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Marion Ross

Rosie the Riveter
World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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Interview 1: May 5, 2011
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Redman: My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today, May 3 2011, for an interview with Marion Ross of Berkeley, California. Today we'll be focusing primarily on Dr. Ross' early childhood and her experiences in the Second World War. Following that, we'll speak about Dr. Ross' time on campus at the University of California, immediately after the war; and then we'll conclude with some discussion of her later life and career. I'm not sure how much we'll get through today, but let's start with the early— First I'd like to begin by asking you to share your full name. Let's start with that.

01-00:00:53
Ross: My full name is Marion Ross.

Redman: And the spelling on the last name is R-O-S-S, is that correct?

01-00:00:59
Ross: Yes.

Redman: Okay, excellent. Would you mind telling me where you were born?

01-00:01:03
Ross: No. I was born in San Francisco, on April the 27th, 1924. You can see my birthday cards still stand on my shelves.

Redman: Is that right? Wow.

01-00:01:15
Ross: All full of flowers. So I was born as the younger daughter of two. My sister Elise is now deceased.

Redman: My sister's name is actually Elisa, spelled E-L-I-S-A.

01-00:01:30
Ross: No, Elise, E-L-I-S-E, the German pronunciation. My father emigrated from Aberdeen, Scotland. Oh, I forgot to spell my name. M-A-R-I-O-N.

Redman: Perfect.

01-00:01:47
Ross: And R-O-S-S. So he emigrated first to Canada for $300 a year, and then eventually the bank—he worked for the Canadian Bank of Commerce—they moved him. They first offered him $100 more a year, if he would move to— It wasn't Toronto, it was Saskatchewan. And then they offered him another $100 a year, if he'd go to Dawson City, then the capital of Yukon Territory, which he did, and he became a Sourdough. This is a person who survived two winters in the arctic area. Then they moved him to Vancouver and then to San Francisco. In San Francisco, he met my mother, who was born in California.

She was the daughter of an immigrant, a German immigrant whose name was spelled Scodie, by the immigration authorities. He came looking for gold. He didn't find it, but he had the wit to become a homesteader. He had a cattle ranch in Kernville, or outside of Kernville, and he was able to name it. He wrote to, I guess the postmaster general, asking for the name of Scodie to become a post office. They rejected it because there was already a Scotia in Northern California. So he named it Onyx [pronounced Oh-nix]. I know the American translation is Onyx, but he didn't know any better and he thought Onyx was a nice stone.

Redman: Can you maybe explain how your mother and father then met? You've done a very nice job of summarizing how they both arrived in the Bay Area, but I'm curious how they then met.

01-00:03:48
Ross: Well, they both lived in a residential hotel, the Hotel Victoria. It's no longer there. It stood on, I think it was Sutter Street. They showed me once where it was. There was another resident there, a Mrs. Driscoll. She said to my mother, "I know a very nice young man that I would like to introduce you to." And Mrs. Driscoll did, indeed, do that. Daddy, I think was a very, very shy man. Well, people were shyer in those days. In many ways, their romance was fostered by a man that also lived in the hotel, Mr. Owen. Later, I met Mr. Owen. He was a jokester. Well, to tell you what I remember about him, once when we were living in Miraleste— I was, oh, ten or twelve when he first visited. He worked in the islands, the Hawaiian Islands. He would pop in; it was just not announced that he was coming. He popped in once with an armload of fresh roses, whereupon Mama sneezed. She was terribly allergic to roses. So the next time he came, he arrived with a bunch of fake flowers. So he was a jokester. He and Peaches—that was the name of his lady friend—and Mama and Daddy double dated quite a lot. Then one day, he went with them someplace; I don't know where. But not with Peaches. So he excused himself and said he wanted to go into this drugstore, that he had a terrible headache and he wanted to get some aspirin. He didn't come back. Mother and Daddy went into the store and the clerk said, "Oh, he just passed through and went out the back door. He asked if he could leave by some other entrance than that in which he came. He didn't buy anything, no. He just asked if he could use the back door." Whereupon Daddy and Mama laughed thought, ah, yes, Clint is up to one of his tricks. So there was this history. And Mama and Papa were married in 1919, in the chapel of Grace Cathedral.

Redman: So he wanted to just introduce these two lovely people and have them spend time—

01-00:06:45
Ross: Well, no, they had been introduced by Mrs. Driscoll. But I think the romance wasn't proceeding as rapidly as Mr. Owen thought was suitable. Maybe he was prompted by Mrs. Driscoll, I don't know.

Redman: That's very amusing. I'm curious, then, what the two of them were like personality-wise. So you said your father was shy and your mother was allergic to flowers, but I'm curious if you could tell a little bit more about what they may have been like as people.

01-00:07:18
Ross: Well, I loved them very much. They were probably very indulgent. Mama was keen on seeing to it that Elise and I turned out to be ladies. Mama could be very critical, and outspokenly critical. Daddy was very slow to make judgment. As parents, what one said, the other one would say, have you asked—

Redman: Your mother or your father.

01-00:08:08
Ross: Or your father. We were fairly honest children and we'd say yes and the other one would say, and what did so-and-so tell you?

Redman: So it was important for them to present a unified front.

01-00:08:21
Ross: Absolutely. *Never*, never disagreed on the treatment of us. Never.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:08:30
Ross: They were absolutely rigid about that. It also didn't matter what the other children did, what their privileges were. We did not go to camp, although everybody we knew went to camp. We weren't allowed to go to the movies in Los Angeles. No, they were very strict, in the sense of what we could do and what we couldn't do. But most of the things we wanted to do was done with their approval; and furthermore, their enabling quality.

Redman: I see.

01-00:09:13
Ross: Absolutely.

Redman: I'd like to ask you a little bit about your early recollections from grammar school. Maybe in particular, I'm interested in both of your siblings and how their experiences— or your sibling. How many siblings did you say?

01-00:09:33
Ross: No, I just had Elise.

Redman: You just had Elise. So I'd be curious to compare a little bit about your two experiences in grammar school; and in particular, if you were interested in math and social studies from a younger age.

01-00:09:46
Ross: No, my interest in the world of economics and government were stimulated by a *marvelous* high school teacher. I went to a very poor, instruction-wise, school in San Pedro. The first eight grades were in Miraleste—M-I-R-A-L-E-S-T-E—Elementary School. We had moved from San Francisco. Daddy, who had worked for the Canadian Bank of Commerce— Certainly, he was employed by them when he married Mother; and he still worked for them for a while. Then after WWI, he had a job in which he—what's the word I want?—renegotiated war contracts between the US government and its suppliers of some materiel, because firms had contracts with the US government to make more materiel, and they didn't need it. So there were various clauses that could be worked out, that they ended the contract and paid off. Anyway, that job came to an end in 1927, I think. I was three years old and I don't remember this at all. This is what Mother told me. She said to Daddy that that was a good time, while he was between jobs, to go visit his parents in Scotland.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:11:34
Ross: I'm sure he would never have done it, because he grew up *extremely* poor, a poverty, I think, that no American can have experienced. So he went. He went for six weeks and came back. That was his only visit home in all of his life. His parents came to visit us when we lived in San Pedro, in 1929. I can remember that visit very, very well.

Redman: How old would you have been about that time?

01-00:12:11
Ross: I was five.

Redman: So that might've been among your very earliest memories of your—

01-00:12:20
Ross: Oh, I can remember the house we lived in in San Francisco, because Elise and I each had a turtle. [chuckles] A *big* turtle.

Redman: Wow.

01-00:12:28
Ross: It lived in the backyard. One day, they went and lived in somebody else's backyard. But I didn't have a dog until we lived in San Pedro. I can remember Tippy very, very well.

Redman: Sure. But then in '29, the grandparents came to visit from Scotland.

01-00:12:49
Ross: Yes. Oh, Grandfather, he was seventy-two years old. I can remember he carried me up from kindergarten, up this steep hill. 18th Street was one of the

steepest hills in San Pedro. He was strong. Grandmother, I have a fainter remembrance of her. She was stout and she wore dark clothing. Grandfather was merry. He was. Daddy had told me that his mother was a great reader. He would get books from the library for her. He told me that she was very ambitious. They had three sons. The oldest one went to London, to the civil service; Daddy emigrated; and Uncle Alick stayed home and worked for a shipping company.

Redman: But there was a line of education there. But there's also this history of deep poverty in the family.

01-00:14:13
Ross: Elise and I visited Aberdeen in 1948. Uncle Alick, the youngest one, was living in the parents' house then and the grandparents were dead. It was a very nice granite house. But growing up, Daddy never talked much about what it was like except how smart Uncle Willie was. The sun rose and shone on Uncle Willie. He was the clever one. When Elise and I met Uncle Willie, happily, Mother had told us before we went, "If your Uncle Willie isn't everything that your father says he is, don't write home and tell us." So Mama was very wise in human relations, she really was. But no, I don't think Daddy's parents had much of an education at all.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:15:21
Ross: Because when we went to the grammar school that Daddy and Uncle Willie had attended, he had told us that Uncle Willie's name was on the board. Well, there was Daddy's, also, as number one. They were in different classes; they were four years apart. There was no age requirement past, I think, what we would call grammar school. You had to be very clever, and Daddy was, to have any education beyond that. Now I've lost track. Oh, Grandfather's visit in 1929. We lived in a terrible house. Oh, the garage door kept falling off. It was a spec house and we rented. I don't know what the rent was, but I know that the landlord had said to Mother that he would like to sell her the house, and Mother said, "You can't give it to me." [Redman laughs] Then they built this very nice house, where I grew up. So grammar school for me was at the Miraleste Elementary School. There, I had *wonderful* teachers. This was a L.A. County public school. I can remember the first teacher we had was Miss Sprung. She taught all eight grades in one room.

Redman: Is that right?

01-00:16:57
Ross: Yes. It was a new building. It was beautiful; it was architect-designed. This was in what would now be called a failed subdivision, as it were, because in the thirties, they built the house. I've seen the architectural drawings, from October '29, and that was the year that Wall Street collapsed. So we had no neighbors for quite a while. But as I say, Miss Sprung taught sixteen children

in eight grades. The next year, we were divided in half, and I think the following year, we were divided into three groups.

Redman: So more people eventually came into the school.

01-00:17:40
Ross: Yes. But still, never got very big while I was there, because I was there in the thirties.

Redman: Interesting. So fairly modest in size.

01-00:17:48
Ross: Yes. But we walked across an open field. I can remember my first, second and third grade teacher was Miss Black. And I adored her. She had brown, curly hair and was pretty as paint, or at least I thought so. We all adored her. Then Miss Jones, in the fourth and fifth grade. Miss Jones taught us a lot. She arranged all sorts of cultural excursions. We went to the Huntington, we went to the L.A. County Museum.

Redman: That's an impressive thing for young school children at that time, to go on these sorts of excursions.

01-00:18:37
Ross: Yes. She had bright red dyed hair and looked a fright. She, in many ways, scared us; but we knew that there was a world out there.

Redman: And you were starting to engage with this world in some way, yes. Because I'm interested in museums, and libraries in particular, I'm curious if you could tell me a little bit about what the L.A. County Museum might've been like for a child at this time.

01-00:19:15
Ross: Well, the tar pits—

Redman: Right, certainly.

01-00:19:18
Ross: —were thrilling. We did draw maps of Egypt and the Nile and we made little boats out of Daddy's pipe cleaners. But I think it was more the tar pits than what was in the L.A. County Museum, and the tar pits weren't part of the museum.

Redman: But at some point—

01-00:19:45
Ross: They were together.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:19:47
Ross: Oh, I remember the visit to the Huntington wonderfully well. I fell in love with pictures by Constable. I still am.

Redman: So some of the art that you may have seen at that time is still influencing your life.

01-00:20:05
Ross: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Redman: Do you think that shows some of the significance of what art can do for the life of an individual, exposing children to art at a very early age?

01-00:20:23
Ross: Yes, yes. I don't know that I believe in playing Bach when you were pregnant, but— Oh, yes. I think children are capable of a lot more than they're given credit for, and I think they understand a lot more than adults who talk.

Redman: In light of that, I'd like to ask, then, a question about economics. The Great Depression had an absolutely staggering effect on the American people, and as you well know, there was another economic recession in '37—is that correct?—when you were fairly young.

01-00:21:02
Ross: I can remember that.

Redman: Can you tell me, from your perspective, what those tough economic times were like to live through?

01-00:21:08
Ross: Daddy had a job, so we were never hungry. We were frugal. Did you know Virginia Smith?

Redman: I'm familiar with the name.

01-00:21:22
Ross: I've been told that nothing passed Kerr's desk that she didn't look over.

Redman: I see. Clark Kerr, this is, yeah.

01-00:21:35
Ross: Yeah. She was president of Vassar and was interim president at Mills, when we had the temporary vote for going co-ed and then the rescinding of that vote by the board of trustees, she became acting president for one year, and I worked for her. I admired her enormously. One time, she said to me what I knew to be true, "There is no substitute for living through the Depression." And she was *truly* poor. I don't know what her religious affiliation was, but she said her mother had the safekeeping of what little money this group had, and they knew she would be fair. We were not poor.

Redman: You hear this a lot as a theme, that the Depression influenced children and adults of that era in all sorts of very important ways. You believe that to be true, in terms of looking back at what administrators may have done, even in the 1950s and 1960s; a lot of it stemmed back to some of their upbringing during the Great Depression, you think?

01-00:23:02
Ross: Oh, sure. We still were living in San Pedro when my best friend, Jackie Bastian, who had a *wonderful* dog, had to move and they sold the dog. Or they gave the dog away. I'm sure you couldn't sell dogs in those days. They went back to the Midwest someplace, and I don't know where, but he was a wonderful friend.

