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Roberta Bremer

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
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Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2008

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Interview #1: April 15, 2008

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Rigelhaupt: It's April 15, 2008. I'm in Crockett, California, doing an oral history interview with Roberta Bremer. To start, if I could ask you to say your full name and the year you were born.

01-00:00:20

Bremer: Roberta [pronounces: Roe-ber-ta] Bremer. I was born in 1917.

Rigelhaupt: And where were you born?

01-00:00:31

Bremer: In Vallejo, California.

Rigelhaupt: And how long did you live in Vallejo?

01-00:00:43

Bremer: Oh, probably four years.

Rigelhaupt: Do you have memories of Vallejo?

01-00:00:50

Bremer: Not really.

Rigelhaupt: Where did your family move to, after they moved from Vallejo?

01-00:00:58

Bremer: Back to Crockett.

Rigelhaupt: *Back* to Crockett?

01-00:01:01

Bremer: They had lived in Crockett before. And then my father worked at Mare Island during World War I. And so rather than go back and forth on the ferry, they moved over there. And so I was born there. And then by that time, World War I is over, and Mare Island's closing down. So they came back to Crockett.

Rigelhaupt: What did your father do for work when he came back to Crockett?

01-00:01:37

Bremer: He was an electrician. Did any kind of electrical work. Worked in the power houses in Mare Island and learned that trade in the navy.

Rigelhaupt: So he was actually in the navy during World War I.

01-00:02:03

Bremer: No. Before. He was out by then, and had come here. Served most of the time in the navy, I think in Washington State. When his seven years was up, then he came to Crockett because he had a brother that was here at that time.

Rigelhaupt: What years were your parents born?

01-00:02:35

Bremer: My father in 1889, and my mother probably—I don't remember exactly the date, but around 1893. She was born here in this town, Crockett.

Rigelhaupt: Your mom's born in 1893, in Crockett.

01-00:02:59

Bremer: Right.

Rigelhaupt: Were her parents born here?

01-00:03:03

Bremer: No, they were both born in Ireland. Came to San Francisco, and from San Francisco, here.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know when her parents, so your grandparents, came from Ireland to San Francisco?

01-00:03:17

Bremer: No. I can not find the date that they came. They were married in San Francisco, in 1882, I believe, and then came to Crockett. Had one, two, three children in San Francisco; the last two were born here in this town.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know what brought them from San Francisco to Crockett?

01-00:03:48

Bremer: Not really. He started a grocery store, but I don't know if that was *why*.

Rigelhaupt: Did your grandparents ever share stories with you of what Crockett was like when they arrived here?

01-00:04:02

Bremer: My grandfather was dead before I was even born. My grandmother, no. I knew very little of her.

Rigelhaupt: And did your mom talk about what it was like growing up here?

01-00:04:18

Bremer: My mom died when I was five.

Rigelhaupt: So it was you and your father—

01-00:04:27

Bremer: Mm-hm. And his mother and father.

Rigelhaupt: And where had his mother and father been living?

01-00:04:41

Bremer: Well, they were travelers. They had lived in Indiana, Illinois, Louisiana, Denver, and then came here because one son was here. And he built a house for them. So then my father, the other son, came when he got out of the service.

Rigelhaupt: So your father's brother, your uncle, was the connection to Crockett.

01-00:05:19

Bremer: Right.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know what brought him here?

01-00:05:24

Bremer: Nope. Never asked him why he came here. He worked for American Smelting and Refining. But I don't know why he came here. They sent him to Burma once. He spent about a year in Burma, working at one of their refineries over there they had trouble with, and they sent him over there. But as far as I know, he did not work for American Smelting and Refining before he came here. So I don't know what brought him here.

Rigelhaupt: Where is, or was, American Smelting and Refining?

01-00:06:17

Bremer: About a mile down the road. But it closed. What year, Fran?

Fran: '70.

01-00:06:26

Bremer: '70. 1970, it closed.

Rigelhaupt: And how long did your uncle work there?

01-00:06:39

Bremer: Till he retired from there.

Rigelhaupt: When did he retire?

01-00:06:45

Bremer: *Gosh!* I don't know. Had to be before '70, that's all I can remember. But I couldn't tell you what—I should know, but I don't.

Rigelhaupt: So your earliest childhood memories are from Crockett.

01-00:07:15

Bremer: Right here.

Rigelhaupt: What are some of your earliest childhood memories from the city?

01-00:07:20

Bremer: From here?

Rigelhaupt: Yeah.

01-00:07:25

Bremer: Small town, you knew everybody. You went to the movies, like everybody else. You went swimming in—The men's club had a nice pool. You spent your summers there. I don't know what else. Whatever else kids do—Played all games that kids today do *not* do. Run sheep run, tag, scoot down the hills on a cardboard box. Stuff that they don't even *know* of today. But that was my childhood.

Rigelhaupt: What are some of your earliest memories from elementary school?

01-00:08:25

Bremer: George Johnson was the principal. When I went to kindergarten, this town had two schools, one on this side of town, which is called Valona, and one on the other side of town, which is Crockett. And the place, the whole town got called Crockett because that's where the post office was. So I went to kindergarten on this side of town. And they had just built the new elementary school when I went in first grade.

Rigelhaupt: Did you have a favorite subject in elementary school?

01-00:09:13

Bremer: Art, I guess. I think that was probably my—I was always drawing pictures to be put up around the blackboard.

Rigelhaupt: So staying in elementary school age, what was a typical day like for your father?

01-00:09:38

Bremer: I'm trying—Oh. Well, in the late 1920s, he was fire chief on the Valona Fire Department. But that's always been volunteer. It's still volunteer. He worked most of that time, as far as I can remember, at Associated Oil Company. When I was in elementary, he had actually worked many places in this area. At one time, for the C&H Sugar, American Smelting and Refining. But always as an electrician; that was just his job.

Rigelhaupt: Did he ever talk about a favorite place that he liked to work?

01-00:10:42

Bremer: No. Although when he worked for Union Oil, he liked that; but that was later.

Rigelhaupt: Well, staying in that time period, in the 1920s, did the city look roughly like it does now?

01-00:11:03

Bremer:

Mm-hm. In 19—Well, after the second bridge was built, which opened in '58, they did build a lot of new homes, which we called Mortgage Hill. So that's up on this side of town. But basically, there wasn't a lot built after that, was there? Or before, I mean. Except for that new section up there, and then one little new section over here, it's practically the same.

Rigelhaupt:

That seems pretty unique in the Bay Area, to have a city be practically the same as the twenties.

01-00:11:58

Bremer:

Has been that long, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, these houses around here were all built—This one was built originally in 1917. When we took it over, it belonged to my mother-in-law and father-in-law. But when my husband and I took it over, then we completely remodeled it. But the foundation was put in and the outside walls were put in, in 1917. And most of these houses were.

Rigelhaupt:

So you had an uncle in the area and grandparents. Could you talk about your extended family that lived in the area?

