

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mrs. Muriel Usselman**

Date of Interview: June 13, 2022

# **National Museum of the Pacific War**

## **Fredericksburg, Texas**

### **Interview with Mrs. Muriel Usselman**

Interview in progress.

Ed Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022. I am at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas, and I am interviewing Mrs. Muriel Usselman, and she was at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked in ... on December the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and we're going to get her experiences. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So, thanks for coming in today all the way from California although you were visiting your son in San Antonio anyhow, I think, and doing a donation today of ... of a picture that you painted, an action scene from Pearl Harbor attack. And I'd like to start by having you give us your full name and when and where you were born, and we'll take it from there.

Mrs. Usselman: My name is Muriel Usselman, and I am ... I was born in Hollywood, California, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

Ed Metzler: Okay. And did ... what did your father do for a living?

Mrs. Usselman: My father was ... worked for the studios, the film studios, as an electrician who did the lighting on stars.

Ed Metzler: Hum! And your mother?

Mrs. Usselman: My mother was a housewife, and a mother (laughter).

Ed Metzler: A much more difficult job (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: Right (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: And do you have siblings, did you have siblings?

Mrs. Usselman: I had a brother who was about eighteen months younger than me.

Ed Metzler: Okay. And so, you ... your early years was ... were in Hollywood?

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And when did you actually move to the ... the islands, the Hawaiian Islands?

Mrs. Usselman: Okay, we moved to Hawaii; we took the [SS] Lurline ship over. It was in October of 1940, and I had my birthday on the ship so it would [be] around the 17<sup>th</sup> ... the time of that.

Ed Metzler: So, you were four years old, you had your fourth birthday.

Mrs. Usselman: I had my fourth birthday.

Ed Metzler: Of course, headed over. What do you remember about that ship? Was that a fancy ship or ...

Mrs. Usselman: It seemed like it to me.

Ed Metzler: Yeah?

Mrs. Usselman: It was pretty ... it was pretty fun. I ... I know that I was amazed by the fake that on my birthday, everybody in that dining room sang to me.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mrs. Usselman: And I thought I was the most special little girl in the whole world.

Ed Metzler: And you were (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter).

Ed Metzler: So, you were impressed.

Mrs. Usselman: I was very impressed.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well, I can understand that.

Mrs. Usselman: And my brother and I did a lot of playing. My mother and father had us on harnesses so we couldn't get away or fall over or ...

Ed Metzler: Go overboard (unintelligible) ... (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah right. So, they had these harnesses, and they had some moving pictures that my father had done.

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. So, what was taking your family to Hawaii?

Mrs. Usselman: My father was given some information by a friend of his who lived there that they were hiring, the Navy was hiring, and my father had been a veteran of the Navy, and I think he left the Navy in '34.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Was ... where was he stationed; do you know when he was in the Navy?

Mrs. Usselman: No, it wasn't in Hawaii then.

Ed Metzler: It was just somewhere ...

Mrs. Usselman: Somewhere (laughter).

Ed Metzler: ... and he didn't talk much about it.

Mrs. Usselman: No, no not really.

Ed Metzler: And you weren't old enough to ask about it yet.

Mrs. Usselman: Not really, no.

Ed Metzler: All you knew is you were on a harness ...

Mrs. Usselman: (Chuckles).

Ed Metzler: ... and he wouldn't let you go! (laughter)

Mrs. Usselman: (Chuckles), actually, it ... it was ... there was just when we were out on a deck.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, (chuckles), okay. So, he ... was he going there to check into whether there was a job or was he ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: ... or was he actually hired?

Mrs. Usselman: No, he was checking into get ... to get a job.

Ed Metzler: And so ...

Mrs. Usselman: And I guess he was pretty sure it was going to be available because he took us all there, including the car (laughter).

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, what was it about the job in Hollywood that made him want something else?

Mrs. Usselman: It just wasn't often enough. When you work for the studios, they ... you come on, you get a job with a ... with a film that's being filmed. When that's done, you have to wait for another one to come along that you get a bid on and you get the job or you don't.

Ed Metzler: So, it's not a ... a forty-hour a week type thing?

Mrs. Usselman: Exactly. So, he was looking for something currently steady.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. Where was your father from originally?

Mrs. Usselman: He was born in Burley, Idaho.

Ed Metzler: And then ended up in Hollywood.

Mrs. Usselman: Somewhere in Hollywood (unintelligible) ... (laughter).

