parts for planes and working in the tool crib—Media presentations about the war—Socializing and entertainment during the war—End of the war and husband's search for work in Alaska—First job in the health care industry—Race relations experience in the 1940s—Clothing and fashion of the time

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Interview 1: June 23, 2011
Begin Audiofile 1

Dunham: It's June 23, 2011, and this is David Dunham here today with Beth M. McCain, and we're here for the Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project. It's a little bit of a mouthful, but here we are, so we usually just start at the beginning. Can you tell me your full name and date of birth?

1-00:00:25

McCain: My full name is Beth Murray McCain, and I was born 1921, September 23, not the 24th, my mother's is the 23rd.

Dunham: Oh, I see, and where were you born?

1-00:00:54

McCain: In Wellsville, Utah.

Dunham: Your son Donald gave me a little bit of family background, but can you for the record tell me a little bit about your parents and grandparents, where they came from and—?

1-00:01:09

McCain: Well, , my mother's grandmother, Ann Roberts Morgan, came to this country from Wales with two daughters in about 1883. One of them, my grandmother Elizabeth, married in Utah, and died about three days after giving birth to my mother. So my grandmother's sister raised her.

Dunham: Where was your mother born?

1-00:02:21

McCain: Brigham City, Utah. My dad's grandfather came from Scotland to this country, and my dad's father, William A. Murray, was born in St. Louis shortly after his parents immigrated.

Dunham: I'm asking all the hardest ones at first to go way, way back. Well, maybe Donald mentioned one thing about your maternal grandfather, so going even farther back on your mom's side, John Morris. He had been a teamster running freight by wagon. Did your grandpa John share stories with you about those experiences?

1-00:03:24

McCain: No, and I'm so sorry because we didn't ask him. If we'd have asked him, I'm sure he would have told us.

Dunham: Okay. That's okay.

1-00:03:36

McCain: But we didn't ask him. But he was a teamster. From here to Montana I—

Dunham: From there in Utah?

1-00:03:52

McCain: Yeah, I think it was Montana. Where they were freighting to, in fact, a good share of the older men were traders at that time. My dad's father had twenty-four children. He was a Mormon pioneer who walked across the plains with an emigrant wagon train and settled in Wellsville.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:04:27

McCain: That's quite a handful. I understand he was quite a disciplinarian. I guess he had to be.

Dunham: Okay, and was that with more than one mother I assume?

1-00:04:39

McCain: No, he had two wives. My father's mother, born Sarah Parker, lived in town, and the second wife, born Amanda Bailey, lived on the farm. All of their children lived mainly on the farm because that's where the labor was needed.

Dunham: But two wives for all twenty-four?

1-00:04:45

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: Wow, that's still a lot each.

1-00:04:49

McCain: He was not being selfish. So, let's see, my dad's family is all gone now, and my mother's family is—I didn't stay as close with my mother's family, so I don't know how many of them are left of their family.

Dunham: Okay, well, can you tell me, do you remember the house that you grew up in?

1-00:05:25

McCain: Yes, it was my grandmother's that I was born in, and I lived on the farm when I was a kid. My dad and my uncles bought the farm from grandpa, and they all farmed except Uncle Will and Uncle David. David was a professor at University State University in Logan, and Uncle Will, he ran the theater in most of the small towns.

Dunham: Oh, yeah, for live performances?

1-00:06:28

McCain: Yes. Well, not for live performances, but—

Dunham: What kind of theater?

1-00:06:34
McCain: Just moving pictures.

Dunham: Oh, really. Did you go to that theater?

1-00:06:40
McCain: Yes, I did.

Dunham: Do you have any memories of that, any movies in particular, or just the experience?

1-00:06:49
McCain: Oh, yes, they played music.

Dunham: Live music?

1-00:06:55
McCain: Yes, live music. I remember seeing the first talking movie. It was wonderful, yeah.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:07:09
McCain: Yeah, and then when color came out, that one was another—

Dunham: And those were all, you saw those innovations at your uncle's theater?

1-00:07:18
McCain: Oh, yes. That was great. The movie theater is not there anymore.

Dunham: How long did your uncle run it, do you know?

1-00:07:37
McCain: Pretty much until he died.

Dunham: Was that many decades?

1-00:07:44
McCain: He retired for a short time, but that was, I was, let's see, how old would I have been? Maybe twenty. So about 1940.

Dunham: When he retired?

1-00:08:17
McCain: Yeah.

Dunham: That was all your young life you had gone there.

1-00:08:26
McCain: So pretty much as long as I could remember that's what he did. But my grandfather had a huge farm, and so with that many, the first family, which is

my dad's family with my mom, they were all farmers, but except two. They were professors at the college. But the others, they bought the farm from my grandfather and they farmed it.

Dunham: What was it like for you growing up on a farm?

1-00:09:16

McCain: I can tell you it was work, work, work.

Dunham: That's what I've heard. What kind of work?

1-00:09:22

McCain: Work, hard work.

Dunham: How early did you start working?

1-00:09:25

McCain: I started working because I started milking before I went to school.

Dunham: Yeah, how old were you?

1-00:09:32

McCain: I was seven years old.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:09:42

McCain: By the time I was eight I was pretty well into doing what I'm supposed to.

Dunham: Okay, wow.

1-00:09:57

McCain: I went to work to milk in the morning at about, well, it was about 5:30 really. In the winter it was bad because we had to ride a horse to go to the barns, and the snow drifts were so high the horse couldn't walk and would have to jump to get through—. Oh, and I remember we used to have a lot more fun than they have today, although I understand this winter was pretty hard.

Dunham: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I've heard Corinne can be one of the coldest places, especially in those years you had some really rough weather.

1-00:10:56

McCain: Yeah, one of the worst places on earth I guess, besides Alaska, was up in the mountains going to Bear Lake over into the Colorado side. There's a valley in there that. "whoooo," gets snow in there. This year is kind of bad there too because there's so much snow in the mountains that when it's melting it comes down, and the rivers are all overflowing, the dams are overflowing.

Dunham: When you were growing up what kind of plumbing or toilet did you have?

1-00:11:52

McCain: Outdoors.

Dunham: And so how was that?

1-00:11:55

McCain: We had an outdoor privy, we called it. I remember my mother used to say, “Dad,” about ten o’clock at night, “Would you kick me a path through the snow to the bathroom privy?” And she said, “While you’re out there sitting down, then melt the snow.” [laughs]

Dunham: How far was it to the—?

1-00:12:35

McCain: It was about, well, it was all about to that fence out there, about twenty-five feet.

Dunham: A little ways, especially when it’s cold in the snow.

1-00:12:50

McCain: Yes. And we had no hot water. We washed, we heated our water on the stove, and we all had wood stoves or coal stoves. Coal stoves in the front room and wood stoves in the kitchen, and everybody seemed to make bread. We all had gardens.

Dunham: Aside from the cows, what else did you have on the farm for animals or crops?

1-00:13:23

McCain: We raised alfalfa, we raised wheat, we raised sugar beets. Oh Lord, I hated those sugar beets.

Dunham: What was so hateful about those?