01-00:12:50

Bremer:

Well, that's all I had, really. When my mother passed away, I went to live with my grandmother and grandfather, of my father's mother and father. So I was raised until I was twelve, and then *they* were both gone.

Rigelhaupt:

So you weren't living with your father.

01-00:13:17

Bremer:

Yeah. My father lived with us, too.

Rigelhaupt:

Oh, okay. So you all lived together.

01-00:13:22

Bremer:

Yeah. Then I went to stay with a—eh—forty-second cousin for a year, in Albany. And then we were in the midst of the big Depression. He lost his job, so there was no money to pay for any board or care for me, so I came back. Although he was living in Rodeo at that time, four miles down the road. And so we lived together from then on.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, that was going to be one of my questions. What do you remember about the beginning of the Depression?

01-00:14:13

Bremer:

There was no jobs, no money. You had no welfare. There was nothing like you have today. Today, the unions will even pay you a small stipend to live. You had nothing. I can remember my father, who was a journeyman, and had been a journeyman electrician for many years, working down in the warehouses here for sixty cents an hour. But you had to eat. There were only the two of us, because I had no brothers or sisters. It wasn't an easy time.

Rigelhaupt: Was it work that brought your father to Rodeo?

01-00:15:14

Bremer: Pardon?

Rigelhaupt: Was it a job opportunity that brought your father to Rodeo?

01-00:15:18

Bremer: No. He had lived here in the house with my grandmother and grandfather, his mother and father, and me. But the house belonged to his brother. His brother had built the house for their mother and father. When they were both gone, when they had both died, he was picking up, at that time, passengers, in his car, in Rodeo, that were working at the Associated Oil, same as he was. So he wanted to move out of his brother's house, so his brother could sell it. And so he moved to Rodeo. He was picking up passengers there anyway. But he'd only been there about maybe a year before I came. And I lived there for a year, and then that was the end of the job. So as soon as we could, we moved back to Crockett.

Rigelhaupt: And did the Depression have a similar impact on your extended family, your grandparents and your uncle?

01-00:16:44

Bremer: All my grandparents were gone by then. Because the last one was 1930. So she was the last one, so they were all gone.

Rigelhaupt: But then was the Depression equally as hard on your uncle?

01-00:17:09

Bremer: No, because he had a good job in Selby. And Selby kept working. I don't remember how they cut down, if they did. But he always had a good job with them.

Rigelhaupt: Now, as you got a little bit older, did you have a favorite subject in middle school?

01-00:17:41

Bremer: We didn't have middle school. Ours was eight and then four. No. Not a favorite subject, I don't think.

Rigelhaupt: In high school?

01-00:18:00

Bremer: Even there, I don't know if I had a *favorite*. I just did what I could in any of them.

Rigelhaupt: Did you graduate high school about 1935?

01-00:18:20

Bremer: I didn't graduate. I got married. [laughs] Six months before. Was supposed to be '35, yes.

Rigelhaupt: Well, could you tell me a little bit about getting married when you were—

01-00:18:39

Bremer: So young? Mm-hm. Celebrated sixty years of marriage, if that means anything. No, at that time, my father and I were still living together. And then he moved over to Vallejo. And my husband got a job first in the C&H. He had been working for an auto distributor here. Actually, he was an automobile mechanic most of his life. But then he got a job in the C&H Sugar. Hated it so badly he couldn't get out fast enough. And then *he* went to American Smelting and Refining. *Loved* that. So he worked there until they went on strike. So when they went on strike, it's then the same old deal; you had to find something else to keep you going. So a friend of ours owned all the taxis in Richmond. So being as he was the auto mechanic, she took him in to take care of her taxis. And then when he'd had enough of that, he came back and worked for the same old auto distributor he had worked for here. Then that one sold and moved to Pittsburg. And he didn't like the commute, so he started his own garage here. When that got to be pretty tough, because people come in and want to talk to you, and in the meantime, you're not doing your work; then you have to work hours at night in order to catch up. So then he was offered a job in the school, the high school. Because at that time, they had all their own buses for transportation. So he took care of the buses, the pickups, the lawn mowers—whatever had a motor, he took care of it.

Rigelhaupt: Could you talk a little bit about what your courtship was like with your husband?

01-00:21:22

Bremer: We went together through high school. That's about all. Whatever was going on, why, we went together.

Rigelhaupt: I'm mostly asking just to get a sense of—So you dated all the way through high school.

01-00:21:39

Bremer: Yeah, if you want to call it dating. We really didn't call it that. You were just going together. Nobody had any money to spend *dating*. The only thing I had was, I could drive my father's car. And so I would load it up and we'd go to whatever games they had—basketball, football or anything like that, that was out of town. That was the only thing different, really.

Rigelhaupt: You said that your husband had worked at American—

01-00:22:26

Bremer: Smelting and Refinery.

Rigelhaupt: —Smelting and Refinery until there was a strike. What year was that strike?

01-00:22:35

Bremer: 1940—about '43, '44, somewhere along in there.

Rigelhaupt: So during the war.

01-00:22:48

Bremer: Yeah. No. Couldn't have been.

Fran: Not during the war.

01-00:23:01

Bremer: They were right after the war. Gee, I don't know, somewhere around in there. Anywhere from '44—But we didn't move till after—I don't know.

Rigelhaupt: And that might be easy enough to find out. But do you recall what the strike was about?

01-00:23:28

Bremer: No. Money. Fran's saying money. Because my son, see, she married my son. And he worked there—how many years did {Sonny?} work there?

Fran: Sixteen.

01-00:23:43

Bremer: Sixteen, I thought that's what—He worked sixteen years for American Smelting. And anytime they ever went on strike, *anybody*, it was *always* for money. Because money was something that they never gave if they didn't have to.

Fran: Well, health benefits.

01-00:24:02

Bremer: Yeah. Health. Yeah, *they* did. But any time C&H ever went on strike, it was for money.

Rigelhaupt: Well, I didn't know, judging from the time period, if it was also potentially a strike to simply organize the union. Because certainly, during the mid-1930s there were a lot of strikes—

01-00:24:26

Bremer: [chuckles] Oh, yes.

Rigelhaupt: —just to be recognized as a union, regardless if you won much from the company—

01-00:24:32

Bremer: Or not.

Rigelhaupt: —just to unionize itself.

01-00:24:34

Bremer: Just to unionize the companies. The big one they had here at the C&H was 1936. And that included half of the warehousemen from San Francisco.

Rigelhaupt: Do you recall which union was organizing that—

01-00:24:54

Bremer: Here, it ended up sugar—

Fran: ILWU.

01-00:25:01

Bremer: Yeah, ILWU. But it was Sugar Refinery Union number one. That much, I do remember.

Rigelhaupt: So the C&H plant has been organized since the thirties.