Redman: [That must have been hard for you.]

01-00:23:39
Ross: There were truly hungry people. There really were. There were soup lines and I saw them; I knew that there were people that were hungry. Of course, I couldn't imagine missing a meal.

Redman: Right, certainly.

01-00:23:59
Ross: So no, it made a tremendous impression.

Redman: At a certain age, children become aware of, there's this thing called money. There's this currency that drives all sorts of decisions, like your parents' or your friends' parents having to move away for one reason or another. And underlying this is this economic driving factor that would be very important in your future life and studies. I'm just curious. It seems like this is a remarkable economic time to come of age during. It must've influenced, at a certain again, then— You mentioned this high school teacher later on who had such an influence in social studies. If you could maybe tell me how those things are perhaps connected, I would be interested.

01-00:24:58
Ross: Well, of course, I didn't see the global picture. But certainly, I turned to economics as a graduate student, on my rather naïve notion that I could make a difference. But as a child, these were all just—

Redman: Abstract.

01-00:25:27
Ross: That is, my parents did not hold political discussions, *ever*. My mother was totally, totally disinterested in politics or economics. Daddy used to put out two dollars when he went off to work in the morning, on the breakfast room table. He'd say to Mama, "Will this do?" And Mama would say yes, whatever he put on the table. Then if it wasn't enough, if we had to pay the vegetable man, who came around with fresh vegetables—I think it was every other

day—then Mama would go downtown and if she needed any money, she'd go to the drugstore and write Mr. Coover a check. Mr. Coover used to deliver ice cream on Sunday afternoons. He'd drive up in his car, from the drugstore, bringing us a quart of ice cream, if we had company.

Redman: I see.

01-00:26:35
Ross: Then we'd sit in the living room and have ice cream.

Redman: All right.

01-00:26:39
Ross: They were not political people. Daddy did go on the board of education when Elise and I were in grammar school. He had strong views about education. I've said this in public; I've said it at Mills College. Daddy said one of the reasons to have an education is that you can go tell anybody, any man or any woman, to go to hell. And he *never* used the word hell. But I can hear him say it now. I remember, also when I was at Miraleste, Ruth Erb. She was the widow of a man who Daddy had been very good friends with in San Francisco. Mr. Erb apparently died very quickly and unknowingly, of a sudden heart attack, at about the age of forty. They had two children, two boys. She had to get a job. Some relation apparently was prepared to pay the boys' schooling someplace. So what she did was, she gave demonstrations in movie houses, of dishes and cooking ware. She came to San Pedro and— Was it the Cabrillo Theater? I think so. Anyway, there were three theaters in town and she went to one. She stayed with us for, I think, the weekend, because those programs were on Saturday morning. I remember Mama taking Mrs. Erb breakfast in bed. We were so impressed by that because Mother *never* waited on houseguests, and here she was carrying up the tray.

Redman: That was because she had this education and was taking in an independent woman—

01-00:28:43
Ross: See, in Mama's day, there were very few women who even went to college, and Mama had gone to college. I don't know if going to college would've given her a better job. Daddy carried $10,000 worth of insurance. And he told us—I guess Elise and I were upset, either by Mrs. Erb not having any money or some other person who'd fallen on hard times—that he and Mama expected Mama to go back to college and get a teaching credential. $10,000 would be plenty for a year. He didn't believe in being impoverished by insurance, because they had a good friend, also from San Francisco, Mr. Elliott— I remember Daddy saying, yes—and called him by his first name—was an excellent insurance man and kept up his contracts by sending everybody a birthday card each year on his birthday; but that it wouldn't do to impoverish your husband by insisting on too much insurance. Later, when I was a graduate student, two of my friends—and they were young then—asked

Daddy how much insurance they should carry. He gave them the advice, and one wife was *furious*! [Redman laughs] Daddy simply said, "Mm." Daddy never rose to the bait.

Redman: It wasn't something to get fired about, it was just a reality.

01-00:30:57
Ross: Well, I've wandered afield.

Redman: Let me ask, then, about seeing young women with an education and being encouraged to have an education, or in some cases, middle-aged women or mother type of generation— Because there's sort of this misunderstanding in popular American history, you might argue, that women prior to the Second World War did not have jobs and they did not have an education. But in fact, there were women in the workplace.

01-00:31:32
Ross: The poor have always been in the workplace, thank you.

Redman: The poor have always been in the workplace, that's right. I'm curious, in light of your understanding of both your personal experience with these women who were educated or did have jobs, and sort of this notion— Maybe I'm underestimating popular American history, but I think that there's this sort of misunderstanding that Rosie the Riveter was the first symbol of American women in the workplace, and that to me, seems inaccurate.

01-00:32:10
Ross: It *is* inaccurate. Women worked very, very hard on the farm when we were an agricultural society. I remember there were men secretaries when I was a child, and the women, as the office staff, were behind men. Did you ever see the play by J.M Barrie, I think, called *The Twelve-Pound Look*?

Redman: No.

01-00:32:51
Ross: The pound is the currency in England. I'm not sure when this play was written, but probably no later than 1920. In it, a woman who's irritated with her husband and bored with her life. Her husband has this woman with this little machine come to the house, and he dictates to her. It's a business relationship. The married woman sees this woman coming and going on her own time, carrying this little black box and going down the street to catch a bus, et cetera, so she gets curious about this and she asks the woman what this is. This was an early typewriter. She's so envious of this woman, and the play's called *The Twelve-Pound Look*.

Redman: Wow.

01-00:33:55
Ross: Because that's what the machine cost.

Redman: Sure.

01-00:33:57
Ross: There's a very good book on professional women. Oh, she was secretary of commerce or the secretary of labor. Frances Perkins was the first woman in the cabinet; but then I can't remember now who it was. She wrote a book on sex in the workforce or something like that. What it was, was an analysis of the role that women played in medicine and some of the other professions in the fifties, compared with the twenties and thirties. The women who entered medicine in the twenties and thirties—and there were a lot of them—they stayed and they had a longer period as doctoring than did men in the twenties and thirties. Either it was so hard to get into medical school that only the most determined ever got there— But nevertheless, there were more women in these professions than in the fifties and sixties. [Added during editing: Juanita Kreps was the secretary of commerce under Carter, and wrote Sex in the Marketplace, American Women at Work.]

Redman: That's sort of a mind-bending.

01-00:35:19
Ross: It's not true that Rosie the Riveter was the first wave of women into the workforce.

Redman: Do you think I'm overstating this argument that popular history or sort of this popular understanding is that Rosie is envisioned in— I don't want to take away from the important contribution of female wartime labor. But it seems as though we, as historians and economists and social thinkers, mark that as being this seminal moment, when in fact, there is this long history.

01-00:36:01
Ross: We're so busy reinventing the wheel. It's true in all sorts of historical things—that the Western world didn't discover gunpowder, didn't discover the things that the Chinese knew 3,000 years ago. So much of modern medicine goes back a long, long ways in China. No, I think that it's probably built into our genes somewhere that we want to be the first. Now, we're certainly the first people to have gone to the moon, the first generation that's gone to the moon; but so many other things are not the newness that we would like to think they are. One thing I think about Rosie the Riveter, there were very few women in the shipyard in which I worked, that were not in welding, in riveting. In the electric department, where they assembled circuit boards, staff were nearly all women. That was attributed to the dexterity that women do have in their hands. But it isn't all dexterity. There are now some women dentists. But oh, twenty years ago, 2 percent of dentists were women.

Redman: That's a position that requires dexterity.

01-00:37:44
Ross: Yes, and 98 percent of the dental hygienists were women.

Redman: Right. That's fascinating. What a remarkably gendered field.

01-00:37:49
Ross: I had a wonderful dentist and he went off to be head of the dental school, and I asked him if he wouldn't try to do something about that, because surely, that can't be anything but discrimination. Just until recently now, you could never become a plumber unless you had an uncle or a cousin who was a plumber. There were simply trades that were, well, almost family.

Redman: It strikes me, just in terms of my experience of interviewing mainly women, it doesn't seem to me surprising when I meet someone who lived through the Great Depression who was a man who became interested in engineering, let's say. But sort of the stereotype that we have today is that women are not encouraged to do math and science at all, and that there aren't any ways around this. But instead, I see that there were a lot of women who were interested in math and science careers. I'm just curious, from your perspective, if there were men and women—or young women, in particular—who, like yourself, showed any sort of aptitude towards fields like economics. I'm curious to see, then, how this plays out over the course of your career. I know that's an enormous question, but—

01-00:39:39
Ross: Well, when Elise and I finished the eighth grade, we had to go downtown to San Pedro, to high school. Well, we had to go to the ninth grade, which was the third year of junior high. At the end of the sixth grade, we had the chance of transferring to San Pedro, seventh, eighth and ninth grades, and then ten, eleven and twelve a little later. Our parents put it to us, did we want to transfer? Because our two best friends, Patsy and Barbara, not related, were transferring. We said no. I don't know why we said no, but we did. That meant we were the only Caucasian girls in the seventh and eighth grade. The population of Miraleste Elementary School was made up of a few families on the east side of the Palos Verdes Hills and the Japanese farmers' children. The Japanese raised tomatoes. They dry farmed them. The Japanese children, after school, were bused home, and there they made little white paper cones to protect the little tomato seedlings. And on Saturday, they went to Japanese school in Los Angeles. So they were not really part of the after-school socializing. We were friends in school. The teachers, they could've been teaching in a public school in 2011. We had lots of emphasis on national festivities. Elise and I, one time I remember Mother made us—she hated to sew—made us plaid skirts and we had little tam o'shanters, and were little Scotch girls and did the highland fling. We all learned each other's national anthems.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:41:59
Ross: Yes. And we danced around the Maypole and somebody explained the various origins of the Maypole dance.

Redman: This all seems fairly cosmopolitan and progressive. Like you said, this could be an elementary school or a high school in 2011.

01-00:42:18
Ross: No, this is in elementary school.

Redman: Wow. Okay.

01-00:42:22
Ross: Oh, high school was a bore. [Redman laughs] No, truly.

Redman: So in elementary school, there was, in the Los Angeles period of your life - Because alternatively, I've heard this notion that the Japanese in California mainly kept to themselves, in an isolated community; whereas Mexican nationals or African Americans or Chinese Americans did, quote/unquote, "a better job of integrating into mainstream American society." And what you're saying, in your experience, is that that's not exactly the case.

01-00:42:56
Ross: Well, the only group I knew as a child were some Japanese adults and my school friends. The Japanese at that time all lived on Terminal Island, totally segregated. Nobody lived on Terminal Island but Japanese, and nobody lived on the western Palos Verdes Hills except Japanese, and they were all dry farming tomatoes. They weren't allowed to own land. During WWII, it got taken away.

Redman: Sure. We'll get into that.

01-00:43:50
Ross: Yes, a little later. So the Japanese that I knew were that there was a— [phone rings; audiofile stops & restarts]

Redman: When we paused, we were talking about ethnic groups and this notion that the Japanese were particularly insular.

01-00:44:11
Ross: Well, one thing, there was a tremendous language barrier. If you've ever known anybody who's studied Japanese, you find out how very, very difficult it is. But there were tremendous spaces, geographically, there were whole spaces of empty, empty acreage, both between Miraleste and this western part, and another great area of nothing growing, except garbanzo beans, between that and Lunada Bay. But in San Pedro there was a Mexican— We called it Mexican Town. They were in an isolated area, but there were other people around them. But the Finns lived very close to one another. There weren't very many Finns, but they lived around together. And there was a distinction between Italians and Yugoslavs that was *fantastically* different. The Italians nearly all came from the island of Ischia, which is next door to Naples, or in the Naples Bay.

Redman: And they viewed themselves as being entirely distinct and separate from the Italians.

01-00:45:33
Ross: Oh, yes.

Redman: I see. Okay.

01-00:45:34
Ross: If you were an Italian, you weren't to go out with a Yugoslav boy.

Redman: Let me ask, then, about religion in those terms. I know certainly in the Midwest, the different religious distinctions were very sharp, even within Protestant divisions or between Protestants and Catholics. I'm curious in L.A. These ethnic divisions were strong. Or you might say racial divisions. But what about religion? Were different denominations talked about in this manner?

01-00:46:12
Ross: There was only the one Catholic church in town and the Mexicans, the Italians, and some Slavs all went to the Catholic church. Now, the other Protestant churches had a mix of the other Caucasians. Mother read the Bible to us when we were little; they did not go to church. When we went to the ninth grade, as part of our socialization process, as I would think of it now, we wanted to go to church, or at least to the young people's groups, because that was important socially.

Redman: A lot of other kids would go.

01-00:47:17
Ross: Yes. Mother and Daddy said to us, "Well, you could go to different churches and try it out." But there were two things we couldn't do. Well, yes, they did say this. Well, they were opposed; they didn't say they wouldn't let us. But we could go to church on Sunday and Daddy would drive us down and we'd sample.

Redman: Right, okay.

01-00:47:49
Ross: One of our best friends was Jimmy Bloch. Jimmy was Jewish, so we wanted to go there. They said fine, but the Jews wouldn't have us. They made it clear to us that there wasn't— Well, it never occurred to us; we didn't know any Muslims, so it never occurred to us. We knew that the Japanese people we knew were both Buddhists and some of them Shinto. But there wasn't any local branch of the Buddhist church or the Buddhist religion. But that also wasn't in our purview. But we couldn't become, or they wouldn't want us to become Christian Scientists or Catholic.

Redman: Interesting. [Your parents] had some opinions.

01-00:49:01
Ross: Oh, yes.