1-00:13:39

McCain: Well, they didn’t have any of the machinery they use today, and you had to go along with a knife that you held here. The blade was about that long with a hook on the end of it, and you’d hook the beet into the ground with this hook, pull it out of the ground because they’d gone along and plowed beside the beet to loosen it in the dirt. Then you had to pull it out, put it over your knee and top it, and then throw it onto the wagon to go to the sugar dump. Then we’d take them when you get a full wagon they’d take them to the dump, and they would make sugar from it. So sugar beets.

Dunham: That’s hard work.

1-00:14:46

McCain: It was, but the weeding was bad.

Dunham: Was that all by hand, or did you have any—

1-00:14:52

McCain: It was all by hand.

Dunham:

Yeah, wow.

1-00:14:57

McCain: Yeah, and you had to leave just one beet, you chop, chop. Then two, see your hoe was this wide. You'd make that many chops and leave a space with one beet in it, where there were maybe. I don't know. fifty, seventy-five beets in that one chop, two chops. So I used to just—it was a lot of work. And bend over, you couldn't stand up because they were down here chopping, so your back gave you—that's why I'm having a good share of it today, I think.

Dunham:

Undoubtedly. Wow, well, was your farm or your family affected particularly by the Depression, the Dust Bowl—

1-00:16:03

McCain: Oh, my goodness, yes. We never went hungry ever because we had every animal there was if you could understand. We had turkeys and goats and sheep, we had a big herd of sheep that we would take into the mountains. They'd come and sheared them and then take them into the mountains, and then we had a shepherd who herded the sheep all summer and then brought them down in the fall. All our young stock we would take into the mountains in the spring, and bring it down in the fall because—that was called Murray Mountain. We owned the dam at the head of the town, and it was—. Now that I think of it, I couldn't have had a better childhood. But at that time it was a backbreaker.[laughs]

Dunham:

Now I forgot to ask, how many siblings did you have?

1-00:17:28

McCain: There were five of us.

Dunham:

Okay and where did you fall?

1-00:17:33

McCain: Pardon?

Dunham:

Were you the oldest?

1-00:17:35

McCain: Yes, I was the oldest, and my sister was the youngest, and I had three brothers in between. My grandfather, John Morris, lived with us off and on. He lived with one of his sons in Idaho at some times, but he lived with us lot of the time. It was wonderful having him live with us. He was a great guy.

Dunham:

This was your mom's father?

1-00:18:08

McCain: Yes. My dad's father died two years after his first wife died. Then he married the second wife when my grandmother, dad's mother, was having a baby. She came to take care of grandma, and grandpa took her as his second wife.

Dunham: Your family was Mormon?

1-00:19:00

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: So what role did religion play in your life growing up?

1-00:19:06

McCain: Religion was our mainstay, really. Our parents were all very religious. Then after a certain length of time Mormon polygamy was outlawed in the Mormon Church, although I think there's still some forms of it being practiced in Utah and Colorado and New Mexico and wherever. But not members of the LDS Church. So—

Dunham: What are your feelings about that?

1-00:20:11

McCain: Well, I don't think a man should have more than one wife. He can't support more than one wife unless they're all working like dogs.

Dunham: Yeah. When did you start going to school?

1-00:20:31

McCain: Oh, when I was six; well, actually I was five. I started a little bit before my birthday.

Dunham: What was the school like?

1-00:20:47

McCain: It was mixed with more than one grade, like the first and second grade would be together. Maybe the fourth and the second grade together and one teacher for both grades. But as we got up into the older grades, then it was more just one teacher. [bell rings]

Dunham: Okay we're back on. We turned off the clock so wouldn't have that interference. So we were just talking a little about your early school experience.

1-00:21:54

McCain: I only went to the ninth grade, no, the tenth grade.

Dunham: Okay, and then what happened?

1-00:22:06

McCain: I quit school.

Dunham: So then were you working full time on the farm?

1-00:22:13

McCain: Yes, and then when I was fifteen I left home and went to Salt Lake to work for another family, help take care of their children, helped to clean their house, and helped cook and wash and iron, and whatever there was to be done.

Dunham: What led to you taking that job?

1-00:23:03

McCain: I was just tired of the farm. My back couldn't take it any longer.

Dunham: Was that work more manageable?

1-00:23:13

McCain: Yes. Yes, it was.

Dunham: How far away were you from your family?

1-00:23:19

McCain: A hundred miles.

Dunham: Oh, wow.

1-00:23:25

McCain: That was almost the first time I'd left home.

Dunham: How often were you able to see them?

1-00:23:36

McCain: Maybe three times a year, Christmas, and maybe—I don't know. In Utah we always celebrate the date that the pioneers showed up in Utah. My grandparents were pioneers. My grandfather was eight years old when he walked from St. Louis to Utah.

Dunham: Again, your son had mentioned that there were many pioneer structures still existing and also that there were some migrating Indians that would set up camp near your town each year selling or trading goods. Can you tell me about that?

1-00:24:32

McCain: Oh, yes, I remember the Indians coming to our town every summer. They would come, and they would ask for bread. They killed game, and they had these little wooden things that they built to put the meat on to dry in the sun. They had little campfires and they lived in teepees just like they—they'd put their teepee up, and they'd stay there until they were through doing what they were doing.

Dunham: So the local community bought goods they had made and—?

1-00:25:38

McCain:

They would just go from door to door. And ask for bread or whatever it was that they needed. They were nice as long as, and then the LDS people took in the Indian children to send them to school, and they lived with them during the school year.

Dunham:

Did they convert them to LDS or—?

1-00:26:22

McCain:

Well, I guess they tried because eventually they would take them to church with them when they would go. My sister Janice had an Indian boy living with them in the 1960s, and he was going to school.

Dunham:

Your sister was already married—?

1-00:26:45

McCain:

Yes.

Dunham:

How old was she when she got married?

1-00:26:53

McCain:

How old was she when she married? I think she was eighteen.

Dunham:

She was how many years younger than you?

1-00:27:04

McCain:

Eleven.

Dunham:

Eleven, right, because you were the oldest; she was the youngest.

1-00:27:11

McCain:

Yeah, so she and I are the only two left.

Dunham:

I also heard you were on a main highway, so during the dust bowl—

1-00:27:23

McCain:

Oh, yes, during the dust storms we would see all these old flivvers with the Isinglass curtains. You don't know about that. You saying that like you did.

Dunham:

No, describe that for me.

1-00:27:46

McCain:

They were canvas topped, and they were maybe two seats—some of them were one—but most of them were two, and they'd put all their stuff on the top. It was just a canvas top with—of course, they had these metal things that went over the top, but they were, let's see—

Dunham:

Was your town a place they would stop or stay over—?

1-00:28:27

McCain: Oh, yeah, because it was the last one before you went to the mountain to go on the other side of the mountain.

Dunham: So would your family with the farm sell some food and supplies?

1-00:28:46

McCain: We didn't sell. We just gave them to whoever needed them, and they all had big families. They were trying to find work.

Dunham: Where were most of them heading?

1-00:29:13

McCain: That's a good question. They were just going. Now my sister said once she went down to the stream below our house where it ran through a little creek that ran through, and she found where someone had been camping and had been eating water snakes because he had no other food.

Dunham: Oh, that was not common I take it.

1-00:29:39

McCain: No, so you have to feel bad, I don't know.