01-00:25:20

Bremer: Oh, yeah. Yeah. They were part of that big deal that took in all of this Bay Area, in '36.

Fran: They had two unions at the C&H.

01-00:25:33

Bremer: Yeah, they had the AFL, too.

Fran: My father worked there. They were on strike when we were kids.
[Bremer laughs]

Rigelhaupt: But then some of the other unions eventually became affiliated with the CIO.

Fran: They did.

01-00:25:48

Bremer: Yeah. Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: Well, if you could say a little bit about what your life was like during the late 1930s, the early years of your marriage, the later years of the Depression. What was life like for you and your husband?

01-00:26:14

Bremer: Work. What else? Of course, the thing was then, at least here, is women did not go out and work. You couldn't find a job, really, unless there was something desperately wrong; then somebody would find a job for you. But even if you worked at that time, if, as a single woman out of high school—which many, many did here—if you went to work in the C&H, when you got married, you were out. You could no longer work. Until World War II. Then,

of course, then they wanted them *all* back. But no, you just worked and lived and paid rent and had parties.

Fran: Took weekend trips.

01-00:27:22

Bremer: Well, yes, took weekend trips. Even during the war, we took weekend trips. But you had your gas rationing then. But my husband, as a mechanic, knew that he could make the car go on kerosene. So you put a little bit of gas in and then quite a bit of kerosene. And we used to go to Tahoe every year. But I mean, you're living on—Well, first he got \$4.80 a day. That was the daily wage. Then it went up to \$5. Then it went up to five-and-a-quarter. So if you had an extra day, you had \$5 extra. In other words, if you're working a ten day pay period, that was fine. Once in a while, due to the calendar, you'd have an eleven days. So you had \$5 extra. So you'd have a party. That's what *we* did. Because outside of the movies, that was your entertainment, really. You didn't have all these gadgets and things, technological things.

Rigelhaupt: Well, speaking of the war, how do you remember hearing about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

01-00:29:06

Bremer: My husband's brother had been over there for almost four years then. And so that was a Sunday morning. We were here in this house, my mother-in-law and father-in-law's house, because we had moved in maybe a year or so prior, because we were going to buy a place downtown, my husband and I. And so we wanted to gather together a little more money and get rid of some of the junk we had and what not, so we had moved in with them. So we were here. And his aunt and cousins and whatnot lived a block away. And so they called that morning and said, "Get on the radio. Pearl Harbor's been bombed." And then of course, with Fred, his brother over there, got kind of iffy for a while. You didn't know *what* had happened. So that's how we heard about it.

Rigelhaupt: And was your husband's brother in the service?

01-00:30:46

Bremer: He was in the navy. He had been in the navy about four years, since about '36, I think it was, when he went in. And so he was due to—his shift was shift—What am I trying to think of?

Fran: His stint.

01-00:31:06

Bremer: Well, his stint in there, anyway, was really over. And he wanted out. Mm-mm. Mm-mm. They didn't say why or anything. Pearl Harbor hadn't happened yet, but no, he couldn't come out. He had to stay. But he was first class. First class, I guess they called it. And so important on his ship. So he was stuck

over there then for most of the duration. He managed to come home once, probably in '43, maybe. Something like that.

Rigelhaupt: Was Pearl Harbor a complete surprise to you? Or was there a sense that the world was headed towards war?

01-00:32:17

Bremer: Complete surprise. Because the Japanese ambassador and all of their high deals were over here in Washington, just smoothing things out so nice. Everything was wonderful. So it came as a complete surprise. At least to us peons.

Rigelhaupt: Did you ever have any conversations with your husband's brother about the fact that he wasn't let out of the navy as perhaps being an indicator that the military had a sense a build-up was coming?

01-00:32:58

Bremer: Well, no. Of course, he knew that must be something to make him stay in. He couldn't get out. But that was all. That was all *he* knew. They just *wouldn't let him out*. But he didn't know anything, either. And certainly, it came as a surprise to the islands, because they didn't know it was coming.

Rigelhaupt: What was you, your husband's, your family's reaction to Pearl Harbor?

01-00:33:41

Bremer: Well, I don't know that there was any particular reaction to the fact that it had been Japanese that had created that. The only problem was by that time, by '41, my son is five, six years old. And my husband's mother and father were German descent. They were born in the Hawaiian Islands, but in German concentrations of workers that their parents had been brought from Germany to work in the islands. They conscripted a lot of people—same thing they did during World War II—throughout the Midwest. They brought them all out here, where the defense plants were. Well, they had done the same thing in the islands. And his grandparents, my husband's grandparents had come from Germany to the islands. And their kids were all born there in the islands. Well, their kids were my husband's mother and father. So when they came over here—1913, something like that—they still spoke German amongst themselves—of course, they could speak English—because they had been living in German communities. They went to a German school, they had their little Lutheran church. So they all spoke German. Well, when World War II came along, they're still considered part of the German society, because it's Germany that's fighting in Europe. And even though this town was full of first generation Italians, they didn't consider that. It was Germany that caused the war in Europe. I'm not making myself very clear, I don't think. But that's the only thing that really—But as far as having a war with Japanese, that didn't mean anything to us at all.

Rigelhaupt: So once the US enters the war after Pearl Harbor, it sounds as though your husband's parents, because of having close ties with Germany—

01-00:37:02

Bremer: They *didn't* have close—Yeah, but they were German descent. And the rest of this town was Italian.

Rigelhaupt: So were your husband's parents then considered somewhat suspect or—

01-00:37:15

Bremer: No, but the kids—My son, at six, the little Italian kids would fight with him because he was German descent. It was kind of a crazy thing. But it was really the kids, more than anything.

Rigelhaupt: And none of the Italian kids faced any—

01-00:37:38

Bremer: Oh, no! They didn't. The fact that they were in it just as much as Germany was didn't affect them. But see, there were so many of them. And he was only one.

Rigelhaupt: So there were a lot of, you said, first generation Italian Americans living in Crockett.

01-00:37:58

Bremer: Oh, absolutely.

Rigelhaupt: Do you know what brought that community here?

01-00:38:02

Bremer: The C&H. Men would come from Italy, get a job here in the sugar refinery, which was good money for that era. And then once they got established, then they sent for the rest of their family. And so yes, this town was primarily— There were a lot of Irish and there were Welsh and there were a few different ones. But the majority was really Italian. And still is. Half of this whole hill here was all Italian.

Rigelhaupt: Now, was there any sense, immediately after Pearl Harbor, that the Bay Area was at any risk, in the sense that it is the next stop from Hawaii to the West Coast.

01-00:39:12

Bremer: Oh, yeah. We had to put the curtains up to block out the lights. Turn off anything outside, of course. And they worried about submarines coming up along the coast. And yeah, there was that concern most of the time, that we are as close as you're going to get to Japan.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember learning about the effort to support the war? As far as buying bonds and—

01-00:40:01

Bremer:

You just did *anything* you could. If you had extra money, you bought bonds. If you had extra gold or anything like that, you turned that in. If you had any metal that they could use, you turned that in. Because we had been attacked, there was the feeling of patriotism that there hasn't been in the last four or five wars that we've been in since then. Now it's, when's it going to be over? And who's fighting who? But it was different. It was a different feeling. Entirely different.

