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University of California
Berkeley, California

Margaret Walton

Rosie the Riveter
World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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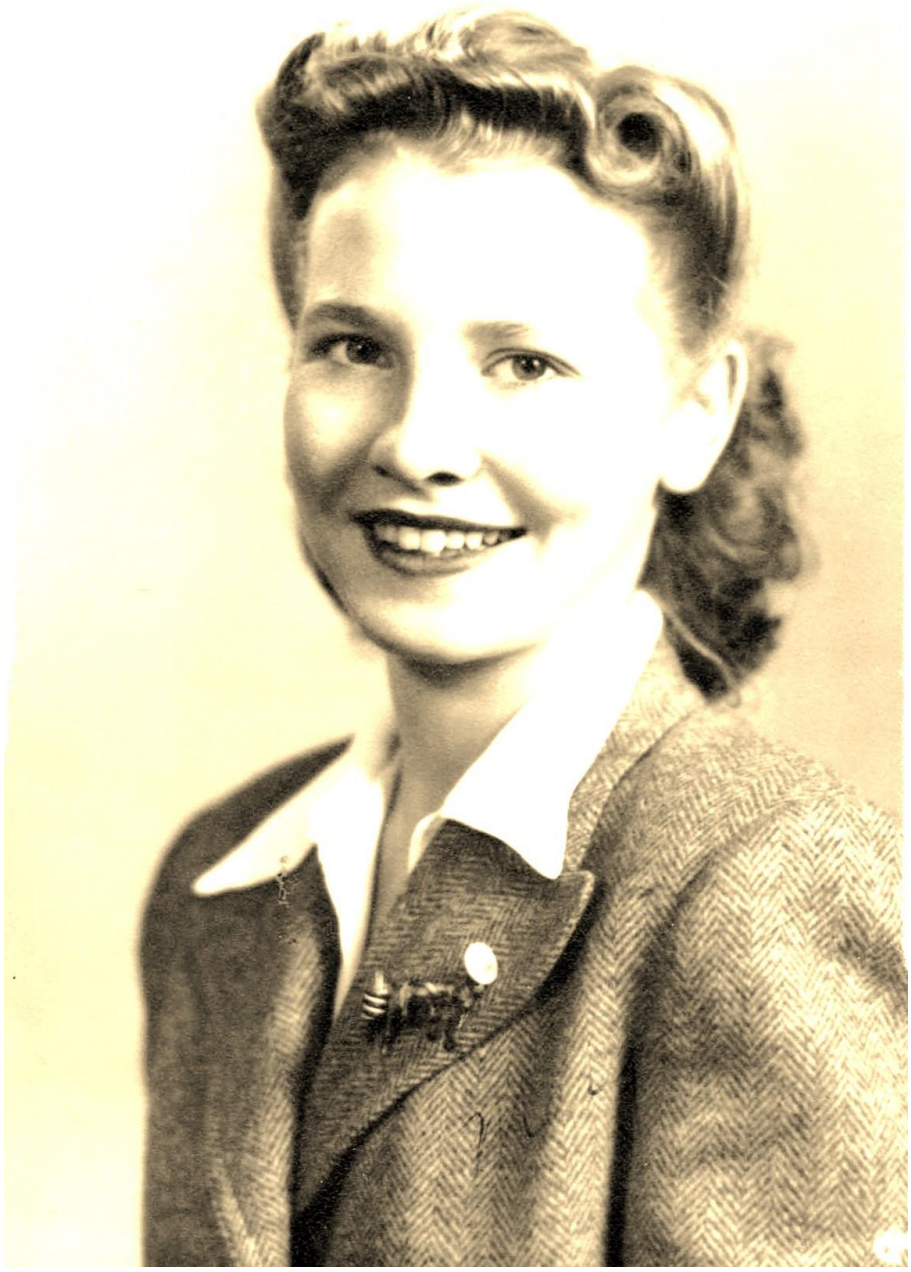
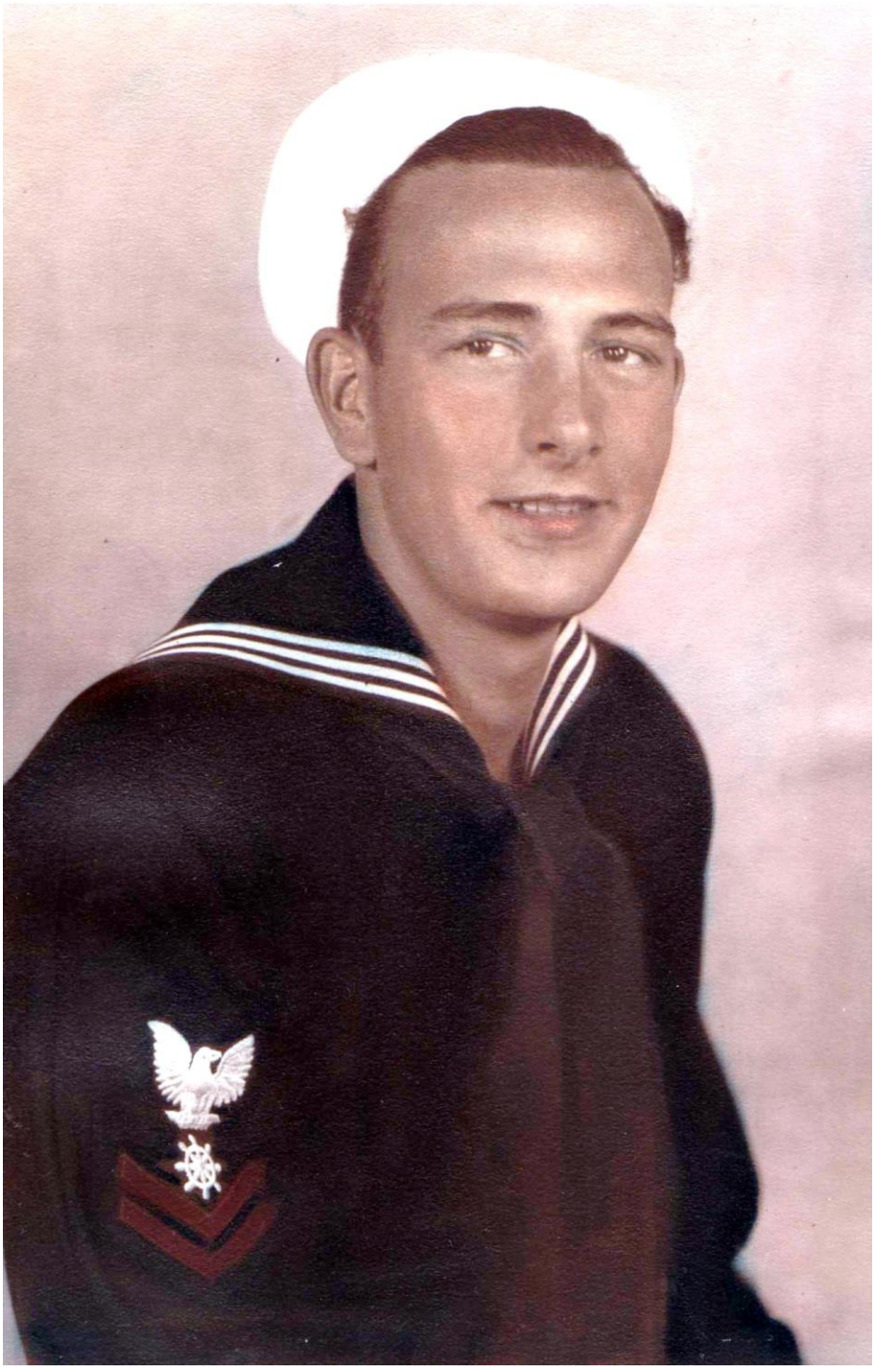
Margaret Jane Cooney, Student at UCSF (1944)