Redman: And they were willing to voice those. But on the one hand, they were willing to let you try out different religions.

01-00:49:08
Ross: Yes.

Redman: Interesting.

01-00:49:15
Ross: I don't think it occurred to them that we might want to do something other than Christianity. Because they didn't read the Koran or the Bhagavad Gita. They didn't read any other texts to us. Well, we knew about Buddhism.

Redman: There was some sort of awareness of this being another distinct religion and it being quite distinct, in some sense, from Christianity or Judaism, and then this being representative of this local group that were friends or neighbors or people that were attending your schools.

01-00:50:01
Ross: Yes.

Redman: That's a very interesting awareness to sort of come to.

01-00:50:11
Ross: We actually joined the young people's fellowship of the Episcopal church, because Mrs. Nurse, wife of the minister, played all these wonderful tunes—not just hymns—on the upright piano. Oh, Daddy always said that the Episcopal church there should've been a mission, [they laugh] because it was so ramshackle and so broken down. When my parents got a new carpet for the dining room, they gave the Nurses the old dining room carpet. That's how poor everybody was.

Redman: Certainly. I can imagine that churches would be something that would suffer, in some sense. On the other hand, is the challenging economic times that—

01-00:51:05
Ross: The Catholic church didn't suffer because it had a huge congregation. They and the Christian Scientists tithed.

Redman: And they did quite well, in terms of fundraising in that time?

01-00:51:21
Ross: Well, they didn't have to fund raise, it came with the territory. In other words, they had a solid internal group.

Redman: Devoted followers, who would also contribute in some—

01-00:51:38
Ross: Well, they tithed. Absolutely.

Redman: So that wasn't just a sort of symbolic— it was an economic practice.

01-00:51:44
Ross: Mm-hm.

Redman: I'd like to conclude this first tape in asking about your childhood. We've talked about a lot of topics on this first tape, in terms of your upbringing and what life was like in California during the Depression. Is there anything else you'd like to add on that thought, before we get into your later life?

01-00:52:13
Ross: Well, I think of it as a very happy time. When we went to school, Mama took us to the library every Thursday afternoon. Miss MacMillan was the librarian. She and Mama would talk books, because Mama read a lot. We would come home every afternoon after school, and Mama would be sitting in the kitchen, baking cookies and reading a book. Reading was built in. After dinner, Mother and Daddy would sit in two chairs in front of the fire, with one lamp between them.

Redman: So reading was absolutely central.

01-00:53:09
Ross: It wasn't talked about. In other words, books were available. I've told this story so many times to my friends. When I was in the fourth grade, I came down to breakfast and asked them what albeit meant. So they explained to me what albeit meant. Daddy said, "What are you reading?" So I said, "Ottillo." Nobody had ever told me it was *Othello*. [Redman laughs] So Daddy said to Mama, do you think she ought to be reading that? And Mama said, "She can read anything she wants to."

Redman: That's a remarkable moment for a young person in fourth grade, to hear that from her parents.

01-00:54:00
Ross: Now, of course, there weren't any unsuitable books around. In the summertime, upstairs, I would lie on my tummy—we had a little balcony and the wind would blow in—and I would spend all afternoon reading. When Elise and I were little, we played jacks. Do you know what jacks are?

Redman: I know what jacks look like. I have to confess—

01-00:54:41
Ross: You move up from picking up one to picking up two, and then you could finally get hold of twelve.

Redman: Twelve, okay.

01-00:54:47
Ross: Yes. We'd spend hours and hours playing jacks. Then in the wintertime, when it rained, we played Monopoly, endlessly.

Redman: Monopoly, that is absolute that I want someone who becomes a life-long economist to have played as a child. It makes perfect sense to me. [they laugh] Learning about money and investing and things of that nature. Wildly inaccurate, perhaps, but—

01-00:55:21
Ross: So many other games didn't appeal to us. Daddy taught us to play poker. [chuckles]

Redman: But that never caught on?

01-00:55:29
Ross: No. No.

Begin Audio file 2 05-05-2011.mp3

Redman: My name is Sam Redman and I'm here today, May 3, 2011. I'm continuing an interview with Marion Ross of Berkeley. Today we are doing two parts of what we hope to be a multi-day interview, and this is the second tape. We talked, in the first tape, about your early childhood and growing up during the Great Depression. Would you be willing to situate me in time? About how old would you have been when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

02-00:00:34
Ross: Oh, well, that was December '41. I was a sophomore. I went to college, Mills College, in September, 1940. I was sixteen. I'd graduated from high school in June of that year. I was a sophomore, and I was then an English major. I thought I was going to write the great American novel. At any rate, I'd been to chapel and I was walking back to my dorm—we then called them halls, not dorms—and there was somebody rushing through Olney Hall, screaming. I was bewildered. The news of Pearl Harbor had just gotten to us. There was no television and most of us didn't have radios in our room. There was a radio in the rec room, rec for recreation, in the basement. My sister and I thought that the rec room stood for it being a wreck of a place, because it was broken-down furniture, et cetera.

Redman: Was your sister at Mills College at the same time?

02-00:02:06
Ross: Yes.

Redman: Now, I've heard accounts that Pearl Harbor took place during finals at Cal. My guess is that Mills was on maybe a different academic calendar at that time.

02-00:02:22
Ross: Yes. At that time, Mills ended the semester the first week in February. So Christmas was a time for doing term papers. We later moved to ending the semester before Christmas. But there were a great many girls from Hawaii at Mills, and they all lived in Olney. There were at least twenty Hawaiian students. They weren't Hawaiians ethnically, they were children of missionaries or mainlanders who'd moved there for—

Redman: So mainly Caucasians who maybe still had families, some of them, in Hawaii, or friends?

02-00:03:06
Ross: Oh, yes, they *all* had families in Hawaii. They came to Mills from Hawaii.

Redman: I see.

02-00:03:11
Ross: And so they were resident in Hawaii; they were born— Well, not all of them, probably, but most of them were born there.

Redman: Right. They called Hawaii home.

02-00:03:21
Ross: Yes, Hawaii was home. It wasn't home just to their parents, but mostly to their grandparents; and some of them, even their great-grandparents. That's probably a little early. Mr. and Mrs. Mills has been in Hawaii for some period of their missionary lives. At any rate, so there was great upset and much to-ing and fro-ing. We also had a number of Japanese students, from Hawaii, some from California, and some from Japan. It's very nice; this year, May Watanabe, who was an American Japanese and was relocated, she's being given an honorary BA this next week. However, for those students who were seniors at that time, they were given real degrees in absentia. That was by decision of the president. An autocratic woman, but she did the right thing.

Redman: I'm sorry, was that decision particularly for the Japanese who had been relocated? Or for all students who then had to leave their education for one reason or another during the war?

02-00:04:56
Ross: It was for all Japanese students, because all Japanese students either went home to Japan, if that was home for them, or they were relocated. For anyone who was a senior that year, they were given degrees in absentia.

Redman: I see.

02-00:05:14
Ross: So now, May Watanabe is going to get her honorary BA degree, because she was just a sophomore, I think, because I remember her from that time. At any rate, there was much excitement. We had an assembly the next day, in which

President Reinhardt addressed us all. She said this was a fateful day, et cetera, but that Japan was now the enemy, but that the Japanese people, and especially the students who we knew here, were not the enemy.

Redman: That must've been a very powerful, powerful moment, at sixteen.

02-00:06:02
Ross: Oh, well, I was seventeen by then.

Redman: Seventeen by that time, sure.

02-00:06:10
Ross: It was a fantastic address, it really was. That's what I think leadership is about, saying things you believe, and also as moral advice to the young. Because we were so unformed, we really were. I think if this had been a speech of hate, we would've had a different attitude.

Redman: Which it certainly could've been. From my understanding of that moment, there was a lot of fear and anxiety, especially on the West Coast, about a possible attack. It really shows a different perspective and tact to tell the students that the Japanese at Mills College were not the enemy. It's a very interesting moment.

02-00:07:20
Ross: Right. Daddy had had a long-term employee from the Hawaiian Islands—Japanese by ancestry, but born in Hawaii—and in February, he was, quote, "relocated." He had been given the opportunity to move over the mountains, to work in the celery fields of Utah. Daddy had advised him not to do that, that Frank was now thirty, thirty-one and Daddy said, "You're too old for stoop labor." Daddy had a faith that the American government would treat Americans differently from Japanese. Well, he was wrong. Frank had married, oh, five or six years before that, because Elise and I went to the wedding. We didn't go to the wedding; we went to the reception. They had finally adopted a boy. Very, very hard to adopt in Japanese society. There's always some relation. If mama died, there's always some relation that would take care of the baby. But they had adopted a baby and mama and baby were sent to a different camp at first.

Redman: Wow.

02-00:09:01
Ross: At any rate, so Daddy drove Frank up to the station. Why were we home? We didn't go home, except for the holidays. Maybe it was later than February. But at any rate, maybe it's what Daddy told me. Daddy wept. I only saw him weep twice in my entire life.

Redman: Wow. What was the second time? Just to contextualize that. Do you recall the—

02-00:09:36

Ross: Oh, yes, I recall. [chuckles] It's when Mama fell. She was very old by then, and there was a tremendous amount of blood. But she was all right. This is the time my brother-in-law took her—I wasn't there—took her to the hospital. She was okay; it was just an awful lot of blood. So I didn't see and Elise told me.

Redman: I'm really curious in that moment, because it seems to me that a lot in your father's generation had a really overriding faith in the US government, and in FDR personally.

02-00:10:17

Ross: Oh, he hated FDR. [laughs]

Redman: Interesting. Because that would've been, in some sense, sort of counter to a lot of people in California, especially immigrants, who attached themselves to FDR and the government and were very pro-Democrat.

02-00:10:34

Ross: Can I tell you a funny story?

Redman: Certainly.

02-00:10:36

Ross: Daddy appeared as a witness for somebody—it was an Italian—for his citizenship. The judge asked him some questions, et cetera. Then in answer to one of them—I don't remember quite how it goes, but—the would-be citizen said, as part of his correctness - He said, "I vote the straight Democratic ticket, and have ever since I came." [they laugh] Oh. So yes, I understand that. But back to this business. San Pedro was much affected by the war, of course, because very shortly, up went all these barrage balloons, as deceiving elements in the war. And of course, we had blackout curtains.

Redman: But just going back to your father dropping off Frank at the train station and that being such a powerful moment for him.

02-00:11:53

Ross: Well, Frank was really quite a wonderful person.

Redman: But I'm curious why so many Californians did not have such a powerful emotional reaction to the Japanese being interned. Your father's reaction strikes me as something I can really relate to. That you have friends in the community and then they're being taken away and being mistreated. It seems like it would be something that would be a controversial moment. But by and large, there was little controversy about it.

02-00:12:31
Ross: Oh, no, people thought that it was the right thing to do. But Daddy thought there was one man in the Japanese community who may have been a spy. The FBI rounded him up on December 8, and he committed suicide in the hospital.

Redman: Interesting.

02-00:12:55
Ross: Because we didn't go home until Christmas vacation, an overnight business. Daddy said that he played too good tennis for being a farmer.

Redman: [chuckles] That's fascinating.

02-00:13:21
Ross: No, he was a fisherman, but Daddy said he played too good tennis.

Redman: For being a fisherman.

02-00:13:26
Ross: Right.

Redman: Okay, so there was some other story there.

02-00:13:29
Ross: But to finish up about Frank, Mama, in her quiet way— She had a long, long-time friend, Aunt Thea, who was married to a professor of botany at the University of Michigan then. But meanwhile, Frank and his wife Hana had been reunited. Mama got the idea that Dr. Gleason—Uncle Alan, Thea's husband—might do something for Frank. She wrote Thea. In the old boys network, Uncle Alan, who was a true professorial type, wrote a three-volume work on the blackberry. [Redman laughs] At any rate, he knew and Mama knew there was a language program at Michigan. Frank was instrumental in helping to teach Japanese.

Redman: Wow. Interesting.

02-00:14:46
Ross: So then towards the end of the war, Frank and Hana lived in—

Redman: Ann Arbor.

02-00:14:52
Ross: Right.

Redman: Fascinating.

02-00:14:55
Ross: So his talents were used.

Redman: That's a nice story, that your parents had his interest in mind and were friends with him. I'm interested, in that that seems that that's such a rare account of an emotional relation—

02-00:15:12
Ross: Well, they didn't socialize with Frank and Hana, you understand. They didn't socialize with them. But one time Elise and I got into some sort of, oh, minor scrape, I can't imagine why. It was in daylight. We ended up in a part of town that we shouldn't have been in. So what did we do? We called up Frank. I guess we called Daddy's plant and—

Redman: Did he come and get you then?

02-00:15:53
Ross: Yes, he came and got us.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

Redman: Now let me ask, then, taking us back to Mills College, can you tell me about what Mills College may have been like in September of 1940, when you arrived as a freshman? I'm just interested in sort of getting a before and after snapshot of higher education, in some sense. What was it like in 1940?

02-00:16:48
Ross: The campus was beautiful. I don't know, I've filtered out so much. Olney had once had two bedrooms with a study in between. But by then, the middle room had been turned into a bedroom. There were three of us in each little compound, and I had the center room in my little compound. It was tiny. Tiny. But we had a wash basin in the room, and of course, the john and shower down the— Were there showers or just a bathtub? I can't see that. I had Dr. Diller for an advisor, and he recommended that I take this wide variety of courses. I took astronomy and English composition and music and history of the Old Testament, which he taught. That was an eye opener because he was a wonderful historian. Most of the students in that class were daughters of ministers, with very fixed views about the rightness of the Bible. Mama had explained that the Bible wasn't all written in one day; it was by different people at different times, and some of the stories didn't quite match. So that was all right by us. He took this very sophisticated historical research, so there was a lot of upset in that class; that's what I remember. Then music appreciation class was a *disaster*, as far as I was concerned. I tried very hard and I didn't get it. Didn't get it. So you want to ask me about the social life?

