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Berkeley, California

O'Neil Dillon and Ruth Hoffman

Rosie the Riveter
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Sam Redman
in 2011

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O’Neil Dillon and Ruth Hoffman

OLIDAY PLAY—Children of the Maritime Child Care nter this week put on three typical Christmas playlets their parents. In the picture above members of the casts of two of the playlets are gathered around the principal characters ni the Nativity Scene.

Photo by RICHMOND INDEPENDENT

Richmond Independent, circa 1944-1945

O'Neil Anna Eugene
Maritime Housing ~ 1943

Photos courtesy of O'Neil Dillon

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Note: "Dillon, M" refers to Marcia Dillon, O'Neil Dillon's wife.

Interview 1: March 31, 2011
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Redman: Today is March 21, 2011, and this is our first tape. I'd like to begin by thanking both of you for sitting down with me today. This is a really wonderful opportunity to sit down with someone who attended one of these schools, and a teacher from one of these schools. So may I ask both of you, maybe starting with Ruth, to share your full name and when you were born?

01-00:00:23
Hoffman: I'm Ruth R. Hoffman. I was born—I hope you don't want the dates. [laughs]

Redman: Oh, that's fine. Can you tell me where you were born?

01-00:00:32
Hoffman: Yes, I was born in Chicago, Illinois.

Redman: In what neighborhood in Chicago did you grow up?

01-00:00:40
Hoffman: Well, I think we moved out of Chicago. I can't tell you when.

Redman: But when you were fairly young, you moved out of Chicago.

01-00:00:52
Hoffman: Yeah, we lived outside, in Calumet City, Illinois; and then in Galesburg, Illinois; and then back to Chicago, when I was high school age.

Redman: And Neil, how about yourself? Could you tell me your full name first?

01-00:01:12
Dillon, O: O'Neil.

Redman: Okay, O'Neil.

01-00:01:14
Dillon, O: Initial S., Dillon, D-I-double L-O-N. Born in Los Angeles, July 12, 1940.

Redman: Okay. And you go by Neil?

01-00:01:22
Dillon, O: Neil.

Redman: Can I ask how you got that first name?

01-00:01:30
Dillon, O: My mother was a communist. My older brother, she named after Eugene Debs, the great socialist. Then when I came along, since she was a fan of the

great playwright Eugene O'Neill, she thought it would be cool if she named her second son O'Neil. So she covered a number of different bases. You knew that story?

Hoffman: I knew that story, but I didn't know about Eugene Debs. I thought it was Eugene O'Neill. [chuckles]

01-00:01:59

Dillon, O: It started Eugene Debs, and then it became Eugene O'Neill. So I've had two last names my whole life. And it's very confusing to people.

Redman: In filling out some of the paperwork, I was unsure, so it's good to get confirmation on that. Well, Ruth, let's start with you. I'd like to ask, then, how you ended up in the Bay Area.

01-00:02:26

Hoffman: Well, my roommate and I from college, we already graduated, and we decided we were going to come to California. So we started out by biking. We sent our bikes from Chicago to—I believe it was Rock Island or Rockford, Illinois. Which, I don't remember. So our parents didn't know that we were going to attempt to bike across country. We arrived by train, picked up our bikes and started. We got into Iowa, and Iowa is hilly, which we did not know. And bikes did not have gear shifts, et cetera, et cetera. I think we got about 150 miles in Iowa. But some of our trips by bike were on a truck. The truckers would stop and give us rides. It was a different era. We were very safe, two girls driving bikes across country. We would sing as we biked, and we sang every song we knew. I don't think individually, you could ever be as happy as we were on that trip. We got 150 miles into Iowa. Then my friend had a friend who was singing in Omaha, so we got to Omaha. We sent our bikes back, by the way. We got to Omaha, and we went all over to these nightclubs to find where Dorothy was singing. We found Dorothy, and she had an apartment, so we stayed with her for a couple weeks. Then we started across country. We got to Denver. We were taking buses by that time. We were in Denver, and we stated in Estes Park. Then we, again, were coming to San Francisco, so we took a bus to San Francisco. [chuckles]

Dillon, O: Ruth, can I ask a question? Why California, and why San Francisco?

01-00:05:32

Hoffman: I had visited Los Angeles the year before, but I didn't think of going to—we just thought San Francisco—

Redman: Just the idea of it sounded—

01-00:05:46

Hoffman: Well, I don't know why we, but we did. San Francisco was going to be—

Dillon, O: Okay. Something about—

Redman: Something about San Francisco.

01-00:05:55
Hoffman: So anyway, when we got to the border of Nevada and California, someone from Kaiser got to the door of the bus.

Redman: So this is as soon as you were exiting. I'm sorry, what city was this in?

01-00:06:13
Hoffman: Well, we left Denver by bus. We got to California. So at the border, this man was recruiting people for Kaiser. One of the announcements he made was, "You'll get an apartment." Well, that was a falsehood. We needed an apartment; we'd just arrived.

Redman: And housing, by that time, was an unbelievable hardship.

01-00:06:46
Hoffman: Yes. But we did not get an apartment. Single people went into the dormitory. So that was a falsehood.

Dillon, M: May I just ask, was this the Kaiser Shipyards?

01-00:06:58
Hoffman: Kaiser Shipyards, yeah, in Richmond.

Redman: Can we step back for a moment and let me ask about Pearl Harbor? So can you situate me in time? Did Pearl Harbor happen before you would've left?

01-00:07:15
Hoffman: I was still in Chicago at that time. It was 1941.

Redman: Can you tell me about December 7, 1941? What do you recall from when Pearl Harbor happened?

01-00:07:28
Hoffman: Oh, yes. Well, of course, it was on everything. We didn't have TV in those days.

Redman: So did you learn about it on the radio?

01-00:07:35
Hoffman: I'm sure, yes, because it was a Sunday. It was very upsetting. It was very upsetting. Because first of all, one, I had a brother; one, I had cousins, male cousins, and we knew what was coming. It was very upsetting, because no one had attacked the—well, prior to our time, there was an attack on America, but not in our time. Because all our male friends would be going and the danger was so bad.

Redman: Stepping back just a minute, I'm curious about your time in school yourself, as a young student. In elementary school and in high school, can you tell me a

little bit about what your teachers were like? Do you remember some of your own teachers? This would've been during the midst of the Great Depression. Is that correct?

01-00:08:46

Hoffman: Yes. But as a child, you accept what goes. We lived in Calumet City when I was in grammar school, and I remember two teachers, specifically. One was a Miss Hall, and one was Miss Griffith. They obviously played a big part in my life if I still remember them. I remember going to Chicago with Miss Hall, at one point.

Redman: On a field trip?

01-00:09:27

Hoffman: Just a couple of us, privately. I remember being skipped by her, grades. Miss Griffith [chuckles] always said, "There are two things you have to do. One is pay your taxes, and the other is get your math." I remember that. But they were approachable and warm. In college, I can't really say that I had any great affinity for any of my teachers.

Redman: Can you tell me about attending college, your choice to attend college in that day?

01-00:10:31

Hoffman: Well, first of all, I went to a junior college for two years, in Chicago, and then I went to the University of Chicago.

Redman: So the University of Chicago, at that time, was a pretty exciting campus to be on.

01-00:10:48

Hoffman: Well, more or less.

Redman: What did you study?

01-00:10:54

Hoffman: I majored in psychology.

Redman: By that time, there were a number of educational reformers there. People like John Dewey. He had established the—.

01-00:11:08

Hoffman: And [Robert] Hutchins.

Redman: And Hutchins and members of the Chicago School. Was there sort of a legacy of that on campus at the time? Or did you have faculty members that were pretty renowned in psychology and education?

01-00:11:26

Hoffman: Well, there was never any closeness with any of the teachers or professors. Never. My friend and I used an office in the psychology building, where Kingsbury, who was the head of the department, had an office. When we studied for the exam, we interspersed an awful lot of humor. This was an old, old building. I remember somebody saying they'd never heard anybody laugh so much when they studied for an exam. We once stayed up all night. Everybody used to say, "Oh, I stayed up all night and studied." So we thought, "Well, we'll stay up." [chuckles] To keep ourselves going, we ate all night. So I don't think staying up all night really helped.

Redman: Some people would go to Hyde Park. On that campus, that's where your soul goes to get crushed, under the weight of all of these studies that you're doing.