Rigelhaupt:

And do you have memories about how you learned about turning in gold or any of those sort of contributions that people made to the war effort? Was it just understood by the community?

01-00:41:10

Bremer:

Well, I think most people would get it from the radio or from your newspapers. Because to my knowledge, there were no meetings or anything like that that told you that. But you picked it up, whatever.

Rigelhaupt:

Did you have family members who were drafted or served during World War II?

01-00:41:45

Bremer:

I didn't, because I had no siblings or anything. My husband's brother, of course. And a few of his first cousins, who were his age. Yeah. They all served. Well, there were two, the ones that had called to tell us about Pearl Harbor, George and Ted, they both served. Yeah, there were a few like that.

Rigelhaupt:

Did you receive correspondence from them, or learn about the war effort through them?

01-00:42:27

Bremer:

Not really. If you did, their mother and father would tell you, "Oh, I got a letter from so-and-so. And they said thus." But that's about the only way.

Rigelhaupt:

Where did they serve? Were they in Europe or in the Pacific?

01-00:42:46

Bremer:

They were both navy, so they probably were here in the Pacific. They're both dead now.

Rigelhaupt:

Could you talk a little bit about what it was like learning about the war without television? In the sense that we get such graphic images, since Vietnam, of the war and what war looks like.

01-00:43:25

Bremer:

And they didn't have that.

Rigelhaupt:

You had newsreels, which were similar, but not brought into your living room. So I'm wondering if you could talk about—

01-00:43:31

Bremer: [over Rigelhaupt] No, no. You had to go to your movie show. And of course, with every picture that you went to see, there was always a—I forgot what they used to call it. But they were the local—not local, but they were the news deals. Can't even think of the name. Movie-something. I can't even think of the name of it.

Fran: Movietone News?

01-00:44:07

Bremer: Well, it was something like that. There was one that was used so much. But that's the way you got it. And then again, your newspaper. And the radio. Don't forget, we had radio. But of course, it's the vision that is much more hitting people. Listening to it, they don't get as much out of it. But see, then again, we went to the movies, oh, most of the time, maybe three times a week. Certainly, twice a week; sometimes three times. So you were getting it; every other day or so, you were getting a look at whatever they had put on their reels.

Rigelhaupt: But would you describe it as a different experience, learning about war without television?

01-00:45:31

Bremer: Oh, yeah. When it's right here in your living room, it's an entirely different thing, I think. Because people turn that on when they get up in the morning, and they don't turn it off till they go to bed at night. And even if you were in the other room, you would hear it. Oh! Something very interesting to watch, maybe. Yeah, there is quite a difference than when you go and put your quarter in the box office at the movies twice a week.

Rigelhaupt: Were you active at all in any religious community during World War II?

01-00:46:21

Bremer: No. We went to church then, didn't we? But not—Well, no. Active, no. You went to church maybe once a week, and that was about it.

Rigelhaupt: What church?

01-00:46:38

Bremer: Presbyterian. Protestant.

Rigelhaupt: And is the church near your home?

01-00:46:47

Bremer: Well, it used to be, but it isn't anymore. Now it's the mortuary. I've been to three different churches in this town, and there isn't one of them left. All Protestant. Presbyterian and Congregational and a Community. But none of them are here now. The Catholic has *always* been here, since my Irish

grandparents starting going to that. Which of course, was a big thing for them. But due to the fact that my mother had died when I was—She had had—Oh!

Fran: Appendicitis.

01-00:47:50

Bremer: Yeah, ruptured appendix. And being she had died when I was such a young person, then I went to live with the other grandparents. And see, they were Protestant. So that was the way I was raised. Otherwise, I'd still be going to the Catholic church here in town.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember hearing about the evacuation orders for the Japanese Americans along the West Coast?

01-00:48:30

Bremer: We had the *Italians* left this town. The Italians had to get out, too. But there was never—Or Germans. If you were strictly first generation German, you had to go, too. But they have never made the big deal of those two that they have the Japanese. But the only Japanese that we had, really, were in Richmond, that had the nurseries. And we weren't connected in any way with any of them. So all we knew is that they were put into these big camps. But yes, we had Italians go from this town. The only one I can think of was one, and she was so old they didn't even bother sending her away. That was Mary Helen and Rose's mother.

Rigelhaupt: Well, how did the town change as Italian Americans living here—Now, were they—

01-00:49:52

Bremer: But see, you had to be born in Italy for them to send you away. If you were a descendant of somebody, they didn't have to go.

Rigelhaupt: So did Crockett get smaller? It didn't change that much.

01-00:50:15

Bremer: There weren't that many old ones left, that had been born in Italy, that had to go.

Rigelhaupt: So your son's friends in school, there was no impact on them.

01-00:50:28

Bremer: No. No. Not on them, no.

Rigelhaupt: Well, how do you remember Crockett changing at the beginning of World War II? Or did it?

01-00:50:42

Bremer: It didn't, I don't think. I don't *really* think it did at *all*. It's never changed that much, really. A few houses here and there that have been built. We've lost

any stores. We don't have stores. We're too close to everything else. So we had a big department store, and that was gone. They had a good men's club. That's gone. Had a good women's club. Buildings. Both of those were really built by C&H. They're gone. Grocery stores have come and gone through the years. We have a couple of—only one, I guess, left now. J&L's the only one left, right? And it's more like a 7-Eleven, that type of thing. They do try to have a little bit of everything. But they are a small, little store. So we just have bars; we have lots of bars. We've always had those. But even those are down from what they used to be.

Rigelhaupt: In Crockett, then, there was nothing like the boom that happened in Richmond.

01-00:52:20

Bremer:

This, up here on the hill, when they—There was nobody here. We're unincorporated. So there was nobody here to really go and buy land and build houses. When the second bridge went in, that was—Like I say, that opened in '58. So all of that section. And Highway 80, which went through the hills, took a lot of houses, took a lot of people. But nobody started anything in this town to make up for that. So they either moved to—some moved to Vallejo, some moved to Rodeo, some, Lord knows where they went. So we lost quite a few people at that time. And then after the bridge is in, then somebody comes along and starts a development up here on the hill. So that's the only new ones that have changed the town.

Rigelhaupt: So there was nothing like the overcrowding, or people renting out bedrooms for workers?

01-00:53:53

Bremer:

No. Well, at the beginning of World War II—Of course, we've got Mare Island right over the straits. So they brought in—What division? I don't remember. But they were kids from Boston. Roxbury and Boston. They were the first ones that come, but they were—Not army. Not Coast—What am I—

Rigelhaupt: Merchant Marines?