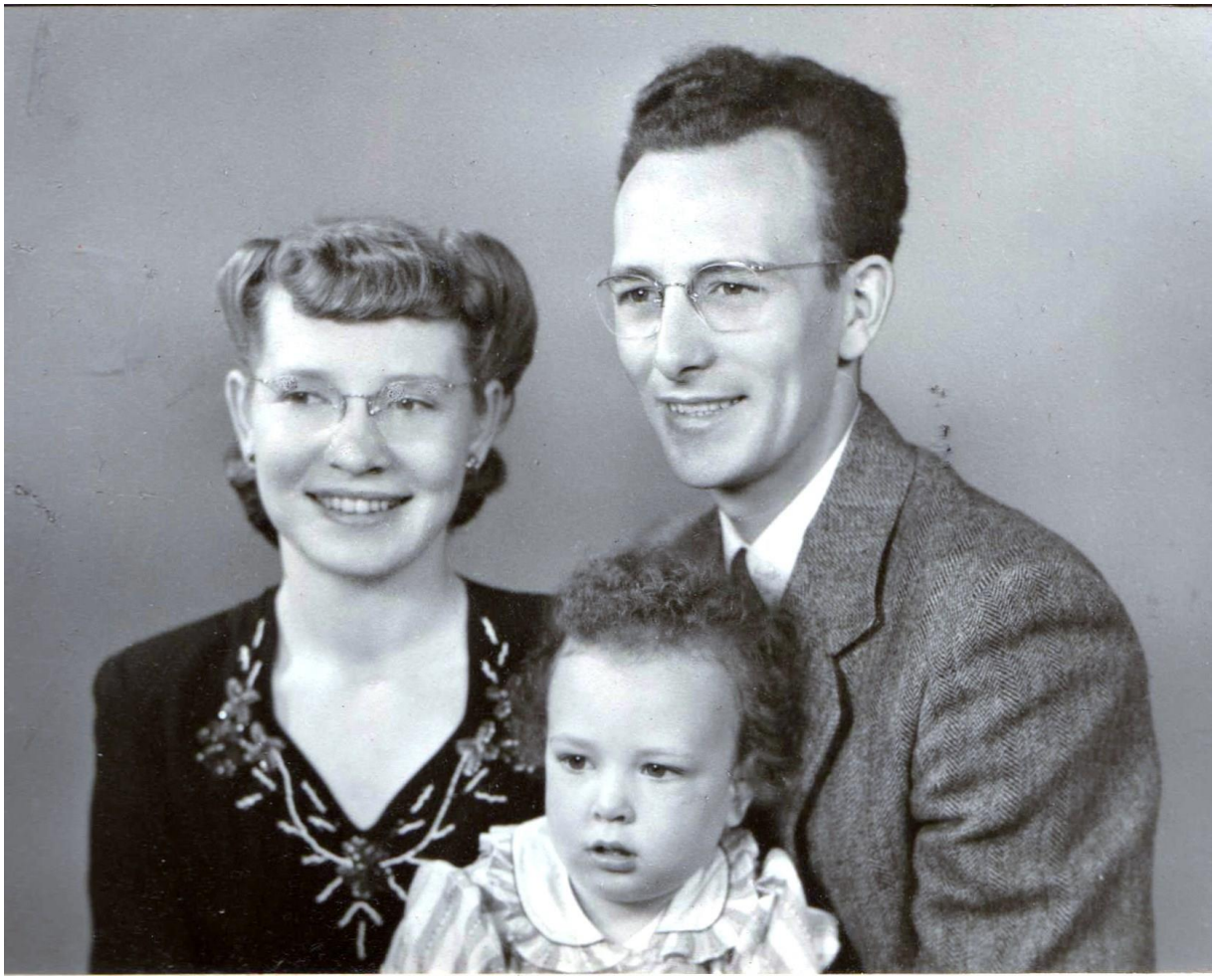


Margaret Jane Cooney, Senior at Fremont High (1941)

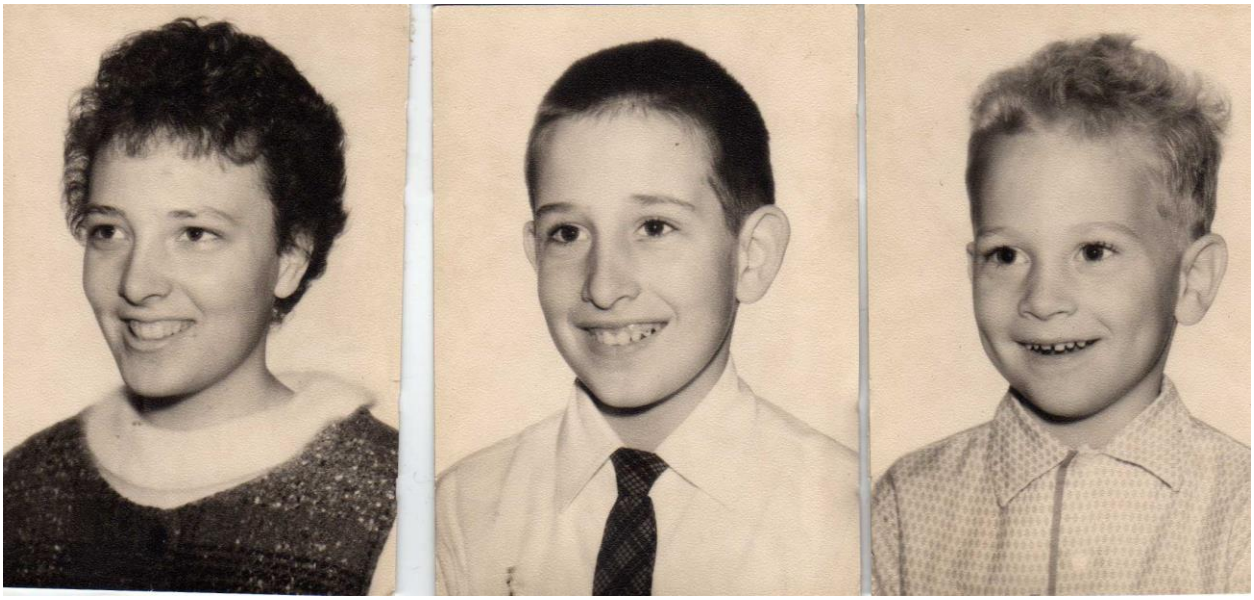


Howard Walton, USN (1943)

Margaret and Howard Walton, Wedding (1945)



Margaret, Howard, and Gail Walton (1948)



Gail, Darrahl, and Paul Walton (1961)

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Begin Audiofile 1

Redman: My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today in Hayward, California. I'm sitting down with Margaret Walton, who's a member of the war alumni classes and a graduate of UC Berkeley. It is October 2011, time is flying by, so I'd like ask by simply inviting you to spell you name for me, say and spell your name for me.

1-00:00:29
Walton: Okay, Margaret Cooney Walton, M A R G A R E T C double O N E Y W A L T O N.

Redman: Terrific. Thank you so much, and can you tell me where you were born.

1-00:00:44
Walton: Born in San Jose, California.

Redman: Born in San Jose. Did you grow up in San Jose, then?

1-00:00:53
Walton: No, we moved back to Oakland when I was about three or four.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about who your parents were?

1-00:01:01
Walton: Well, my father's family had the ranch in San Jose. His grandfather had brought wagon trains out to California, and my father then came and worked for the Post Office in Oakland.

My mother was born in San Francisco before the earthquake and then moved to Oakland, and she was a kindergarten teacher, Montessori trained—

Redman: Did you happen to know your grandparents or your grandfather in particular, or your father's father?

1-00:01:37
Walton: My father's father I knew as a small child. I had memories of him.

Redman: Did he tell you any stories of traveling to California?

1-00:01:44
Walton: Not really. At that time it was just—we'd visit the ranch and look at the chickens, and that was all. That was it.

Redman: That was enough excitement for a small child, right?

1-00:01:51
Walton: Yeah.

Redman: So you said your father worked for the Post Office.

1-00:01:59
Walton: Yes, he did.

Redman: Was your mother a homemaker, or did she work as well?

1-00:02:04
Walton: She stayed in the home most until the war came, and then she thought she should be helping, so she worked at the Army Depot Station down at the Oakland waterfront until the war was over.

Redman: Let's get back to that in a moment. So let me ask about your father's experience, then. Usually I ask with men of that generation if they had worked in any New Deal programs like the CCC or the WPA that were around.

1-00:02:36
Walton: Actually not, but we had projects that they—we lived in a blind street, and they paved our street. It was a WPA project.

Redman: You were a pretty small child when that—

1-00:02:52
Walton: Well, at that time I was, let's see I was born in '24, so I was already six, eight, nine, so then as a teenager we used that street a lot.

Redman: So that was a pretty—

1-00:03:06
Walton: Smooth surface to play on.

Redman: Intimate relationship to that street there, of course, especially as you're a kid I suspect playing on that asphalt. But can you talk a little bit about how Oakland might have been changing during that era. Of course, that was the Great Depression prior to World War II when there was this massive influx of people coming. Was Oakland a little bit quieter back in those days?

1-00:03:30
Walton: Well, in comparison it seemed like it, and the thing that I remember about Oakland is you could just go anywhere. The transportation was fantastic. I wanted to go left to go downtown, I could take that bus. If I wanted the other one, I'd take the other bus or a streetcar, and you could just get anywhere you wanted to go.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about how that worked? Were you able to as a pretty small kid start taking buses and streetcars and things of that nature?

1-00:04:01
Walton: Pretty much. Really, I remember mostly by junior high I could go anywhere, and when I was even at Berkeley I could come home, and I could stand on Broadway and MacArthur alone at midnight and not think a thing about it.

Redman: So it was a pretty safe town in that era.

1-00:04:19
Walton: Worked out, yeah.

Redman: Were the other kids pretty mobile as well, being able to travel by the middle school age, junior high, to be able to travel around town?

1-00:04:30
Walton: Oh, we could go all the way out to the end of the streetcar line to Hayward to the Plunge, or we could go to San Francisco. And when Treasure Island was on, and the Fair was there, you could go over to the Fair and back.

Redman: Can you explain to me what the mole system was? There was a ferry system to travel—

1-00:04:50
Walton: Yeah, we would go to—my grandmother used to take us down to the mole and get on the ferry with a bag of dried bread so we could throw it to the seagulls, and that was our outing. We'd just ride the ferry over to San Francisco and back again. My dad worked at the mole for a while before he got to the Post Office, and he drove a forklift.

Redman: Tell me a little bit more about that experience of what it was like to take the ferry, because the bridge as I understand '33, '37 was when that was being constructed, so you must have memories of traveling to San Francisco—

1-00:05:31
Walton: Oh, yes.

Redman: —before the bridge.

1-00:05:33
Walton: Before the bridge. And, as I said with my grandmother—actually, in 1941 I didn't go to my senior ball; before 1941 I went to someone else's senior ball, and we in our cars went on the car ferry across to San Francisco and then drove down the peninsula until we found an early morning breakfast place. But that was my other experience with the ferry.

Redman: I assume you must be able to recall what the Golden Gate looked like before there was a Golden Gate Bridge.

1-00:06:04
Walton: Yes, yes. But no, I wasn't that impressed with it, but I do remember that there was no bridge. The thing about the Oakland-San Francisco Bridge was that my grandmother's brother, who lived in San Francisco, had a bet with her that they would never build it, that it wouldn't work. So the minute that bridge was open the family outing was to take Nana over to San Francisco to collect the 50 cents bet from Uncle Frank.