Dunham: Well, when you moved to Salt Lake and worked for this family, what was, that sounds like such a big change in your life. Aside from not having to do the farm work anymore, what was that like?

1-00:30:05

McCain: That was great because I didn't have to bend down and stay there all day.

Dunham: Yeah. Did you have other family in the area—?

1-00:30:20

McCain: Oh, yes, they had three children, which I took care of, I saw they got their baths and ate and—

Dunham: Had you done this growing up for your younger siblings already, so you were very experienced—?

1-00:30:41

McCain: Yeah, so it was no big thing, and I knew how to take care of the house and could do the cleaning, and I was good at ironing. So none of those things were really new to me.

Dunham: Were you having to send money back to your family, or just on your own?

1-00:31:05

McCain: No, no, I just, I would buy birthday presents for them, and I only made \$5.00 a week.

Dunham: So enough to take care of yourself.

1-00:31:30

McCain: Yeah.

Dunham: Did you have time to yourself? You were a teenager; did you socialize?

1-00:31:35

McCain: Well, I had Sunday off, but I went to church with them and spent the day mostly with them. Until I met some of the girls that lived in Salt Lake, I didn't really do much chasing around.

Dunham: When did the chasing around start? How long had you been there? So you came at fifteen, so you were a teenager.

1-00:32:16

McCain: Well, I was nineteen before I married. We had huge dances, so when I got to know the four girls in the apartment house in Salt Lake City, then I would go to the dances with them. I was about eighteen. We'd go stag, and just go to the dance and come home stag. They had the Coconut Grove in Salt Lake, and it was a huge dance hall, and they had all the big bands that came.

Dunham: Do you remember any in particular that you saw?

1-00:33:11

McCain: Oh, yes, Benny Goodman and all of the big ones. They were wonderful. That was our pastime even in when I was at home. We had at least one dance a month in the recreation hall of the church. We had a lady that played the piano and a saxophonist and one that did xylophone. We had wonderful times just dancing, dancing. It'd be nice if they'd do that today because give the kids something to do besides get in trouble.

Dunham: Some communities are better about it than others certainly, but yeah, they need a lot more activities open to kids in music. So was there any dating outside of the dances?

1-00:34:36

McCain: Oh, yes, once in a while we'd meet somebody that was interesting.

Dunham: What kind of dates would you go on?

1-00:34:46

McCain: They usually traveled in groups, maybe three, four or five of them together, One had a car, and they all came together, and they all went home and picked their dates up together. It was fun. We used to go to the lake and swim in the lake on our days off. We only had two days off.

Dunham: Were you living in the apartment complex or—?

1-00:35:21
McCain: I did after I quit work for the family that I was working for.

Dunham: How old were you when you quit work?

1-00:35:32
McCain: Probably seventeen.

Dunham: Okay, and did you find other work, or how were you supporting yourself?

1-00:35:36
McCain: Eighteen, maybe. Yeah, I worked for one other family, but I didn't care for them that well. They didn't have children, and I didn't feel that I had enough to do.

Dunham: Just keeping house—

1-00:35:56
McCain: Yeah, but I lived in the apartments until I got married.

Dunham: So how did you meet your husband?

1-00:36:09
McCain: Through a friend. She introduced me to him. He was the recruiting officer for the Merchant Marines in Salt Lake.

Dunham: Do you remember your first date?

1-00:36:31
McCain: Yeah, I do. It wasn't that exciting. We went to the dance, and then we went to the apartment, and all of us just had a fun time playing cards and what not. We played canasta.

Dunham: Was everyone in the apartment Mormon?

1-00:37:20
McCain: Yes, they were. In fact, there were only two people in my town where I lived my whole life practically.

Dunham: That were not—

1-00:37:33
McCain: That were not Mormons.

Dunham: Did they have another religion?

1-00:37:39
McCain: I think they were Catholic, but I don't know for sure. But I think they were.

Dunham: How did they get along?

1-00:37:50

McCain: They went to our church. [laughs]

Dunham: Go along to get along, I guess.

1-00:37:57

McCain: Yeah, they were fine. The parents didn't go to the church, but the kids did. We had fun. They were just part of our gang. Then I remember when I was a kid we used to celebrate May Day and have a Maypole where all the kids from the school, from the grade school, would take the ribbons and braid the Maypole. I don't think they do that anymore; I've never seen them. That was on the school playground, and May Day was a celebration day where it was usually nice during that period.

Dunham: Your first husband was Mormon, then?

1-00:39:09

McCain: No.

Dunham: Oh, he was not, okay.

1-00:39:08

McCain: He wasn't. Robert was Lutheran, yeah. But I sort of got out of going to church there for a while and not going to church, and I got away from, it doesn't take long to and then I married the kids' father, David, and he was Catholic.

Dunham: So now you're talking about your second husband. That's quite a number of years later after the war, right, okay. Okay, we can get there, but so was it an issue? So you had already kind of been away, you were still in Salt Lake but not attending church, was that an issue at all for your family?

1-00:40:21

McCain: Yes. They didn't like it, but it wasn't so much for me as it was for them.

Dunham: You were finding yourself and enjoying life.

1-00:40:39

McCain: Yeah, I was just like all sixteen-year-olds. Fifteen.

Dunham: So how did you come to be married to your first husband?

1-00:40:59

McCain: He and I were going together, and come to find out that they were going to draft him into the Army. He said, "Oh, no, no. I'm not going in the Army after spending all the time that I've spent in the Merchant Marines." So he went back to sea being with a merchant ship. So that's what he did during the war.

Dunham: So were you married before the war started, or what year did you get married?

1-00:41:50

McCain: Oh, yes.

Dunham: In Salt Lake. At some point did you go to Connecticut? Was that before he went to sea?

1-00:41:59

McCain: Yes, that was when he went back to the Merchant Marines. They sent him to teaching navigation. So he was teaching in the school, and that's when we went to Fort Trumbull in New London, Connecticut. This was the US Maritime Service's Officer Candidate School. We were there for I don't know how long.

Dunham: Okay, what was that like?

1-00:42:46

McCain: A year or so.

Dunham: What was Connecticut like?

1-00:42:47

McCain: It was different. I had never been anywhere out of the state practically up until that point, and it was different going to—and then electricity was rationed, so they turned the lights off at a certain time at night. We had a lot of rationing during the war.

Dunham: What was that like for you?

1-00:43:32

McCain: Well, you had to learn to how to go without traveling. There was not much traveling done during the war because tires were rationed, gas was rationed, nylons were rationed, shoes, a lot of things were rationed.

Dunham: Is there anything in particular you missed or really appreciated when you're not?

1-00:44:10

McCain: Well, not really. They gave us enough that we weren't shorted too much on anything. Some people said they were hungry, but I had never been hungry. We had every animal there was a need for.

Dunham: Growing up on the farm.

1-00:44:43

McCain: Growing up on the farm, and it was great. I got to know all the animals. My cousin taught me how to milk, which was not a good idea. [laughs]

Dunham: Why's that?

1-00:45:01

McCain: Because once I learned how I had to go every morning, every night.

Dunham:

So did you avoid learning new skills? I guess you really wish you never had to learn how to do the beet, the beets, not the beet. Sorry I shouldn't have brought it up.