01-00:12:43

Hoffman: Well, there's a lot of competition. But I don't think we felt it as much. I know my roommate and I—first of all, I didn't know her from before. I knew a lot of people there that I'd gone to school with for years, that had gone to the University, but I didn't know her. Somehow, we each knew some people, and we were all standing in a group, talking. She announced that she was getting a ride with a couple of guys. I said, "Where do you live?" She said, "Where nobody else lives." I kept saying, "Where do you live?" And she said, "Where nobody else lives." I kept repeating, and finally she told me. She lived two blocks from me. Because we lived sort of northwest, and this was all the way south. So I began commuting with her and these fellows. Then she and I became very friendly, so we decided we were going to look for a place to live. We couldn't afford campus, so we found a rooming house. For four dollars a week, between us—so that was two dollars each—we were going to rent a room. Now, we had to get approval; don't forget, we had parents who didn't believe in people going away from home. She had a brother-in-law who had to look me over, in order to get permission.

Dillon, O: I have a question. Women in college, in those years. Where did the idea that you should go to college come from?

01-00:14:59

Hoffman: Nobody said no when I wanted to continue. That's all I know.

Dillon, O: It came from you.

Hoffman: One of my cousins said—she and I, I think, were the only girls on my mother's side that went to college. She was saying, "It's strange that we should be the only two that—." This was the girls, not the fellows. I said, "Well, nobody said no." My father believed in education and my mother believed in education.

Redman: I wanted to ask a little bit about your parents, actually, and ask what they were like.

01-00:15:44
Hoffman: They were from Europe; they were from Romania. I think my father came over when he was sixteen, my mother when she was thirteen. On my mother's side, the reason that she had—I think their families were very close. One of their cousins was very bright, and they wanted her to have an education, so they sent her to America. And at a later date, she came back, took my mother and her own sister to America. So that's how they arrived.

Redman: Were your parents religious at all?

01-00:16:55
Hoffman: I think my mother's family was, not my father's, because my father didn't believe in all that stuff. My father must've had brothers here, because I think he was the second youngest. He came when he was sixteen.

Redman: All right. So can I ask about the Great Depression? You'd mentioned that as a child, you'd sort of roll with these experiences or adapt fairly quickly. But do you recall how that may have affected your parents or any of your neighbors or family friends at all?

01-00:17:47
Hoffman: We were very aware of it. Fortunately, my family never went on welfare. Some families did, but our family never did. Somehow, they still made a living.

Redman: How many siblings did you have?

01-00:18:07
Hoffman: I had two sisters and one brother.

Redman: I'm sorry, what were you going to say? About the Depression, how the Depression affected—

01-00:18:17
Hoffman: Well, you knew. Nothing was hidden from the kids, really, except things they didn't want you to know. But you knew that the breadlines—you knew this, that and the next thing. I don't think we were ever deprived of anything. But nobody ran up credit bills. There wasn't the competition I think they have nowadays. The credit cards were never in existence. We never had charge accounts. I think maybe with the butcher or the grocery store, until next week or something; but you didn't live on credit.

Redman: So let me ask, what sort of occupation did you think you were going to have, or were hoping to have, when you were in college?

01-00:19:27
Hoffman: I knew that psychology wouldn't get me anywhere without higher degrees, and I wasn't interested in going on in school. I thought it was too artificial for

living. Somehow I always had jobs. When I got out of the University, there was a radio code research project going, and I was hired for that.

Redman: On the campus of the University?

01-00:20:07
Hoffman: No, it was downtown, in Chicago. But I'm sure the employment office had a listing. I became a friend of the man who was in charge of the project.

Redman: Was it mostly women working on the project?

01-00:20:30
Hoffman: Yes, yeah.

Redman: Many of them young, recent college graduates like yourself?

01-00:20:35
Hoffman: I don't know. I don't remember too much about them. We were friendly, but I don't think we became intimate friends.

Redman: So this was after the war had started, is that correct?

01-00:20:54
Hoffman: That's right.

Redman: In downtown Chicago. About how long did you work there, do you know? Do you remember?

01-00:21:04
Hoffman: Not too long, because I didn't think I was accomplishing anything there. I think I left and took a trip to Los Angeles, from that.

Redman: That was maybe in '42, '43, sort of at the start of the war?

01-00:21:26
Hoffman: It would be '43.

Redman: '43, okay. I'd like to ask one more question about this. When you were crossing the border into California, and this representative from Kaiser came on—I know they were recruiting people from all over the country, but did you get any sort of a feel of who was on this bus with you? Were there people from all over that seemed interested?

01-00:21:56
Hoffman: Well, I don't remember those things. I don't remember interacting with anybody on the bus, except my friend.

Redman: Your friend was interested in Kaiser, as well?

01-00:22:18
Hoffman: Well, yes. First of all, we needed a place to live, and here he was holding one out to us. Secondly, we were going to need money.

Redman: Now, Neil, I'd like to switch to you for a moment and ask, because this intersects with your parents' story, from what you told me, in that they had jobs at the shipyards. Is that correct?

01-00:22:45
Dillon, O: They came up from LA because of the work available up here, as did many people. The jobs were up here.

Redman: Can you tell me a little bit about who they were and what they were like?

01-00:22:57
Dillon, O: Well, my mother came from Russia, from Ukraine. She was sent with 200 other children, on a kinder transport to America, to get away from the persecution of the Jews in that part of the world. It took them two years to reach New York. She learned four, five or six different languages during that time. [chuckles] Wound up in New York. Had a relative there who taught her the fur finishing business. She worked in the garment industry, and she was involved in *the* first labor action in America, the Garment Workers of the—What was—?

Dillon, M: Women's Garment Workers.

Hoffman: Oh, yes.

01-00:23:46
Dillon, O: There was a big strike.

Dillon, M: There was a big strike.

Redman: Is this following the Triangle Shirtwaist fire?

01-00:23:51
Dillon, M: Yeah, some years after that.

01-00:23:53
Dillon, O: Yeah. But it was one of *the* first labor actions in America. She went to jail, actually. She got arrested.

Hoffman: Oh, did she? Oh. Good for—

Dillon, O: She was a union activist.

Hoffman: All my life, or at least the life I remember, I have admired strong women. Somehow, I started being attracted to them from the very beginning.

Dillon, M: And she was strong.

Hoffman: And she was one of them.

01-00:24:23
Dillon, O: Well, she had to be. She had to survive. She never saw her family again, after ‘15. They were wiped out in World War II.

Dillon, M: No, World War I, Neil.

01-00:24:37
Dillon, O: Wait a second. No, no. They were wiped out when the Nazis went through there, later on. She came over in 19—

Dillon, M: Fifteen.

01-00:24:48
Dillon, O: In 1915. But never saw her family again after that.

Redman: And then your father?

01-00:24:55
Dillon, O: Well, so she came to LA. There were friends in LA, and she was working in the garment industry. My father immigrated from India, came to UC Berkeley, sent by his family, to study agriculture. They had land in the Punjab. He was a Sikh in Northern India, and they sent him for education at UC Berkeley and Davis, in agriculture. He never went back, for obvious reasons. He had an arranged marriage when he was a teenager.

Hoffman: Oh? [chuckles]

01-00:25:29
Dillon, O: He was like seventeen, had an arranged marriage, and had a son by that marriage. So I have a half-brother in India, who plows his field with white oxen. The two finest white oxen in the village. So they met and married in Los Angeles.

Dillon, M: He was working as an extra.

01-00:25:52
Dillon, O: He worked in the movie business, as an extra. Very handsome fellow, and had aspirations.

Hoffman: Oh, yes. Yes, he was. I knew his father.

Redman: He had aspirations of breaking into the film industry.

01-00:26:03
Dillon, O: Right. And did big parts. Actually was in *Gunga Din*, the movie *Gunga Din*. He had a drinking problem, and they fought their whole lives. Later on, were

divorced. But at that point, they were still married, and we came up for work up here. My earliest memory, actually, is being on some kind of transport. I think it was a train car, coming up from LA. I remember the green in this car. Plus there were a lot of people dressed in olive drab. So these were the soldiers. So this whole memory of green. And it was kind of smoky. I must've been about two, three, two and a half, three, something like that. So it's my earliest memory.

Redman: So you get some of these vague memories, that then you have to dissect a little later. What did that mean?

01-00:27:06

Dillon, O: But that was coming up on the train, with all these troops moving, during the war.

Redman: Both of your parents were attracted to the shipyards, in particular, then, at that time? Or what sorts of jobs did they get when they got here?