Redman: I understand that some people were skeptical because when the Bay Bridge was completed it was the largest bridge that had been completed to that date. It was a complex engineering project, and some people just sort of assumed that it wouldn't work, is that correct?

1-00:06:52
Walton: Well, in our family Uncle Frank did believe it. He even had this bet with my grandmother.

Redman: So how about you, were you surprised at all that this bridge was constructed and they—?

1-00:07:03
Walton: Oh, it was a matter of fact to me. I saw it going up, and I figured well, that's what you do; you build a bridge.

Redman: Now, tell me what it was like to visit the World's Fair in 1939. What was that experience like for you?

1-00:07:14
Walton: Oh, exciting. It was just like, all of a sudden, you were in another world, you were just totally cut off, and so for that it was a real shot in the arm for that time to have something that was so spectacular.

Redman: But I understand there was somewhat of a convergence of when you see these old posters, there was a pride in convergence of not only having the Fair, but then also having this new Golden Gate Bridge, and the new Bay Bridge as the same time.

1-00:07:45
Walton: And celebrating everything yeah, at the same time, yeah.

Redman: Now, it's also an interesting convergence in terms of time because in '39, of course, things were changing pretty rapidly in the Pacific and in Europe. While you're sort of lost in this magical world of the Fair, is there sort of an awareness that—?

1-00:08:10
Walton: Well, they were making quite a point about it being Pan Pacific, that the world is greater than what we have right here in our backyard. That was pretty much a theme that was developed.

Redman: So do you recall an international flavor of the Fair, a lot of countries being involved, people from—?

1-00:08:28
Walton: Oh, yeah. Yes, the pavilions, the different ones. That was the most fascinating part because you'd step in the door, and you'd be like in this other country because everything would be themed to where it came from. Later a friend

said they went to Great America, and they couldn't understand—there was something they kept feeling, like, "What was this, what was this?" It was Treasure Island. All the trees had marimba music coming out of it.

Redman: So, can you talk a little bit about any recollections of particular pavilions or countries that were surprising, or new, or particularly interesting to you at that age?

1-00:09:17
Walton: I remember the tower, the sun, and—not really, it just all was the tapestry of the whole thing.

Redman: It blended. Let's talk about school a little bit. When you were in school, later on the sciences, and I presume math and science, would become topics that were things that you would be studying for your career in nursing, but I'd like to ask, early on were you interested in math and science in particular?

1-00:09:56
Walton: I guess yes, and one thing I remember distinctly is the physiology teacher in high school had to go and bring her own textbooks for me to read because I'd read all the ones that she brought to class.

Redman: Oh, is that right? So you were absorbing material pretty quickly.

1-00:10:18
Walton: I did very well; I did well.

Redman: Did you read a lot as a kid?

1-00:10:22
Walton: Yes.

Redman: What types of things did you like to read?

1-00:10:29
Walton: Well, I remember the story about yellow fever, when the doctor finally discovered that it was the mosquitos.

Redman: So you were reading about things like that, like scientific discoveries?

1-00:10:48
Walton: There was another book about going across around the world with rice, the different strains of rice and where you could get people to start planting rice, and they would have a better diet. That was junior high.

Redman: So as a young person you were engaging with some of these pretty serious topics, but—

1-00:11:12
Walton: Caught my interest.

Redman: So where were you finding these books? Were you ever encouraged or discouraged from reading particular books or exploring particular—how were your parents in terms of—?

1-00:11:28
Walton: My mother, as I had mentioned earlier, she's Montessori trained, so she was for, "Try everything, check it out." And it was the school library, and there was a little branch library near the house, and I could go there.

Redman: Would you accompany your mother to school, either before or after? I am asking this because my own mother was a kindergarten teacher, and I've interviewed other students of teachers who often have memories of going to schools even before or after hours and maybe getting to play with the toys or reading books or things like that. Was there sort of an environment of education in the house then?

1-00:12:11
Walton: In the house, in the house, yes.

Redman: Can you talk about what it was like to grow up in your house?

1-00:12:20
Walton: Well, I consider myself very fortunate in that I had parents that were agreeable with one another about what was going on, and that my mother had this, and the approach was we'd come and say can we do so and so, and the first question was well what would it take to do that? Of course, in those days, one thing was money, and the other was resources, and they would pull you to work it out in your own head on how it was going to happen. Not just, "Oh, yeah, we can do that here," your habit.

Redman: Right, not offering kids necessarily a simple solution, but having them work it through.

1-00:12:59
Walton: Work it out for ourselves.

Redman: Now one thing you said that was particularly interesting was that when a kid is asking how to do something during the Great Depression, money is often tight.

1-00:13:13
Walton: Tight. Mother and Dad had an arrangement. Dad would bring his pay home, and there was a neighborhood near us that they called Jingletown because you were paid in cash, so every Friday night pockets jingled. But he would bring the pay home, and they had envelopes. They would sit at the table, we'd see this, sitting at the table, and they'd put the rent money, they'd put the mortgage money, they would put the PG&E [Pacific Gas & Electric] money, and then there would always be an envelope for—I had a brother and a sister, so this payday was Margaret's payday, so whatever went into that envelope

we could use for something special for Margaret. If she needed shoes, then maybe this was when Margaret got her shoes. The next week it would be Ruth's turn, and the next week it would be David's turn. So you knew that your turn would come, you might not get it right now, but your turn would come, so you could plan for it, and you could wait for it, which was one way of handling the shortage of money.

Redman: This is maybe getting into both your siblings' later life histories, but was that an influential thing for you as children to see your parents budgeting out and organizing their finances?

1-00:14:37
Walton: Well, I'm sure it was, and it saved a lot of arguments.

Redman: Is that right? Yeah.

1-00:14:42
Walton: You know like, "I want it, I want it, I want." "Well it's not your payday." That was the answer. Like my mother never made me go to bed. The clock said it was time to go to bed.

Redman: I see. So in some sense you're making me think I want to raise my own kids like that, I think that's what I'm trying to say. That seems like a good system. But was that a different upbringing from the other kids in your neighborhood, do you think?

1-00:15:15
Walton: Well, yes, I've known other families where their fathers weren't steadily employed or didn't bother to work that often, and they couldn't depend on anything. When they had money, they spent it right away on whatever they needed right then. They didn't have the feeling that "we could plan and we could do it ahead."

Redman: I see. Now how about your parents, were they religious at all, or were they—?

1-00:15:42
Walton: Yes, Father was raised Roman Catholic in an Irish family. His name was Aloysius John Cooney, so we got the Irish in there. My mother's family were Episcopalian, and when we were kids neither one of them went to church. So my grandmother would come by and take us to the little Unity Truth Center around the corner. So we got our Sunday school in the Unity, which I think is really a wonderful basis for any religious training. Of course, later my mother saw to it that Daddy did go to mass because she told him, "When you die and I have to tell your brothers that you can't get buried because the priest won't let me, you better start going," and he did so that mother wouldn't be unhappy and so—

Redman: So there was mild acceptance there but never feverish—

1-00:16:46
Walton: No, no, my father's sister-in-law would take me to mass. I still remember her taking me into a Good Friday service or something, so she tried but it didn't work.

Redman: As a kid what was your response to that early experience of going to mass on occasion, or Sunday school?

1-00:17:07
Walton: Oh, I figured that was what Daddy was used to, and it was interesting to find out what it was all about. But it didn't impress me.

Redman: It never took hold. Can you talk about the other kids in your neighborhood growing up? And you'd mentioned that the WPA at a certain point came through and paved the street.

1-00:17:24
Walton: Yeah, and so it was so nice and smooth that the kids from all around would come down and we would skate, and we would play tag.

Redman: Do you happen to remember the name of the street by any chance?

1-00:17:36
Walton: Yeah, Brookdale Avenue. Right at the end of Brookdale Avenue, right off of Fruitvale in Oakland.

Redman: And can you—I'm sorry I interrupted there—I was asking about the other kids in your neighborhood, and you'd mentioned that they would come out and play, then, on the street.

1-00:17:53
Walton: Yeah, they would all come down to our street to play, and we'd draw big circles on the pavement with chalk and play Keep Away and Red Light, and all those—

Redman: Did you get a sense that the other kids had similar backgrounds to your family, or was it a pretty mixed bag of kids? Were they mostly from California—?

1-00:18:18
Walton: Now that you ask me, I have no idea. I mean they were just kids, and they lived nearby.

Redman: And most of them white in that area.

1-00:18:29
Walton: Most of them white, yes. There were some black families not too far away, and there were some in the school, but most of the ones we played with were white.

Redman: Now how about political viewpoints? Did your parents give you any sense of what their political feelings were? I know a lot of people listened to FDR giving his fireside chats—

1-00:18:48
Walton: Yes, we did, definitely, and strong union, strong union, and Democrat, yeah.

Redman: So were they particularly in favor of FDR, were they attached to him in any way, or was it more of a Democratic sense or a union political sense?

1-00:19:17
Walton: That was mostly at our level, with the families. Dad was a sub for the Post Office for a good long while, so pickings were slim, and as Mother would say, "Your father has a job. He might not work every day, but if anyone asks you, yes, your father has a job." They would come to the house and pool, potluck, and you'd hear them talking about the jobs and stuff, but it didn't really impress me that much, and with FDR it was like your friendly grandfather.

Redman: Was sitting around the radio an activity for your family?

1-00:19:57
Walton: Oh, yes.

Redman: Can you talk about maybe what radio programs you would have listened to in that period?