Ed Metzler: Somewhere ... somehow.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, somehow (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter). Okay. So, you sailed into Honolulu?

Mrs. Usselman: Honolulu. There's a place there, the Aloha Towers ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: ... was the tallest building in Hawaii at the time.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Now it's probably the smallest (laughter).

Ed Metzler: Yeah, that's right. I ... I ... well, you were there ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: So, you know pretty much what modern Honolulu looks like.

Mrs. Usselman: Right. I go back almost every year.

Ed Metzler: Oh, do you?!

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, you're quite familiar with how things have evolved there?

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: So, he's headed to take a job, and it would be an electrician-related job?

Mrs. Usselman: It was in the gyro (sp?) shop, and I believe he had a pretty good position there. He was a very talented electrician; he was an electrician.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And I don't know much more about it than that, except that we were all able to move into the naval housing right there. So, he rode his bike to the work, but he could have walked.

Ed Metzler: So, the housing was there at Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Well, I got a map here of the island, and of course, there's Ford Island right there.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And there's Hickman Field, and so, you had housing just right ... somewhere ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right ... right in here, right in here somewhere.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, very close by.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So, what was the housing like? I mean, was this a small little house or what?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh, this was ... there were four units in a building – two single units on each end and two double units or two-story buildings in the middle.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: We had one of the two-story units.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. And so, you ... so he transferred an automobile there as well, is that what I heard you say?

Mrs. Usselman: Yes, yes.

Ed Metzler: So, you got transportation?

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, you arrive there in about a year before the actual attack.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum, a little bit more than a year.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, how was it settling in as a rambunctious four-year-old?

Mrs. Usselman: As I remember, it was great! I think we loved Hawaii. I remember driving around; I remember that he had friends and we drove to people's home and I liked the island a lot.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, you didn't get what they call island fever?

Mrs. Usselman: Not me, no.

Ed Metzler: Where you just wish ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... that there was more room and more things to do?

Mrs. Usselman: No. My mother had been ... lived in Hawaii when she was a teenager. Her father had the contract, the painting contract, to build the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

Ed Metzler: Oh!

Mrs. Usselman: So, he had moved his family over there in the '20s.

Ed Metzler: So, there's roots already ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... in your family.

Mrs. Usselman: So, my mother already knew she loved the islands.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: So, we were very happy there.

Ed Metzler: Yeah! Yeah. So, what's the first thing that you tend to remember or think about when you first arrived there? What ... you went ... were you going to school yet?

Mrs. Usselman: Not at that time. I ... I didn't start school till the following year.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, you were, what in kindergarten, I guess what we call the first grade?

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, I think there was a ... there might have been a kindergarten, I don't remember it very well.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: I just remember being there, playing a lot. I do remember after the war a lot more.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: But then, I was a little older.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, yeah, the older you get, the more you tend to remember, except when there's these horrible events like ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... like we're getting ready to talk about. So, your father got the job.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And began work immediately, I guess, or pretty quickly.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And the housing was provided by the military or ...

Mrs. Usselman: As far as I know.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, he seemed to be A-OK with how things were going as far as you know?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Again, you're ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... four or five years old, so ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... everything seems okay probably (chuckles).

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, it seemed fine.

Ed Metzler: So, you had friends to play with?

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And ... and we know the weather was mild.

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter).

Ed Metzler: So, you didn't have weather (unintelligible) ... (laughter) or anything like that.

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter), well, we went to the beach a lot.

Ed Metzler: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And did ... were you able to travel to any of the other islands or around on Oahu?

Mrs. Usselman: On Oahu. We didn't go to the other islands. My father did.

Ed Metzler: Hum.

Mrs. Usselman: He was flown over to Maui. I remember that.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: I remember because he told me that he flew ... the plane flew right over our house.

Ed Metzler: Oh!

Mrs. Usselman: And ...

Ed Metzler: He could look (unintelligible).



Mrs. Usselman: Look at ... yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Hum. I wonder what took him to ...

Mrs. Usselman: I don't know.

Ed Metzler: ... Maui?

Mrs. Usselman: I don't know. He had an important job; I do know that.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: But I don't know.

Ed Metzler: Of course, the Navy was all over the islands.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: It was ... it was ...

Mrs. Usselman: All the military was (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I mean, the Army and the Navy. So, it was really a military-type state in a lot of ways.