01-00:27:20

Dillon, O: Specifically for the shipyard. Applied, and both worked in the shipyards. My mother was a welder. That welding helmet of hers was in the garage for many years afterwards, and my brother and I and all our friends would play with it, for years on end, the big welding hat. I don't remember what my dad did in the shipyards, but they both worked in the shipyards.

Redman: Did your mother talk about, then later, taking a welding class or some sort of certification program?

01-00:27:54

Dillon, O: She didn't. I didn't know what the training was.

Redman: I know many of them went to Oakland High School, or a high school in Oakland, and some of them trained onsite at the Kaiser Shipyards. But sometimes Kaiser would hire them and send them to Oakland. Yeah, so let's see. So you were fairly young, obviously, when your parents arrived. Did you start in school right away?

01-00:28:25

Hoffman: He was four, in the child care center, because he was in the four-year-old group. Eugene was in the five.

Dillon, O: My brother.

Redman: So you came with your brother, Eugene, who was about one year older.

01-00:28:42

Hoffman: Older.

Redman: Ruth, I'd like to ask if you could maybe paint me a picture, then, of when you arrived at Kaiser.

01-00:28:51
Hoffman: Okay. As I say, we were lodged in the dormitory.

Redman: In Richmond.

01-00:28:58
Hoffman: The dormitory had a lot of women, and a lot of women were extremely, I'd say, rough, tough women. Here are two—

Dillon, O: University of Chicago grads? [laughter]

Hoffman: Graduates. Actually, in many ways, we had a protected life, because we had parents who took care of us. These women were an eye-opener.

Redman: Many of them from the South? Many of them from the Midwest?

01-00:29:37
Hoffman: No, I don't remember class or race difference. Anyway, Adeline and I were put in welding. We took the graveyard shift. Don't ask why because I can't remember. But we were gung-ho on everything.

Redman: I know it was more money.

01-00:30:05
Hoffman: I don't remember that. At any rate, we were going to learn how to weld. So the instructor that we had was a very nice human being, and we spent hours talking to him. We must have welded, or been learning how to weld, and our complexions suffered. We broke out. At that point, Kaiser had a doctor available for their workers, so she and I went to the doctor. The doctor said, "If you want to keep your complexions, get out of welding." He said that. [Dillon and Redman laugh] So then we went to the personnel man. The personnel man, I remember, was a very tall, large man. He became indignant. "You should have come to me first," and blah-blah-blah. He swore at us. He really swore at us. Here again, nobody'd talked to us like that. So he kept swearing, so at one point, Adeline swore at him, and then he became civil.

At that point, you could not change jobs; the War Manpower Commission was on. So we went to the War Manpower Commission, and there was Maude B. Porter, a wonderful woman. Just wonderful. She said, "No problem. You're both college graduates. We have child care centers here. We have jobs for you." So that's how we got our jobs. We became very good friends with Mrs. Porter, and on holidays, she invited us. She lived in Berkeley, in some apartment somewhere, and we would walk down the hills on stairs, so there're areas where there are stairs in—

Dillon, O: Oh, yeah. Lots of paths.

01-00:32:40
Hoffman: She would invite us on the holidays, whatever they were, Christmas or whatever, and we became very good friends. Mrs. Porter had a former daughter-in-law, in San Francisco, and when she would come to visit, she always came to see us, so our friendship continued. When I went to visit some friends in Kansas, at one point, on the way back I went to visit her. She was in Kansas City, Kansas or Missouri, I don't remember which. She was living there then, and I always saw her. And she used to come and visit us, even after my marriage.

Redman: Mrs. Porter—you said her first name was Maude, is that correct—she was part of the War Manpower Commission?

01-00:33:48
Hoffman: She was working at the War Manpower Commission. That's how we met.

Redman: By that initial contact with the War Manpower Commission, asking permission to change jobs. That's a wonderful story.

01-00:34:02
Hoffman: Yeah, we had no trouble.

01-00:34:06
Dillon, O: She could understand the issue of complexions. [they laugh] The guy couldn't.

Redman: Wasn't important to him.

01-00:34:13
Dillon, O: And a better use of resources, if you have college educated people. A better use of your training.

Redman: Yeah. Put them into something like the child care center. I want to just step back one moment and ask about the healthcare plan at Kaiser, because that was a pretty innovative—

01-00:34:36
Hoffman: Very. Kaiser's brother-in-law was a physician, and he was in charge of it.

Redman: I think something like 98 percent or 99 percent of the employees at the Kaiser Shipyards signed up for the healthcare plan.

01-00:34:55
Hoffman: Well, I don't remember all the details. But obviously, if a doctor saw us, we were covered.

Redman: Tell me about what the school was like when you arrived there.

01-00:35:13
Hoffman: It was the on one 10th and Florida, I think.

Redman: You have a picture here.

01-00:35:22
Dillon, O: Is this the one that we visited?

Hoffman: Yeah.

Dillon, O: So it's basically this one.

Hoffman: Yeah.

Dillon, O: That was it. That's what it looked like.

01-00:35:42
Hoffman: That was a very modern one. We had an upstairs. At first, they had the children take naps upstairs, and then they decided if it was a fire hazard, we couldn't do that. So we had the beds, nap time on the main floor.

Dillon, O: It was nap time. Nap time, you remember that?

Hoffman: That's right. That's how they were.

Dillon, O: I thought it was bizarre to say, "Go lie down." It was like, "Really?"

Redman: "Why do I have to do that?"

01-00:36:16
Hoffman: The restless ones you would sit next to and put your hand on their back and put them to sleep.

Dillon, O: Oh, yeah. That worked with my youngest son, Michael, actually.

Redman: Tell me about how the age groups were divided up at that time.

01-00:36:33
Hoffman: Well, the four-year-olds were in the room next to ours. We were the five-year-olds. There were characters in these kids already. Neil's brother was very—well, they were both very bright. But O'Neil's brother—

Dillon, O: Eugene.

Hoffman: —Eugene, stayed with me long after I left the school. I always remembered Eugene. And I'll tell you why. When we got married, I knew they were living in Berkeley, and the two of them were out playing catch of some kind. We came, because I wanted Eugene to meet him. Eugene was very concerned about whom I would marry. [Dillon laughs] Well, he was. This is a five-year-

old kid. He one day asked me who I lived with. I was living with Adeline, so I told him. He said, "Well, when a man comes to you, wants to marry you, you ask him if he drinks. And if he drinks, you send him away." This was a five-year-old. How could you forget that kind of five-year-old? He also used to be very funny, but I couldn't laugh in the class. When I would be angry and I would say something to the kids, he would go like this. Hitler. I thought it was very funny, but I never—

Dillon, O: Oh, yeah? He'd do a sieg heil? I never heard that before.

Hoffman: I couldn't laugh. You would lose all the discipline. [laughter] Eugene was priceless.

Dillon, O: He later became a teacher, on his own, and he used a lot of humor in the classroom.

01-00:38:34
Hoffman: I'm sure. I'm sure.

Dillon, O: Got the kids' attention!

Hoffman: Well, it was there. The little girls I don't remember too well. I remember one, when she had a birthday once and her mother was picking her up from the group. The mother said, "Well, she had a birthday yesterday." I said, "Fine." I said, "How was it," and so forth and so on. "What did she get?" Some green things. The green things were money. [they laugh]

Redman: No concept.

01-00:39:14
Hoffman: Yeah. Well, it was amazing to watch. We had an incident. We had a new teacher, and she happened to be black, okay? She was very well trained. She was one of the few college graduates at that point, because we had a lot of older women who were teachers. They'd come back to the workforce because of the war. She was good. She was very good. And she was assigned to our room. This one day—I remember the kid, Morgan, Morgan Coolie. His mother came to pick him up and the mother's crying away, and I thought, "Gee, something happened in the family," what have you. So I went over to the mother and I asked if I could help her or something. She said that she was taking him out because of the teacher.

Dillon, O: Because she was black?

01-00:40:28
Hoffman: I said to her, "I'm very sorry to hear it." I said, "Morgan was doing very well here, and she is one of our best teachers." And she was. She was really good. She took him out.

Redman: So there was still an element of racism that played itself out at the school.

01-00:40:49

Hoffman: Two weeks later, she comes back with Morgan. Morgan comes back. Great. We welcome Morgan, no big deal. We had one kid named Lawrence, and he was a problem at times. Lawrence was on a bicycle, going around. They were playing bus stop. So there were a couple of kids waiting to be picked up. So Lawrence starts in, "Eenie meenie minah moe." And Morgan says, "Come on." He says, "Come on, pick me up. We don't say that anymore." If you were free to do what you want to do, I would've rushed over and given him a hug. But you can't do that. You just have to act as if it's the most normal thing in the world. And that's all it is.