1-00:20:03
Walton: My dad made a crystal set. So we heard Amos and Andy on that. Then, of course, One Man's Family. That was about San Francisco. Those were about the two I really remember, and then you get into the later on, when you get some of the review shows, Jack Benny, George Burns, Milton Berle, with the different names.

Redman: Now how about music? Were you parents, did they listen to music at all?

1-00:20:33
Walton: Not a lot. My mother played the piano.

Redman: So did you grow up with a piano in the household?

1-00:20:38
Walton: Yes, we grew up with a piano in the household. I had piano lessons when I was nine.

Redman: Did those stick, the piano lessons? I see you have a piano in your home.

1-00:20:47
Walton: For me it did. I have an organ and a piano.

Redman: Oh, wow.

1-00:20:50
Walton: Yes, we all had piano lessons, and Mother said I was the only one it stuck with. But then I did a lot more singing, so I only took about three years of lessons. But it was enough to be able to play, to accompany myself for practicing. Then I've had years when I played for the church; I've been a church musician.

Redman: I see. Now do you think women, other students, other young girls were ever encouraged to go into particular subjects in school pretty early on? I'm wondering if in middle school and high school girls were more or less discouraged from doing math and sciences. Or was that not your experience?

1-00:21:39
Walton: I don't remember. I don't remember that at all. I just remembered that if you wanted to take a class, you signed up for it, and you took it. My grandmother was widowed when he was fifty-five, and she had five daughters—well, four daughters that lived. Her story to us always was, "You find something that you really want to do, prepare yourself the best you can, to do that because it's nice to get married and have children, but you do need to know that you can support yourself, no matter."

Redman: So that was the—

1-00:22:22
Walton: The theme in our family.

Redman: So when you were maybe in high school, then, did that start giving you thoughts about college, or did those thoughts maybe come a little earlier? And how about your mother, had she attended a college?

1-00:22:35
Walton: She went to Miss Barnard's Normal School for Young Ladies in Berkeley.

Redman: Did she talk about what that had been like at all?

1-00:22:50
Walton: The biggest thing that came out of that was that when it came time for me to leave high school, and I was thinking of just going into a nursing program somewhere, she said "Margaret, I think it's important that you have some co-ed experience, and Cal would be very nice. Then you could go into a nursing school."

Redman: That's very interesting that your mom encouraged you to go to a co-ed institution in that era.

1-00:23:19
Walton: Yes, she had gone right from high school into Miss Barnard's Normal School for Young Ladies, and then she taught one year and then got married, so I think she always thought that maybe she'd missed something. [laughs]

Redman: You were talking before we started the interview about your senior year of high school, so I'd like to focus in on that year for a moment. Before December, when Pearl Harbor took place, what was your life like in that early semester? You were maybe thinking ahead of attending college—

1-00:24:00
Walton: College, yes. That summer—I'll just slip in that that summer I worked in San Francisco, and that's where I got the keypunch experience. And taking that commute across on the Bay Bridge on the trains, the war ships had come into the bay, and we always used to have Fleet Week, and everything, and these big white shining ships would come in. Well, they were all gray, and the man near me said, "That's war color." I was just so outraged that he would even say that. Why would he talk about war? That was his observation of why the ships were all dull gray, now, and not shiny white.

Redman: That's fascinating.

1-00:24:51
Walton: No, my senior year was pretty carefree, nothing was going on much.

Redman: Okay, let's step back a moment because I'd like to hear more about that. I would like to ask, do you have anything to add about what it was like to take the train across the Bay Bridge, because that's no longer there, so it seems to me an interesting experience to cross the bay and then be able to look down and see the ships that were anchored there or coming through.

1-00:25:20
Walton: Yeah, they were all on the lower level; the trains were on the lower level.

Redman: I see, so was it pretty visible then, you'd be able to—

1-00:25:26
Walton: Yeah, you could see a lot.

Redman: Were those trains generally pretty crowded when you would commute?

1-00:25:33
Walton: Yeah, they were. A lot of people were crossing back and forth.

Redman: Now, you had worked at the Moore Dry Docks for a summer.

1-00:25:44
Walton: Yeah, that was after my freshman year at Berkeley.

Redman: Can you tell me what job, so you were doing a card punch—?

1-00:25:56
Walton: Card punch the first summer between my last year of high school—I was proofreading the cards against the printout. They didn't trust computers that much.

Redman: Sure, yeah.

1-00:26:11
Walton: Then I could see all these keypunch machines, and so the gal had let us come at lunch time and try them out, so then I was moved up to the keypunch machines and learned that.

Redman: What was your impression of these activities? What did you think about it?

1-00:26:31
Walton: Well, I thought it was pretty fascinating that you could take—well, that was the thing about—you asked me the World's Fair. The thing that I remember about that was people would put cards—pink, green, yellow cards—in a slot, and this machine would sort them. It was the keypunch. So I was watching this, and I got up to the alphabetic machine. I could put letters in besides numbers, and there were all these other people running around sorting and things, and it was fascinating. I think if I hadn't gone back to school, if I had stayed around, I probably would have stayed with the computers because it absolutely fascinated me.

Redman: Was it something about the organization of the math or the—?

1-00:27:14
Walton: Yeah, it was the fact that it was so precise that you could set something up that would carry through and come up with an answer that you could use.

Redman: So then, getting to your senior year, it's interrupted by this major event on December 7th. Pearl Harbor is attacked. Do you recall where you were when you learned of this?

1-00:27:45
Walton: I was still in my bedroom reading and listening to the radio because I had fallen and split my lip, and I was feeling very sorry for myself because my senior ball was coming up Friday night, and I had this mashed up face. And then I had the radio on, and I got the news, and I ran out and told my folks. My dad and my brother were washing the car, and I says—I don't know. Anyway, I told them. That's where I was.

Redman: How did people react?

1-00:28:20
Walton: Oh, it was unbelievable because then you come back in and glue yourself to the radio to hear what else was going on because it was just out of the blue.

Redman: So it was a shock.

1-00:28:27
Walton: It was a real shock.

Redman: And was it thought at that time that people's lives would be changed?

1-00:28:38
Walton: Well, right away you got the news that the coastline could be attacked at any minute, and—I don't know—there must have been something going on because my dad had already built black out curtains to put up in the windows. So we had one room that had only one window that he had fixed, and so when it was time to have our lights out, we congregated—that was our bedroom—in that room because in any other room the light would leak out.

Redman: I see. So that's how the blackouts were done in the home, and then the block wardens would walk around and make sure that everyone was in compliance.

1-00:29:21
Walton: In compliance, yeah.

Redman: What did you feel like when early on these new blackouts were initiated and there was talk on the radio about a possible attack against the coast and rumors about that? Was that a frightening moment?

1-00:29:44
Walton: Well, you had to just go on. The biggest thing about that was the day—let's see, Pearl Harbor was the 7th. Okay then, the next Monday or Tuesday in the mid-morning at school they got the word, "Send everybody home, all the kids home." So, all of a sudden here we are all back at the house, and excited, and my sister's hysterical about what's going on. My mother gave us each a pail of water with vinegar and newspapers and said, "Wash the windows." Put us all on each different sides of the house so we couldn't chatter with one other.

Redman: Because everybody was just getting each other more and more worked up—

1-00:30:36
Walton: Yeah, yeah, no, it was escalated.

Redman: So your mother separated you and gave you a cleaning task. That's actually a pretty good way to address that. Go ahead.

1-00:30:45
Walton: That Friday night would have been my senior ball, and that was cancelled, but also my date was already down at Camp Pendleton heading for North Africa, so I didn't even have a date for the senior ball.

Redman: So that took place pretty quickly, that people had enlisted and—

1-00:31:07
Walton: He was already in the National Guard.

Redman: Can you talk about maybe some of the other students, in particular the other boys, who were seniors? Did a number of students leave that semester, or did most students finish their high school degree?

1-00:31:28
Walton: My class finished because it was only about four weeks, three or four weeks, but then a lot of them signed up right away. A lot of them were gone.

Redman: Did they go all over, it seemed like, or—?

1-00:31:41
Walton: Yeah, one fellow was in with the—oh, what's the group in the South Pacific where they would build the bases?

Redman: Oh, the Seabees?

1-00:31:48
Walton: The Seabees, yeah, they built the bases, and some were pilots some were, yeah.

Redman: Shortly thereafter it was announced that the Japanese living in California had orders to relocate to camps. Were you aware of this development, or was there anyone in your neighborhood in particular that—were there any families that were affected by this?

1-00:32:25
Walton: I didn't get the full effect of the families being affected—at that time the Japanese that I knew were in the high school class, and I didn't know what happened to them. Because I was already off to Berkeley.

Redman: So they, in your recollection, continued on and finished high school, and then you lost track of them?

1-00:32:48
Walton: Yeah, as I say it was only a few weeks.

Redman: Were you sort of aware of the news of people—?

1-00:32:57
Walton: Yes, yes.

Redman: And maybe sort of assumed, do you think, at that time that your acquaintances from high school—?

1-00:33:01
Walton: Well, they had to do what they had to do. It was later when different ones would come back, several years later, that we got the story about that.

Redman: And did you have any particular reaction to that at the time?

1-00:33:18
Walton: At the time I don't think—I had so much else on my plate I really wasn't paying that much attention.

Redman: But it sounds like you've learned about it subsequently, and your feelings on it, I suspect, are stronger than they were at the time.

1-00:33:34
Walton: Yeah.

Redman: Let me ask about rationing.

1-00:33:42
Walton: Oh, that was a picnic. My mother would shop down at the Tenth Street Market in Oakland. Number one, she would find she'd paid for something, she didn't know what, until she got home in her bag. The guy had some extra bananas or something, so it wasn't actually rationed, but it was hard to get. I would get two shoe rations because I was in nursing. I had to have good shoes to be a nurse. Plus I had the regular shoe. Well, I could wear any shoe. My foot would fit any shoe, but my mother had a very particular triple-A heel, whatever, so I always gave her my other shoe ration.