Redman: Yes. Well, let me just go back quickly to the Old Testament course. It seems to me like that would be a situation where a lot of students would be introduced to the very concept of critical thought for the first time. Here, geez, let's jump into this topic that cuts to the core of what your parents' identity is or your family identity or your personal identity as a Christian. So I can sort of see some of that backlash. But I'm interested then, as you become a faculty

member yourself, seeing how the other students around you absorbed critical thoughts. From the sound of it, your mother had sort of instilled that very early on, by saying, some of these stories have conflicting ideas and it wasn't all written in one day. It's not just taking it as the literal word of God, capital G; it's looking at it with a different sort of a lens. For my own college education, it seems that I learned as much by the bad professors as the good professors, in terms of my thinking later on as a scholar, in terms of how to teach and how not to teach, I guess. So there was a lot going on there in that freshman year, it sounds like. I'm curious then if we could talk about either that or your social life, I'd be interested in, as well.

02-00:20:42
Ross: Well, I didn't have any social life. I suppose I was in the process of adjusting. We had been told by Mama, at frequent intervals, "When you go to college," etcetera. It was assumed we'd go to college. My two best friends [in high school] were in the class ahead of me and another friend, the same thing, but she didn't go to college, she eloped—which was a staggering shock to me. Oh, she did go to college, but she eloped her freshman year, that was it. At any rate, of our graduating high school class, Elise and I were the only two girls who graduated from college.

Redman: Wow. It's a pretty staggering attrition.

02-00:21:58
Ross: It was not an academic high school. I think five boys rode in one of their fathers' cars to UCLA, as freshmen. It was a poor place. It was poor. So back to college. I don't know quite what I expected, except it was going to be a wonderful new world.

Redman: So you were looking forward to it.

02-00:22:28
Ross: Oh, yes! Oh. Yes. We loved it.

Redman: Do you recall why you chose Mills, what attracted you to Mills?

02-00:22:37
Ross: Yes. They didn't have SAT scores then, and the college boards were only in the east; but there was a Stanford— It wasn't called the Stanford achievement test, but it was a Stanford test. They graded us A, B, C, D or 1, 2, 3, 4, because I remember we took it in Long Beach High School. Mama drove us over there on a Saturday. We didn't know what these people were doing, walking up and down the aisles. At any rate, so I got a 1 and Elise got a 3, which meant acceptance.

Redman: And one was—

02-00:23:32
Ross: Top.

Redman: —the highest.

02-00:23:33
Ross: Yes. I was offered a scholarship. Stanford took 8 percent of its class as women. Mama didn't want us to go to Berkeley because there was no dormitory life and you had to live in a boarding house or join a sorority, and we were anti-sororities. Mama had been a Theta, so she could've introduced us to the Theta group here, but— I don't think we would've pledged. I don't think they would've invited either of us; but we didn't want it. Mama didn't want us to go east because we'd marry some Easterner. [they laugh]

Redman: That was a terrible fear, I suspect.

02-00:24:55
Ross: Yes, it was. We thought about Pomona, but we didn't want to live there. It was smoggy. It was smoggy then. Was it tar they burned? What was it they burned in the wintertime to keep the frost from destroying the oranges? It was real smog; it was black.

Redman: Wow. Okay, yeah. Disgusting.

02-00:25:33
Ross: Yes, yes. What did they burn? I can't remember. Anyhow, so it was a new world. We took ourselves to the opera.

Redman: To what extent did you experience San Francisco and Oakland?

02-00:25:51
Ross: Oh, we went to the movies at Grand Lake. The bus went there. We went to the opera and we went to the de Young museum, frequently. No, we were bent on improvement. Yes, we were.

Redman: So a lot of reading and experiencing new things.

02-00:26:26
Ross: Right.

Redman: Interesting.

02-00:26:27
Ross: It's what college was about.

Redman: Certainly. So then in 1941, in December of 1941, a lot of things, I suspect, changed at Mills. Now, at Berkeley, I know that a lot of young men were either drafted or joined and left. There was still one more semester left for a lot of seniors, but people left school and went into the service or worked for the federal government. How about Mills? What was the transition immediately after Pearl Harbor, if any? I suspect there was.

02-00:27:11
Ross: Well, a number of the Eastern students, their parents withdrew them. Totally non-Japanese students left.

Redman: I know that there was a lot of looking towards the Pacific, in terms of attention on the West Coast, for obvious reasons. On December 8, it would've seemed like the prudent thing for some families in the East, to withdraw their daughters from Mills.

02-00:27:46
Ross: Well, it was a hysterical time. Then later, the transportation problem for their going home for Christmas became very problematic.

Redman: Did that instill more of a seriousness of the fear? Was the situation of the war already a grave enough situation to sort of understand that this was a major world event? Or this was something new or different, something that you hadn't quite experienced before; that people were withdrawing from school and going back east and that Pearl Harbor had been attacked? Overnight, it seems to just be this incredibly dramatic life change.

02-00:28:38
Ross: Well, it *was* dramatic. After all, in WWI, the US as a whole was remote from attack. In WWII, Hawaii was just a territory. And it didn't have the tourism that it has now, and it was detached by— It's a five-hour flight. I think it's a five-hour flight to Hawaii, isn't it?

Redman: There's a lot of ocean.

02-00:29:21
Ross: Yes, there's a lot of ocean. I'm afraid there were a great many people who really didn't see the importance of Hawaii. You know that the extension of the draft by congress—was it in '38, or was it as late as '39? —only passed by one vote.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

02-00:29:51
Ross: Oh, America First. Pro-German was big.

Redman: Wanting to isolate, stay out of the war.

02-00:30:02
Ross: Not our business.

Redman: Yes. Did you find that reflecting in California? I know certainly, that was the attitude of a lot of folks in places like the Midwest, and there was absolutely an element of that in Washington, D.C. But was that true in California, too, that a lot of people thought, before the war, this is none of our business, let's stay out of Europe? Was that the sentiment that you saw?

02-00:30:25
Ross: When I was a senior in high school, pushed by this wonderful civics teacher, I was the representative of San Pedro High School at the World Friendship Club annual debate, in May of 1940. This is when, a few days before the meeting, Holland and Belgium were overrun. This is before France fell. The question [chuckles] that we were posed was, should the US intervene on Britain's behalf in WWII? I was the *only* pro person in that discussion. This was of all the high schools in Southern California.

Redman: What year, do you recall, was this again?

02-00:31:27
Ross: I think it was May 15, 1940, and I think France—

Redman: Wow.

02-00:31:31
Ross: France hadn't fallen yet, but Belgium and Holland had been overrun.

Redman: And you were the only representative.

02-00:31:36
Ross: I was the only one from the San Pedro club who took the pro position. At this meeting, I think there were two of us. I think there were four of us, but I'm not sure about that, four of us on the panel. I don't remember. But I know that I was the only person, and I was the representative for San Pedro.

Redman: So in other words, there was a large degree of resistance to us entering the war, still, in California—

02-00:32:15
Ross: Yes.

[End of Interview 1]

Interview 2: July 12, 2011
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Redman: All right. My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today again with Marion Ross. It's our second session today, on July 12, 2011, and today we'll be starting with the Second World War, and following that, we'll talk about some time you spent on the campus of the University of California, and specifically, your involvement with the International House, I'd like ask about.

03-00:00:29
Ross: Yes. What happened to the shipyard experience? I thought that's what it was all about.

Redman: Yes, let's get into that. Let's spend the majority of today talking about that. So I'd like to begin, then, situating us in time at the very start of the war, what your recollections were about Pearl Harbor.

03-00:00:47
Ross: Now, am I to look at the camera or look at you?

Redman: You're to look at me, if that's all right.

03-00:00:50
Ross: Oh, sure, All right. It was Sunday, December 7. I first heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor when I was walking back to my hall, after chapel. There were these girls screaming down the corridors. We had a great many Hawaiian residents in Olney; that was their hall. So we had about twenty, divided over the four years. We also had a number of Japanese Americans and a couple of Japanese students from Japan. Now, the thing is, I can't remember; I think they lived in Mills Hall. They did not live in Olney. At any rate, so everyone was excited. The girls were trying to get in touch with their parents. They nearly all lived in Honolulu. Cissy lived in Paia, which is on Maui, and another girl lived on the island of Hawaii, but the others were all Honolulu students. Nobody knew anything, and so it was a very frantic time. Our head resident— Dear me, the whole idea of a chaperone now is so long gone. Mrs. Judd had been the governor's lady of Hawaii for many years, and she was divorced, but she still had lots of friends in Honolulu. I can't remember the rest of the day.

Redman: Do you have a sense of how so many students from Hawaii or from Japan, or Japanese American students had ended up at Mills in particular? Do you think it was sort of a coincidence, or was there a reason for that?

03-00:02:58
Ross: Oh, well, no, Mr. and Mrs. Mills had been missionaries. They were mostly in what is now Sri Lanka, but they had had a stint in Hawaii, and I think that was probably the origin. Also it was a time of women's colleges flourishing, and Mills was closest to Hawaii. I think that also had a bearing. Then, once you

get a group coming from a particular area, then they have friends and enrollments build on that. Because we had a strong contingent from New Trier Township High School, outside of Chicago, and another contingent from Oklahoma. This happens. At any rate, I remember we usually had assemblies on Wednesday afternoon; but we had a special college meeting on the Monday, and President Reinhardt gave a wonderful address. What I remember her saying to us is that Japan is the enemy of the United States, but the Japanese people are not my enemy or yours. That made a lasting impression on me, about the distinction between people who were our friends and their government.

Redman: It's a very powerful statement.

03-00:04:35
Ross: Oh, yes, it was. Well, she was a powerful woman. And she believed it, and you knew that.

Redman: It's a really interesting statement, as well because it seems, just in terms of what I've read about the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, it sounds as though that was something that needed to be said, as well.

03-00:04:53
Ross: Oh, yes!

Redman: Can you maybe elaborate for me why someone would be moved to make that very powerful statement at that time?

03-00:05:19
Ross: Well, I don't know if I told you that I'd gone to elementary school with a great many Japanese children. I don't remember any prejudice about them in that period in my life. But I had seen some of it when I went to high school downtown. Did I tell you that all the Japanese people—except for the farmers, who provided the children that came to my school—that the Japanese in San Pedro were *all* living on Terminal Island.

Redman: Yes, yeah.

03-00:06:02
Ross: And the Navy took that over. So I think that I became aware that there was prejudice. I may have told you that in my high school, there was one Negro girl, and there were no—and we called them Negroes then—workforce in San Pedro at all. So I don't know why I became aware. I don't know. But I was aware that there was prejudice. My parents admired the work ethic of the Japanese, which was evident to them and to us. Us, meaning my sister and me. So when you say about the need, well, President Reinhardt was very, very smart. She was, in my view, very old then; she was sixty-plus. So, she had experienced a lot in her life. So I can't really explain, except in retrospect, it was necessary, and I'm grateful to her for being so able to express it so

beautifully. Then as I told you—she must've persuaded the faculty to do this, but—[she] did grant the seniors degrees in absentia. The executive order, which removed the Japanese beyond the Rockies, restricted them to beyond the Rockies, was very traumatic for them and traumatic for the people that missed them.

Redman: Now, it's interesting, because so many people that I have interviewed have talked about their communities in California as being somewhat separated from the Japanese community in California. They often express feelings as though the Japanese community maybe self-isolated or they were isolated for one reason or another. Now, as a student, I would assume that you're living in a dorm, on the same floor with many Japanese students, and you're interacting with them, you're learning with them, you're perhaps studying with them. It seems more traumatic, in some sense, to—

03-00:09:03
Ross: They did not live in my hall.

Redman: Okay.

03-00:09:09
Ross: I'm trying to think of the class which— No, May was the only girl I really knew. She was a Japanese American.

Redman: She was taken to a camp, is that correct.

03-00:09:36
Ross: Yes. Yes.

Redman: So when that happened, some people seem to have had conflicted feelings about that.

03-00:09:45
Ross: Oh, I didn't.

Redman: You didn't.

03-00:09:46
Ross: I thought it was wrong.

Redman: Yeah. It's very clear to you at that time, that—

03-00:09:49
Ross: Yes. No, I should tell you that in San Pedro, there were two men who were rounded up the day or two after Pearl Harbor. One of them committed suicide in the hospital, and I don't know what happened to the other one. But otherwise, they were Americans. I may have told you that this wonderful man worked for Daddy. Did I tell you that?

Redman: Yes.

03-00:10:21
Ross: Yeah, Frank Inouye. Well, he was born in Hawaii, but he wanted to be an American, and he was an American. His brother-in-law served in the U.S. Army. But no, in March, he was carted off.

Redman: So there seemed immediately to be a tension there for you between, to state it baldly, the democratic ideals and freedoms of the United States and the treatment of the Japanese.

03-00:10:51
Ross: Yes. Yes. Well, I don't know. This order [Executive Order 9066] was signed by Franklin Roosevelt. One of my historian friends made an error, one of the few errors he ever made, by telling me that it was an order put out by General—I think his name was DeWitt—who was in charge of the whole western United States. No, it was right straight from President Roosevelt. I can only think there was such confusion in Washington, and I think it's human nature to want to blame somebody. So who do you have to pin the tail on the donkey?