Dillon, O: Well, that's great.

01-00:41:47

Hoffman: That was a high point. That kid would never be prejudiced after that. He wasn't; his mother was. But that's how prejudice starts, with the parents.

Redman: The age groups, what was the youngest?

01-00:42:15

Hoffman: I don't remember what they started with. I don't really know. I don't remember anything besides these two groups.

Redman: So definitely four-year-olds and five-year-olds.

01-00:42:34

Hoffman: And five-year-olds, yeah.

Redman: But there might've been more.

01-00:42:37

Hoffman: When we went in that time, did they mention if they were younger than three, four?

Dillon, O: I don't remember.

Hoffman: I don't think so.

Dillon, O: We went back and toured the school. The Park Service gave us a—

Hoffman: Yeah. And it looked different. [chuckles] Well, we have an adult view now.

Redman: Let me ask quickly before I get back to details of what the school was like, when you guys visited the school together, what sort of an experience was that like for the two of you?

01-00:43:10
Hoffman: Well, it wasn't what I wanted to do for any great length of time.

Dillon, O: No, I came up with this idea. I said, "Ruth, let's go do this. Let's go back."

Hoffman: It was too one-sided. Kids are fine, but don't forget, I was young. I got promoted from being just a teacher to—whether the term was supervisor or director, whatever. So I was in charge of the school, another school. It was the Washington School. The head of the child care centers was Mrs. Boucher, Erlich Boucher. She was another one of these women I would be attracted to as people.

Redman: A strong woman.

01-00:44:20
Hoffman: Strong women. She promoted me to the—whether it was head teacher or—there was a term, but I don't remember if it was supervisor or what. I was the head of that school. Well, when I went into it—and this is, I'm sure, why she was interested in me for the job—the kids, at lunch time, would run all over the place. They didn't sit and eat. Whoever was directing them at that point let them run all over the place. I didn't. In no time, they were sitting. They'd eat their meal, and then they were dismissed. She was very impressed with that. Then the school we visited became—I guess there was a Mrs. Tilles who was the head of it. For some reason she left and I got that school. So I was back then.

Dillon, O: As a supervisor?

Hoffman: Or whatever, the head of the—

Dillon, O: Principal. Principal.

Hoffman: That became a little boring to me.

Redman: So initially, you really loved teaching and you were good at it.

01-00:45:48
Hoffman: Well, I liked it. I liked it because it was what I was doing.

Redman: Right. So tell me about arriving in this new place. A lot of these students are the children of the shipyard workers. You described that some of them could be quite different.

01-00:46:09
Hoffman: Oh, yeah.

Redman: In terms of behavior and attitudes.

01-00:46:12

Hoffman: Yeah. Well, there was another one that I worked on, Billy Bob.

Dillon, O: Billy Bob. [laughs]

Hoffman: Billy Bob, so you know he's from the South.

Dillon, O: You know he's from the South.

Hoffman: He had temper tantrums, he spit, he bit people. Well, you don't do that. When I'm there, you don't do that. So I worked on him. I don't know if you want all these details.

Redman: Oh, absolutely, yes.

01-00:46:47

Hoffman: Okay. If he was going to spit, he was going to spit in the toilet. What's more boring than to look at the toilet and spit in the toilet? So that didn't last long, and he stopped spitting. Then I took him to the zoo one Saturday, just him. He had a father, but no mother. Whatever happened, I don't know. I didn't have a car; we went by bus. So crossing the bridge he looks at the water, and then he says, "When do they pull the plug?" [laughter] Fine. Then we got to the zoo. At that time, there was a chimpanzee who made a lot of noise with those iron bars, hitting the fence. Then when people gathered around, he'd spit at them. So Billy Bob says, "Oh, he shouldn't do that." I said, "No, Billy Bob. Where should he spit?" "In the toilet." [laughter]

Dillon, O: So you're using that psychology that you had training in.

Hoffman: Yeah, yeah, that they don't teach you in college.

Redman: Right, they didn't teach that at the University of Chicago.

01-00:48:19

Hoffman: You know the thing I objected to in college? You did not learn how to be a well-adjusted person. You don't. The teachers themselves aren't that well adjusted.

Dillon, O: But what I'm impressed with, Ruth, is you didn't say, "You've got to stop doing this." You said, "You can keep doing this, but this is where you do it." That was really smart.

Hoffman: That's right. But you have to—

Dillon, O: It's psychologically smart.

Hoffman: —rely on yourself. There are no books that tell you how to do this or that. There's no books that go through all this. Maybe now, but at that time, there weren't.

Redman: You were sort of learning by doing.

Redman: To a large extent, it sounds like it. Did you learn from some of the others teachers? Or did you help some of the other teachers?

01-00:49:06
Hoffman: I don't remember. I don't remember. But I learned from the—

Dillon, O: I'll be back. Keep going, keep going.

Redman: You're hooked up.

01-00:49:14
Dillon, O: Oh, I'm hooked up. That's all right.

Begin Audio File 2 03-31-2011.mp3

Redman: I'm back with Ruth Hoffman and O'Neil Dillon. It's March 31, 2011, and this is our second tape. Neil, when we were in the break there, we were talking a little bit about your mother. Ruth, we were talking about if you remembered meeting different parents and what parents were like. And you had some memories of his mother, is that correct?

02-00:00:28
Hoffman: Oh, yes. I had met his father, too.

Redman: Can you tell me about what they were like?

02-00:00:39
Hoffman: Well, his mother was warm. Your mother was a warm person.

Dillon, O: Like hot. Tempestuously warm.

02-00:00:47
Hoffman: Well, but I react well to people who are warm.

Dillon, O: I'm sorry.

Hoffman: No, this is fine.

Redman: No, she had a favorite personality, from the sounds of it.

02-00:01:00
Hoffman: Yeah. She was bright, very bright. And she wasn't afraid to tell her opinion. My room had a big table, and the kids sat around it at time. We were working

on something, and I hear one kid say, “Jesus makes it rain.” Somebody else, “Jesus makes it snow,” and so forth and so on. Eugene pops up. He says, “Is that right, Miss Rubin?”

Redman: Oh, wow.

02-00:01:54
Hoffman: That’s Eugene. I said to Eugene, “Some people believe it, and” I said, “some people don’t believe it.” I said, “It does not make it wrong, not to believe.” Then when your mother came in, I told her. She said, “Well, we’re not exposing them to religion now. We’re going to let them decide what they want at a later date.” I said, to me that was fine. To somebody else, it might not have been, but this was my—I didn’t have a big religious background, so it didn’t bother me at all.

Redman: Neil, your mother, she had been raised in the Jewish tradition, culturally, but was she religious at all?

02-00:02:49
Dillon, O: She was not religious. Jewish culture was an important thing, but she was really anti-religious.

Redman: As part of the American Communist party, then, that would make sense with that world view, right?

02-00:03:06
Dillon, O: Right, right.

Redman: How about your father then? He had been raised—

02-00:03:11
Dillon, O: As a Sikh.

Redman: But did he continue practicing?

02-00:03:14
Dillon, O: He did not. So again, it was more cultural, but not religious. So we had no religious upbringing, in that regard. It was really the other way around. It was very anti-religious, on my mother’s part. My dad just didn’t argue with her.

Redman: How about his view politically? Was he communist himself?

02-00:03:39
Dillon, O: No.

Redman: So did his views ever clash with your mother’s? You sort of mentioned that maybe he might not have—

02-00:03:46

Dillon, O: Well, let me ask Ruth. Ruth, did you figure out why Gene was telling you, watch out if the guys drink?

Hoffman: Because your father drank.

Dillon, O: He told you that? Or you knew that, you figured that out.

Hoffman: I don't remember that.

Dillon, O: But you knew, yeah.

Hoffman: But I knew. But it'd have to be in his background.

Dillon, O: Experience, yeah.

Hoffman: It's just sad. It's very sad that he—

Dillon, O: So my father had a drinking—I'm sorry.

Hoffman: That's all right. It's just very sad for a child to have that kind of burden. An adult, too.

Dillon, O: You get what you get, right?

Hoffman: Well, I know, I know.

Dillon, O: Can't pick your parents.

Hoffman: You can't pick your parents.

Dillon, O: But my mom and dad really never got along very well. His drinking was a problem, and they fought all the time. So it was quite dramatic.