Redman: And so with that coupon she could then go down—

1-00:34:38
Walton: She could go down and get a pair of real shoes.

Redman: Now, I understand that some families would engage in sort of a black market of these coupons. Or, to put it another way, you might trade off if your family had needs for shoes versus tires or whatever. Were you aware of any of that?

1-00:35:03
Walton: I wasn't aware of much of that. I remember one time the fellow that was driving us out to Berkeley—there was either something wrong with his car, or he had run out of gas, and I said, "Oh, well, we'll just take our car." I got the keys, and we took the '28 LaSalle, and we went to Berkeley and back. I said, "I hope that was all right, Dad." He said, "Yeah, it was fine, but it was a good thing you could do it on what was in there." He wasn't driving it because there was no gas in it. I didn't know about this stuff. I was there; "We'll go."

Redman: You could have been stranded.

1-00:35:42
Walton: We could have been stranded at any point.

Redman: So then at a certain point you eventually enrolled at UC Berkeley.

1-00:35:51
Walton: Yeah. In February 1942.

Redman: I'd like to ask a little bit about your decision to enroll at Cal. Your mom had suggested that you—

1-00:36:00
Walton: Yeah, well, it was there. And she had had an experience with the hospital in San Francisco. A friend of the family was deathly ill, and nobody knew what was wrong with him until they took him to UC, and they found out it was a liver abscess and da-da-da-da. Mother did a direct blood transfusion for him.

Redman: Wow.

1-00:36:23
Walton: So she was really impressed with the nurses and knew that they were UC nurses.

Redman: Now, blood transfusions would have been a fairly new practice in that time.

1-00:36:34
Walton: Well, it's still pretty risky. See, this would have been in the late thirties, in the late thirties, with our experience with Cal.

Redman: So I can see how that would have been pretty amazing, a pretty impressive experience.

1-00:36:51
Walton: Yeah. So that when it came to it, her thought was she had seen the nurses, she knew that Cal had a nursing program, and if I just at least tested the waters—well, once I was there and in the program, there was no turning back because it just was lock-step, and I worked that summer because I needed the money to get back in. $27.50 was the registration fee.

Redman: Which then, I'm sure, felt like a lot.

1-00:37:28
Walton: —felt like a lot, yes. Then I was looking at adding the two years under my belt, then I would have to go to the hospital. Well, that was like $800, and I would have to work again. And that's where I might have fallen into the computers. If I had gone back to keypunch and computers, I might never have gotten—but the Cadet Nurse Corps came through from the US Public Health. They needed more nurses. So they made scholarships for nursing students. So *my* way was paid. I didn't *have* to stop and work.

Redman: Now with the Cadet Nursing Corps, this is a simple question, but were there special uniforms that you had to—?

1-00:38:11
Walton: Absolutely.

Redman: Can you tell me about that program a little bit more, including a little about the uniforms, maybe?

1-00:38:21
Walton: There's a lot to that uniform story because I—

Redman: Because I think people recognized that program. I think people have mentioned the—

1-00:38:27
Walton: Oh, yes, we had beautiful gray, dove gray uniforms with bright red epaulettes and silver buttons. And we had a summer uniform; it was white or—. We had a purse that had a cover on it, we had the gray cover or the white cover, and we had a hat with a big epaulette red thing in the front.

Redman: Were you proud—?

1-00:38:50
Walton: We even had a song. We had a song that I led one time. Then everything was there when I went into my dorm room over in San Francisco, because that was the medical center, still UC Berkeley. My uniforms were all there—I'd been fitted for them—my uniforms were all there; my cap was lying on the bureau. Everything was there ready for me. My books for when I went to class were ready for me.

Redman: So how many girls do you think were, percentage-wise, receiving support from the Nurses' Corps?

1-00:39:34
Walton: I think about 100 percent. I don't know of anyone—.

Redman: A good percentage.

1-00:39:35
Walton: Yeah, a good percentage, I don't know of anyone that was paying their own way.

Redman: Oh, is that right? Wow.

1-00:39:36
Walton: In my class—

Redman: So were the girls pretty proud of being part of this program?

1-00:39:45
Walton: Oh, yeah.

Redman: So it was a fun thing to wear the uniform and—

1-00:39:50
Walton: Yeah, we wore it. I remember going to Broadway in San Francisco one night, and I even have a picture of my friend and I, she and I in our uniforms, and we're peering over the top of some scantily clad misses. Yeah, we wore our uniforms. In fact, I was in Los Angeles on vacation, and I wore my uniform when I went with my mother's friend to a radio show. We were in line. They came and got me, took me out of line and put me with the military because I was in uniform.

Redman: That must have played a pretty role in shaping—I can imagine how that experience would shape your education in that—

1-00:40:34
Walton: I might as well drop it in now that when I married, during my course of training, and was pregnant and had to leave, I had to go up to the office with my uniform. And they stripped the buttons off, they took the epaulettes off. I think if I had a sword they would have broken it. They took the thing off my hat. They gave me the uniform and the overcoat and everything because no one else could use it, and they let me buy my books at used book rates, and that's how I got drummed out of the Corps.

Redman: All right, so now were women not allowed to continue if they were married or pregnant in particular?

1-00:41:13
Walton: Now, married was okay, which was very unusual; other schools didn't allow it. But pregnant, you had to leave at some point the way you'd be done, so—

Redman: So now, going back then to your experience early on, I'd like to ask first about your impressions of the Berkeley campus, and then what it was like to be over in San Francisco at the hospital. But let me ask, at the Berkeley campus when you first arrived there what were your first impressions of it? What were your first thoughts of being on campus there?

1-00:41:52
Walton: Where am I going to go? Where am I supposed to be? I've had dreams of being in the middle of the campus, and I didn't know where my next class was. Then I finally told myself, "You dope, it's inside your binder; you've got the list." I never had the dream again, but you're in the anthropology building way up here, and you're supposed to be at the life science building way down there. But you had your stated program, and you maneuvered from one to the other to the other, and that pretty much kept you in line.

Redman: Can you talk a little bit, maybe, about using the libraries at all? Do you have any recollection of using maybe Dole Library, the big main library at Cal?

1-00:42:41
Walton: I remember going to the libraries. I was commuting from East Oakland, so I really didn't hang out or stay much there. I remember going to the Bancroft Library and curling up and reading plays.

Redman: Is that right?

1-00:42:56
Walton: Yeah, for my respite. That's where I would kind of hole up. If I thought it was getting too much for me I would head for Bancroft.

Redman: So now let me transition to the San Francisco campus. When you were at the hospital, presumably it was a medical school as well.

1-00:43:20
Walton: Medical school, we had classes with the medical students.

Redman: And what was that experience like being in that type of environment?

1-00:43:28
Walton: Well, it was, hmmm—it was what I did. It was six days a week, and it was a full program, and after our first semester we also had ward duty right away.

Redman: Can you tell me about what ward duty might have been?

1-00:43:50
Walton: Well, in the beginning they let you bathe a patient. It depended on where you were in the level of what you'd been learning in class.

Redman: So was there sort of the rigid clinical program that maybe you hear about today? I'm thinking of maybe an early integration into your nursing.

1-00:44:14
Walton: Oh yes, and one thing that we were very proud of because of some of the—and later they got very academic about everything; you could do it all in the lab. You had this arm here, and you learn how to do this, and you didn't work with a patient, you didn't need to work with the patients, but ours was integrated very early on, and we would have full shifts, we would have, and classes.

Redman: Let me ask about anatomy. It seems like a little bit of an unusual question, but was there any work with cadavers?

1-00:44:51
Walton: Oh, yes. Because at Berkeley—that's where I took the anatomy class—we had emeritus professors in the classroom because everyone was drafted and taken away. I had Olmsted for my physiology, I had Saunders for my anatomy, and Meyers for bacteriology. I had a Spanish professor whose research work was

in sixteenth century poetry, and as long as we spoke it nicely and sounded good, he passed us. In the classroom it was really interesting.

Redman: Let's talk a little bit more about that, so there were a lot of professors who had maybe been retired for a while—

1-00:45:34
Walton: Oh, yes.

Redman: And they were asked to come back.

1-00:45:38
Walton: Yes.

Redman: Do you think most of the professors simply saw this as maybe a war contribution, or were some of them rolling their eyes like, "Here I go again"?

1-00:45:46
Walton: I felt that every one of them was sincerely committed to doing what they were doing, and very, very understanding of the students and all. I know my dad was quite ill at one time, and I had just come from seeing him, and they tried to give him last rites. He kicked the priest out. Anyway, I had come to a final or a midterm or something, and I had to pith my frog and get the muscle, and I had to set it all up and everything, and everything was going wrong. It was a mess. Dr. Olmsted came to me and said, "Do you need a little rest? Things aren't going well." And I said, "No," and "My dad's sick," and he said, "Go out, and get some fresh air." I went out, and came back, and he'd cleaned everything away. He said, "Would you like to try again?" I said, "Yes." I started over again, and everything just—I smoked my drum; everything was smooth as glass, and it went great. But if he hadn't seen to give me that opportunity, it would have just—I'd have just been out.

Redman: That's really interesting. Do you think a lot of other students at that time—I'm thinking of not only the effects of the Depression that were still lingering, but also having family members now away fighting overseas, that might have been occasionally an emotional trying thing in addition to things like deaths in the family and things like that. But you found your professors fairly understanding, it sounds like.