1-00:45:18

McCain:

Oh, beet fields. They were terrible. All my cousins were on the farm, too, so we all wound up in the same spot, just thinning beets and working in the hay fields and riding the dairy cars when they'd cut the alfalfa and stack it into a stack. They had a derrick which would pull a big fork up. It would go down and take a big fork of hay from the wagon, pull it up into the air, and then they would push it to where it had to go, and then dump it. Then you'd have to ride your horse back. The horse was what pulled the fork up in the air, so you just rode the derrick horse all day in and out, in and out.

Dunham:

We're back on the farm, you reminded me about another story Donald shared with me about your aunt, Ann Morris Hover, who lived near Los Angeles and would send clothes to your mom? What did your mom do with those? How did that work?

1-00:46:50

McCain:

Well, she would make them over into clothes for us kids. Oh, yeah, so we always had clothes, but who knows? They were always built from somebody else's or—?

Dunham:

Did you learn to do that as well?

1-00:47:10

McCain:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Dunham:

Well, back to the war; when did you first hear of the war breaking out, the attack on Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that?

1-00:47:23

McCain:

You know, I really can't remember when I heard because there was always soldiers in Salt Lake when I got there. I never knew what soldiers were before that, and then when I got—they always had because there was a lot of places around Salt Lake where—

Dunham:

The military were stationed?

1-00:47:57

McCain:

Where the military was all stationed.

Dunham:

Okay, did you date soldiers?

1-00:48:05

McCain:

Yes, I did. I did. When we would go to the lake or something, we'd be on a date with the soldiers, and they were a lot of fun. I took one of them home to see my parents once. He was really nice. In fact, I really quite liked him, and then they shipped him overseas, and I didn't see him for quite a while. In fact, I didn't see him for a long time, and then he wrote to me, and I was married at that time, so—

Dunham:

With your first husband?

1-00:49:08

McCain:

Yeah.

Dunham:

Okay. Did you write back?

1-00:49:14

McCain:

Yes, I did, I told him that I had met Robert, and that he was a very nice man, and that I enjoyed his company and that we had married, and sorry he waited too long. But that was it.

Dunham:

Was it an issue with the first man, that the first man was not Mormon either? Was that an issue for your family, or—?

1-00:49:54

McCain:

No, I think he might have been Mormon, I don't know, but I think he was a Mormon.

Dunham:

When you married was your family supportive, or were you kind of separate from them at that time?

1-00:50:12

McCain:

No, I was just married by the bishop. I didn't go to the temple to be married, and they didn't make a big fuss about it. I guess they were just glad to get rid of me. [laughs]

Dunham:

Were most all your girlfriends when you were a teenager there, were they all Mormons, and did many of them marry non-Mormons as well?

1-00:50:48

McCain:

Well, no, most of them married into the Mormon faith.

Dunham:

Well, you mentioned rationing already; did your life change in other ways during the war. I guess you got married right around the time the war started, is that—?

1-00:51:16

McCain:

Um hm. Well, you couldn't do much traveling because of the rationing, but I don't remember it being such a big hardship. But I know we didn't do much traveling around.

Dunham: How did you get to Connecticut?

1-00:51:53

McCain: On the train.

Dunham: What was it like once you got to Connecticut then? Were you in civilian housing?

1-00:52:16

McCain: Yes. I told you that the lights were—electricity was rationed. The oil—see, they were heating their houses with oil, and they'd turn it on for short periods during the day, but at night there was no heating the house.

Dunham: And you were there in Connecticut during winter?

1-00:52:48

McCain: Oh, yes, and it was in the winter, so—

Dunham: Was it the same or worse than you'd experienced in Utah?

1-00:52:55

McCain: Oh, heavens, no. I've seen winters in Utah that my father and brothers had to build a tunnel from the house out to the street because it was too high to throw the snow over the top.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:53:13

McCain: So they'd just have to carry it out.

Dunham: Yeah, did anyone every get frostbite or—?

1-00:53:20

McCain: Oh, yes, many times, many times.

Dunham: What was health care like back in Utah; now I know you worked later in health care?

1-00:53:34

McCain: We had one doctor. He brought you into this world, and he did anything that was to be done with you.

Dunham: Okay, was he a good doctor?

1-00:53:48

McCain: As far as I know. He took out my appendix. He took my brother's out.

Dunham: How old were you when your appendix came out?

1-00:54:00
McCain: I think I was thirteen.

Dunham: Wow. Do you remember that experience?

1-00:54:16
McCain: Yes, my brother was in the bed next to me. He was having his removed also.

Dunham: Two for one.

1-00:54:28
McCain: No, it was when we had our tonsils out that we were in the beds next to each other, and he couldn't take the anesthetic.

Dunham: Why was that?

1-00:54:50
McCain: Because he'd got so ill with it. He was just deathly ill, and I was eating ice cream. He didn't like it. [laughs]

Dunham: Back with the start of the war, how did it affect other members of your family, your siblings, your brothers?

1-00:55:25
McCain: Oh, I had three brothers, and all three of them went to war. Keith went to the Pacific, Luther Lee went to Europe, and one was in the—what was the other one afterward?

Dunham: In the Philippines?

1-00:55:44
McCain: No, Luther Lee was wounded in the Philippines. Derlin, my third brother, wasn't in World War II.

Dunham: Oh, the Korean, and then Vietnam?

1-00:55:51
McCain: Korea? Yes, he was in Korea.

Dunham: In the fifties. The oldest two—

1-00:56:03
McCain: Keith was wounded in the Pacific.

Dunham: Okay, maybe that's what I heard.

1-00:56:12
McCain: He was—he was shot in the back, and he was over in San Francisco at the hospital over there for a while. He was in Texas, and then they let him go home for a while before he was discharged.

Dunham: The one who was shot.

1-00:56:55

McCain: Yeah, yeah. It was hard for mother because she never knew what was going to happen.

Dunham: Sure.

1-00:57:13

McCain: When Keith was shot she passed out colder than a wedge.

Dunham: Wow.

1-00:57:21

McCain: Yeah.

Dunham: Were you there then, or heard that or—

1-00:57:24

McCain: No, I was not. But I know my mother, and Janice said that she just barely made it in the house, she was so faint.

Dunham: I'm going to change the tape now, that's where I will take a little break, and then we'll talk I think about your on to California and Alameda.

Begin Audiofile 2

Dunham: Okay, this is Tape 2, Interview 1 on June 23, 2011 with Beth McCain. We talked a little bit about your time in Connecticut. Did you go directly from Connecticut to California?

2-00:00:15

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: Okay, and what was that like? How did that come about?

2-00:00:20

McCain: Well, that was quite interesting because I had always wanted to go to California, never made it, but here I am going, so it was on the train, and it was very interesting, did a lot of stops along the way and—

Dunham: Stops where you stayed over in other places, or just—?

2-00:00:56

McCain: No, just stopping, and—

Dunham: Why were you coming to California?

2-00:01:07

McCain:

Because I think Robert had to go out to sea because he had been teaching, and he had to be in the Army, now. Why I didn't feel that the Maritime Service was not part of the services because that's where they got their supplies from a lot of them, was the Maritime. But anyway, we came to California because there was a school here in Alameda for them that teach navigation, and I think Robert had to go out to sea for a certain length of time. So we came to California. His folks lived in Long Beach, or his mother. So we went to Long Beach first, and then we came to Alameda afterwards.