Redman: You can't recall what your father did at Kaiser; but did he ever tell any other stories about what it was like? In particular, what it was like to be Sikh in the US or to have that sort of a cultural background or a racial background? Or was there any sort of stories passed down about that experience?

02-00:05:07

Dillon, O: No. No, that never came up. He didn't talk about it.

Redman: And then your mom's political viewpoint certainly would've been, though the American Communist Party was comparatively thriving by our standards today, that would've been, still, a pretty controversial viewpoint to some. She seemed like a pretty strong-willed person, but did you ever see some of the push back against her ideas or viewpoints?

02-00:05:39
Dillon, O: Maybe that's what they fought about, a little. Not really. Not really. The Communist Party, in those days—the Russians were our allies. They were the only ones fighting the Germans, in the early part of the war. As one of my friends' mothers said, who was also a Communist in those days, she said, *everybody* was a Communist in those days, especially if you lived in Berkeley.

Redman: Right, certainly. Yeah.

02-00:06:11
Dillon, M: Neil, do say your mom took you and Eugene to the Friends' church. Because that explains her position.

02-00:06:22
Dillon, O: Well, you mean anti-war?

Dillon, M: Yeah. That was her political position.

Redman: She did take you to the Quaker meetings.

02-00:06:30
Dillon, O: When my brother and I were teenagers.

Hoffman: Yeah, but I think they chose it, didn't you?

Dillon, O: No, no, no, no.

Hoffman: Oh, she did.

Dillon, O: So Anna had an idea. This is when the draft still existed. So she wanted to turn us into conscientious objectors.

Hoffman: She's right.

Dillon, O: So she said, "I know, I'll take them to the Quaker church, downtown Berkeley." Opposite Pete's, that Quaker church. You know that one?

Redman: Yeah, I know exactly where.

02-00:06:52
Dillon, O: So here this, what, sixteen- and seventeen-year-old, or fifteen- and sixteen-year-old go into this Quaker church, we sit down, nobody's saying anything.

Redman: It's totally silent.

02-00:07:01
Dillon, O: Yeah. And we're sitting there thinking, this is bizarre. Then after about ten minutes, someone stands up and says a few words and sits down, and then everybody's quiet again. We thought, "This doesn't make any sense." So she

got us there a second time, but that was the end of it. It never worked after that.

Redman: Do you remember what she may have talked about, in terms of her job at Kaiser, about that experience was like for her, as a welder?

02-00:07:35

Dillon, O: Well, now I'm what, four or five, five years old. I don't remember. They'd just go off to work. I don't remember them talking about what the work experience was like, or complaints about it or anything about that. I was too young.

Redman: Do you remember anything about going to school in the morning, what that would've been like?

02-00:08:01

Dillon, O: Well, I remember a number of things from school. One was the fire escape. Because we would have fire drills.

Hoffman: Oh. Yeah, yeah.

Dillon, O: Right? Remember those?

Redman: And it looks like a giant, fun slide.

02-00:08:19

Dillon, O: It's a slide. So when we would have fire drills, we'd all get to go out, down this slide. That was unforgettable.

Redman: Yeah, that's a pretty amazing set up.

02-00:08:29

Dillon, O: So that was one issue.

Hoffman: But that's why they stopped having the beds upstairs.

Dillon, O: Upstairs.

Hoffman: We had to set them up every afternoon.

Dillon, O: Oh, because of the fire risk. Yeah, well, then we didn't have any more fire drills after that, I guess. Or at least not down the slide. So that was one issue. The other issue was the nap time, which I showed you. I remember the naps. And just vague memories of the school itself and the other kids. But that was about it.

02-00:09:09

Hoffman: Well, when a parent had a day off, the kid was having a day off from school. So you'd hear the day before, oh, tomorrow I have a day off, from the kids. I

used to think, "You need a day off. You need to be away from all the people and all the disturbance and what have you. My husband is asleep."

Dillon, O: That's okay, that's okay. I do have another memory, and I have a cutout from a newspaper. It shows a group of kids, from *The Richmond Independent* newspaper. This was around Christmas. It's a picture of kids on this stage, who were doing the Christmas plays at that time. I don't remember the picture being taken, but I remember they gathered us up in the evening, in a group, and we went off—we just followed each other, and they told us to all stand right here, and we were standing right there. Then the curtain opened. I was unaware of what this was. This big curtain opened, and there were all these people out there, including your parents. We were there looking out. I remember that very dramatically, because—

Redman: Kind of freaking everybody out.

02-00:10:38
Dillon, O: Right.

Hoffman: I don't remember that. I don't remember Christmas there.

Dillon, O: Yeah, there were plays that the kids did.

Redman: So your career as a Hollywood actor may be not quite as extensive as your father's.

02-00:10:53
Dillon, O: Right.

Redman: Right. As soon as those curtained opened—

Dillon, M: Sam, may I just say one thing about [Dillon's] father? You asked about his father's political affiliations or whatnot. But there was quite a large Indian Sikh community all through California and Central California, and your father was a part of that, and you were, too.

Redman: Can you can talk about your father's involvement?

Dillon, M: So you don't want to give the impression that your father had no community.

02-00:11:22
Dillon, O: No cultural— Oh, right.

Redman: Can you talk a little bit about your father's experience in California? Actually, I'm going to pause. [audio file stops & restarts]

02-00:11:34
Dillon, O: —was in her papers, after she died.

Redman: Tell me about what this clipping is.

02-00:11:43
Dillon, O: Well, this is a clipping that has to do with the children of the Maritime Child Care Center putting on a nativity scene. My memory of it was that they gathered us together as a group and they took us to this place. They said, all you guys stand here, and then these curtains opened. I had no idea that we were standing on a stage and that there was an audience out there, including your parents. So this was that experience.

Redman: Would this have been maybe over the lunch hour?

02-00:12:15
Dillon, O: No, this was in the evening.

Hoffman: It doesn't say where it was.

Dillon, O: I don't know where a theater was, but there we are.

Redman: You'd mentioned that there was also a photograph of your mother in a very typical Rosie-the-Riveter—if you could just describe it for me.

02-00:12:43
Dillon, O: Oh. Well, you know that bandana? That one? And a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. I don't know if the Rosie the Riveter—well, she had tuberculosis as a child, and actually had a—they had surgery on her knee, so she couldn't bend one leg. So she had this stiff leg, which she was terrified that when she came through Ellis Island, that if they found out she had tuberculosis, she would've been sent back. But at any rate, so the picture is of her, looking kind of like Rosie the Riveter, with an arm akimbo. Tough lady. You wouldn't want to cross her. [they laugh]

Redman: Ruth, I want to ask about some of these kids. One of the things I wanted to ask about was discipline. From the sounds of it, you were able to whip them into shape pretty quickly. Did the kids need any special discipline, did you think? Or were they very well behaved once they arrived in school?

02-00:14:00
Hoffman: I don't remember. I just remember the ones that I had my specialties with, let's put it that way. I don't remember. As a rule, you didn't have a lot of disturbance. But the ones who disturbed, you had to take care of it; otherwise, you lose the whole group.

Redman: For both of you, my impression is that art was something that was really emphasized in these child care centers, and that drawing and painting was something that the kids did.

02-00:14:45

Hoffman: Oh, we had a woman artist. I think Haley was her last name. She came around every week, and we had drawing sessions. We had finger painting; we had easels. So you expose them to things. We read to them. We always had stories. We had free play time, but there was also quiet time. You just didn't let them run without—

Dillon, O: It doesn't sound like you had a major problem dealing with the behavior.

Hoffman: No, no. Well, the ones we had were individual, but nothing—

Dillon, O: Yeah, then you'd design a program for them. But it didn't sound like you felt the class was out of control or it was just like—

Hoffman: Oh, no, no, no. Never. Never. It was the adult.

Dillon, O: You taking responsibility here? [laughter]

Hoffman: Well—

Dillon, O: It doesn't sound like behavior was a problem.

Hoffman: No. No.

Redman: Do you remember any of the art—finger painting or things like that—very early on?

02-00:16:06

Dillon, O: Actually, I do not. We did go to the art show of the children's art.

Hoffman: Yeah. Looking for the work.

Dillon, O: I was looking for my name on these things.

Hoffman: No, we didn't see anything.

Dillon, O: So I don't remember much of that.

Hoffman: No, no.

Redman: You'd mentioned being told to take a nap as sort of being like, "why do I need to lay down?"

02-00:16:27

Hoffman: That was routine. That was routine. I think the kids grew ready for it, because they actually did sleep. Being with a group day in and day out is very hard. It's hard for adults; it's twice as hard, or more, for children. As I say, when the

kids used to say, “Oh, I have a day off,” I used to think, “Good. You need time away from all this, because it’s wearing. It’s very wearing.”