1-00:47:26
Walton: That was—yeah, yeah.

Redman: That's a pretty amazing example.

1-00:47:29
Walton: Yeah.

Redman: What were the other students like in your nursing program? Can you talk about some of them, some of your impressions of who they were?

1-00:47:42
Walton: There were girls from Los Angeles area, quite a few from Los Angeles area, and they were all good, solid people. In fact, our class was rather unique in that of the thirty-seven or thirty-nine that started, at least thirty-five of us graduated, and we met every year with our families up until maybe about five years ago. So we formed some very strong friendships with very solid people.

Redman: Did a lot of people stay in the Bay Area then?

1-00:48:29
Walton: Not too many. Several were up—two girls live up out of Jackson, and Sutter Creek. Three families were in Oregon. Let's see one was Hitlands over in Santa Rosa, There was two or three in San Jose.

Redman: But a lot of them out on the West Coast.

1-00:48:53
Walton: On the West Coast, yeah. All along the West Coast, yes, yes. One of them who did come back to the West Coast lived in Chicago for a while.

Redman: Let me get back to human anatomy just for a moment. Did your first experience of maybe seeing a human cadaver, was that surprising, or were you ready for that?

1-00:49:17
Walton: I was, yes I was ready for it. It was interesting, I thought, "Oh good, finally I get to see what it really looks like.

Redman: All right, so you' maybe read about it and seen it in textbooks.

1-00:49:25
Walton: Oh, I'd seen the physiology books, and in high school I remember one time the teacher had sheeps' hearts, we'd worked on sheeps' hearts, had to dissect them and find the valves—

Redman: So that was some good preparation for that type of experience. I'm going to ask about two classes outside of your course work or two types of classes outside, you'd mentioned poetry and Spanish. Did you take any classes in say history or anthropology or—

1-00:50:00
Walton: I took anthropology early on, and what I also remember is art appreciation and music appreciation.

Redman: Did any faculty stand out in anthropology or—?

1-00:50:15
Walton: Actually not; I don't remember any of those.

Redman: But do you remember sort of that experience of what—-

1-00:50:21
Walton: Oh, sitting in a big room and slides going up on the wall. Later, being in Europe myself and saying, "Oh, is that how big it really is?" You can only get it so big in a book.

Redman: Right, exactly.

1-00:50:31
Walton: They can say that it's sixty by seventy feet, but you just don't get it until you're standing in the Doge Palace or somewhere.

Redman: But that experience of taking those classes in the liberal arts, from the sounds of it was relatively enjoyable—

1-00:50:47
Walton: Oh, it's fascinating. In particularly that art appreciation I remember working all the way up through the years was fascinating, but when it got to the modern art, and even to the architecture and the planning of cities, that was really pretty interesting.

Redman: Okay, that's great, with that I'm going to stop and change tapes.

Begin Audiofile 2

Redman: This is Sam Redman, and I'm back with Margaret Walton in Hayward, California. This is our second tape today. So when we left off we talked a little bit about what the experience was like for you on the Berkeley campus, but now I'd like to ask what the San Francisco hospital campus was like as a student.

2-00:00:25
Walton: As a student. Well, our time was pretty much taken up with classes and ward duty, but we had a noontime chorus, and one of the dental students played piano and took care of that, and we sang for a couple of things around there, and then I would go with my friends to the USO, dance at the USO.

Redman: Tell me about what USO dances were like in that era.

2-00:00:54
Walton: Oh, they were fascinating. I went in Oakland, and also when I was at Berkeley. One thing about it was you met kids from all over the nation, New York to Los Angeles to midway, and the dancing was so different with some of them. The Peabody from New York and the Shag from Los Angeles, and all the different dances were really interesting.

Redman: Now I understand the pretty common conversation starter in that era was, "What state are you from?" when you would meet someone maybe at a USO, is that right?

2-00:01:29
Walton: Yes, pretty much.

Redman: So you were maybe learning a little bit more about these places.

2-00:01:34
Walton: About these places, yeah.

Redman: Now, one of the questions I was going to get into was that the San Francisco Bay Area was rapidly changing in this era. There's the influx; we'll get into the shipyards in particular in a moment. But there were also many more men I understand walking around visibly in uniform since this was an important site for the Pacific theater. So there would have been a lot of soldiers, and sailors at any given time, walking around San Francisco. Did you notice them on the streets—?

2-00:02:11
Walton: Oh, yes.

Redman: What was sort of the impact of that do you think on the city?

2-00:02:22
Walton: Well, it pretty much was that you couldn't forget that the war was going on, and the guys were passing through the area, and a lot of them came back here because they found that they liked the climate; they liked what was here.

Redman: Did you get the impression when say you were at a USO dance, that the troops or the sailors that you were spending a little time with, that they really liked it here in the Bay Area?

2-00:02:49
Walton: Yes, yes.

Redman: Okay, but were some of them also homesick, I assume?

2-00:02:54
Walton: Oh, yes. In fact, one of the fellows—my folks would call up USO on a Sunday and say, "Any fellows hanging around there? We got Sunday dinner. We'll come down a get them." They would get the fellows and bring them home to dinner. My mother would write to their mothers, and we would take pictures and send to them. One young man in particular, his fiancé came out, and mother put her up, and they got them their blood tests and their license and helped them get married—

Redman: Wow, oh, interesting. Yeah, that's fascinating.

2-00:03:28
Walton: My brother was only—anyway, he was too young to go in the service, so she felt whatever she could do for any of the boys that were away from home, that she would do it.

Redman: Do you think there was a pretty common sentiment in those days? How about stepping back a moment to the Great Depression? Did you ever have people coming up to the door—?

2-00:03:55
Walton: Oh, yes. When I came home from school, then it was my job to answer the door because Mother had been answering all day, and I was to listen politely, and say, "Thank you, but no thank you." Because they were selling something or whatever. There was one exception, I think mother did. We have a picture of my sister and my brother and I with a goat cart. She decided she had money for that, so we have a picture of us with a goat cart.

Redman: How about—this is something that as a busy student you may not have gotten into—but your observations of how this was working out in the city? How did blackouts affect night life, clubs, bars, music halls, dances? Do you have any idea how that would work?

2-00:04:48
Walton: Well, the only one that I really remember was that first Friday, then they lifted the blackout about 10:00 and for some reason, I don't know, there was a marine at the house, and, "Let's go down to the City Club." So we did, we'd go down to the City Club and where before the entire dance floor was surrounded with a stag line, there was half the floor because there were only half of the people there. There were fewer gals, so I really danced that night. Even the orchestra was coming in in pieces, the drums walked in about an hour later.

Redman: Interesting. So it disrupted people's schedules.

2-00:05:34
Walton: I'm sure it did, yeah.

Redman: In a variety of ways, that's interesting. How about religious services in San Francisco? Did you have any experiences with that in that era? No, okay.

Walton: No.

Redman: But did you get the sense that some of the other nursing students—were they spending their time doing any particular activities that maybe you weren't taking a part—?

2-00:05:59
Walton: No, I can't think of anything, yeah, because I was spending my time commuting back home on the weekends and—

Redman: I'm sure a lot of people were working pretty diligently?

2-00:06:06
Walton: Yes.

Redman: Tell me about what housing was like for nursing students? You understand that a number of people were maybe living at home, but were there some people—?

2-00:06:19
Walton: Well, we all lived in the dorm. What was a distinction was that whenever there was an affiliation like a nursery school or a visiting nurse association, those of us who lived within fifty miles were sent home, and they found us an affiliation because the girls who live in Los Angeles and everywhere else, they used all the San Francisco slots.

Redman: I see.

2-00:06:46
Walton: There were a few times that—one of those was when I met my husband.

Redman: Is that right?

2-00:06:51
Walton: Yeah.

Redman: Can you talk a little bit about that story, how that came to pass that you met your husband?

2-00:06:55
Walton: It was a nursery school experience, and it was in Berkeley. They figured I lived in Oakland, Berkeley, you know, so—I had always hung out at the Masonic Club when I was on campus, so I did the same. After I was through with the nursery school I went over to the Masonic Club, and my cousin Alice Ann was there at the time.

Redman: Can you tell me what you might do at the Masonic Club? What was there for people to do, what was the attraction?

2-00:07:21
Walton: Oh, they liked to play bridge. There was one fellow who would run around and say, "Fourth for bridge." And I said, "Well, if they're that hard up." I said, "Okay." He said, "Let's get two more." So anyway they finally banished the bridge to the auditorium because they were too cozy by the fireplace. But, study, I'd read and I'd study and wait for my next class or—

Redman: But it was a quiet, nice space to—

2-00:07:49
Walton: It was a nice space. So that during that nursery school experience there was the annual ball that we had, and, of course, I had to go to that. At the ball I met—my cousin introduced me to this fellow because he was a friend of the one she wanted to have for the evening, and that's how I met my husband. He was in B12. He had been in the preflight program, which was cut because it was getting near the end of the war, and so they cut the program and sent him back into the B12. Well, mid-year calculus and everything, nyehh. So he was soon back in the fleet.

Redman: And did he then spend some time in the Pacific?

2-00:08:46
Walton: He never got there. He got on a ship. He got on the Henderson. It was a brand new ship, and they left Bremerton, but they went like this, zig zagging all the way to San Diego because the screw was not right on the ship. They couldn't even use their—he was a sonar, and they couldn't even use the sonar—

Redman: Oh, wow.

2-00:09:08
Walton: They had to use the fathometer, and they went back up again to the dry dock, and by that time our daughter was born, and he was married, and he had enough points, and he got out of the service in the fall of 1946.

Redman: So can you tell me a little bit about your experience working at the dry docks? How did that come about as an opportunity for you?