Mrs. Usselman: Right, right.

Ed Metzler: So, you went to school then, and I would guess in September of '41 then ...

Mrs. Usselman: Probably, yes, that ...

Ed Metzler: ... when you started school. And what do you remember about that, just ...

Mrs. Usselman: Don't remember anything about it. I remember having to be vaccinated, but I don't remember anything more.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: At that age, I just don't recall anything specific.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. I'm kind of the same way. I think back when I went to kindergarten.

Mrs. Usselman: The things you remember are the things that are usually, in some way, tragic or ...

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Or have a real early change your life.

Mrs. Usselman: Right, something that is ... it really happens to you.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, you're in school, your father's working at a responsible job, you have an older brother.

Mrs. Usselman: Younger brother.

Ed Metzler: Younger brother, so he's not in school yet.

Mrs. Usselman: No. Matter of fact, this would be his birthday today.

Ed Metzler: Ah! Is he no longer living?

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: I'm the only one left.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Well, last of the Mohicans, huh?

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), yeah, that's a lot of people that I talk to these days, they are, you know, nobody's around the family anymore.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And living with the next generation for the most part. So, tell me about your experience and what you saw, what you heard on that fateful day.

Mrs. Usselman: Okay. I'll just kind of start with ... the day before, my family ... we had gone out to do a little Christmas shopping, I believe.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And while we were in the store, I had a little record player, a little children's ... children's record player. My father bought me a new record, children's record. So, that morning at eight o'clock-ish, I was playing my new record. My mother was upstairs giving my brother a bath.

Ed Metzler: This is a Sunday morning.

Mrs. Usselman: Sunday morning.

Ed Metzler: *The* Sunday morning.

Mrs. Usselman: December 7<sup>th</sup>, Sunday morning.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And all of a sudden, the electricity went off.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And then there was a lot of noise. And just about that time, there was a knock on the door, and I went to the door, and it was some teenage boys, and they said, "The Japs are bombing, come out quickly." So, I ran out with them. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, where's your mother (unintelligible)?

Mrs. Usselman: ... my mother's upstairs giving my brother a bath.

Ed Metzler: And ... and you're out ...

Mrs. Usselman: And I ran ...

Ed Metzler: ... running outdoors, while ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... I ran out ...

Ed Metzler: ... under attack with some teenage boys.

Mrs. Usselman: That's right. That's right. And there was everybody coming out into the streets.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mrs. Usselman: So, the little ... one of the boys put me up on his shoulders so I could see, and all I can remember was the black smoke over this whole part of the sky, totally! And on the other side, lots and lots and lots of little brown puffs of smoke everywhere, and airplanes. And airplanes flying right overhead, and I could actually see pilots in the planes; they were that low.

Ed Metzler: Uhm! Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: That's with the red zeros on them.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, with the ... the red meatball on the side of the ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right. And just about that time, my mother came out and took me back in the house, and telling me I couldn't be out there anymore (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter). So, you were right on the front lines there for a few minutes at least.

Mrs. Usselman: Right (laughter), for a few minutes. And I had no real fear because I didn't understand.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mrs. Usselman: Until I got back in the house and my mother told me that it was dangerous and ... and that we were worried about Dad.

Ed Metzler: Now, you ... this is a weekend, so, was your ...

Mrs. Usselman: He was at work.

Ed Metzler: He was at work?!

Mrs. Usselman: He was at work.

Ed Metzler: Hum! So, did he work ...

Mrs. Usselman: I don't ... I don't know ... I don't think he worked seven days a week, but he did work Sunday.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: So, they must have worked seven days a week, but he ...

Ed Metzler: Well, they had all kinds of ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... had some other ...

Ed Metzler: ... rotating shifts ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... exactly.

Ed Metzler: ... probably ...

Mrs. Usselman: But ye was definitely working.

Ed Metzler: ... because there was always somebody working there ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... on duty.

Mrs. Usselman: So ...

Ed Metzler: So, he was away.

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: He had already gone to work.

Mrs. Usselman: He, yeah, he was already at work.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mrs. Usselman: So, my mother had no way, there was no way of communicating; no phones, no electricity to get any kind of news from the radio, no nothing. So, all she wanted to do was to find out if her husband was alive.