Redman: Is it your sense that that confused a lot of progressives, even at the time, in terms of maybe the faculty members at Mills or at Berkeley. It seems as though when I talk to people who were ardent supporters of Franklin Roosevelt all along, and even continuing on through the war, a lot of people were either quietly frustrated by that decision or very upset by it.

03-00:12:27
Ross: Well, I honestly thing that it receded from most of our minds, except for the one or two people that I was in touch with. There was so much else going on. There was a strong, strong view about keeping America out of the war. And this was a shock. I don't think we'd ever had foreign troops—maybe Mexico at some time; I'm a little hazy on my history there. So it was a great shock. I think a lot of people just thought, well, this is a terrible price to pay, but we're going to pay lots bigger prices. We had sort of a public forum on Thursday nights, at the college, in which the then professor of economics and a political scientist invited people from the community to come and have a discussion on the campus. I don't ever remember any discussion in those meetings. I don't.

Redman: How about general dissent against the war, in any sense? That's something that we see as commonplace now, in terms of the post-Vietnam era, especially, with protests or visible protests or visible speech.

03-00:14:41
Ross: No.

Redman: Nothing like that.

03-00:14:43
Ross: Not in my recollection. Not in my recollection at all. There were impassioned speeches before Pearl Harbor, but—

Redman: That dissent was sort of silenced after Pearl Harbor. Now, when a traumatic event happens in 1940 or ’41 or ’42, and you’re a student on campus, is your first reaction to run to the radio?

03-00:15:16
Ross: Yes. I can remember the blare. We didn’t have lots of radios. Every student didn’t have an iPod and didn’t have the equivalent radio then; but there were a few radios in the hall and the news was, blasting, for the whole corridor to hear.

Redman: I see. So my next question, I fear that I wrote it before the start of the interview and maybe I should change the wording. I wanted to ask about how California began to change immediately at the start of the war. There was such a massive influx of workers, especially to the Bay Area, to work at shipyards. I’m curious about your own story, if you could sort of explore for me how the Bay Area was changing; and then also your own life, getting involved in the shipyards, when that came about.

03-00:16:16
Ross: Okay, well, that’s in ’44. So let me say what did happen before that was that a good many faculty took secondary jobs in the shipyard. George Hedley, a Methodist minister who taught religion and sociology, he became a timekeeper, I think, at the shipyard in Richmond, on the night shift. Then a number of the faculty went off to war. Dean Rusk went off and Dan Dewey went off. I think he went off as a private. He was a classical scholar, and he went off as a private. [they laugh]

Redman: Wow.

03-00:17:12
Ross: After the war, he and Mrs. Dewey took over the Anna Head School, which is now part of the Head-Royce complex.

Redman: I see.

03-00:17:24
Ross: He was a true academic, and I’ve often wondered—of course, I didn’t dare ask him—how he did as a private. Let’s see. Miss McElwain went off, and another person in the phys-ed department, went off and joined the WAVES, Miss Williamson. Yeah, that was it, and Miss McElwain joined the WAVES.

Redman: Did that have any effect on the student body, in terms of seeing your faculty either go off to a branch of the military or volunteer in some capacity?

03-00:18:18
Ross: I think we admired those who went off to the war, but it didn't really impact us very much. It didn't. One event I can remember is that the grounds staff was decimated. I think they must've been of military age, for the most part. So we noticed, and we began something called Heyday-Playday, which one of the faculty organized, we would take a day off in the spring and volunteer to clean up the campus. Then in the afternoon, we'd have races of some sort or another. I just think that we were so self-absorbed, at that time, in our own lives. I think most of the population that I knew thought it was a very just cause.

Redman: How about yourself at that time? You're in the midst of taking classes and studying. You're interested in English; but then I assume you're also becoming, in some sense, interested in economics.

03-00:19:50
Ross: Well, in the fall of my senior year, I changed my major from English to the combination major of economics and sociology. I was really much more interested in sociology, but that was really because I so admired Dr. Hedley.

Redman: Can you talk about Dr. Hedley a little bit?

03-00:20:12
Ross: Well, maybe I told you that when he retired, *Time Magazine* had an article about him, calling him. Dr. Chips. But he was more than Dr. Chips. He brought different viewpoints to the campus. He brought— Oh, the man who organized the longshoremen. Oh, wait a minute. He was an Australian, and he led the '33 strike of the longshoremen. Harry Bridges. Do you know the name?

Redman: So he was a labor activist.

03-00:20:59
Ross: Oh, very.

Redman: Yes, yeah, an important labor activist.

03-00:21:02
Ross: And Dr. Hedley went over to San Francisco to observe the 1933 strike. He was then [a] Methodist minister in Oakland. He wasn't associated with the college then; and he went over and wrote an article about what he observed of the '33 strike—a very different viewpoint from what you read in the paper. In 1943 he brought Harry Bridges to one of the campus assemblies, he urged opening the second front. He was a very outspoken friend of the USSR, and he made a very impassioned speech for opening the second front. I can remember that very well. When Dr. Hedley died in 1970, there were a great many Catholic priests at the church service. When I was walking up to St. Paul's Church, who should I see but Harry Bridges. I almost told him I

remembered that day, and then I thought better of it; but I'm sorry now I didn't.

Redman: Interesting. But that's a powerful thing for a student, to get some radically different viewpoints from the mainstream, perhaps.

03-00:22:30
Ross: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we did.

Redman: Yeah. Did this occur in terms of both from the left or the right, or was it mainly doing the more radical viewpoints and having the progressive—

03-00:22:41
Ross: Yes. We didn't have very many right-wing speakers.

Redman: Okay.

03-00:22:47
Ross: I think we didn't probably need them. I think we were pretty much exposed to that under ordinary circumstances. No, but I also remember Dr. Hedley bringing a very powerful Negro minister as the chapel speaker one time. I have a copy of that talk. Let me fill that in later.

Redman: Sure.

03-00:23:24
Ross: I can remember that. Oh, and we had a farmworker.

Redman: Oh, is that right? That's very interesting. Speaking about agricultural issues?

03-00:23:39
Ross: Yeah.

Redman: Yeah. It seems that it's quite an interesting time to be on a college campus; not only in terms of rationing and changing housing situations in the Bay Area, but also the ideas that were prevalent at that time.

03-00:23:59
Ross: Well, mind you, rationing didn't amount to a hill of beans. People who tell you how important it was, it wasn't.

Redman: I would love to hear why that's the case. I'm *very* curious.

03-00:24:11
Ross: Coffee was rationed. My parents sent a can of coffee with me back to Dr. Hedley because he talked about missing the coffee. My parents had a cup of coffee and breakfast and otherwise, didn't bother. So they shared their coupons. Gasoline was a pinch. But otherwise.

Redman: It was fairly easy to navigate?

03-00:24:49
Ross: Yes. Oh, yes.

Redman: So now, as you're completing your degree, you're studying now sociology and economics, can you tell me maybe a little bit more about some of the things that interested you, in terms of the ideas that—

03-00:25:08
Ross: Oh, well, I thought there was going to be a whole new world after the war. We had Thursday night meetings where I remember being the representative to talk about what was going to happen to the Mariana Islands. Talk about significant! [they laugh] But I was an important cog in the whole machinery, and somebody else talked about what would happen to Germany. I guess that's the first time I read Keynes' *The Consequences of the Peace*.

Redman: What did you think of that text, in particular? Had you read Keynes before?

03-00:25:56
Ross: No. I took economics from a professor who never mentioned him.

Redman: Ah, interesting.

03-00:26:05
Ross: Yes.

Redman: Because he's such a significant thinker in economics of the twentieth century.

03-00:26:07
Ross: Yes. Yeah. But it took a long time for his ideas to penetrate.

Redman: I see. Okay.

03-00:26:16
Ross: But to Keynes, in his books, he simply talked about the folly of World War I financing and the reparations demanded of Germany. That book had been published long before; it had been published in the twenties, I think. [1919]

Redman: But it suddenly again became quite relevant.

03-00:26:42
Ross: Yes. I palled around with a great many idealistic students, and we didn't foresee Bretton Woods at all, but we looked forward to— I don't think that it really sank into us that we might lose the war. I remember my father, who listened to the radio avidly, was very, very worried. We thought that was because he was old. Then, of course, there was the dreadful Battle of the Bulge. But by the time I graduated, which was in May of— No, it was June; it was just when we— I was thinking about D-Day. I graduated on a Sunday, and D-Day was June 6. So it couldn't have been the same day, but—

Redman: It was right around the time of the invasion.

03-00:28:05
Ross: Yes, it was within a day or two. I gave the commencement address and it was, ever onward. By then we had such tremendous dominance of forces, dominant forces, that it was pretty clear that we'd win. I wanted a job to help the war effort. Nobody seemed to want me. [they laugh] So I might as well be honest and say that Daddy, through his friendships with the people in town, got me hired by L.A. Ship. The man who ran L.A. Ship was the father of one of my friends in high school.

Redman: Is that right?

03-00:29:06
Ross: Yeah. And he'd run L.A. Ship for a long time. Well, the Navy took over and it didn't think it was a very efficient shipyard. Well, it wasn't, I guess. It was used to turning out a ship once in a while and repairing ships. So the Navy put in Todd, which was a big New York firm, and renamed the yard as L.A. Todd. The Todd men came in in boilersuits. Do you remember seeing pictures of Churchill in a boilersuit?

Redman: Oh, sure. Yes.

03-00:29:46
Ross: A zip-up thing.

Redman: Right.

03-00:29:47
Ross: Well, these men all wore white zip-up suits. They were arrogant and—

Redman: There are organizational management types coming in and—

03-00:30:03
Ross: Yes, yes, yes.

Redman: —the workers maybe didn't—

03-00:30:08
Ross: Nobody liked them.

Redman: Nobody liked that so much.

03-00:30:10
Ross: They replaced some of the supervisors. I was going to say, so I started in in absentee control.

Redman: So you were checking—

03-00:30:27
Ross: Why people missed work.

Redman: —why people missed work.

03-00:30:31
Ross: I'm sure they all lied to me now. I worked six days a week, from eight-fifteen to four-fifteen, with twenty-five minutes for lunch. There was a hideous cafeteria, which I only went into once because I didn't think it was clean. Also in twenty-five minutes, there wasn't time to go to the bathroom, wash your hands, and eat lunch. So my mama made me lunch every morning and I sat on a bench outside. The only other place that you could sit, besides going to the cafeteria was this hideous room with no windows, adjacent to the ladies bathroom. Talk about unpleasant places.

Redman: Right, right.

03-00:31:18
Ross: So I arrived and I worked for Mr. Leroy B. Zust. He was in charge of absentee control. So I went around the yard asking people why they'd missed work.

Redman: So maybe they'd missed work the previous day and you were checking in on them.

03-00:31:37
Ross: It was usually checking up on the previous week.

Redman: I see.

03-00:31:40
Ross: So I had Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday to check up on in the previous week. I don't think I could check up on the current week, because I think those absences didn't get processed that quickly.

Redman: Now, I have seen posters of a government campaign against absenteeism. I believe there was also a song that was, don't be an absentee, and little jingles or things like that.

03-00:32:14
Ross: Don't remember those at all.

Redman: So I'm just curious if those were commonplace or anything like that.

03-00:32:22
Ross: Well, there weren't any posters in the plant. I can't see a one. But I can't see it for anything. In other words, later, when I went on the night shift to see what it was like, [chuckles] then I saw these pinups down in the holds. But there weren't any in public.

Redman: Now, what were some of the reasons that people gave you for being absent?

03-00:32:57
Ross: Now, mind you, I now see that here I had my mama to make my lunch and I washed my own hair.

Redman: You were maybe, what, nineteen at the time?

03-00:33:13
Ross: Yes. No, I just had my twentieth birthday. So some places wouldn't hire me, because I wasn't twenty-one. So then as I say, Daddy— Mr. Hanna, that was his name, found this vacancy. So I don't know what Mr. Leroy B. Zust did before he had me to work for him. But I went around and asked them and they told me that they'd been sick. Some of them were honest. See, a lot of these people had children. So the child was sick or— They told me all these believable things—the car didn't start, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera—and I wrote it all down. Then I made little charts. Some departments had more absenteeism than others did, and nobody had made a little chart like this before, so I made improving little suggestions. The arrogance. One's mind boggles thinking about it. But I felt useful.

Redman: At the same time, it seems like a useful idea to me, to sort of see which departments are suffering from this more than not, to see if you can address those things. But was that received, that idea of creating this chart? Or did that make too many waves?

03-00:34:45
Ross: Well, I don't know that anybody read it. [Redman laughs] No, I really don't. So then I was "promoted," quote/unquote, to terminations. The employment office at that time was divided, terminations and entries. I've forgotten what they called entries. Maybe that was called the employment office. Anyway, I was in terminations. There in the war, if you left a job, if you wanted another job, you had to have an Availability Certificate. Have you heard about these?

Redman: No. So did you have to go to, let's say the next shipyard? Would you have to go to Kaiser and make sure that there was a slot or something?

03-00:35:31
Ross: No. In order to prevent an escalation of wages, the government introduced the idea of having an Availability Certificate, which supposedly, was very hard to get, to prevent somebody from then going over—see, Kaiser was just across the water—and get a better job.

Redman: I see. Okay.

03-00:35:55
Ross: And then ping-pong back and forth. So in terminations, we had a couple kinds of quits. One of them was that they were fired. There were two things for which the union would not object to being fired; otherwise, the union would take up— Because management quite wanted to get rid of some of the, quote, "trouble makers." So if a person was found drinking on the job or fighting on

the job, the union wouldn't discuss it, wouldn't mess with it. So people would—men; I didn't see any women do this—go around swigging an open bottle. You could arrive drunk on the job, but you had to be drinking on the job. So the foreman, who would be furious because he was losing a good man, had to send him up to be fired. Had to. So there were two men who were security guards. They were sweet-tempered men. They would go down and say, "Oh, come along; we know what's happening."