Dillon, O: For me, it was a new routine.

Hoffman: That’s right.

Dillon, O: I thought it was a little strange, but I went along with the program.

Redman: Right, yeah. So reading and quiet time, do any of those components of the routine stand out, other than taking naps? It sort of mimics my early—I kept taking naps through high school and college, which might’ve been a problem.

02-00:17:23
Dillon, O: [he and Hoffman] Oh, you were into naps.

Redman: Right, yeah.

02-00:17:28
Dillon, O: Not really.

Redman: Do you have some early memories about some of the other students?

02-00:17:35
Dillon, O: Not specifically. But as a group. I remember there was a whole group of kids in the neighborhood, and you would all be running around together doing things. We lived in maritime housing. There was a lagoon in back, full of water, so we made rafts that you could then get on and push out into this water. There was a lot of activity in the evening. In those days, the kids would just go out. The parents would not have to hover over them. We could go out and play in the evening, and we did that a lot. Let me see if I have a picture of—kids like this. That’s my brother and myself and one of our friends at maritime housing.

Redman: So that’s maritime housing in the background.

02-00:18:34
Dillon, O: Yeah, this is maritime housing. You want me to run through some of these?

Redman: Yeah.

02-00:18:42
Dillon, O: Here’s the kids. You asked about kids; here are kids.

Redman: Do you remember what group of children this is?

02-00:18:48
Dillon, O: Just neighbors. Neighbor kids. And dogs. Dogs were popular. A lot of dogs.

Redman: The housing units may have had dogs. Okay. One of the questions I have is, we talked about kids running around, playing around in the neighborhood. I know there were three different shifts at Kaiser. There was the day shift, the swing, and then the night. With the kids, then, I assume parents might have to coordinate that or that sometimes their kids would be in the day care center. Maybe parents, then, wouldn't do a night shift?

02-00:19:28

Dillon, O: I don't ever remember my parents being away at night, or that special arrangements were made to take care of us. I don't think they were on the night shift.

Hoffman: I don't think so, either, because they had to pick them up at a certain time. I think we closed at six. We didn't run during the night in our child care centers.

Redman: But up until 6:00 o'clock in the evening.

02-00:19:54

Hoffman: I think it was.

02-00:19:56

Dillon, O: So here are some more children. That's my mother. If you notice, my brother and I are on the outside of the group, one on one side, one on the other. I don't know if you can see the steel plates on our shoes, the toes. That was to help make them last longer.

Redman: So there was a shoe ration at that time. I never realized that.

02-00:20:20

Hoffman: Yeah, yeah.

Redman: Did your parents put those on?

02-00:20:26

Dillon, O: Yeah. There was—

Hoffman: Probably a shoemaker.

Dillon, O: Well, there was a real effort to preserve things, and shoes was a big one because kids can wear out shoes just like that. So that was always an issue, in terms of when we had shoes.

Hoffman: I don't remember those.

Dillon, O: Tap. What do they call those things? The metal plates on the heel. So it was a money issue.

Redman: So Ruth, I want to ask, how well prepared—

02-00:20:58
Dillon, O: Wait, she wants to look at the pictures. I'll show you the pictures here. So my brother and I and my father, if you want to—

Redman: Yeah, of course. That's great.

02-00:21:12
Hoffman: Your father's good looks don't show up on this picture.

Redman: He was a tall—well, I suppose you're children, but he looks quite tall in that.

02-00:21:19
Dillon, O: So here's my mom and dad and my brother and myself. We're both holding puppies.

Redman: Did you have dogs?

02-00:21:28
Dillon, O: Yes, always. Always. Big important thing. Well, here's my mother holding puppies, the tail end of a dog.

Redman: This is, again, at the—

02-00:21:46
Dillon, O: At maritime housing. And the most memorable memory of maritime housing was learning about how you kill a chicken, cut its head off. See this thing flying around? Because people would butcher their own chickens, right? That was unforgettable, as a child, let me tell you, to see a chicken without a head, flying around. Did you ever see that, Ruth?

Hoffman: No.

Dillon, O: Never saw that?

Hoffman: No.

Redman: Wow! I can imagine. Because people say in Richmond, that area replaced true farmland, in the sense that people had goats and chickens and things like that in their yards. But they still had the chickens at the maritime housing.

02-00:22:35
Dillon, O: Right. Yes, they did. [they laugh] Fresh, they was fresh.

Hoffman: I can top that. My father used to bring live chickens home from the country, when he was out in the country. He would butcher them in the bathtub. Not often, but occasionally. We didn't have a backyard.

Dillon, O: For them to fly around in, without a head.

Redman: Ruth, could I ask, how well prepared do you think most of the students were for preschool?

02-00:23:11

Hoffman: They weren't prepared; they were just there because they needed care during the day. I think those child care centers did a very good job, considering. Considering, number one, it was a wartime thing, which means it was sudden. And that they had enough qualified people was very important. I think they did a good job, really, because now with the private ones, I don't know how they work. But the thing that gets me—remember that case back east somewhere, where the kids supposedly—these are little kids. Little kids don't differentiate in a lot of stuff. They don't know when breakfast is; they don't know when lunch is. It's important. But all the adults took these kids' words for it, that the child care center— it was a family that ran this child care center. They did weird things like something with the devil and something with this and that and the next thing. They committed these people. The adults were found guilty—

Dillon, O: They were persecuted, prosecuted.

Hoffman: —and put in jail. How can you take the kids' word for it? There was a question about that they weren't led by the prosecutors, the investigators.

Dillon, O: Yeah, that was bad.

02-00:24:59

Hoffman: You could. You could put words into a kid's mouth. The other thing that bothers me, you have other adults working there. They know what's going on.

Redman: Right. So let's talk a bit, because you had mentioned that not only your friend was a University of Chicago graduate, but there were other teachers there who had college degrees.

02-00:25:19

Hoffman: They were all older than we were. I don't know what their backgrounds were.

Redman: You were one of the youngest?

02-00:25:28

Hoffman: That's right. They were mostly grandmothers. They had come back to help the situation.

Redman: So some of these women had come out of retirement.

02-00:25:41

Hoffman: Or wherever. Or they have been housewives. They had not worked all these years. When I decided to join Red Cross and go overseas, I was leaving that school, the maritime school. One of the women said to me, "If I were your age, that's exactly what I would do." I thought to myself, "Well, when I'm

your age, I'll say I did it." That's been my philosophy all these years. Do what you want at the time.

Dillon, O: I have a question, Ruth.

Hoffman: Sure.

Dillon, O: My understanding is that this is really the first organized child care program.

Hoffman: It was.

Dillon, O: Were you aware of that at the time? Did you know you guys were being pioneers?

02-00:26:36

Hoffman: No, no. Because what did we know? We got out of school, we had our trip, and we needed a job. That's the way it was. That was the way it was.

Dillon, O: So you were participating in a historical event.

Hoffman: And we didn't know it.

Dillon, O: In multiple issues. But that's one of them.

Hoffman: Not only that, but after we were with Kaiser, we still had the child care jobs, but we moved to San Francisco. Where did we live? The twelfth floor of the YMCA hotel. That was for women only, because that was a hotel that had families and—but what was for women only, and men were not allowed. If a man walked up the stairs, if you saw a man on the twelfth floor, you'd hear, "A man!" He wasn't welcome. So we were just interested in everything. We were meeting new people, we folkdanced every Friday in San Francisco. The first winter that we were in the child care center, it rained Monday through Friday and the weekends were gorgeous. We explored. We had friends, and we went to Mill Valley, and we went here and we went there. We had a ball.

Redman: Let me ask what sort of things you were doing on your off hours, on the weekends. You explained a little bit, but folk dancing in San Francisco?

02-00:28:29

Hoffman: When I lived in the hotel, I met one of the occupants, the male occupants, and every night, we went to a different restaurant to eat. Well, at that age, you explore. You do a lot of things.

Redman: My understanding is that for many of the folks that were living here during the war, it was a stressful time because the war was actually going on, and they were worried about their friends or loved ones overseas; but at the same time, so many people were coming out of the Great Depression, and they finally had

a little money in their pocket, that they were able to go out and do things and enjoy.

02-00:29:18
Hoffman: That's right.

Redman: So that was reflected in your experience, in some sense?

02-00:29:23
Hoffman: Oh, yeah. Well, we had a salary.