Ed Metzler: That's first thing, yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: And there wasn't anything that she could do at that point. So, we had a car and it was in the garage and she ran out to the garage which was separate ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: ... from the rest of the housing and got radio on the car, so she could, at least, find out what was going on. But there was no news of anything or anybody surviving or not surviving. It was nothing that she could, that I know of, that she could find out.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: My parents, neither one, ever really talked about ... a lot about it.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah. My father never really told me anything much except when I asked him, "What did you do?" He just told me they jumped underneath the benches and the tables.

Ed Metzler: Were ...

Mrs. Usselman: And there was glass everywhere.

Ed Metzler: At his work?

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, at his work.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: My mother ... my mother was twenty-four years old, and she was amazing. I do remember that. She was *amazing*; she just kept it all together. And we, as kids, weren't ... weren't scared. We were ... we were aware that something was happening and it was serious, but we weren't scared 'cause she really ...

Ed Metzler: And that's because she wasn't.

Mrs. Usselman: ... 'cause she was ...

Ed Metzler: Or at least she didn't show it.

Mrs. Usselman: Right; she did not show it. But she said that every time she went out to the garage, those planes were ... would ... she would see those pilots just like I did in the planes. And they came around, sometime in the next hours, and asked us to evacuate. And my mother said, "No," she did not want to leave until she could find out if her husband was alive.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mrs. Usselman: And they left her alone. And finally at five o'clock that afternoon, they said, "You have to go, it was now going to get dark."

Ed Metzler: And ...

Mrs. Usselman: And so, we had to go to ...

Ed Metzler: Still no power?

Mrs. Usselman: No power, no nothing.

Ed Metzler: And she didn't know anything about your dad?

Mrs. Usselman: Nothing. So, we went to the YMCA in Honolulu which is a little of a trek; I don't know how far, but it ... a few miles. And we went to the YMCA in Honolulu where we had to stay for the night, and that was horrible. I remember that as being horrible.

Ed Metzler: How so?

Mrs. Usselman: Just wall to wall cots, people everywhere, all ... all ages. Babies crying, children crying, dogs barking, people being sick.

Ed Metzler: (Chuckles).

Mrs. Usselman: My brother being sick, just awful, just a horrible experience.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: The next morning, oh, and that ... that evening, my aunt, my brother's sis ... uh, my ... my father's sister lived on another part of the island, and he was able to call her 'cause he had access to a phone. Why, I don't know, but he did, and so my mother called her ... her sister-in-law and found out that he was alive. But he ... he wasn't allowed to come back home until the following evening, Monday evening.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: So, he was involved in clean up and rescue and mostly clean up.

Ed Metzler: But at least you got your father back the next day.

Mrs. Usselman: We found out ...

Ed Metzler: And he was okay.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, what else did he happen to tell you, if anything, about the experience from his viewpoint, that you remember?

Mrs. Usselman: For ... basic thing was that he would not talk a lot about it.

Ed Metzler: I can understand.

Mrs. Usselman: So, I ... I ... I think for the two weeks ... because he worked for two weeks, he went every day for two weeks, and that was all body clean up.

Ed Metzler: Aft ... after ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, it was all body.

Ed Metzler: So ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... on the ships, I guess, and ...

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ... maybe even at the airfields where they were a lot of bombing going on.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, I don't know exactly where abouts he worked, but he was definitely on duty.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And your mother, how is she doing at this point, once her husband is back? I mean ...

Mrs. Usselman: As far as I can remember, we ... we just ... we just followed the instructions. The instructions uh, blackout. We had to blackout all of our windows, and that was with tar paper, that we couldn't be outside at all and have any lights on in the dark at all, you couldn't even go outside and smoke.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mrs. Usselman: So, I remember that, and we ... we children were not allowed to turn lights on. And ...

Ed Metzler: So, once the sun goes down, things pretty much come to a stop.

Mrs. Usselman: Exactly. You couldn't have cars, or lights, no ... no lights at all were allowed. It was ... and then, we had, I guess, men that patrolled the area and made sure that everything was secure.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, I guess MPs were ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... were they in vehicles ...

Mrs. Usselman: So, we had that.

Ed Metzler: or were they ...

Mrs. Usselman: Walking.

Ed Metzler: Walking?

Mrs. Usselman: Walking. I remember that.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, so that's a security patrol.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: 'Cause nobody knows at this point whether you're getting ready to be invaded.

Mrs. Usselman: No, we ... we had no idea. So, it was basically being treated as ... as we were at war.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And I can remember that my father and the other members of the community we lived in, that building, started to build a shelter, a bomb shelter. They were digging, they were going to go down and dig and make this bomb shelter.