2-00:09:31
Walton: Well, my dad was a letter carrier, and he'd hear this lady singing, and when he'd give her the mail, he said to her, "You know, my daughter sings." "Well, bring her around." So I took lessons from Ezil Pedroni for quite a few years—

Redman: Can you spell that first name, Ezil?

2-00:09:53
Walton: E Z I L. Ezil, yeah. I would leave Berkeley campus, get off at her house, and then go on home. Her husband worked at the dry docks, so I guess Dad said something about, "Margaret needed a job for the summer." So they hooked me up with Mr. Pedroni, and he put me in the office. I had had the experience with keypunch, so I got me a keypunch job at the shipyards.

Redman: Now can you tell me about what it was like to work at the shipyards, because I understand for people who worked either on the line or in the hiring hall, for some people who had been Cal students or things like that, that was a bit of a shock for them to be working in a different environment.

2-00:10:40
Walton: Different environment, yeah.

Redman: Were there mostly other girls working at the keypunches at that time?

2-00:10:47
Walton: Mostly, mostly, and some fellows, some fellows. The impact mostly was getting to the station and back and on the streets because of all the workmen with their hard hats and everything around, but once I was on the base, I was in an office situation, so that was not any different than I had had in San Francisco.

Redman: But did you notice the workers on your way in?

2-00:11:17
Walton: Oh, yeah, sure.

Redman: My sort of perception is that it would have been a pretty diverse work force by that time.

2-00:11:24
Walton: Oh, by then, yes. And well, my other connection with that is when I did the home nursing affiliation. I moved home, and my district was the area down by the docks, and the families I visited with, many of them were the ones that had come from the South and East to find work with the shipyards, and they were living six families in a basement, and it was amazing the conditions that they were living in.

Redman: So that was a surprise.

2-00:12:04
Walton: That was, yeah.

Redman: And how about the state of the health of the people that you were working with? I imagine that having six families in an abode and sometimes the lack of running water and things like that, there were a number of public health concerns—

2-00:12:18
Walton: Yeah.

Redman: But then also in the South there was lack of education about health issues and things like that, and a lack of care. So my understanding is that there were a high number of things like sexually transmitted diseases, and things of that nature in the populations that—

2-00:12:42
Walton: Well, I wasn't—I didn't meet that. What I was doing—I remember about the families in the basement. It was a prenatal visit, a young girl, and she had all the baby's clothes in a suitcase under the bed, and I could touch the ceiling. Unfortunately, I said that, and I think they all got evicted. Anyway, and then

the other family I think were old Oakland residents, and she was caring for a paralyzed sister, and I would take care of her.

Redman: So now women's changing roles during World War II: more women at that time that are entering some traditional occupations, quote unquote traditional like nursing, and then there were also people entering industrial labor, so these Rosie the Riveters.

2-00:13:45

Walton: Rosie the Riveter type things, yeah. Well, as I told you, my mother decided that she should be doing something, and so she applied and was being interviewed at the Army Depot. As she sat there a man got a telephone call, and he looked at her as he's talking, he said, "Well, I think she could do that." And he said, "Do you ride a bicycle?" My mother said, "No, no, no." And he's, "Oh, okay, I'll have to find someone for you." It was something where they had to ride a bicycle between the buildings, so she ended up in invoices and paper stuff.

Redman: And this was again at the Moore Dry Dock?

2-00:14:29

Walton: No, this was at the Army Depot.

Redman: Oh, sorry. This was at the Army Depot, okay. How did she describe that experience?

2-00:14:37

Walton: It was very interesting for her because she had never really been in a work force other than that one little teaching thing, and she made many good friends there, and it was like a whole new family for her.

Redman: Now, I understand at the Oakland Army Base there were a number of classes available for other people working on the base, and a lot of people would stay there for a number of years and make a good career working—

2-00:15:04

Walton: Yeah, she had one friend that was there for eighteen-twenty years. And finally retired. And they said, "What was the reason?" She said, "The commute." She had been commuting from Richmond forever. But she stayed. But Mother decided once the war was over, and that was the reason she'd done it, so she quit.

Redman: I see. So let me ask you, was there any dissent or did you notice any people disagreeing with the war in and of itself? It seems like a lot of that isolationist sentiment or dissent against the war had vanished as soon as Pearl Harbor happened.

2-00:15:49

Walton: Yeah, yeah. I didn't have any sense of that during that war.

Redman: There was a large overriding sense of patriotism and unity, I understand.

2-00:16:00
Walton: Yes, yeah, and everyone did their rationing, and everyone did their duty as they found it.

Redman: But people did want to get involved, it seems like. People like your mother were compelled to find some—

2-00:16:19
Walton: Some way to help.

Redman: Do you think that in some sense fed into these scrap metal drives or Victory Gardens, or—?

2-00:16:23
Walton: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Rubber, [laughs] the tin foil off the cigarette packages.

Redman: So that may have been a useful thing, but it's also a way that—

2-00:16:38
Walton: A bonding sort of a thing. You get a couple of people doing it and—

Redman: Would people encourage each other to do things like that?

2-00:16:46
Walton: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

Redman: That's interesting. So let me ask about community groups or civic organizations. What do you think the Masons were doing during the war?

2-00:16:57
Walton: I haven't a clue. My grandfather had been a Mason, but I haven't a clue.

Redman: Other than playing bridge—

2-00:17:01
Walton: No. I was in Job's Daughters, and my real connection with them went into my first year at Berkeley, but after that I wasn't. And I know that they went into drives and this and that, but I wasn't with it.

Redman: Now I'd like to ask about a couple of different expressions that were popular around the time of the war that I'm wondering if you can define for me. "Behind the eight ball?" Have you heard that expression if someone or something is behind the eight ball?

2-00:17:37
Walton: Well, I've heard that, yeah.

Redman: Can you tell me what that means do you recall? There's also "a rip snorter," if someone tells a funny story I guess it could be a rip snorter, would that—?

2-00:17:49
Walton: Well, if it makes you laugh so loud, the rip, but that's about all. "Behind the eight ball" was not a good place to be. In pool it's a difficult shot, isn't it?

Redman: Yeah, the last shot, or yeah, yeah, yeah. Then "tied to an apron string"—

2-00:18:12
Walton: Oh, yeah, sure. Well, there's the fact that mama's boys are usually the ones that were talked about of being tied to—anyway. Women, too, too close to their mothers.

Redman: Now, an event happened in 1944 in the Bay Area at a place called Port Chicago.

2-00:18:33
Walton: Oh, yes.

Redman: There was a large explosion there that killed a large number of sailors. Can you talk about that experience and what—?

2-00:18:41
Walton: Well, from my perspective the only thing that I immediately was aware of was—I was at a Job's meeting. My father was home. He thought there was an earthquake from the—and that's East Oakland from Port Chicago. Except for that, there was a little bit in the papers at the time about—there was devastation, and this and that, that's all I knew. I didn't know anything about the inner workings of the staff or the rest of this and that or anything.

Redman: But that stuff did come out later on, and so that's something that you've only very slowly became aware of, I assume.

2-00:19:27
Walton: Yeah, but it wasn't anything at the time.

Redman: But the initial reports did include that there was a Navel disaster—?

2-00:19:34
Walton: Yeah, and explosions and armament and then to this, yeah.

Redman: Let me ask about what life was like then at the end of the war. In particular do you remember V-E Day, and the surrender of Hitler and Nazi Germany before the surrender of the Japanese? Was that—?

2-00:19:53
Walton: Yeah, I remember hearing about that. It wasn't as empathic because we still had the Japanese. It was V-J Day that really, you know—

Redman: I understand from a lot of people, especially on the West Coast that there was a sentiment of, okay, now we turn our attention to the Japanese and a possible invasion of Japan. At that time possibly a fiancé, or soon to be very quickly husband, were you concerned about his going over to the Pacific?

2-00:20:35
Walton: Well, at the time it was—let's see; we were married in April, and he then, by May, was up in Bremerton. Now, this is all '45 which this happened, so he was up in Bremerton. So there was still a possibility of war going on in the Pacific, so yeah, it was a possibility that he would go. But then it very quickly resolved itself.

Redman: I see.

2-00:21:05
Walton: And that took care of that.

Redman: Yeah. Now how about V-J Day then—

2-00:21:11
Walton: Oh, that was—they went around the wards and every other one of us or something they said, "Go on home." So I got all packed up, and I got down to the bottom of the hill on Parnassus, and I was waiting for a streetcar to go home. Well, I didn't know what was going on downtown, and everything, and all these cars were going that way, but none of them were coming this way, and finally someone said, "Well, there's no more cars, give it up, you're not going to get out of here." So I went back up and stayed the night, and then the next morning I went home. My mom and dad had decided to just see what was going on, so they'd gotten on the train and come over to San Francisco. They were walking up and down Market Street and all, and my dad said there was a sailor and an Army guy, and they'd switched hats. They were walking down the street. Then there were another couple of guys, and they were trying to make up to my mom, and finally one of them says, "Oh, he's too old to get another one," so they let them alone.

Redman: But people were having a pretty good time

2-00:22:22
Walton: They were having a pretty good time, yeah.

Redman: And you were sound asleep—

Walton: I had to go back. I had to go back, yeah.

Redman: So, can you tell me, then, a little bit about what life was like for you at the end of the war and graduating nursing and then starting a career.

2-00:22:42
Walton: Oh, yeah, well—

Redman: Then also having a, school was interrupted by—

2-00:22:45
Walton: By having my daughter Gail. I left when I was five months pregnant, and I went back when she was three months old.

Redman: Pretty quickly.