Redman: So they'd usher this drunk man, or partially drunk or whatever else—

03-00:37:18
Ross: Yes. Well, had been seen drinking. So we then had to fire him. Then he got an Availability Certificate, because he was fired.

Redman: I see.

03-00:37:31
Ross: It wasn't a voluntary quit.

Redman: So did you sort of read them their version of the Miranda Act or—

03-00:37:40
Ross: No. No. No. No, they came up—

Redman: Merely to get the papers.

03-00:37:46
Ross: Yeah.

Redman: I see.

03-00:37:46
Ross: Then they got paid off immediately, within four hours. Now, if they were a voluntary quit, it could take a week to get their pay. But if they were fired, boy, I think Mr. Massengill handed out our cash. He was the paymaster.

Redman: So they just wanted to get people out of there, if they had made the decision to get themselves fired, more or less.

03-00:38:03
Ross: Yes.

Redman: I see.

03-00:38:03
Ross: And then the other one was fighting on the job. But that was harder.

Redman: Because you needed a willing partner, in some sense, to fight with. [laughs]

03-00:38:09
Ross: Yes. So then maybe somebody hadn't like somebody, so he'd think, oh, well, I'll just—

Redman: Here's my chance. Okay.

03-00:38:20
Ross: —punch him in— Well, then maybe that fellow liked the idea and maybe he didn't. Of course, I was just bug-eyed at all this.

Redman: Right, certainly.

03-00:38:29
Ross: Then when the other people who wanted an Availability Certificate, they had to go home. Nearly all of the laborer jobs were held by Negroes, who came from the Deep South. They came from Arkansas, they came from Alabama, some from Texas. They truly would want to go home. There'd be somebody sick. So they'd go home and then drift back some time later. If they had nothing bad on their record, they'd be rehired. There was a little checkmark on the back of everybody's quit slip, which said, "do not rehire." So if somebody'd been a pain to the foreman in one way or another, he wouldn't be rehired.

Redman: But if he had gotten himself fired and the foreman was upset that they were losing a good man, you maybe might not check that box.

03-00:39:48
Ross: Right.

Redman: So that they could potentially change their mind and come back.

03-00:39:51
Ross: Yes.

Redman: I see. This is a broad and a challenging question to come at, but I'd like to hear your perspective of— There are 150,000 workers coming in from all over the country, but especially a lot of African Americans from the South, as you'd mentioned. I'm curious if you immediately saw, when you entered the shipyard, a racial dynamic that you were unfamiliar with, having grown up and having had one Negro friend in high school.

03-00:40:25
Ross: Yes, one. And she wasn't much of a friend. She wouldn't be friends; I just knew her.

Redman: Okay, an acquaintance, I see. So now there's a massive influx of African Americans from the South. Did that surprise you?

03-00:40:42
Ross: No. There were all sorts of white people coming from those very same places.

Redman: I see.

03-00:40:49
Ross: Now, what I think distinguished [the African Americans]—and in that period, they were Negroes—was when I moved to the employment office from terminations, to the front office, was to see groups of men, five, six to a car. It was usually an old black rattletrap, but a sedan. They would've driven out from wherever they came from, and they would not have a Social Security card. Or if there was one, they would present it as though each one of them had George Washington's Social Security card. I tried *desperately* to explain to them about the retirement system and they should have separate Social Security cards, so they could be building towards their future. I never got that message across. That was just me, who tried for this. We had a Coast Guard man up on the second floor, who looked over everybody's papers. We actually had one German spy pass our scrutiny. He was later collected. But I think about that Coast Guard man waiting to question all these poor Negroes using the same Social Security card. Where else would they have come from? They *had* to be Americans.

Redman: But it maybe showed the depth of the poverty, in some sense, in the South, and the lack of education—

03-00:42:42
Ross: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Redman: —to see those things. Now, I've heard from a woman who worked at a hiring hall at the Moore Dry Dock, that one of the questions that they asked everyone was about health. Are you healthy enough to work at a shipyard? Were there any sorts of questions like that, that you recall?

03-00:43:02
Ross: If they could mark the space, they were hired.

Redman: They just needed bodies. Warm bodies.

03-00:43:10
Ross: One thing, a lot of people came in and said they were painters, and they weren't. The painter foreman, oh, was he irascible! So I asked him what questions I should ask. He told me about the rules of painting. You start up in the corner. He told me all these things that I was to ask. So I devised a little test, both for the painter people and one other group, of asking them to draw a rectangle and a triangle. Some of them didn't know what a triangle was, or a rectangle. So that didn't last long, [laughs] because the test was too hard. But the painting test did save the foreman *oodles* of time, and he was very grateful.

Redman: That's very interesting. Even a very, very basic test, from the sounds of it, that a lot of people were incapable, at that time, of doing it.

03-00:44:17
Ross: Yeah.

Redman: Interesting.

03-00:44:19
Ross: So it was interesting. Actually, I was befriended by a man in the termination section, who had shared with me a manual that he had written at another place, about what these people did. Because when I saw these job labels, chipper and caulker, I had no idea.

Redman: Yeah, certainly. There wasn't a college class at that, I assume.

03-00:44:53
Ross: No. No, no. I knew what welding was because I'd read about it. But riveting? I didn't really know what a riveter was. There was Rosie the Riveter, but I'd never seen anybody rivet. So he shared this manual with me and I got in and read it. I had also said that I didn't type, when I took the job. I didn't type. One day, Mr. Zyink, who was the person— No, he wasn't the personnel manager, he was assistant personnel manager. He came into the office and I was typing away like crazy. He said, "I thought you didn't type." I said, "I don't." He accepted that. We had some typists and Inez was the girl who typed for me. She was a high school dropout, very attractive and, I think, very bright. Of course, I was only supposed to have graduated from San Pedro High; that was my cover story, because I thought then, they wouldn't take me, probably.

Redman: Interesting. If they knew you were a college graduate. Did you tell them that you couldn't type because you were afraid that as a woman, you would be funneled into a particular type of job?

03-00:46:25
Ross: Absolutely.

Redman: I see. Okay.

03-00:46:28
Ross: I was never a very good typist, but I could type. I was horrified at Inez's lack of ambition. I knew I was not going to make a career out of this; I was going to do my war bit. So then I got promoted to the employment office and had this interesting time, seeing all these different people float through the office. Then there was a man in the employment office—there was just one; well, Mr. Cameron, who'd been there when I first got there—he disappeared into some other better job, somewhere outside the yard. Mr. M was not given Mr. Cameron's title, but he was the senior interviewer. He had a secretary, and then there was Edith, Mabel, and me. I didn't know that he was taking bribes.

Redman: Interesting.

03-00:47:51
Ross: He would take people into his office. The rest of us stood at the counter. Daddy made me a wooden, slatted board to stand on. Then one day, a painter, whom I'd seen a number of times over the year, came through as a drunk discharge. He called me bright-eyed little girl or something or other. I was never little, but was dignified. Anyway, he said something to the effect, you don't have a clue what's going on. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, think about it. Who does that man see?" So I thought about it. I went home and told my parents that this painter man— My parents listened to me.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

03-00:48:46
Ross: That he'd suggested that Mr. M took bribes. Daddy said, "Probably." So then I brooded about whether or not I should report my suspicions. Mama said, "Why don't you quit?" [chuckles] That was Mama's answer, stop doing what you don't like.

Redman: Right.

03-00:49:19
Ross: I can't remember what that man's name was. His first name was Fred. He came into the office and said to Edith and Mabel and me, something like, what's going on in this office? We all looked blank. I think Edith and Mabel had tumbled to it. But, they were in their thirties and this was a job that they needed and wanted. So he said that he'd now had two complaints, just over that weekend. So maybe the painter fellow talked to some other people. Said that Mr. M would ask them for a loan, and then never pay it back.

Redman: I see. So they, in some sense, the accusers, were no longer implicated in bribing this individual.

03-00:50:21
Ross: No. So Mr. M was gone that day, I think.

Redman: That's quite interesting, that that was caught. I want to ask a question that a lot of historians sort of go back and forth. I think you've indicated a bit of an answer. A lot of historians debate the degree to which women who had found jobs during wartime wanted to stay on, versus if they considered it a wartime job, and maybe wanted to go on to another career or return to the home. One of the possible answers for this seems to be that some women who were older or less educated, they'd had a higher paying job in the shipyards; of course, they would want to keep that job. But someone who was younger or was maybe a student or a college graduate like yourself might not want to stay working in a factory.

03-00:51:23
Ross: Well, I should tell you there were two classes of women. Well, three classes of jobs that women held. One were the electricians. They did those boards.

Redman: Sure, circuit boards.

03-00:51:46
Ross: Circuit boards, yes. They were highly skilled. But I don't think any of them was classified as a journeyman electrician. But these were good jobs. A lot of these women had stable marriages and were doing this balancing act of husband, kiddies, job; just terrific. There were very few quits among them. Then there were the welders. I don't think there were any women riveters. Let's skip that one. There were lots of women welders. They came and went. You could advance to being a journeyman welder, which isn't terribly skilled, in my view. Then there were the women laborers. They were sweepers. That's what they were called, they were called sweepers. They were all black. That was the term, I think, that was used for that category, unskilled. I became friends with the woman who— Well, what she did was she monitored and cleaned the john in the yard. In the yard. When I'm talking about eating lunch in this airless room, I'm talking about where the white-collar women could eat. I didn't know that there were two gangs in this African American group of sweepers. Later, when I got promoted, when V-E Day came. Mrs. Icy M. Early, that was her name, was the wife of an admiral, and she was the women's coordinator for the yard. On V-E Day, she quit. So she was an example that she was doing her duty, doing it, now over with. So then I was asked if I'd like to do it. Sure. There was a woman in the office already. I think probably she resented me, but she was always perfectly nice to me. But her job was going to be gone when the shipyard's job was done. So she had fudged the numbers of women who were employed. So when I got to be promoted to this job, I then wore trousers and a hardhat—I'm sorry I don't have the hardhat still—and I walked around the yard. So at one point, I didn't know it, but I broke up a gang fight. The woman who ran the johns—there were several there—she said I wasn't to do that. She said, "They've got knives."

Redman: Wow. Okay.

03-00:55:20
Ross: I never told my parents that.

Redman: [laughs] Right.

03-00:55:24
Ross: So Fanny—that was her name, Fanny, this nice woman; she was very nice—she said to me once, "I've been married umpteen years to my husband. We never had no kids. But Effie, she's only seventeen and she's had two kids already." Well, this was a shockeroo to me.

Redman: Right.

03-00:55:56
Ross: But I got along fine. The black women were kind to me. They could've made trouble. But I think that was because a worker was injured down— she was eight flights, eight decks down. The nurse wouldn't go down there. She was wearing a skirt, and said, oh, the men might look up her skirt. I said, "Well, why aren't you wearing trousers, then?" So I went down and the woman wasn't hurt; she was hysterical. But she could've been badly hurt. So I thought, well, she deserves to be lifted up. We had a litter in the so-called infirmary, and the men who were trained to do that went down with the litter and put her on, and I said the doctor would check her out. But she said, "Oh, I'm fine now." So I think she didn't want to be carried up.

Redman: Steal a little time, yeah.

03-00:57:05
Ross: But they worked in gangs of eight.

Redman: I see. Okay.

03-00:57:08
Ross: So this put me in good order, that I'd come down.

Redman: With that, I'd like to add a new tape.

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04-00:00:03
Ross: No, it was interesting. I was interested every day. I was.

Redman: Yeah. I can imagine. Being exposed to some new people and new experiences, is that correct?

04-00:00:14
Ross: Yeah.

Redman: I wanted to ask. You've brought up several very interesting things that I wanted to ask about. But one is a pretty sensitive subject, is about— We talked a little bit about women having children; I'm wondering if you heard any stories around the shipyards about abortions.

04-00:00:40
Ross: No. No, never.

Redman: And the sort of follow-up question that I'd like to ask is if there were any stories or accounts of homosexuality at that time. Okay.

04-00:01:04:
Ross: Never heard the word.

Redman: Gay or lesbian?

04-00:01:08
Ross: No.

Redman: Not until much later.

04-00:01:10
Ross: No. Absolutely not.

Redman: Sure.

04-00:01:12
Ross: The first time that I ever heard—there was a euphemism for homosexuality—was when Alger Hiss— I was a graduate student. We were at a party at Miss Davis; she was the secretary of the econ department. We were discussing—we were always discussing things passionately—about why would anybody who had the best of US to offer, betray us? Then there were those of us who said he didn't betray us; it was all a lie. There was this discussion, back and forth, back and forth. Then somebody said, "Well, he didn't dare have the State Department know this because he'd lose his job," blah-blah-blah. And somebody said, "And lose his wife." I said, "Well, how could he lose his wife, by being a traitor to his country?" That might make her very unhappy, but for better or worse. So somebody turned to me and said, "No," and used some term, that he could be blackmailed. Well, that he could be blackmailed because, and used this word for homosexuality, which I can't remember now. That was the first time that I'd ever heard it discussed.

Redman: So now going back to, let's say, in between V-E Day and V-J Day, as the war seems to be winding down. I understand that already at that time, a number of goods or products or services that were unavailable during the war, began to appear again. New cars, new washing machines. Some women ended up leaving jobs at shipyards or at airplane factories or in the defense industry, as the war started to wind down. I'm curious if you could tell me a little bit about what the end of the war was like, through your eyes.