Dunham:

Because that's where Robert was getting training?

2-00:02:57

McCain:

No, that's where he was going to teach.

Dunham:

Oh, he was teaching, okay.

2-00:03:08

McCain:

That's where he could catch his boat from, his ship from.

Dunham:

So you said you had always dreamed of California. What had made you want to come to California when you were younger?

2-00:03:18

McCain:

Yes.

Dunham:

What was your image of California, and how did it meet—?

2-00:03:25

McCain:

I just thought it was going to be wonderful, sunshine and honey and all that good stuff.

Dunham:

Did it meet your expectations?

2-00:03:37

McCain:

Well, not exactly. We went to Long Beach first, and then into Los Angeles. I tell you the smog was so bad there that I couldn't see. I cried all the time I was here because I couldn't see. The smog—because I came from the farm where there wasn't any.

Dunham:

Beautiful land, hard work.

2-00:04:10

McCain:

Yeah, right, really.

Dunham:

But no smog.

2-00:04:13

McCain:

No smog.

Dunham: So what about when you got up to Alameda, did you have a place to live or—
?

2-00:04:24

McCain: No, that was the problem.

Dunham: This is in '43.

2-00:04:26

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: This is when everybody's coming here.

2-00:04:31

McCain: The Navy was here, and the Army, too. Man, there was no housing. We had to live in a bedroom. We rented a bedroom from some people on St. Charles Street in Alameda. We ate our meals out until we could find an apartment, and as soon as we found an apartment then we moved to Lincoln, Lincoln Avenue. I think Howard Rossiter met the man that had the apartment on Lincoln when he came to Alameda because that's where he lived was where we moved. His wife Ethel and I became very good—in fact, she's my best friend, and she and he were very good friends also. They went out to sea, both of them, and they were gone until the war was over, and then they came back and they—

Dunham: Is this in 1943 that you moved to Alameda and—?

2-00:06:29

McCain: I think so.

Dunham: How did you come to find work?

2-00:06:38

McCain: Well, when we were living in the bedroom, the war had broken out, and it was going pretty good, and the air station had opened in 1943. They were trying to recruit workers, so I knew that Bob was going to be out to sea and I would be sitting doing nothing because I didn't have any children. So I went to the machinists' school. It was a shop in the high school, and I went to learn how to run the lathe and the milling machine and the dualsaw and a bunch of other things.

Dunham: Had you already interviewed for a job?

2-00:08:04

McCain: No, I was just going to take some of the classes.

Dunham: Did you have to pay for those classes?

2-00:08:08

McCain: Yeah, I'm sure I did, I can't remember, but I think so.

Dunham: Did you like the skills you were learning?

2-00:08:17

McCain: Not really.

Dunham: Okay.

2-00:08:22

McCain: When we got to the air station we had machinists in the shop that would set the machines up for us, and then we would run the machine, and they would set it all up. We didn't have to do that. Then all we had to do was just run the machines to put out the part.

Dunham: Well, how did you come to get a job at the Naval Air Station in Alameda?

2-00:08:59

McCain: That's where I decided I was working was that they—well, I don't remember now if I—

Dunham: Had they advertised, or had there been a recruiter, or you just went in there and asked? Did you have any friends that worked there already?

2-00:09:23

McCain: No, because I didn't know anybody here when I first came.

Dunham: What was that like when you did first come? I mean, you made this good friend at the apartment, but did you feel like an outsider?

2-00:09:36

McCain: Yeah, I really did because I didn't know anybody here except Ethel and Howard, and that's about the only couples that I knew really, other than the ones that were at the base, the Reserve Officer Training School, where my husband was.

Dunham: Did you meet other people there, at the base?

2-00:10:09

McCain: Yes, I did. But we didn't have a car so Howard and Ethel had one of these little rumble seats. Have you ever ridden in a rumble seat?

Dunham: What's a rumble seat?

2-00:10:29

McCain: Well, a rumble seat is where you open the trunk and the seat comes out. And you sit in the back. It has no cover over it. You're just sitting out there in space. [laughs] It was fun. We used to like to get in and just ride around.

Dunham: Mostly just around Alameda?

2-00:10:59

McCain: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: Yeah, okay. What was the social life like there?

2-00:11:07

McCain: Well, the Maritime School had a party out at Hearst Ranch in Pleasanton. It's over by I think Dell Lake. You know where that is?

Dunham: Yeah, I know Dell Lake.

2-00:11:32

McCain: It's on the other side of the—

Dunham: The ranch?

2-00:11:33

McCain: Yeah, it's a ranch over there. Lake Del Valle, it was. They had their party over there, and we got to know quite a few people from over there at that time. Then, all the boys were out at sea. Ethel worked at the air station also. She worked for one of the commanders or somebody out there.

Dunham: In an office job?

2-00:12:15

McCain: Yeah, in an office job.

Dunham: What exactly did you do at the—?

2-00:12:20

McCain: I worked in the A & R Building, which was to assemble and repair airplanes. So actually we built parts for the airplanes. We made the parts that fixed the problems.

Dunham: What kind of equipment were you using to do that?

2-00:12:49

McCain: Well, it just depended on what parts they needed. They'd make them. They'd set them up where you'd go in, and you'd just run this machine, and then we put out this part. After you'd make the parts that they needed, then they'd set it up for another part.

Dunham: So was it making one part at a time or making a great many parts?

2-00:13:28

McCain: Well, mostly making many parts.

Dunham: Okay, so was it monotonous work?

2-00:13:32

McCain: Yes. It was. I worked on the lathe. You know what a lathe is?

Dunham: Yes.

2-00:13:42

McCain: Yeah, and I worked on the lathe, and I worked on the milling machine. And I worked on the dualsaw, and I worked on the drill presses.

Dunham: Wow. What determined which area you were working in? Did you decide or did somebody else—?

2-00:14:00

McCain: No, no, they told you where you were going to be working.

Dunham: Who were you working for?

2-00:14:13

McCain: Our boss.

Dunham: What was the makeup of your co-workers? Was it men and women, people of different races, religions?

2-00:14:16

McCain: Yes, a lot of the women were outside of the people who were setting machines up. A good share of them were women, and I was friends with a lot of the people from the air station. We used to go out and socialize occasionally because by the time I got to work at the air station, Bob and Howard were pretty much going out to sea. They were gone, and then in the tool crib where you had to go to get all the tools to work on the machinery with, there was a lady that I worked with and later on she was my head nurse at the hospital. She worked in the tool crib, and so I worked with her for a while in the tool crib, and so I did many jobs.

Dunham: What were you doing in the tool crib?

2-00:16:04

McCain: When they'd need a tool to set up the machine with, they'd have to come to the tool crib and say, "I need such, this type wrench, then call it by name."

Dunham: And then you'd lend them—

2-00:16:21

McCain: You would go to the shelves and the drawers, whichever, and get the tool and bring it. And they'd give you a tag, or we'd give them a tag; no, we'd give them the tool, and they'd give us a tag. So it was, just depended on the day as to what you were going to be doing and how long you was going to be doing it.