Redman: Let me ask about pay.

02-00:29:30
Hoffman: Well, first of all, we got paid on the tenth of the month; once a month, we got paid, in the child care centers. We didn't have a big pocket waiting, so that we could use during that time, so we took odd jobs at night or on our day off. We worked at the theater, as usherettes, and we worked at a cannery on our day off. It all helped.

Redman: There were some other ways to bring in—

02-00:30:23
Hoffman: We needed ready money in between. We didn't have a kitchen, so we had to eat in the cafeteria. There was a big cafeteria on Market Street that we ate at. We did well.

Redman: So can you tell a little bit, was there anything like a Victory garden at the school? Was there any sort of gardening?

02-00:30:48
Hoffman: No, we didn't have that, no. No, these children were too young.

Redman: Too young for activities like that. Did the teachers ever participate in a war bond drive?

02-00:30:59
Hoffman: I don't know. I have no idea. I know we didn't get approached, because first, we didn't have any money. But I don't think we were approached.

Redman: Ruth, I want to ask, you had spent some time working at the shipyards; but what were some of your impressions of what the shipyards were like at that time?

02-00:31:24
Hoffman: Well, I can't tell you because we were just in the learning part, at that point. I never saw a ship at that point.

Redman: Did you ever go to a launching, one of those events?

02-00:31:43
Hoffman: No, never. Never.

Redman: Do either of you have any sort of notion of how many students were at the school or how many teachers were at the school?

02-00:31:57
Hoffman: No, but I don't think we had more than two teachers at a time. I may be wrong, but I don't think—I can't remember how many rooms we had. We had a cook; we had a doctor come in. As I say, we had the art teacher.

Dillon, M: About how many kids would be in your class?

02-00:32:30
Hoffman: I don't know. The picture I had had them all sitting around. I don't even know if I still have the picture. I brought it to the first meeting with you and Eugene.

Redman: One of the things that was mentioned is that a doctor would come to take a look—

02-00:32:49
Hoffman: We had a doctor; a woman doctor came to see the kids.

Redman: Can you tell me about that? Because it strikes me that that's a pretty innovative and progressive—

02-00:33:00
Hoffman: I think it was. I think so. There was no question; the doctor came.

Dillon, O: Once a month? One time? Beginning of the semester? Screen the kids?

Hoffman: I don't know. I don't know.

Dillon, O: You don't remember?

Hoffman: I don't remember. But I know that I even went to her on one occasion, privately. The kids would have impetigo. We treated the impetigo. You had to take the scab off and put purple gentian. Or gentian violet, whatever.

Dillon, O: Gentian, yeah, yeah.

Hoffman: We were always purple. We were always purple. Do you know where to go?

Redman: Should we take a break?

02-00:33:48
Dillon, O: No, we're good. Marsha will look.

Redman: Did the number of—?

02-00:33:53
Hoffman: No, she's taking care of it.

Dillon, O: She's taken care of. Okay.

Redman: Did the number of students at the school stay roughly the same throughout the war?

02-00:34:02
Hoffman: I think we only had so much room for each, so we had a finite number.

Redman: Now, one of the things that I've read is that, towards the end of the war, some workers just left their jobs at the Kaiser Shipyards. But it strikes me that that may have been more applicable to single men who had come to find work at the shipyards, or single women who had found work at the shipyards and then maybe would go home. So did parents provide a little bit more of a stable environment? Did they tend to stay? Or would students ever just disappear?

02-00:34:39
Hoffman: Well, I left the school. I left in '45.

Redman: Did you leave before the end of the war?

02-00:34:49
Hoffman: Oh, yeah.

Redman: You said you got a job with the Red Cross. Is that correct?

02-00:34:56
Hoffman: I went to Europe. At that point, I was accepted by Red Cross for club work. I got as far as Washington, and then the war ended, so the program ended. They didn't need all of us. We were offered jobs in hospitals, and I did not want to work in a hospital. I can't say I quit, because at that time I was terminated. So I went back home. I was always lucky; I had a home to go back to. I did go with the Red Cross two years later, in '47.

Redman: Whereabouts did you—?

02-00:35:57
Hoffman: I went to Europe. Because I had been in the program up until '45 and then had been terminated. I was given a choice, the European theater or the Eastern, and I chose Europe.

Redman: Let me ask a few more questions about the school before we move on to some other themes. I'd like to just ask if there were any volunteers at the school, in addition to the teachers.

02-00:36:33
Hoffman: No, no. Just us. Just us.

Redman: Neil, would you maybe sum up—I know these are very early memories for you, and some of them may be a little spottier than others, and that's perfectly fine. But can you sum up some of your thoughts, and what your brother may have told you were his thoughts, about preschool and sort of this experience of parents working at Kaiser? It's a pretty interesting way to attend an early school.

02-00:37:09

Dillon, O: Right. Again, like Ruth says, it's just living life. This is the way the world went, and we didn't know any different. Well, we were involved in all these activities at a very young age. That's what I remember. All this action. Living in maritime housing, with all the kids, the school activities. It was just a very busy time. A lot of fun, too.

Redman: So it was enjoyable to live in this place with all these other young children and all these dogs.

02-00:37:57

Dillon, O: Dogs, puppies, chickens without their heads on, running around.

Redman: Lots of new experiences.

02-00:38:04

Dillon, O: Getting to slide down a slide. This bell would go off and you'd get to slide down the slide. Sounds good to me. [they laugh]

Redman: I still sort of envy you. Now, I know that Richmond and Oakland grew extremely rapidly during the war, combining this influx of people. Do you have any impression of how this may have affected education in the region, outside of the school? Do you think that others schools were pressured, with the influx of people?

02-00:38:39

Hoffman: I don't know, because this was just the child care center.

Redman: And you had a limit of the number of students you could have, is that right?

02-00:38:45

Hoffman: In each room, I think they did, because they only had so much facility.

Redman: Did you get the impression that there was maybe a wait list or something like that?

02-00:38:56

Hoffman: I don't know because as a teacher you weren't involved with that. I think as the director, or whatever the term was, for the whole school, we had somebody doing the other clerical work. Because I didn't get involved in registering people.

Redman: Were the teachers active at all in a union?

02-00:39:30
Hoffman: No, no, no.

Dillon, O: From my experience, in terms of this question about schooling, our family moved to Berkeley. When the war ended and that job ended, we moved to Berkeley. The primary schools were excellent. There was no problem with that aspect of education for me, going right into the primary schools.

Hoffman: I had the same in Chicago. Years later, you hear how terrible the schools were, but we got accepted everywhere, from high school. We had good education all those years. In Chicago, you never bought a book. When we lived outside of Chicago, our parents had to buy the books. The schools were good. They were really good. And they had two-year college. Nobody got turned away from a college.

Dillon, M: I would like to add one thing about Berkeley, this area, just in terms of O'Neil's experience. It does turn out it helps. O'Neil and his brother were *very* smart kids, and his mother, Anna, advocated for education non-stop. It was her primary responsibility. So I'm just saying, one reason you had good experiences was that your mother made sure you had—even though there was no money, made sure you had—

02-00:41:15
Dillon, O: But the resources were there.

Dillon, M: Resources were there.

Hoffman: That's right. But we had the same.

Dillon, O: In the school system, the resources were there. Let me tell Sam this. Have you heard about the self-educated Jew?

Redman: Well, I've heard that, sort of the concept, in some sense, of cultural—yeah.

02-00:41:35
Dillon, O: *Very* important in the Jewish tradition, education. Even though a lot of Jewish people had minimal formal education, the importance of education in the culture, just enormous.

Redman: Yeah, going back to the tradition of reading the Torah.

02-00:41:54
Dillon, O: So there's this concept of the self-educated Jew.

Dillon, M: Tell him the first movie you ever went to.

02-00:42:03

Dillon, O: No, it wasn't the first movie I went to, but we went to see *The Bicycle Thief* when it came out, the Italian post-war realism. *The Bicycle Thief*. I was seven years old, 1947. This is the kind of thing the family would be involved with.

Redman: Right. Yeah. So pretty advanced. I'd like to ask about the end of the war. The dropping of the atomic bombs, can you tell me about that, from a child's perspective? You would've been, by this time, maybe six. Five, six?

02-00:42:44

Dillon, O: Five, six. I have no memory of the issue of this being a special weapon. So I have no memory of that issue. What about you, Ruth?

Hoffman: I remember when it occurred because it was all—but that was your enemy, so you didn't worry about what was happening to them, because we were concerned with winning.

Dillon, O: Right.