04-00:03:46
Ross: Well, as I remember, there weren't any new models for a couple of years. They were the 1941 models. Well, when I was this women's coordinator, and I rushed around the shipyard checking on— Because women were supposed to wear hard-toed shoes, and particularly the sweepers would come to work with open sandals. Well, it really was dangerous. Then there was also a rule that a woman couldn't lift more than forty pounds. I think I got that enforced.

Redman: Now, how did the issue of skirts or dresses versus trousers— You'd mentioned that as being an issue for some of the nurses, whether or not they could go up and down the decks.

04-00:04:52
Ross: The women in the yard, the welders wore trousers, and the women electricians, I think they wore trousers. No, it was only the nurse— Well, the women in the office wore skirts. I never saw Mabel or Edith or the girl with whom Mr. M was having an affair— She was pregnant, and I wondered if she ended up having an abortion. But I wouldn't *dream* of discussing this with anybody.

Redman: Interesting.

04-00:05:41
Ross: With anybody.

Redman: So even if there was a potential for a rumor for something like that, it was something that was off the table for discussion or interoffice rumor.

04-00:05:51
Ross: Mm-hm.

Redman: That's very interesting. Okay.

04-00:05:54
Ross: Now, mind you, this was a very small office. But no. So no, the nurse— I went down to see Dr. Wildman—that was her boss—and I complained to him about her, because what good was she?

Redman: Right.

04-00:06:19
Ross: I think he was having an affair with her.

Redman: Is that right? Was there a lot of that going on? Sort of the code word that I use for a lot of these interviews, I'll say, was there any hanky-panky going on?

04-00:06:39
Ross: [laughs] Oh, that's an old-fashioned term.

Redman: Yeah. A lot of people react to that and they say, oh, well, I was married, but I knew a lot of other people who were maybe having an affair or something else. So it's clear that that sort of activity was occasionally taking place, even on the grounds of the shipyard. But I'm just sort of wondering about sex and sexuality at that time. With a lot of young men being away overseas, do you get the sense that there were affairs between men and women who maybe a woman's husband was away or a boyfriend or something else?

04-00:07:18
Ross: Or they were there.

Redman: Or they were there. Yeah.

04-00:07:21
Ross: Now, every morning, Daddy drove me to work—it was on his way to his job—and we picked up Irene. Irene's husband was off at the war, and we picked her up every morning. Never found another thing out about her. Never. Never.

Redman: Just part of a share-the-ride sort of—

04-00:07:43
Ross: Yes. She was always prompt, and she got in the car and we all said hello and we drove on. So I don't think that she was having an affair. Anybody as self-contained as she was— But I didn't socialize with any of these people. I was all business. Now, when I did work those two nights on the night shift, Daddy took me down, of course, and picked me up. I remember I was going in the hold of one of the ships in the repair yard, and one of the workmen said, "Don't go any further." I said, "Why not?" He said, "She's plying her trade." Even *I* got that.

Redman: Right.

04-00:08:45
Ross: So I backed out. So there was commercial activity.

Redman: Even in the hold of a ship.

04-00:08:57
Ross: No, I remember that very well, because—

Redman: That's an amazing incident.

04-00:09:04
Ross: I thought about this man wanting to— I don't know whether he was protecting her, I don't know whether he was one of her customers, or whether he just thought it would be a shock to—

Redman: To little old you, if you walked in on—

04-00:09:24
Ross: Yes. Yes. So I don't know. But I wrote a report that I thought the night shift could be disbanded, because actually, the day crew had to redo a lot of the things they did.

Redman: Ah, is that right?

04-00:09:45
Ross: Yes.

Redman: Okay.

04-00:09:46
Ross: Because the welding supervisor—he was over the foreman—he'd created a big stink about the work they had to redo. In some report—I don't know whether it was a Kaiser report— There was a report that when the night shift was disbanded, output figures rose.

Redman: That's very interesting.

04-00:10:28
Ross: Yeah. I wish I could tell you the reference, but I can't.

Redman: So then you stayed at the shipyard until the end of the war, or a little after the end of the war?

04-00:10:39
Ross: Yeah, a little after the end of the war. What I did was begin processing RIF [reduction in force] notices. So a lot of people left the shipyard between V-J Day and— It was really later, because you see, Japan was thought then to— going to be a terribly long and bloody war. So it wasn't until about September that we began issuing these RIF notices. Then in January, I expected to be RIF-ed, because now there're almost no women left. I think Mabel wrote me my RIF notice. I can't remember now. But at any rate, so I went home and told my parents my job had come to an end. They thought that was fine. Mama said, "Why don't you go to Berkeley and take a few courses?"

Redman: That was a major turning point in your life, that little statement right there.

04-00:11:55
Ross: Mm-hm. Because I said I didn't know quite what I wanted to do. I said I didn't want to work in industry, because the best job there was the secretary of the personnel director.

Redman: Tell me, what do you think you learned? This is an enormous question. But it seems as though you learned quite a bit from—

04-00:12:23
Ross: Oh, I did.

Redman: —your time at the shipyards. Being there from maybe '44 to '46?

04-00:12:30
Ross: Yes.

Redman: It seems like there were a lot of experiences crammed into those two years. Can you maybe summarize for me, the place of the shipyards in your life?

04-00:12:41
Ross: Well, I think I saw the ruthlessness of really big business. One of the things that made a tremendous impression on me was when Mr. Hanna came through the terminations. He was escorted.

Redman: This is an individual that you'd known.

04-00:13:12
Ross: Well, he was the head of the L.A. shipyard.

Redman: Right, yeah. Okay.

04-00:13:15
Ross: Furthermore, he was the father of a girl I knew. I didn't really know her well, but— He was a pillar of the San Pedro community. They'd stripped him of his badge. We all had to wear badges, and then your identity card. I gave him back his identity card. I remember Edith saying to me, why was I crying? Because I saw a man who'd done his best, and he was just tossed out and I don't know what happened to him. But he was probably fifty-five or sixty. I still think that's no way to treat anybody.

Redman: Right.

04-00:14:09
Ross: I also saw Mr. Massengill, the paymaster, who took Edith, Mabel and me and Mrs. Massengill to the company Christmas party, just that once. I never went the second time. But Mr. Massengill thought we should show up, so he drove us to Los Angeles. People were drinking much too much. Daddy's rule had been, even though I wasn't twenty-one, you're to have a Scotch and water, and no mixed drink, ever. [chuckles] I took his advice. Then I think lots of people went off with people who they didn't come with.

Redman: I see. So this sort of opened your eyes to corporate America, in some sense.

04-00:15:07
Ross: Yes, and I didn't want any of that.

Redman: Yeah. Okay.

04-00:15:11
Ross: You see, also I didn't think much of supervision, in that Fred, whatever his name was, came and asked us about Mr. M. Well, I think he had not been doing his job. He might've tumbled to this by looking in on Mr. M once in a while. No, and I saw a great many people who just didn't like their lives.

Redman: Right, okay.

04-00:15:55
Ross: I thought that was too bad.

Redman: Yeah. It seems like a lot of powerful lessons about the corporation, the structure of a major corporation, and thinking of capitalism as, in and of itself, without a conscience.

04-00:16:10
Ross: Yeah, but I believed in capitalism. I think it's what somebody said to me in graduate school; there're lots of problems, but every other system seems worse.

Redman: Right. Yeah, yeah.

04-00:16:29
Ross: But no.

Redman: So it didn't make you fundamentally question the economic structure, but you saw these individuals behaving—

04-00:16:41
Ross: Badly.

Redman: —badly, within the system.

04-00:16:44
Ross: Yeah. And I didn't want it.

Redman: I'm going to pause just for one moment. [audio file may stop & restart]

04-00:16:59
Ross: We had dates on Saturday night, but these were people who passed through the airwaves. Sunday was mostly getting ready for Monday.

Redman: So were there USO dances occasionally, things like that, that you would attend?

04-00:17:19
Ross: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, yes. Oh, yes.

Redman: Were those things enjoyable.

04-00:17:24
Ross: Oh, sure. Oh, sure.

Redman: But there was never a deep, meaningful relationship that—

04-00:17:28
Ross: No. Now, one of our friends, Catherine, met the man she later married. Elise, my sister, and I went to their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

Redman: Oh, terrific.

04-00:17:41
Ross: That was swell.

Redman: But that was not a common occurrence.

04-00:17:46
Ross: No. No, it was passing.

Redman: So now, your mother makes this comment, in 1946, that maybe you should go take some classes at UC Berkeley. It seems like a major turning point in your life. You go back, and what classes do you decide to enroll in?

04-00:18:03
Ross: Oh, that first semester, I was just in time; for the spring semester, it was just time to enroll. I took a seminar in agricultural history with Paul Taylor. I've come to admire him enormously. But at the time, he had us read agricultural journals of the nineteenth century. We simply noted them and summarized them for him. Articles that had to do— Oh, I can't remember now. But at any rate, it was a very boring.

Redman: It sounds pretty tedious.

04-00:18:52
Ross: Obviously, it was part of his research. Then I took a very interesting course with Mr. Gulick, on labor movements. It compared the Austrian labor movement— Of course, when he told me that he was going to compare Austria with the US and a bit of Britain—I thought he meant Australia, because Austria, to me, was a foreign land.

Redman: Yes.

04-00:19:28
Ross: Well, no, he did mean Austria, because of course, his great work was *Austria From Habsburg to Hitler*, a two-volume work. That was interesting. Then I took another course, and I took micro, micro theory. That was wonderful. It was taught by Professor Ellis, who— No. I took that in the fall. No, I didn't take that. I took three seminars, the third one I can't even remember.

Redman: So it strikes me that—this is maybe a bold proclamation—but that to be on the Berkeley campus in 1946 is one of the most interesting, amazing times to be a student on campus. You're looking forward and you have people like Henry Luce talking about an American century that we're embarking on. You yourself had been thinking about a post-war, international economic landscape, even as a senior. But things like the Marshall Plan were only barely coming into focus at that time. It was unclear what the post-war economic world would look like. Did those issues resonate with you at the time?

04-00:21:01
Ross: Oh, sure. In the spring of ’45, I guess I was entitled to a week’s vacation, and I came up to attend some of the public meetings of the UN conference. That made a terrific impression on me.

Redman: It seems like people who were aware of international politics at the time or people who were reading newspapers, that was a very powerful moment in the Bay Area, having those meetings take place here. Then of course, signing documents.

04-00:21:35
Ross: Yes. Oh, I was thrilled by that. By change, I met Clement Attlee.

Redman: It seems that a lot of people at that time—and I’m talking specifically about maybe let’s say 1944, ’45, and ’46—were talking about a sense of international unity and cooperation and peace. Were those messages, too that resonated with you?

04-00:22:00
Ross: Oh, yes. It was a time of hope. It truly was.

Redman: How long do you think that that moment lasts, before more of our senses of fear—

04-00:22:20
Ross: Over the Cold War.

Redman: —[over] the Cold War start to emerge as more of a reality?

04-00:22:25
Ross: Mm-hm.

Redman: So is there a moment where there was a turning point? Was it Sputnik? Or was it earlier than that? Or was that sort of a gradual transition from this sort of hope of the United Nations and the Marshall Plan, against the backdrop of the Cold War?

04-00:22:49
Ross: Well, wait a minute. When did the McCarthy era really begin to bite?

Redman: So early, mid-1950s, I believe. But there would be a window in time that I could see that if McCarthyism really changed attitudes, that would make sense.

04-00:23:16
Ross: Because now, there were some good things that happened. Truman integrated the armed forces.

Redman: Did you see that as a big step?

04-00:23:28
Ross: Yes, I do. And I see the GI Bill as maybe the most important thing in the first half of the twentieth century, because that allowed education of people who had *no* chance.

Redman: Right. Right. I'd love to ask about, following the war, some of the things that I've seen listed in historical documents that I haven't found anyone who's able to speak to it. I think you're the perfect candidate who would notice this, is that a lot of people came back, at Berkeley in particular, not just to begin undergraduate training, but a lot of people came back to either advance their education— So people who had bachelor's degrees saw in the GI Bill an opportunity, maybe, to go get their masters or their PhD. And a lot of students that were starting were maybe a few years older—

04-00:24:28
Ross: Oh, yes. Yes.

Redman: —because the war had interrupted their education or postponed their education. They had this, often, amazing life experience of traveling; sometimes terrifying experiences that made you grow and change in all sorts of different ways, during wartime. I'm curious how that would affect the campus and the feel of the campus at that time.

04-00:24:48
Ross: Well, what really impacted me and how it became real for me, was that in September—no, it must've been in the spring—I met a woman at a bus stop. I lived up on Cragmont, and I used to go down to the library at night. There was a streetcar, mind you, that ran from the North Gate, up Euclid. So I met her at this bus stop—it was only a streetcar—and she said to me, well, why was I living in this dopey boardinghouse, when I could be living at International House? I didn't even know that International House existed. So I was admitted for September, and it's in many ways, that's what changed my life, because I met all of these *interesting* people.

Redman: Now, I've read that you started living in International House maybe later in '46, and you lived there between '46 and '51?

04-00:26:02
Ross: Well, '46 to '48, and I was a dropout, and then I came back and then stayed till '51.

Redman: I see. Now, I've noticed that you describe this as a golden age of the International House, and I was wondering if you could describe what that might be, for me. What was it like living in the I-House at that time?

04-00:26:25
Ross: Well, now, somebody has just done a book on the golden age, Jeanine Costello Lin and Tonya Staros. She did it for her father and her father's friends, and then I-House undertook to publish it because they thought it

would make good publicity, which it did. The only thing is that I think all of the contributors, except one maybe, are Americans. And they're typical of the Americans who were going to college then, in that most of us were white, middleclass.