01-00:54:37

Bremer:

No. National.

Rigelhaupt: National Guard?

01-00:54:44

Bremer:

Yeah. They were part of the National Guard. I couldn't come up with it. Well, they were the first ones that hit here. They were here by, oh, hardly three days or so after Pearl Harbor. They were here in a hurry. And it's the middle of winter, and it's pouring down rain, and they didn't even have *tents* set up for them. And so they plunked them up on the top of one of the hills here overlooking the straits, so they had a good view of Mare Island. Well, then all

the people up on that hill took these kids in, because they're all living on a hill, they all have rooms downstairs or basements that are completely closed in. So they took them all in and set up cots in their basements. And most of them were Italian. And they fed them, they took care of them, till they finally got some barracks built up there for them. So we had kids, from the very, very beginning.

Rigelhaupt: Other than that, was there a big influx of people in military service in the area?

01-00:56:20

Bremer: Not in town. Of course, all those—not all, but a *good portion* of those kids that came from the Boston area, when the war was over and they were released, they all went home. But in the meantime, they had married girls in town, a lot of the girls in town. But they were going home to Boston. But when they got there, Boston wasn't like Crockett. So back they came. So they built their homes and raised their kids right here.

Rigelhaupt: So Crockett now has a relatively strong connection to Boston by the National Guard that were stationed here.

01-00:57:06

Bremer: [over Rigelhaupt] Yeah. Yeah.

Rigelhaupt: I'm going to pause here because I need to change the tape.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 04-15-2008.mp3

Rigelhaupt: Okay, I'm on tape number two with Roberta Bremer. Let's switch gears a little bit. If you could talk a little bit about some of your first jobs during World War II.

02-00:00:31

Bremer: Well, my first job was down in Oakland. Because we're back to strikes again. C&H was going on strike, and there were quite a few girls that were being put out of their jobs. And a lot of them didn't even have—This wasn't a great town for cars, at that time. So they had all managed to get jobs at Capwell's, because it was just before Christmas. So they had no way of going, to get down there. So I said, "Okay, I'll go. I'll get a job and I'll haul a carload." So I did. So that was my first job, was wrapping gifts to be mailed out at Capwell's in Oakland. Then after that, of course, Pearl Harbor came along right about then. And even in Oakland, there were times when everybody had to go down into the basements of these department stores and block out everything. But we worked down there till after Christmas; then that was the end of that job, of course. So then the local department store that we had here in town called and asked if I wanted a job. Well, why not? Everybody was

going to work then. So I worked down here for, I don't know, maybe two years. And then from there, I transferred to Richmond, to the Boilermakers Union. Worked with them.

Rigelhaupt: What did you do with the Boilermakers Union?

02-00:03:09

Bremer:

Clerical. I don't even remember exactly what, but I had worked to make sure that everybody's dues were paid. I just remember one particular fellow who had been a boilermaker, apparently, for years. He wasn't even working; he was a little elderly. But if you didn't pay your dues at a certain time, then there was quite a reinstatement amount if you wanted to get back into the union. And some of these fellows had belonged for many years. And this old fellow was forgetting his. And so I got a hold of him and said, "Get your money in here, or you're going to be up for reinstatement and it's going to cost you money." And so he did. Then he sent me a box of candy. But that was part of my job, somehow. I don't remember exactly what—but just office, clerical work.

Rigelhaupt: So did you work there 1942, '43?

02-00:04:42

Bremer:

Somewhere along in there, yeah. Then my friend was the head of the Teamsters, and so she says, "Get over here, I'll get—" Because I wanted a job in the truck dispatch, because one of my favorite things was driving. Anyway, so she got me in yard four in truck dispatch. So that's what I did.

Rigelhaupt: When you say truck dispatch, what does that job entail?

02-00:05:24

Bremer:

Well, mine entailed a pickup painted *bright* yellow. Because I got the job of piloting. It was the pilot car. Yard four was the smallest of the yards. And most of their things for these ships—the double bottoms, the superstructures and all of that—were made at ironworks outside of the yard. So we would have to go and pick them up, no matter where. One came from Folsom, up by Sacramento. That one, we always had to have a highway cop with us. But from Oakland, Independent Iron Works down in West Oakland did our double bottoms and some of the superstructures. Anyway, I drove the pilot car for these. So that was—Mostly. But then of course, that's only maybe once or twice a month. The rest of the time, it was pick up equipment all over the Bay Area.

Rigelhaupt: So you were a member of the Teamsters, but you were officially employed by Kaiser?

02-00:06:53

Bremer:

Yes. Yes. And you got your orders from truck dispatch there in Kaiser yard. Every morning, they'd say, "Okay, here. This is yours for today." And you'd

pick up wherever you were supposed to go to get any of this equipment. Or pilot a big load in. See, when we would go to West Oakland, to the Independent Iron Works down in West Oakland, there were no freeways. All you had was San Pablo Avenue. We used to pick up the superstructure, the top part of the ship—The pilot house and all of that came as one big box, one big metal box. Well, San Pablo Avenue had four lanes. We took up the center two, leaving one lane going north and one lane going south. But then we had to have a fellow up—Oh, OSHA would *die* if they saw this! We had to have a fellow up on the roof of this structure. And as we went down, me first, down San Pablo Avenue, this fellow would have to go from the front of the superstructure, with a board, sort of, that had a notch in it, and he would lift all cross wires. Nothing was underground. And he'd have to lift the wire up, run it all the way back to the back, and then dump it off. And then get back to catch the next one. [laughs] So you see, OSHA would have a thousand fits if they saw things like that. But that's the way we had to get it back from West Oakland clear to Richmond. Had to go the whole way. Took up the center two lanes. We were that big that we took up the center two lanes.

Rigelhaupt: And is that the job you stayed with throughout the rest of the war?

02-00:09:19

Bremer: Yeah. Yeah. Worked there till the yard closed.

Rigelhaupt: If my math is correct, you had a son born in—

02-00:09:40

Bremer: 1935.

Rigelhaupt: Okay. And was your husband then working, as well, during the war? I would imagine there was a lot of electrician work.

02-00:09:50

Bremer: American Smelting and Refining.

Rigelhaupt: What was it like finding childcare at that point in your life?

02-00:09:57

Bremer: My mother-in-law lived right here.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember any other discussions with women that you worked with at Kaiser, about other ways they found childcare?

02-00:10:09

Bremer: No. No. But I know they had them. At least in Richmond area, they did. They had childcare places. Kaiser provide some of them, I'm sure. But no, I didn't. But see, by that time, my son is ready for about the first grade, so it isn't baby childcare.

Rigelhaupt: But did you have a sense that it would've been harder than, say now, if both parents are working outside the home, to find childcare?

02-00:10:56

Bremer: I don't think so. I don't think it would've been any harder. Because there was always some women that are home tending their own, and they're usually willing to take in other kids. But fortunately, I always had my mother-in-law.