Ed Metzler: Where ... whereabouts?

Mrs. Usselman: In our backyard. They ... we had a big area 'cause it was four of us.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And so, back there; I remember that. And then ...

Ed Metzler: So, that was big enough for how many people would you ...

Mrs. Usselman: Probably families, probably all the four families.

Ed Metzler: So, was everybody doing that from all the buildings?

Mrs. Usselman: I don't think so. I ... I just remember that it was our ... our group, that's all I remember of that.

Ed Metzler: How far did they get in digging?

Mrs. Usselman: They got a pretty ... they got a lot of it done at that hole. I remember a big hole being dug (laughter), pretty big, square hole.

Ed Metzler: And you ... and you can't dig that deep on those islands ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... before you run into water, I would think.

Mrs. Usselman: I know. I don't know. I don't remember that (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: Did you ever go in?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh no, I didn't go in.

Ed Metzler: And they never used it, of course.

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: Because there was never ...

Mrs. Usselman: Never, no it never got finished.



Ed Metzler: ... it never reached any more time.

Mrs. Usselman: At ... at that point, and I don't know the timing, but at some point, we had to leave because they had to make room for the ... the military personnel coming over.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: So, all of we civilians had to move out of there.

Ed Metzler: And where did you go?

Mrs. Usselman: And my father then went to work for uh, a vocational school teaching electronics, and we lived on the ... on the uh, grounds. So, we had to leave (unintelligible).

Ed Metzler: So, was this still on Oahu?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So, was that down in the Honolulu area or ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, I think so, uh hum.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, you stayed, but you had to move off of the ...

Mrs. Usselman: Had to leave the military ...

Ed Metzler: ... the military site.

Mrs. Usselman: ... yeah, right. And he ... and he left the Navy, too, because Navy military was coming in.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: Right. So ... so, they ... he didn't have a job there anymore ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... 'cause everything was totally changed.

Mrs. Usselman: Right, everything changed.

Ed Metzler: Do you remember anything along the lines of what was available to you like food, uh, gasoline ...

Mrs. Usselman: I know that ... we ...

Ed Metzler: ... or ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... I don't know much about gasoline; I do know that food was rationed, and there was a shortage of sugar, and I don't remember what all else; I do

remember that, and I don't think butter was available. Uhm, don't remember a lot about that. I didn't have too much to do with foods (laughter) except eat it.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, as long as ... you ... you ate it when they brought it to you.

Mrs. Usselman: Right (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter), I understand. And ...

Mrs. Usselman: The vocational school was fun. I liked being there.

Ed Metzler: Well, did you school there, or were you in a public school?

Mrs. Usselman: I was in a public school.

Ed Metzler: But you were on the grounds of the vocational school?

Mrs. Usselman: We lived on the grounds, yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, this was a private school that's ...

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ... teaching people ...

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ... so they can go to work.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And what kind of skills? I mean ...

Mrs. Usselman: All I know is my father taught electronics because he was an electrician.

Ed Metzler: Electronics, yeah. Which was quite an ...

Mrs. Usselman: And they entertained ...

Ed Metzler: ... up and coming ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... military personnel almost every weekend.

Ed Metzler: Really?!

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And what did that ...

Mrs. Usselman: We had lots of Navy men that would come to our house and just ... just be, you know, some place to go and people to visit, and they had fun.

Ed Metzler: And what, barbeque or ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah, barbeques, stuff like that.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: That was ...

Ed Metzler: So, was that part of (throat clearing) your father's job in a way?

Mrs. Usselman: No, that was ...

Ed Metzler: He just ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... (unintelligible) who he knew people, a lot of people.

Ed Metzler: Friends being friends.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And having a little bit of a social life.

Mrs. Usselman: I do remember, it's very interesting because of my age, I do remember one gentleman that was in the Navy that had three children, I believe, a wife and three children, and he was ... took to us kids a lot. And he was very friendly. I remember his name. I don't know if you want to hear the name.

Ed Metzler: I ... of course!

Mrs. Usselman: His name was Ed Zendry (sp?) and he was a lieutenant, and he was a lieutenant on the USS Seawolf which was a submarine.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Which was lost at sea, and I remember that. And it broke my heart.

Ed Metzler: Wow! So, he never came home?

Mrs. Usselman: Nope.