Redman: Ruth, I have two more questions about events that happened in the Bay Area. In 1944, there was a massive explosion—

02-00:43:25

Hoffman: In Port Chicago.

Redman: That's right.

02-00:43:27

Hoffman: I lived in San Francisco and I had no idea where Port Chicago was. But when I worked in Contra Costa County later, much later, I realized where Port Chicago was and what was what and what have you. But at that time, it didn't mean—it was a little blurb in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Redman: So it wasn't a big story at the time?

02-00:44:00

Hoffman: To us, it wasn't because we didn't know that much. It was a giant explosion.

Redman: Do you recall hearing it?

02-00:44:10

Hoffman: Oh, you hear about it. Even now, sometimes they have a program.

Dillon, O: No, you mean at the time. You weren't aware when it happened. You didn't hear it when it exploded.

Hoffman: Well, no, no.

Dillon, O: You were in San Francisco.

Hoffman: We just saw the paper. I didn't live in Port Chicago.

Dillon, O: Yeah, right.

Redman: The other event that I'd like to ask about—we could talk more about the end of the war, as well, if we'd like—in 1946, there was a general strike in Oakland. So following the war, there were a number of strikes. So this would've been perhaps before you had left for Europe. But in Oakland, there was a major general strike.

02-00:44:49
Hoffman: I was not here in '46.

Redman: By '46, you'd gone—

02-00:44:57
Hoffman: I left at the end of '46, so I don't remember that at all.

Redman: That's fine. So maybe you could talk a little bit about what the end of the war signaled for your life. You were enrolled, starting in the Red Cross. Did you know that you would continue on in the Red Cross following the war?

02-00:45:23
Hoffman: No. I worked for the Red Cross for one year, because then they disbanded the program. Then I worked for the Army Special Services for a year, in Europe. So I was in Europe for two years.

Redman: Then you came back to the US?

02-00:45:44
Hoffman: Yes, in the end of '47.

Redman: Where did you live at that time?

02-00:45:49
Hoffman: I went back to Chicago, until I decided what I was going to do. Then I returned here, afterwards.

Redman: When you returned to the Bay Area, what sort of occupation did you have?

02-00:46:03
Hoffman: When I what?

Redman: When you returned to the Bay Area then.

02-00:46:07
Dillon, O: What work did you do?

Hoffman: In '48, I think I was in child care centers or nursery schools, whatever they were called, in San Francisco.

Redman: So you continued on a little.

02-00:46:21

Hoffman: Yeah. Then I worked for the probation department in San Francisco, on a temporary basis; and then I worked for the social service department in San Francisco. After that, I had a friend who was the secretary to the probation officer in San Francisco, and all these job applications came across her desk. One day she said to me, "You should go take this test." It was the one in Contra Costa County. Fine. I was working at the social service at that point. So I thought, fine. So I took the test. I had a friend who had a car, and he drove me to the test, which was on a Saturday. I took the test, passed it, and then they had an oral exam, and I was offered the position. I had a friend, whom I had worked with in San Francisco, probation department, on a temporary—it was a temporary program. She was working in Contra Costa County then, probation department, and she saw me when I was there for an interview. She said, "When you're finished, come and see me." She talked me into the job, because she said, "It's a great job."

And it was. It was, because it was a small organization. I was number sixteen. Everybody was first name. The judges would call you by your first name and you had access to the judges, if they wanted to know something and what have you. I took the job. And I needed a car for the job, okay? So I had to go back, because my father would get me a car. Then my father was uptown, so I had to wait, and I couldn't come back in at the time I was supposed to start the job. So I called and talked to the probation officer and told him. He said, "Fine." So when I got the car, I had to drive across country myself. I'm lucky I made it. [laughter] Then I was back at work. Bill had a week's vacation and I had three days for over admission day, and we got married. We went to Reno. I drove; he didn't have a car and he didn't drive. We got married, came back, and I came back to the office and I announced I'd got married. Oh, all the girls. We had a great set up. Our office was here and the secretaries and stenos were right actually down the hall, this far. Every morning, I heard a funny joke from them. Every morning, because we would have coffee with them. So I came back and I worked for two days and I got three days off for the rest of the week, I think. That was the beginning of my life.

02-00:50:26

Dillon, O: As a probation officer.

Hoffman: As a probation officer. Which was great, because you think you did something; you don't know. I'm sure there was some good sometime. When I retired, I got a letter from one of the gals who worked there, telling me that some good had come of one of the cases. When I said to a friend, who had also worked in the department—she's one of those strong women. I said, "The beauty of working there was, number one, we have a decent retirement. Secondly, we made good friends. But the good friends came first."

Redman: Neil, I'd like to ask what happened to you and your brother after the war. You went on to school in Berkeley.

02-00:51:30

Dillon, O: Right. We went through the Berkeley school system. I went to Cal, Gene went to San Francisco State, became a science teacher. Married, had two beautiful daughters, worked in the San Francisco schools, in the middle school, as a science teacher.

Hoffman: Head of his department.

Dillon, O: Ah.

Hoffman: It's what he was. That's what he told me.

Dillon, O: Oh, yes, you're right. You're right. My regret is I never saw him teach. But he was a great practical joker, and would do things to keep the students' attention. He'd do a magic trick, like reach up and pull a ball out of his ear in the middle of a lecture. Or he'd do some other things that you probably don't want on tape. [they laugh] I went to Cal. I then went to UC medical school.

Hoffman: In San Francisco?

Dillon, O: Yeah. I was accepted at the School of Engineering at Cal, out of high school, and then I said," Ah, I think I want to be a doctor."

Hoffman: Good for you.

Dillon, O: So that's what I did.

Redman: What type of medicine did you practice?

02-00:52:45

Dillon, O: General medicine for a while, took care of Peace Corps volunteers overseas for a couple of years. Then came back and did a psychiatric residency, and then practiced psychiatry until I retired.

Redman: Did you do that in the East Bay or in San Francisco?

02-00:53:00

Dillon, O: In the East Bay, for the most part.

Dillon, M: The last ten years.

Dillon, O: Then I went to work in the prisons for the last ten years, before I retired.

Redman: Can you tell me what prisons you worked in?

02-00:53:15

Dillon, O: There's two prisons in Vacaville. One is the Vacaville hospital prison, which everybody is aware of; but there's a regular prison up there, too called California State Prison, Solano. I worked there as chief psychiatrist. Then the last two years before I retired, I worked at San Quentin, on death row.

Hoffman: Oh.

Dillon, O: Well, if you're interested in human psychology and pathology, you really saw some very interesting pathology. So there was a professional interest and gratification, actually, from the work. Then I retired about ten years ago.

Redman: So some time away.

Dillon, O: Huh?

Hoffman: That long. Good for you.

Dillon, O: That long. Eleven, actually. Yeah, I'm sorry.

Redman: I'd like to conclude our session today just by asking—we've talked about a lot of different topics. We've talked about your arriving in California and arriving in the Bay Area, a bit about what your parents were like, and then taking this job at the Kaiser Shipyards and getting into the maritime school and some of your early impressions of what it was like to be a student. Do you guys have any other additional thoughts on that time? This seems like a pretty remarkable friendship that the two of you have.

02-00:54:43

Dillon, O: Well, we probably ought to tell you how that came about. Ruth? You were looking in the phone book?

Hoffman: I was looking in the medical directory. We needed new doctors, because we weren't going to go to San Francisco anymore. In the directory, I see O'Neil Dillon, and then right below was Marsha Dillon. I knew there were no two O'Neil Dillons. [others laugh] I had been looking in phone books for years, to see you people listed, but it was always in the local phone book that I was listed in, and they weren't living there. So I wrote him a letter telling him who I was, et cetera, and that I would like to renew my acquaintance. I said, "Please share this letter with your brother." That's how it started. Then I got a phone call from O'Neil. I thought, wonderful.

Dillon, O: Yeah. No, that's great that you did that.

Hoffman: That's more than ten years ago. I can't remember.

Dillon, O: More than ten years ago.

Dillon, M: No, that's thirteen or fourteen years ago.

Dillon, O: Yeah.

Redman: I think that's a great place to wrap up for the day. I want to thank you both for taking the time and sitting down and participating.

02-00:56:07

Hoffman: Well, it's been interesting.

Dillon, O: It's been *very* interesting.

Hoffman: We both learned a lot.

Dillon, O: Yeah, I heard some things I had never heard before. And thank you for doing this kind of work, because it gives us an opportunity to do something special—

Redman: It's been wonderful. Thank you.