Rigelhaupt: Did you stay on with Kaiser after the war ended?

02-00:11:27

Bremer: No. That's it. The war is over, you're out.

Rigelhaupt: What did you think of that decision?

02-00:11:37

Bremer: I'd been through—Like I say, when I was born, it was practically the same way. World War I. At your defense plants. Naturally, if you had a job someplace else, it would stay. But your defense plants were down. That's it.

Rigelhaupt: Did you go on to another job after the war?

02-00:12:10

Bremer: Yeah. But there was about—oh, there must've been maybe two years in between. Then I went back to work again.

Rigelhaupt: In a job similar to the one you had?

02-00:12:22

Bremer: No, no. Back in the department store.

Rigelhaupt: Which department store?

02-00:12:31

Bremer: Well, this time, it was in Rodeo. Again, it was always office work type of thing. Then after that, I worked here. We had a big laundry here in town. And I worked in the office in the laundry for a couple of years.

Rigelhaupt: In this division you worked at in Kaiser, in the trucking, if you had to give a ballpark percentage, what percentage of your coworkers were women?

02-00:13:13

Bremer: I would say at least 50%. Because the fellows drove the big trucks that went out and picked up these pieces. The twenty-ton trucks. So anything like that—Yeah, it must've been at least 50%. At least. Maybe more. Because they picked up all the mail from downtown Richmond, brought it in, did all the work in the yard itself. Which required a lot, because you'd have to go to wherever they were putting together a piece, or making it; take it down to the ship, whatever they were building at that time; haul them in from here to there. There was a lot of work in the yard itself.

Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense from your other coworkers that many of the women that you were working with had already had various jobs before starting at the Kaiser Shipyards?

02-00:14:35

Bremer: Not particularly. But a lot of them came from the Midwest. I don't know what they did back there. But they were brought out here. Showed beautiful pictures of these lovely apartment houses that they were going to live in once they came out and worked in the shipyards. They were nothing but *barracks*, plain old barracks, when they got here, with not a tree planted in front of them. And they had them all pictured as beautiful places. And they were full of cockroaches.

Rigelhaupt: Well, part of the reason I ask that question is that one of the common stories about Rosie the Riveter—who probably never actually existed—

02-00:15:34

Bremer: Well, they did. Oh, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: But in the sense that World War II is the *first* time that women—

02-00:15:40

Bremer: That they'd ever worked.

Rigelhaupt: And certainly, you had before. So I'm wondering if you had conversations with other women about what it was like working—what was different about working—

02-00:15:52

Bremer: About the work. No, I don't remember, if I did, really. That's very truthful. I don't remember talking to any of them about what they had done before. But I know that a lot of them, yes, it was the first job they'd ever—Some of the men had built fences. Outside of that, they'd never done any carpentry work or *anything*. And there were certainly many of the boilermakers that went through my desk, and welders, that had *never* done that before. They came right off the farms.

Rigelhaupt: Well, what's interesting in bringing up the boilermakers is one of the things I've read about, with that union in the Bay Area, is that African Americans were in auxiliaries within the union. And there was a big legal case to try and integrate that union during World War II.

02-00:17:00

Bremer: See, I don't remember colored *at all*. So I don't know anything about that. But from where I was sitting, I never saw any colored.

Rigelhaupt: So from your impression, it was a predominantly white union and a predominantly white work force.

02-00:17:22

Bremer: Definitely.

Rigelhaupt:

But even after a lot of—I think a lot of the jobs, say in the Kaiser Shipyards—I don't know what percentage; I don't know if a lot is accurate, but certainly a fair number—were represented by the boilermakers. Like at Moore Dry Dock in Oakland, and the shipyard up in Marin. A lot of those jobs were represented by the boilermakers. And certainly, one of the things I've read about is that tens of thousands of African Americans moved from the South to the Bay Area, *particularly* for these jobs.

02-00:18:03

Bremer: See, I never saw any. I'm *sure*. Because I probably would have noticed them. Because see, we didn't even have any colored in this town until—what would you say, Fran? It's only—

Fran:

We do now.

02-00:18:28

Bremer: Well, now we might have—

Fran:

Just a little handful.

02-00:18:31

Bremer: —a little handful, that's all. But up until, oh, maybe ten years ago at the *most*, we never had *any*.

Fran:

Well, there was a boarding house in town when I was about ten. And my girlfriend's grandmother fed—And these men, African Americans, had cots lined up on both sides of the old skating rink. When you were a kid, that was the skating rink. These people worked for C&H.

02-00:19:05

Bremer: See, I didn't even know that. But I don't remember *any* colored coming into the boilermaker's.

Rigelhaupt:

Yeah, I think the actual legal case wasn't even decided till 1945. And then of course, by the time it actually came down, a lot of the shipyards were closing.

02-00:19:27

Bremer: Closed, yeah.

Rigelhaupt:

It was the end of the war. So it may not have had as much of an impact while you were there, early in the war.

02-00:19:33

Bremer: No. Yeah. Yeah.

Rigelhaupt:

In the jobs that you went forward with after working in the Teamsters and then Kaiser, were you also in positions represented by unions?

02-00:19:54

Bremer:

Yeah, I was when I was here first, in the department store. Yeah, we had to join a union. I didn't want to. It wasn't going to make any difference in my job, it wasn't going to make any difference in my pay or what holidays I had off or anything. To me, it was just extra money that I had to put out for no reason. But then of course, the minute you went to the yards, yeah. You got your job *through* the unions. They were the ones that—I don't know how they worked it, but undoubtedly, when yard two or three wanted ten workers—they might've wanted five boilermakers, three welders, and a carpenter—they just called the union, and the union sent them out.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, do you think your involvement with the Teamsters during World War II had an impact on your life or politics or anything since then?

02-00:21:05

Bremer:

Which is something you had to pay for. Whatever they worked out between themselves and the employers, you had nothing to do with, didn't know what it was all about; you just paid your money.

Rigelhaupt:

Did you stay friends with any of your coworkers who had worked at the Capwell's in downtown Oakland?

02-00:21:31

Bremer:

No. Well, they were really only the ones that I was hauling back and forth. And they were people that had been born and raised here. [laughs]

Rigelhaupt:

Well, part of the reason I ask is there was a general strike in Oakland in 1946.

02-00:21:48

Bremer:

Ah, well, see, mine was early.

Rigelhaupt:

And had actually started with department store workers.

02-00:21:55

Bremer:

Oh.

Rigelhaupt:

So I was curious if you had heard anything—

02-00:21:57

Bremer:

No.

Rigelhaupt:

—about it from people that you had worked with previously.

02-00:22:01

Bremer:

Mine was strictly almost like a Christmas job.

Rigelhaupt:

Well, thinking about your drive from Richmond, all the way down San Pablo into West Oakland and back, if you could describe anything that you saw of one of the busiest thoroughfares in the East Bay at the time—

02-00:22:22

Bremer: It was the only one we knew!