Dunham: How long did you work there?

2-00:17:02

McCain: All during the war until it ended.

Dunham: Were there more women as the war went on that worked there?

2-00:17:09

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: When you first started working there was there any issue with the men? Were they respectful of the women?

2-00:17:18

McCain: No, they were good. There were sailors that were working there.

Dunham: What about the ethnic or religious makeup of the workers? Was it varied?

2-00:17:43

McCain: It was very varied. Yeah, there was all religions, and there was no issue that I knew of about religion.

Dunham: Was there a strong feeling of patriotism, or was it more just a job? Can you tell me about that?

2-00:18:03

McCain: Oh, yes, yes, there was. We went to movies, and the movies were all about the war. They were telling you how the Germans were acting, what they were doing and all this, and so we—

Dunham: Both the newsreels before the movie and the movies themselves, the content was war-based as well.

2-00:18:42

McCain: Yes, yeah.

Dunham: What movie theaters did you go to?

2-00:18:48

McCain: Well, the Alameda Theater right there, and then there was another one in Alameda; where was the other one? The Vogue Theater. Those were the two movie theaters. They would sort or instill patriotism into you, too, as you were going to the show, and they were telling you all this muck that was going on.

Dunham: How did you feel about it at the time?

2-00:19:34

McCain: Terrible, terrible.

Dunham: How so?

2-00:19:36

McCain: Hitler, who was something else, and I think he was a very cruel man. He wanted to do away with the Jews, and he was doing a pretty good job of it.

Dunham: Did you know any Jewish people at the time?

2-00:20:15

McCain: I don't know that I did.

Dunham: How about any Asian Americans that you—?

2-00:20:20

McCain: Oh, yes, there was Asians.

Dunham: Did you know any Japanese Americans?

2-00:20:28

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: Who were interned?

2-00:20:35

McCain: No, no.

Dunham: You may have arrived after they had mostly gone, been interned.

2-00:20:46

McCain: Yeah, because I don't remember them going to the—there was a bunch of them in Utah, and I don't remember that at all.

Dunham: Were there Asian workers where you worked at the air station that you can recall?

2-00:21:18

McCain: No, I don't remember.

Dunham: Okay, how about African American or Latino?

2-00:21:24

McCain: Oh, yeah, there were many African Americans.

Dunham: Were the work forces integrated, or did they tend more to be segregated in groups?

2-00:21:41

McCain: No, we were just all working together as far as I knew. Of course, we didn't get around much, in fact, I just found out how little I got around the air station.

Dunham: How so?

2-00:21:54

McCain:

Just the other day my daughter took me for a ride, and we went onto the air station and went all around, and I said, "I never knew all this was out here." She said, "Oh, yeah." But see, there was so much of the military on the station when I was there that we just didn't feel I guess that we could go. Maybe we couldn't, I don't remember, but I don't remember that we ever really toured the station.

Dunham:

Did you join a union?

2-00:22:38

McCain:

Yes.

Dunham:

Do you remember that process? Do you know what union you were in?

2-00:23:03

McCain:

I don't remember. I don't because—and you know, to tell you the truth, I'm not sure that I did join the union at the air station. I know I joined the union at the hospital, but now I'm trying to think if I joined the union, but I don't remember.

Dunham:

I know at the shipyards around Richmond and elsewhere it was mostly union positions, whether there were various issues with the unions at first, again maybe a little earlier, but who they would let in or not, first gender then even race. Were there any disabled workers at the air station that you can recall?

2-00:24:04

McCain:

I don't think there were any working with us.

Dunham:

Okay, just at some points during the war as they recruited from more areas, sometimes there were disabled workers there.

2-00:24:12

McCain:

I don't remember them.

Dunham:

What was health care like during the war? What kind of health care did you have if any?

2-00:24:31

McCain:

I don't know that I had a health issue, so I don't remember.

Dunham:

Were you working on was it day shift, or did they have day, swing, and graveyard shifts?

2-00:24:48

McCain:

They had alternative, depending on where you wanted to work, I guess, but I mostly worked days.

Dunham:

And your good friend who was in the apartment complex, did you work with her? Well, you said she worked in an office.

2-00:25:09
McCain: She worked in a different building completely, and I never saw her at work.

Dunham: You didn't have a car, but how did you get to and from work?

2-00:25:28
McCain: We pooled.

Dunham: Carpooled?

2-00:25:28
McCain: Carpooled back and forth, and then we'd pay them so much for riding with them because of the gasoline, so it just depended.

Dunham: Do you recall what you were paid, about?

2-00:26:01
McCain: No, I don't.

Dunham: Did you have any sense—did you ever hear of other jobs, the Kaiser Shipyards or elsewhere, and—

2-00:26:10
McCain: Oh, yeah.

Dunham: What did you hear about them?

2-00:26:12
McCain: Well, I knew that they had other shipyards where there were women welders and other types of jobs, but I wasn't interested in being a welder.

Dunham: You were happy with your job.

2-00:26:39
McCain: I was happy doing what I was doing.

Dunham: What was Alameda like during the war? I haven't interviewed a lot of folks focusing on Alameda, can you—?

2-00:27:02
McCain: Well, the train ran down at the foot of Clement, is that Clement, down only on Lincoln.

Dunham: It crosses Lincoln?

2-00:27:16
McCain: No, it's down where the shipyards were, down in that area, and the train runs along there. It's so easy to get caught up in different things that was happening during your life, and you think it was one time when it wasn't.

Dunham: Well, especially if you had a lot of experiences, right?

2-00:28:06

McCain: Yeah.

Dunham: Did you go into other cities? Did you go into Oakland or Berkeley or San Francisco?

2-00:28:13

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: What would you do?

2-00:28:18

McCain: One night I remember Ethel and I decided, “We’re going to go to Oakland; we’re going to a dance.” So we go over there, and we’re going to go to—so we did, we went to the dance, and we danced stag. Just whoever asked you to dance, you’d dance. Then we decided we’d go home. We weren’t having much fun, so we’d just go home. So we were going to catch the bus to go home, and we go out to catch the bus. And these two soldiers were outside, and they start following us when we left. I thought, “Holy Smokes, I don’t know if this is such a good idea or not.” I said to Ethel, “I don’t know about this, girl.” So I’m walking down, and Ethel’s coming right beside me on the sidewalk, and she goes into one of the stores thinking she’ll go in and look in the window and maybe they’ll just pass on. He goes right in with her. And all of a sudden I hear a whack, and it’s Ethel. I said, “What happened?” She said, “Don’t ask.”

Dunham: But she had done the whacking, okay.

2-00:30:13

McCain: So we caught the bus and went home.

Dunham: Wow.

2-00:30:17

McCain: That’s the last time we did that. [laughs]

Dunham: Okay. But did you go to other dances where there—?

2-00:30:26

McCain: No, no, we didn’t.

Dunham: What about back at the job? Was there socializing at work, was there dating?

2-00:30:28

McCain: Oh, yes, they had little get-togethers, but it didn’t amount to anything, just—

Dunham: There wasn’t any intermingling sort of or rumors of hanky panky at the job site?

2-00:31:08

McCain: Oh, I guess there was, I don't know.