2-00:22:55
Walton: Pretty quickly, oh, yes. So, in the meantime, see, during the war they had scaled back the time we had to spend to meet the basic State requirements for the license, but once the war was over, the school reverted back to their full program, which added ten months to the program.

Redman: Wow.

2-00:23:19
Walton: Mother and I had made this plan that she would take care of the baby, and, it turns out, my husband because he was out of the service and going to San Francisco State, and so for eight months, and then I get this letter that says I had to do these sixteen or eighteen months more. Mother said, "Well, you want to do it, don't you?" and I said, "Well, yes." And she said, "Well, then, we'll do it." And I went back to school, and I came home one day a week. My mother, my father, my sister, my brother, my husband and baby, and then I went back for six days again. Then I had to have some special assignments to fill in these gaps and—

Redman: Now what did your husband think about this challenge of finishing this nursing program?

2-00:24:19
Walton: Well—

Redman: Was he supportive and—?

2-00:24:21
Walton: Oh, he was very supportive, oh yes. I had been engaged to someone, a civil engineer, when I was still on my way to San Francisco, and he wanted me—since he'd graduated—he wanted me just to quit and go with him to Oakridge. But anyway, I said, "No, I like going to school." He didn't see it that way, but Howard did. He understood. He was good, and he was going to school.

So we were both going to school, and I finally got out in '47, and he had two more years to go. And we lived on the campus, which is now the campus of San Francisco State. Then, it was just a bare lake bottoms with some housing, that's all that was out there. We lived there, and I worked at the hospital and he went into the campus in San Francisco.

Redman: Now, was he able to use some of his GI Bill benefits?

2-00:25:20
Walton: Did, and housing and his schooling is all GI.

Redman: Wow, so can you talk about the impact of that on your life? Do you think that the GI Bill—

2-00:25:31
Walton: Oh, it made all the difference in the world. I don't know how he would have gotten his education, and being able to live on the campus was wonderful, and I was able then to stay and work at UC. I worked in the clinics, and I was head nurse of the Derm Clinic until he was through, and then we came to San Leandro, where he started teaching. Taught thirty years.

Redman: And what grade level did he teach?

2-00:25:58
Walton: Fourth, fifth and sixth.

Redman: Now can you tell me a little bit about how the practice of nursing was changing between, say, when you first began and then maybe the first decade or so after the end of World War II? My limited understanding is that World War II had rapidly increased the ability to do some blood transfusions—

2-00:26:26
Walton: The things that were always reserved to the doctors, and things were little by little, even in the muscular injections, were unheard of that nurses should do that, but while I was in school, that was brought in to the nursing field. I'm trying to think of some of the other things, but—and, of course, we saw penicillin come in, and we saw the different ways of medicating, and we had to be able to do that because penicillin was given every three hours in the beginning.

Redman: Wow.

2-00:27:04
Walton: Every three hours, like a pin cushion.

Redman: Now, how about imaging in terms of X-rays or things like that, were those improving pretty steadily, or was that less of a—

2-00:27:17
Walton: Well, it was slow. I wasn't that close to it in the clinics. I had a stint when I was doing—I worked with a chest man that did bronchoscopies and all; we did fluoroscopies, and I worked for those patients. Same old, same old, then.

Redman: What was the most interesting to you, you'd mentioned that you worked with germs in particular, or, with which lab, I'm sorry, that you—?

2-00:27:51
Walton: Oh, no, well, one affiliation was with the surgical clinic, and we would do minor surgery in the afternoons, and I wrote a manual for the books for the set ups for the surgeries.

Redman: Was that an experience that was particularly interesting to you?

2-00:28:11
Walton: Oh, yes. It was fascinating.

Redman: Did that stem back, in some sense, to dissecting a frog in high school?

2-00:28:24
Walton: It helped, yes. Actually, the doctors would have—I was able to scrub in with the doctors on these surgeries.

Redman: And that was a pretty unique experience.

2-00:28:30
Walton: That was very, was very.

Redman: Now I'd like to ask about the development of something called the war alumni classes at UC Berkeley. Can you explain to me what the war alumni classes are?

2-00:28:45
Walton: Well, those years that the classes were being accelerated and people were moving through the campus pretty fast, I came to it later. I went to a twenty-year reunion, and I thought, "Oh, that was really keen." And then in the *Cal Monthly* they said that they were having a reunion planning for the next one in five years, and they were inviting people to come join the committee. I thought, "Oh, that would be something nice to do." So I trotted myself out there, little knowing that they had this nice strong group of people already entrenched in working together, but it's been wonderful. It's been like, what, forty years since then, forty-five years. Forty-years, actually, since I've been working with them.

Redman: Now, you said these classes were tied together by some pretty unique circumstances you went through together, including the class structures had changed; their time on campus was probably noticeably different—

2-00:29:57
Walton: Different, yeah. Instead of having two semesters a year they had three, so that someone who thought they were going to graduate in '46 was already done in '45, and they were out of there. So that was the biggest distinction on those classes. It didn't happen before, and it hasn't happened since.

Redman: But were many of the people of the similar generation, too, I assume, in terms of age and—

2-00:30:26
Walton: Oh, yeah, we're all pretty much the same age.

Redman: And people got along pretty well—

2-00:30:32
Walton: Well, and the thing is that when they—see, I left the campus after two years. I was over in San Francisco, and for those that stayed there the whole time, when they had, the V12 was there in full force, and a lot of these—

Redman: These other classes—

2-00:30:50
Walton: These classes, and a lot of their activities were geared to the war effort, getting into buses and going to dance at the bases, and going out in the fields and bringing in the crops, they talk about, but I didn't have that experience.

Redman: So different students maybe had different experiences, but a lot that ties them together. I want to step back and ask if you were familiar with the International House on campus.

2-00:31:23
Walton: I knew of it. That's where Howard stayed.

Redman: So had you spent any time there at all?

Walton: No.

Redman: Let me ask about how cities may have changed after World War II. In particular, San Francisco seems to grow and grow and grow. Richmond is a little bit of a different story after World War II, and the shipyards eventually leave, and there's a bit of decay there. Oakland, sort of a mixed bag. Can you talk about how, maybe, these cities were changing right after the war, maybe in the fifties and sixties?

2-00:32:02
Walton: Fifties and sixties I was in San Leandro, and except for going back to visit my folks, I really wasn't paying that much attention—

Redman: Were a lot of people moving out to places like San Leandro?

2-00:32:12
Walton: Castro Valley got a lot of people from Oakland, and San Lorenzo.

Redman: People were using their GI Bill, I assume, to build houses and buy houses.

2-00:32:20
Walton: Right, yeah, we used the GI to get in here.

Redman: So that was a pretty common experience of people in your generation, I assume. Did that mean that a lot of people, then, would commute in to hospitals from suburban areas?

2-00:32:35
Walton: Well, it depended. I know I had friends that worked at Highland had to go back to Oakland. But I worked at Fairmont Hospital in San Leandro.

Redman: So you were pretty close.

2-00:32:47
Walton: My commute was close.

Redman: Well, can you tell me, maybe you have some pictures that you'd like to share or things that you'd like to add then as we conclude here, or—I'll maybe pause this tape.

2-00:33:01
Walton: Yeah, pause it for a minute. [Pause tape]

Redman: Great, so the last question, I believe, I was going to ask is that you'd mentioned that Harry Truman was your graduation speaker.

2-00:33:12
Walton: Yes.

Redman: I was curious if you can talk a little bit about the transition when FDR passed away, and then there's a new president, and a lot of people were very sad about the death of FDR because he had been President for so many years.

2-00:33:26
Walton: So many years, practically my whole life.

Redman: Practically your whole life.

2-00:33:30
Walton: I remember Hoover. I remember Hoover.

Redman: It's interesting as well because Hoover was somewhat of a California figure, and then you have FDR who comes in, and you'd mentioned her was sort of a grandfatherly figure.

2-00:33:47
Walton: To me he was then.

Redman: Certainly, and then he passes away. Was that a pretty traumatic experience for people?

2-00:33:54
Walton: Oh, it was a shock for everyone, yeah. And then the unknown, we've got someone who was just the Vice President, and now he's the President and nobody had any idea what that was going to be like.

Redman: So what were your first impressions of Harry Truman then? If you had any at all—

2-00:34:13
Walton: Well, I did. I thought that he was very businesslike and down to earth and willing to face the facts. Well, he was the one that said, "The buck stops here." Isn't it? I voted for him, it was the first time I voted in my life.

Redman: Tell me about his being graduation speaker. Was that a pretty impressive—?

2-00:34:46
Walton: Well, it was, it was, but there was so much going on. I'm graduating, I'm sitting here, there's a million people, my family's here, and I think the fact that I have a newspaper clipping that has this picture that says that he was there is the biggest impression.

Redman: Well, let's ask a final question. Usually I ask people about the place of World War II in their lives as a final question, but I'd like to take a different tack today. I noticed when I came in, there's a Cal rug, and you've got some decorations set up for the war alumni class or reunion—

Walton: Well, I have to show those.

Redman: Yeah, exactly, so the question that I have is the place of Cal in your life. You spent two years on the Berkeley campus; then you spent time at the UCSF campus—

Walton: Three years.

Redman: Three years there. What is your relationship to Cal today?

2-00:35:42
Walton: Today. Through the committee, that's it.

Redman: The war alumni—

2-00:35:50
Walton: The war alumni group, yeah.

Redman: So tied together through that war time experience in a sense, but then also the connection to Cal.

2-00:35:57
Walton: Yeah. So, it's been interesting that it's been so many years, and it's consistently continued to be good.

Redman: Well, I'd like to thank you so much for sitting down and chatting with me today.

2-00:36:13
Walton: Thank you, Sam.

[End of Interview]