Rigelhaupt: Well, if there was anything you saw that you think was unique to the World War II era, going all the way through Richmond and Berkeley and Oakland.

02-00:22:34

Bremer: Well, Independent Iron Works in West Oakland was its little buildings that they had. They had lots of *workers* there, though. And outside of that, San Pablo hadn't changed in fifty years, probably, till you got to Richmond, and there were the three, four shipyards.

Rigelhaupt: Did you get a sense that it was busy along the thoroughfare? There were lots of people walking and out on the street? That there was a hustle and bustle about—

02-00:23:10

Bremer: Well, yes, that you don't see today, really. Because you never see anybody walking the streets very much anymore. Well, they used to, because they didn't all have *cars*. That was the thing.

Rigelhaupt: Did you see anything along there that would be indicative of the issues that came up with so many people moving to the Bay Area?

02-00:23:42

Bremer: No. If it did, it didn't affect me. I still lived in the same town, in the same house. No.

Rigelhaupt: But you didn't get a sense that there was just too much traffic, too many cars? That sewer lines couldn't be built fast enough? All the types of things that cities were having trouble—

02-00:24:01

Bremer: Having trouble with? No. You were working six days a week, you had things to do on the other day, and you didn't even think about things like that. Today, I'd be much more thinking of something like that than I ever did then.

Rigelhaupt: In thinking back at your work at the Kaiser Shipyards, did you get a sense that there might've been any environmental issues or workplace safety issues? Especially considering the man on the top of the moving vehicle.

02-00:24:48

Bremer: No, I think of that *today*, I didn't think of it *then*. It was just a way that, in order to get down San Pablo—Of course, nothing, as I say, was underground. I didn't think anything of *that* at that time either, because no town did. This little town put everything underground, finally. But all towns had wires strung all over. But I've thought of it many times since. OSHA would *die* if they saw this! [laughs]

Rigelhaupt: But anything else that we might consider environmentally unsafe now, that you saw in the Kaiser Shipyards then, that was taken for granted?

02-00:25:36

Bremer: Can't think of anything particular. No, not really. If it was, it didn't make an impression, because it was *normal*. All this stuff was the way you had always lived. Nothing changed that much because they couldn't do anything *except* war effort things. They couldn't manufacture *anything*. Even your automobiles weren't made, because they were busy making Jeeps or planes or something. So I would say there wasn't a great deal of anything different than what you had lived with before, for those four years or so.

Rigelhaupt: Did you ever have a sense that workers' safety was ever compromised?

02-00:26:38

Bremer: I don't think they cared. No, I can't say I saw it, but it was just get things done fast as you can. That was just the big thing.

Rigelhaupt: Did your husband ever talk about it at the—

02-00:26:55

Bremer: At Selby? Selby, we always called it the old man's home. No, Selby didn't make any big—Did they?

Fran: No.

02-00:27:04

Bremer: No, nothing. They didn't make any big changes at all. The only thing different that I could say that anybody did is they didn't travel the same. By that I mean any time anybody's going to go anyplace today, they run to the nearest airport and they fly. I don't care from here to Los Angeles or from here to New York, they're going to fly. They didn't do that then. That's the only thing. Your trains and your buses were your means of transportation. I had one I think is funny. I got an order out of dispatch to go pick up—There were three of them, I'm sure. Some of the executives always came in, from wherever they were coming from in the United States, they came into the Kaiser main offices, which were down on Franklin Street in Oakland. Okay. I got the order. Because sometimes we drove cars, if the order was right. I got the order to go pick up these three men down on Franklin, at the Kaiser main office, and take them to the 16th Street depot. The 16th Street depot was where all the trains came in. Because see, there were no bridges. Well, you did have the main bridge. But that was sort of a main place where they distributed trains from all over California, wherever they were coming in from. Anyway, I was to take these men to the 16th Street depot. They had a certain train to catch at a certain time. Okay. So I went down, picked them up. When I picked them up they said, "Our suitcases are at the St. Francis." I said, "You mean you don't have them with you?" "Nope. We left them in the lobby. Somebody's watching them at the St. Francis." So I said, "Well, hang onto your hats, this is going to

be a ride.” Because see, at that time, the bridge went west on the top; the bottom was for trucks; then you had the red cars, besides. So okay. I had to pick them up in Oakland, take them to the St. Francis; they had to run in and get their suitcases; I had to get them back to the 16th Street depot in Oakland to catch that train. Well, they made it. But one fellow said, “I couldn’t have done it. I couldn’t have done that.” [laughs] So here were three Kaiser executives, but they were traveling by train. They were going back to Chicago, if I remember right. But they had a ride that day.

Rigelhaupt: Do you remember the explosion at Port Chicago?

02-00:31:00

Bremer: Very well. I was sitting in the balcony of the movie house down here. And when stuff started to—The ceiling plaster was starting to dust down. And you’re sitting there, and something’s happened and you don’t know what it is, and you’ve only got one staircase to get up or down. If anything had happened to *that*, you’re stuck in the balcony. And I’m trying to figure whether I could hang over the end and drop into an aisle. Yes, I remember that very well. But it worked out all right, the stairs were okay. We rushed out and started waking through town. And boy, the windows that were out on the street were just hard to believe.

Rigelhaupt: What did you think had happened?

02-00:31:57

Bremer: Everybody thought it was Mare Island. That was the first thought. Because of course, everybody was out looking at this damage that had been done. And everybody thought it was Mare Island, that it’d been bombed or something. And then of course, the word came through from the fire department that it had been Port Chicago.

Rigelhaupt: But one of the thoughts that probably ran through your head was, are we under attack?

02-00:32:29

Bremer: Oh, of course! Because Mare Island, if that sound and that amount of damage had been done, it would’ve meant that they had bombed Mare Island. But yeah, it was—And where my husband worked at that time, I think—or where he had, anyway, before—was this dealership, this automobile dealership. And of course, the showroom had *huge* windows. But all the windows had been sucked out, see, and all the glass was laying in the streets.

Rigelhaupt: Was this house damaged at all?

02-00:33:22

Bremer: I don’t think so. Of course, we weren’t living here at that time. But no. The houses, none of the houses seemed to get it. It was the big windows. The bakery, I remember, and I think the Emporium lost some windows. And

{Neff's Garage?}, of course, he lost windows. But it seemed to be the big ones. If it bothered anybody else's, I didn't know about it. Oh, I might at that time, but it didn't stick with me.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember hearing about the end of World War II?

02-00:34:08

Bremer: We were in Tahoe when [clock chimes] Germany quit. And I don't remember how we got it. Newspaper, radio, something. But outside of that, we must've—We were on vacation, that's all I remember.

Rigelhaupt: Would that've been about April of '45?