Redman: That's right. Yeah, sure.

04-00:27:15
Ross: The were some interesting Americans, American men who'd had fantastic war experiences, but most of the really interesting people were foreigners. They, of course, were enchanted to be here, because even if they hadn't had distinguished war records, they'd been miserable.

Redman: So you think especially emerging from the context of war, that they may have spent the last five years of their life or more, then suddenly coming to peaceful little Berkeley, in some sense, with a—

04-00:28:04
Ross: Well, it's a *wonderful* place.

Redman: Gorgeous campus, beautiful International House. So this was an eye-opening experience.

04-00:28:11
Ross: And lots of good food for the international students.

Redman: Okay.

04-00:28:14
Ross: And sweet American girls.

Redman: Right, right. Do you get a sense of what programs many of these students were coming to the United States on?

04-00:28:28
Ross: Oh, yes. There was tremendous—what's the word I want?—national identification. There were a tremendous number of Indians and Egyptians, and there were financed by their countries. These students were financed by their governments, so a lot of them were not privileged. The Indians mostly studied engineering; and the Egyptians, mostly civil engineering.

Redman: Was there an influx of Chinese students at any point during this time? Or did that come later. I know International House has, for quite some time, had a relationship with China, but I'm curious if—

04-00:29:15
Ross: Yes. Well, now, Wen Yen and Milton, they came from Tientsin. But yes, there were a number of Chinese. Well, there were, but now, some of them came later. Of course, '49 was a big exodus of Chinese from the mainland.

Milton had actually been born in Oakland. His father, I think, was a dentist in Oakland. But both true in the Chinese culture and in the Japanese culture, he was sent back to be educated in what was thought to be home. Milton walked by night and slept by day, from Tientsin, a port city—back to where the American forces were, over in Chunking, and he joined the American Army. Of course, his Chinese was perfect, because he'd been raised in China.

Redman: Right, yeah.

04-00:30:39
Ross: And passed as Chinese and essentially, spied for the American government.

Redman: Is that right? Okay.

04-00:30:46
Ross: So he came in '46 and later married Wen Yen. She is still playing tennis every day. Milton died a couple years ago. They're the ones I've known best.

Redman: I see. So then turning again generally, you've mentioned, in an article honoring you for winning the Alumna of the Year at I-House, you talk about a really diverse array of people that were on campus during that time, and how much they influenced your life.

04-00:31:18
Ross: Yes.

Redman: I'd like to ask a series of questions, but most of them are focused on how the campus was changing at the time, specifically in terms of the students. I'd ask you to think back to your time before the war, at Mills, and thinking about maybe what you knew of UC Berkeley and what the students were like there.

04-00:31:40
Ross: Well, we had— Oh, what's the word. They weren't individual dates, they were invitations to various fraternity houses; and then various groups at Mills invited fraternity X. They were dancing mixes or whatever you want to call them. Some of my friends married men they met that way, and some of them married— Well, two of them married pilots who'd passed through the space at some time. A lot of people at I-House married each other. It was a matrimonial factory. [Redman laughs] It truly was. The marriages, with one exception that I can think of, lasted.

Redman: Interesting.

04-00:32:51
Ross: Well, the men were ready to get married. They were five, six years older and, I think, knew what they wanted.

Redman: Were there a number of instances of foreigners, then, marrying American women?

04-00:33:06
Ross: Yes. Yes. Yes. And some foreign girls. That lovely girl from Turkey, Eren Sunel (sp?) married Paul Olsen, a Norwegian. Yes.

Redman: Now, do you get the sense that those relationships, in 1946, was there any discrimination at that time in a place like Berkeley, in terms of—

04-00:33:39
Ross: Oh, yes.

Redman: —relationships of different races or cultures?

04-00:33:43
Ross: Oh, sure. Now, when I-House was created in 1930—and it's written in Mr. Blaisedell's—he was the long-time director—oral history, about Harry Edmonds—who was Mr. Rockefeller's front man, as it were— [that he] wanted I-House to be built where it is, so it'd be an affront to the stodginess of Berkeley, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Well, lots has been made of that. But also, I think it's got to be said that there were tremendously good forces that welcomed this sort of activity. Ralph Fisher, who was a businessman in Oakland— or was he a banker? he was something or other—was very supportive, as were people in Berkeley, of integration. What some of them worried about was men and women together. But there was discrimination. The coffee shops along Telegraph Avenue— And Telegraph Avenue went all the way up to Sather Gate then; the boundary hadn't been moved yet.

Redman: Right.

04-00:35:02
Ross: They did not serve—we were still calling them Negroes—coffee. So I sat in with two men who were in economics. And there's an oral history about one of them, Emmett Rice, in Bancroft. He only died this spring. His daughter, child of a mixed marriage, is now high up in the State Department.

Redman: Interesting. Okay.

04-00:35:38
Ross: But I know that when he went to Cornell, the way was paved for him by somebody here, who knew somebody at Cornell, so they lined up an apartment for him in advance, et cetera. When Wen Yen and Milton wanted to buy a house on Grizzly Peak, they bought it through a friend, because—

Redman: Going through a realtor at that time—

04-00:36:14
Ross: Yeah, the realtors were redlining the area.

Redman: So there were clear instances—

04-00:36:21
Ross: So there were instances of discrimination. And blatant.

Redman: Blatant discrimination, very open. Now then, another question I wanted to ask, going back to your understanding of— It's a little bit of a tricky question, but I'm wondering if there were other dorms that were co-educational or men and women, or was that unique to the I-House, at the very early founding?

04-00:36:48
Ross: The co-ops were separate. I can't think of any mixed sex, because there were only two dorms, university-sponsored dorms, and one was Bowles Hall, and that was all men. The other one was the women's one, built in '42. I can't think of its name. Anyway, no, I can't think of any. The women's dorm was named Stern.

Redman: So were men and women at International House separated in any way?

04-00:37:26
Ross: Oh, yes. Yes.

Redman: How would that work?

04-00:37:27
Ross: By floor.

Redman: Okay, so by floor.

04-00:37:30
Ross: Yes.

Redman: I see.

04-00:37:31
Ross: Now, can I tell you this story of a Swedish economist?

Redman: Please.

04-00:37:35
Ross: He was being shown around. Mr. Blaisedell had shown him the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Swedish economist said, "Ah, we abolished toll bridges in the twelfth century, in Sweden." So then when they were at I-House, Mr. Blaisedell showed him around. So the Swedish economist observed that the men and women are separated by floors, and Mr. Blaisedell said yes. So he said, "In Sweden, don't you?" He said, "No, they're not." Mr. Blaisedell said, "Well, don't you have trouble?" The Swedish economist said, "Yes. Don't you?" [Redman laughs] Isn't that darling?

Redman: Yes, it is. Yes. It shows that it's not just where the sleeping arrangements are, necessarily.

04-00:38:28
Ross: Now they're not separated.

Redman: So let me ask. Let's say you're a young graduate student or taking courses at the Berkeley campus. What sorts of trouble could you get into at that time, socially or— I'm not insinuating that you were out drinking and carousing.

04-00:38:51
Ross: What sort of problems that were frowned upon? You're thinking about—

Redman: Sure.

04-00:38:57
Ross: —social issues? Well—

Redman: I assume that so many of the students were so diligent that that was less of an issue. Would you say that most of the students were fairly studious during their time here, and focused on their studies? Were there other students that were celebrating the fact that—

04-00:39:26
Ross: Oh, there were the fraternity boys. What did they do? Did they see how many men could get into a telephone booth?

Redman: Sure, okay. Yeah.

04-00:39:40
Ross: Then there was something about goldfish swallowing. But the cops, the Berkeley cops—and I'm thinking of the campus cops—they mostly were sort of getting drunks home. And there were panty raids.

Redman: It sounds like nothing too dangerous.

04-00:40:21
Ross: I can't remember. I can remember there were some barrels set on fire at some point, but I can't remember when that was. No.

Redman: All right, maybe we can turn back to scholarship for a moment. I'm curious about what you were learning in these classes that you were taking now.

04-00:40:45
Ross: Well, one, I've got to be very grateful to Mr. Kidner. He taught statistics. He called me in, I guess the second week of class, in September, and asked me if I'd like to be a TA. I said, "Well, I've never taught." He said, "Well." I didn't realize at the time, but of course, they were *desperate*. They had oodles more people enrolling in economics than they'd ever thought, and so they needed a live body to teach. He then went on to say, he said, "Well, you did well in your two economics classes as an undergraduate, and you seem to have done all right this spring. So," he said, "Why not?" So I said, "Sure." But before

that, he said to me, "I see that you got an A from George Hedley." I said yes, and he said, "What'd you think of him?" I said, "I thought he was wonderful." He said, "Well, why don't I give you your first job then?" He said, "George gave me my first job."

Redman: Oh, wow. That's very interesting.

04-00:41:51
Ross: So this is a story about the old-boy network.

Redman: Yes. Yeah.

04-00:41:57
Ross: I'm sure he would've given me the job anyway, but—

Redman: But it was clear in that—

04-00:42:00
Ross: —he was pleased. He was pleased.

Redman: So then let me ask about your experiences teaching. I can imagine teaching economics at this time at Berkeley, for the reasons that we've discussed, were very interesting. I can imagine the normal groups of young recent high school graduates, combined with students who had come back from the Pacific or Europe, to other students who had maybe spent time working in defense industries. [doorbell or phone rings] Would you like me to pause that? [audio file stops & restarts]

04-00:42:34
Ross: —and that's because they'd been too lazy to sign up in at a decent hour.

Redman: So you had all of the football players in your first economics discussion section. Eight a.m. on Saturday.

04-00:42:48
Ross: For the most part, they were hopeless students. We gave them quizzes every week, and these were multiple-choice quizzes. No, we didn't. No, that was later. No, I take that back. But we had several exams before the final. Professor Gordon looked over the A's and the D's and the F's and he read them. He was very conscientious. So the A's, he agreed with me. The D's, sometimes he moved up to a C. And the F's, oh, failing, he moved up to a D. I didn't like this because F meant they hadn't done *anything*. A good many of the football players were in that category, because in my other sections— We had six sections a week. When I think about it now— And there were at least fifteen people to a section. That's a lot of papers to grade.

Redman: Yeah, that's a lot of papers to grade.

04-00:44:10
Ross: Then I had one or two older men—they were probably thirty—who argued with me in class. Sometimes they were right. That was very embarrassing, but okay. It wasn't that first semester, it was later, that I had a student who'd been troublesome to me. Then when I was home for Christmas vacation, he had taken captive his girlfriend, at pistol point. Made the *L.A. Times*.

Redman: Wow.

04-00:45:04
Ross: But she got away. So he didn't come back. That was kind of exciting and a little bit troublesome. But I had very few women. Very few. They were mostly men.

Redman: I hate to say this, because I'd like to go on and on with you about your time at Berkeley, and let's do a follow-up on that. But to conclude today, I'd like to conclude by thinking about the war, if you wouldn't mind. In particular, we talked about the place of the shipyards in your thinking, but I'd like if you'd maybe put in context for me, the place of the war in your economic thinking, in your political thinking and your social thinking, as far as the immediate aftermath for it. Well, you were this bright-eyed young graduate student, some sense; but you'd also had some very deep and heavy and powerful real-life experiences, working in the shipyards. So it seems to me a blending of this sort of youthful naiveté with, also the experiences of someone who had worked at an interesting place.

04-00:46:24
Ross: I never mentioned it.

Redman: So you would never mention to your professors, say, that you had an experience at the shipyards? That's very interesting.

04-00:46:35
Ross: I didn't say anything to my professors. No, I didn't.

Redman: How about for you internally?

04-00:46:44
Ross: It was a new world.

Redman: It was a new world. Okay.

04-00:46:46
Ross: Yes.

Redman: So yet again, you've had this new world at the shipyards, and then you're entering a new phase in your life that is, in some sense, completely disconnected. Now, it seems like there maybe were some lessons. We talked about feelings about big corporations and maybe were there questions about

capitalism? Can you add anything else to that? Is that a pretty accurate portrayal of who you were, then, in 1946, as far as these thoughts churning about in your mind?

04-00:47:29
Ross: I never had a life plan. This is one of the things that sort of upset me in the last few years of teaching, was that by then, the women I taught were so determined to— or at least felt that they ought to know what they were going to be doing in twenty years. What I thought about when I went to college was that I was very impressed, again, by Dr. Reinhardt's statement that the purpose of a liberal arts education is to make a woman more interesting at forty than she is at twenty. Now, that can probably be thought of as sexist. You were to move into Mrs. Three-in-one, as the wife of a successful businessman, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But I was very optimistic. One of the pieces that I wrote for I-House once upon a time, when I said it was the best of times and it was the worst of times, to paraphrase—not even to paraphrase, to quote—

Redman: Dickens.

04-00:48:55
Ross: Dickens, thank you. That there were all these real problems about the under-developed world, and terrible, terrible poverty abroad and at home, and prejudice, but it was still a time of hope, that we could— This is one of the things that I thought economics would do for me, would be make me a skilled person to "solve," quote/unquote some of these problems. I saw the war as inevitable, in hindsight. I saw it as inevitable. Now that I've read a bit more than I did then, I think I clearly see now there were ways that we could've acted, and should've acted, in advance. But we didn't. So then I thought we should make the best of it.

Redman: I think I'll conclude with that and we'll pick it up again in a future session.

04-00:50:20
Ross: Okay, fine. Did you see *Midnight in Paris*?