Dunham: Nothing first hand.

2-00:31:13

McCain: No.

Dunham: What about were there any injuries you were aware of, people getting hurt sometimes?

2-00:31:21

McCain: Oh, yes, yes.

Dunham: Any that you remember?

2-00:31:26

McCain: I don't remember any offhand, to tell you the truth.

Dunham: Did they have on-site first aid or medical attention to some injuries, do you recall?

2-00:31:42

McCain: If they did, I don't know.

Dunham: Well, you were lucky not to have to need it.

2-00:31:46

McCain: Yes, thank goodness. Although I did tear a finger once. But then I just had to go to the doctor and get it sewed up.

Dunham: How did that happen?

2-00:32:02

McCain: On the dualsaw. You're sawing and sawing and the metal breaks through, and your hand goes under the blade, and you almost lose a finger.

Dunham: You didn't slice it off.

2-00:32:15

McCain: No, no, it was sliced pretty good, but I didn't slice it off.

Dunham: So you leave work immediately and went to the doctor, I assume.

2-00:32:29

McCain: Yeah, so—

Dunham: Was that in Alameda?

2-00:32:32

McCain:

Yes. In fact, there was a hospital right in Alameda. After I came back from Alaska, after the war was over, I remember them saying that the war was over and that—But I don't remember too much about the next part of the day. I just remembered them saying that the war was over.

Dunham:

Were you at work?

2-00:33:31

McCain:

Yes, I was.

Dunham:

Was there a big celebration?

2-00:33:40

McCain:

Oh, yes, everybody was cheering and yelling, and it was quite a thing. Then it took a while for the boys to come home, and so we were still working for some time. Then when my husband came home from overseas there wasn't much work because there were so many people looking for work at that time that there just wasn't too much to be had. So he decided he wanted to go to Alaska. So we went to Alaska for about maybe a year and something; it wasn't too long.

Dunham:

Why did he want to go to Alaska, and how did you feel about it?

2-00:35:02

McCain:

Because there was a lot of merchant ships running back and forth into Alaska, and there was a lot of waterways that you needed to be a ship.

Dunham:

So to utilize his skills.

2-00:35:33

McCain:

Sort of like fertilizer, sorry, that need the waters—

Dunham:

To navigate—

2-00:35:48

McCain:

Navigate, navigate was what I was trying to say, so he wanted to be a navigator.

Dunham:

So did he find work doing that then?

2-00:36:03

McCain:

Well, he did, but it wasn't the kind of work that he wanted. So he was a bartender for a while. He worked in the Marine ways where they repaired the ships, and we bought a boat and we went fishing every night after work.

Dunham:

Did you like that?

2-00:36:37

McCain:

Yeah. It was fun.

Dunham: What was Alaska like?

2-00:36:43

McCain: Alaska was different. There wasn't very much going on there at that time that I was there.

Dunham: What time of year were you there? Were you there for a whole year; did you experience winter and summer?

2-00:37:00

McCain: I was there during part of the winter, and I was there part of the summer.

Dunham: So you experienced the long nights and long days.

2-00:37:17

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: Okay. But did you live in Alaska a big city—

2-00:37:26

McCain: I lived in Ketchikan. That's one of the first cities you go into after you leave Canada. It's built on the water. The whole city is built over the water practically, and there's a big mountain in the back. It's called Deer Mountain, [ringing sound] My son's in there.

Dunham: Okay.

2-00:38:17

McCain: We used to hike up to the top of that, and then you could look over onto the other side and see down. They only had a few cars up there, they didn't have many cars.

Dunham: How did you get around?

2-00:38:40

McCain: With people who had a car. Also, we had the boat, so if we wanted to go someplace, we'd take the boat, or, we sold it when we left there.

Dunham: So how long were you there, or what caused you to leave?

2-00:39:05

McCain: It wasn't too long. I left my husband while we were up there, came back and spent some time with my folks. Then I went back to Alameda and got ahold of Ethel and Howard again. Then I met my second husband after I came back.

Dunham: How did you meet him?

2-00:39:44

McCain: Through a friend that I worked with at the air station. Ray Barker, he worked in the machine shop where I worked, and his wife was Mary, and they

introduced me to David, and that was the kids' father. We were married shortly after that.

Dunham: So had you divorced when you were in Alaska?

2-00:40:30

McCain: Yes, yes. In fact, we had done that before I left there.

Dunham: So you weren't together too long. He'd been away at sea for quite a while, and then how long were you together after he came back?

2-00:40:42

McCain: Probably a year.

Dunham: Okay, so it just didn't work out.

2-00:40:51

McCain: Yeah, yeah. Don't ask me why; I don't know.

Dunham: Well, it's not that uncommon.

2-00:41:08

McCain: Yeah, if I had been smart I'd have probably stayed married, but I was just not very—see, I don't know, I wasn't very hip. I just thought it was going to be—I thought marriage was going to be a great big romantic thing.

Dunham: Like the movies.

2-00:41:33

McCain: Yeah, I guess.

Dunham: What did it turn out to be?

2-00:41:39

McCain: Didn't turn out that way, and then that marriage didn't turn out so good either.

Dunham: How many children did you have?

2-00:41:56

McCain: Three.

Dunham: Three.

2-00:41:59

McCain: Had twins the first time, and then five years later I had another daughter, so I didn't—Alaska was quite interesting when I was there, though, because there wasn't too much going on. There was fish canneries, and a lot of fishing was turned in there; that's what they did. They fished for a living, and there was very few cars. There were airplanes; they had small planes, and the boats.

Dunham: Did you work while you were there?

2-00:43:10

McCain: Yes, I worked in the hospital while I was there.

Dunham: How did you come to do that?

2-00:43:13

McCain: They needed people, so they were trying to get—there were some nurses that are new, and they are saying, “Beth, come to the hospital. We need you.” So I went, and they trained me.

Dunham: So that was the beginning of your career in health care.

2-00:43:35

McCain: Yeah.

Dunham: Did you like it right away?

2-00:43:37

McCain: Yes, I did. I did. There was a lot of tuberculosis up there at that time because the Indians were—they were not immune to tuberculosis like we are. As soon as they were introduced to it by someone, they just came out full bloom sometimes, and a lot of young kids.

Dunham: So what was your role? Were you like a nurse’s aide?

2-00:44:27

McCain: Yes, yes, I was. I go into the room one day, and here’s this old man. He’s out of bed, he’s under the bed, and he has his feet up in the springs and his hands, and he’s looking for his teeth. It was so funny.

Dunham: I’m going to adjust your microphone, just a second here, it came out. There I think I’m done, sorry.

2-00:45:21

McCain: You had some crazy experiences on your job sometimes.

Dunham: Sure. Were there any other—back at the Naval Air Station—any other particular memories of it that stand out, anything unusual that happened, or just in your experience?

2-00:45:43

McCain: No, I can’t.

Dunham: You did quite a variety of jobs it seems; did you have a favorite or least favorite job?

2-00:45:54

McCain:

I liked working in the tool crib where they would come and ask for tools, and you'd just go and get the tool they needed. You had to really know where the tools were in order to pass them out. Otherwise it took you forever to find them, and that was not good.

Dunham:

Did it take you long to learn all the tools?