02-00:34:36

Bremer: '45, yeah, somewhere about that time, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: And how do you remember hearing about the atomic bombs being used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

02-00:34:49

Bremer: Again, radio, newsreels, or the newspaper.

Rigelhaupt: What was your reaction to the use of nuclear weapons?

02-00:35:03

Bremer: I don't think that that was pushed so much right at that time. Later, it began to come out what had actually—All this work that they'd been doing in New Mexico and—that began to come out a little at a time. But they weren't really pushing what happened. They did push how they *got* the bombs there, how the men were trained to fly that far and whatnot. And then to get away fast and all of that. But I don't think they pushed the idea of what a *tremendous* amount of damage it had done, right at first. The war was over, that was all they knew.

Rigelhaupt: But there wasn't a sense of—

02-00:36:09

Bremer: Whether it was right or wrong? No.

Rigelhaupt: I was going to ask more just about the impact of seeing the mushroom cloud and understanding that this was some big, tremendously powerful new weapon that had hit the face of the earth for the first time.

02-00:36:31

Bremer: Well, yeah, but I still think that they let out just a little at a time. I don't think they threw it all at us at once. That's my feeling. Now, that's a long time ago. Don't forget that. Sixty-some-odd years? Gee whiz.

Rigelhaupt: But there was a tremendous amount of news coverage of—

02-00:36:56

Bremer: Oh, yes. Oh yes, there was. But I still think they let a little at a time out.

Rigelhaupt: Was there a similar amount of news coverage of the fire bombing of Tokyo, preceding—

02-00:37:13

Bremer: Not that I remember. With the Enola Gay?

Rigelhaupt: But I think the Enola Gay carried the first atomic bomb.

02-00:37:22

Bremer: Bomb, yeah. No. Did it? Yeah, it did. That was the atomic bomb, not the first bombing of Tokyo. That was another one.

Rigelhaupt: But certainly, the amount of civilians that were killed, in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were upwards of 100,000.

02-00:37:44

Bremer: Oh, yeah.

Rigelhaupt: But a similar number of people died in the fire bombing of Tokyo, just a month or so—

02-00:37:51

Bremer: Before.

Rigelhaupt: And I'm just wondering, in your recollection, was the coverage similar or different because the weapons used had been different?

02-00:38:04

Bremer: If it did, it didn't affect me. Or I didn't pay any attention, or no one I talked to ever paid that much attention. Again, because of that thing. People look at things, I think. Either that, or I was so young that my own life was more important than all the rest of this stuff. Now you figure out all these things and think, work your—I certainly never thought of OSHA when I'm thinking; that came *years later*. But today, with television, and somebody's always telling you their feelings about it or somebody else's, so that you constantly have this going on all—Then, I don't think we did. You got all the news, but it wasn't it depth, maybe—that's the way I'm putting it—as it is today.

Rigelhaupt: How do you remember hearing about the holocaust and the liberation of the concentration camps in Germany and Poland?

02-00:39:28

Bremer: I haven't the vaguest idea how I ever heard about those. Cannot remember.

Rigelhaupt: Was there a sense at the time that what you were actually seeing, in some respects, was unbelievable?

02-00:39:46

Bremer: Well, yes. But then, all those pictures didn't come out right at first, either. Again, it's piecemeal. And putting it all together, then you realize what a horrendous thing had been going on, that so many people *knew* about, but never said a word. I don't know.

Rigelhaupt: Has that been something that—I'm trying to think how you come to look backwards on that, having gained so much knowledge about the horrors that occurred during World War II, but that were not being publicized, that you were not aware of. How do you make sense of that, looking backwards?

02-00:40:44

Bremer: It's just like today. How much do you actually know today? No matter *how* much we get on that boob tube, there's still a lot going on that we are not told about. Or we just don't think it *could* happen. And like I say, when you're young, you're too interested in your own life. Some of it, eh, that's somebody else. You don't seem to put it all together. Or at least I didn't.

Rigelhaupt: As you look back at all the human tragedy that occurred during World War II, and you think back about your experience living through it, do you think that World War II gets held up in this country as more important and having had a greater impact on the nation than, say, the Korean War or the Vietnam War?

02-00:42:06

Bremer: They're so different. That's the only thing, to me. They are so different in the way they affected the people in the United States. World War II was nothing—Korea was, eh, there was a war going on, soldiers were being sent, soldiers were dying; but it didn't affect everybody's living. World War II did. Women had jobs that they'd never had before. Women were doing jobs, like Rosie the Riveter, that weren't even *thought* of for a woman to do. You had sugar coupons; you couldn't buy that. You couldn't buy gasoline unless you had a coupon. It affected your living in every way. The rest of the wars, it's some unfortunate person that has to go and fight them. That's half the way some people think.

Rigelhaupt: So in some respects, you would say that during World War II, everyone in the country was more intimately connected to the war?

02-00:43:38

Bremer: Connected. Something affected them. I don't care who they were. In some way, they were affected.

Rigelhaupt: Either serving overseas, knowing someone serving overseas, or just in their daily life?

02-00:44:54

Bremer: In their daily life, passing out their coupons in order to buy things. It had to affect everybody. But never after that have *any* of these—Korea, Vietnam, the islands, the one in—What's the last one they call? Oh. Oh, well. Anyway, in

no way does—I would say not even 50% of the people are involved *in any way*. Now, I'm not, in my living today. I don't have any relatives that are in the service. I naturally don't have any close friends; my close friends are all dead. Sorry about that. In anything I buy, I don't have to have a coupon for. I can buy all the gasoline, if I want to pay \$4.00 a gallon for it. And I am sure that, oh, 50%, probably a lot more than that, are like me. They're not affected in any way, shape or form. But not World War II. If you wanted sugar in your coffee, you were affected, if that was the *only* way. Very different.

Rigelhaupt: Well, those are largely my questions. And the way I like to end an interview is to ask, first, is there anything I should've asked and I didn't? Or two, is there anything you'd like to add?

02-00:46:12

Bremer: No, I can't think of anything, particularly. No, not really. Your questions have been more than I expected. I mean more *of* them than I expected. But I can't add anything to it, I don't think. Just that you're making me think back quite a few years.

Rigelhaupt: That's true. But I appreciate you taking the time to think back to these years and add it to the collection.

02-00:46:55

Bremer: Well, whatever. It's been quite a life. Like I always say, from Model-T Fords to men on the moon, it's been—[laughs] A lot of things have happened.

Rigelhaupt: You've seen a lot of changes.

02-00:47:11

Bremer: Yes. I always say to where you used to have to roll up the windows in an old Ford—You had a strap. And you had to pull the strap up, then the window would go up. Or you'd let the strap down, then the window went down. Most people never even heard of that! You hadn't, see? That's what I mean. From that type of vehicle to the men on the moon, to things out in space staying there for months and months at a time—it's been quite few changes.

Rigelhaupt: That's a nice place to end. [Bremer laughs] Thank you.

02-00:48:00

Bremer: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]