2-00:46:25

McCain:

Well, I had someone working with me who had been there for a long time, so she knew where everything was. So it didn't take long for me to find out where the tools were and to be able to find them.

Dunham:

Now during the war while you were working there had you heard about the Port Chicago explosion in July of 1944 or the subsequent mutiny trial?

2-00:46:57

McCain:

Yes.

Dunham:

What do you remember about that?

2-00:46:58

McCain:

I don't.

Dunham:

You didn't hear it or feel it where you were in Alameda?

2-00:47:01

McCain:

No, no, I didn't.

Dunham:

But you did hear of it at the time?

2-00:47:07

McCain:

Oh, yes.

Dunham:

Did you hear about the trial after—?

2-00:47:13

McCain:

That was in Europe wasn't it?

Dunham:

No, there was the huge explosion where over 300 people were killed, predominantly African American stevedores who loaded the ammunition at Port Chicago, and afterwards they were asked to go back to work in kind of the same questionable conditions after they just lost many of their peers and many more had been injured. So a number, fifty, were eventually put on trial. They all initially refused to go back to work, but fifty were put on trial on Treasure Island. There is a question about how much was really known about it at the time and what the perception of it was. So that's why I was just curious if you heard about it then or after.

2-00:48:01

McCain: No, I didn't.

Dunham: Were you still in the Alameda area during the general strike of Oakland in '46, had you heard about that at all?

2-00:48:14

McCain: I don't think so.

Dunham: That's fine. During the war years and after, was religion or other community organizations a part of your life?

2-00:48:33

McCain: I didn't join it so, why, I know that there were many, many religions, but I never found that there any—every once in a while you'd get a black person that might give you a little trouble because some of them were carrying chips on their shoulders that you couldn't say anything to them. They'd get really huffy. One day this girl I was working with—I called her black; no, I called her Negro. Oh, she got really upset with me, and I said, "Well, I don't know what to call you. I can't call you white, and I don't know if I should be calling you black, but you are Negro. That's what it says in the dictionary." She said, "I'm not Negro." So I was having a little problem there at one time, but got that straightened out.

Dunham: How did it get straightened out? Was there an intermediary, or did you solve it yourselves?

2-00:50:25

McCain: No, no, no, it was just, I never allowed myself to fight.

Dunham: Did she seem like she wanted to fight?

2-00:50:33

McCain: Oh, yes, I think she would have, but I told her, "Look, girl, this is between you and I. You and I have to settle it. As soon as I find out what I can call you, I'm going to be happy, and when you find out what you can call me, you can be happy." I said, "You can call me white, pink, red, because I am most of those at one time or another." So I said, "You're not going to hurt my feelings, but as soon as I find out what I can call you, then we'll both be happy." So she said I could call her black, so that took care of that.

Dunham: Were there any other incidents like that, or did you see any fights there?

2-00:51:58

McCain: No, I never did, although I wasn't looking for them, so it could very well be there was. But I don't remember.

Dunham: Did women's fashion change during the war?

2-00:52:16

McCain: Oh, definitely, yes, yes.

Dunham: Did they wear that kind of clothes around town, too, or what was your impression of it?

2-00:52:24

McCain: Well, that's when women started wearing pants. They would go to the show or whatever occasionally, and when they started wearing comfortable shoes.

Dunham: Did you not wear pants or comfortable shoes?

2-00:52:55

McCain: Well, I really didn't because they really didn't make comfortable shoes like they do today. They didn't; you didn't have a choice because I just remember that I had high heels, and high heels were always narrow.

Dunham: Is that what you wore to work?

2-00:53:28

McCain: No, no.

Dunham: What did you wear to work?

2-00:53:30

McCain: I wore shoes like I got on only they weren't wide like this because they didn't make wide shoes years ago. And dresses became shorter.

Dunham: Did you ever hear of any gay or lesbian relationships during the war years?

2-00:54:04

McCain: You know, I don't think I ever did.

Dunham: Or rumors of it?

2-00:54:13

McCain: They must have been around. I was so—from the beginning that I had, we never knew there was anything such as gay or whatever. Lesbian. We never knew that. If we had them in my school, I just didn't know who they were. Maybe I just thought they were acting natural, just like everybody else. I don't know.

Dunham: I know you went to Alaska and you said you worked for a while after the war ended, but how did your time at the Naval Air Station Alameda come to an end working there? Did you resign, or were you let go?

2-00:55:16

McCain: No, Bob went to Alaska first, and then I went afterwards. I'm trying to remember whether I just quit or if they told us that we were finished.

Dunham: Did you have any desire to continue doing the work indefinitely, or if Bob hadn't wanted to go to Alaska, do you think you might have wanted to continue that work?

2-00:56:00

McCain: No, I don't think so. No, I think it was just a thing to do during the war, but I don't think I would have stayed in it.

Dunham: Well, in reflecting back on the war and how it fits in the story of your life, is there anything else you'd like to share?

2-00:56:30

McCain: You know, after this is all over, I'm going to remember a lot of things that I should have said, but I can't—it was kind of a dark time during the war in the lights were dimmed out, and we pulled our blinds, and it wasn't that bad, though, really, when we knew what was going on in some of the other places. In Germany and some of those that they were invading.

Dunham: Sure, well, when you came back from Alaska and after you got married your second husband, then did you work again soon after that?

2-00:57:59

McCain: Yes.

Dunham: What kind of work did you do then? Did you continue to do health care?

2-00:58:05

McCain: He and I bought a candy factory.

Dunham: Oh.

2-00:58:08

McCain: Where we made suckers, and we sold them to the gas stations where they sell gas, and then an emblem of their station we made into an all-day sucker, and they gave them out with the gasoline to the children.

Dunham: Did you do that for long?

2-00:58:55

McCain: Well, it wasn't too long, I'm not sure just when it was, how much it was, but it wasn't too long. We moved it from the candy factory where we had it on Lincoln Avenue down to Clement Street. Then David decided he wanted to go into a machine shop, so we sold the candy factory and all the molds and everything, and then he moved the machine. But he was going to have the machine shop in the—but then we moved. So he moved the machine shop to another place on Clement Street. The hospital is on Clinton. Clinton, Clement, I don't want to get them mixed up.

Dunham: We can clarify that. And then how soon after did you get back into health care?

2-01:00:38

McCain: Then the hospital was practically across the street from my house. So then I decided, "Well, I'm going to go to see if I can get a job at the hospital." So I did, and I worked there twenty years.

Dunham: What did you do there?

2-01:00:56

McCain: I was a nurse's aide. I worked in practically all the floors on the hospital. The Emergency, the babies. I was on the baby floor for some time, and then in BYU, oh, all of them, a lot of the older people I was with, too.

Dunham: Well, we're almost out of time today. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close?

2-01:01:45

McCain: I can't think of anything, except that I was married a third time.

Dunham: Okay, did you want to say anything about that?

2-01:01:57

McCain: Well, no, it was not a big, exciting thing. It was just he was a nice guy.

Dunham: Well, that's important.

2-01:02:17

McCain: Yes, it is.

Dunham: Okay, well the third time was the charm there?

2-01:02:22

McCain: Yeah, I guess. [laughs]

[End of Interview]