Ed Metzler: Wow.

Mrs. Usselman: Never even found out what happened to it.

Ed Metzler: Seawolf?

Mrs. Usselman: The Seawolf.

Ed Metzler: Hum! Do you remember any military brass coming, you know, like ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... leader ... leadership from the military ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... ever come to the ... okay.

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: I would not expect them to.

Mrs. Usselman: No not, no not really. He was the one, the only one that I remember as ...

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: ... and he was a lieutenant.

Ed Metzler: So, how did you get information about what was going on in the war? I guess you had radio and ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right, whatever the usuals.

Ed Metzler: ... newspapers and ...

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter), newspapers, yeah. And then there was no way to leave the islands, you know?

Ed Metzler: Even if you'd wanted to.

Mrs. Usselman: There was no way. You think about it. There was ... there was no flying. They weren't going to put you on a ship, so there was no way to leave the islands. And my mother's fam ... my mother's mother and father lived on ... in Los Angeles, and they wanted us to come back, and so it took three years.

Ed Metzler: So, you were there for three years, huh?

Mrs. Usselman: Three years.

Ed Metzler: Three years after Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So, all the way to '44 from '41.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: So, late '44!

Mrs. Usselman: Right. So, we were still at war when we got back to the mainland. But what we had was passage on a Dutch freighter.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: An old Dutch freighter, and it Z tracked all the way to San Francisco.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: Yep!

Ed Metzler: Just so you wouldn't get torpedoed which ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right, and that was strange. All the men were not allowed to be on the same deck as the women and children, and they were only allowed to have two meals a day (chuckles), but we were allowed three. It was a very interesting trip.

Ed Metzler: So, how old are you at this point? So, you're seven years old.

Mrs. Usselman: I think I'm seven.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: So, you're starting to notice a lot more things.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, how was the food there? Did they ...

Mrs. Usselman: The food on the ship?

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: Pretty bad (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: Lot of rice (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter). Yeah, and powdered eggs and ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right, exactly.

Ed Metzler: ... powdered milk and, yeah right.

Mrs. Usselman: Right. My mother used to make sandwiches and sneak them to my dad so he could get something to eat in the middle of the day.

Ed Metzler: So, this is the whole family going back? Your father didn't stay ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... 'cause he wasn't in the military, also.

Mrs. Usselman: No, we all came back.

Ed Metzler: So, what was it like to get back to the mainland?

Mrs. Usselman: Well, then we went ... we went back, with ... to Long Beach where my father went to work for the Navy. He worked on Terminal Island in Long Beach for quite a few years.

Ed Metzler: The (cough), excuse me, the fact that he was involved in electronics which was cutting edge stuff back then, very important meant that he probably always could get a job.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Because of what his ...

Mrs. Usselman: I know that they awarded ... he got some kind of an award. They actually had him go back to New York to give him this award, to the Navy.

Ed Metzler: The Navy did?

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mrs. Usselman: But I don't have any information about it at all.

Ed Metzler: That's all you know (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter). When ... when we ... when we were in the naval housing, right after the war, we had to wear identification. We had to all have identification on us – our ... our name, our address and our blood type.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mrs. Usselman: And my father had printed on a little metal plate that he put on a necklace for me in a Lucite heart, and my mother had one that she wore on a necklace. I don't know where my brother had his or ... and we also had to have gas masks that we had to take with us to school and everywhere we went as children.

Ed Metzler: But never had to use it?

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: Uhm.

Mrs. Usselman: So, those are some of the things I do remember.

Ed Metzler: So, that's kind of like the dog tags that they had ...

Mrs. Usselman: Exactly, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, just in case.

Mrs. Usselman: Only ... only, yeah. And so, we had to wear those.

Ed Metzler: Uhm. So, I know that you have done a painting that you're donating to the Museum, and it's a ... it's a scene of the attack. It's got the airplanes and the ... and the American ships. What led you to do that painting?

Mrs. Usselman: The ... the sky itself is what I remembered; I did not see the ships. But when I saw that ... I'd seen something like that and I thought that's ... that's what I remember, that's it! And 'cause that is a vision that I will never forget – that ... that sky.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. Yeah, that's burned in your brain.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: 'Cause it was such a traumatic ...

Mrs. Usselman: So, I was just ... I was just ... felt like I wanted to paint it.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: So ...

Ed Metzler: And did you do ... you ... you did other paintings, right?

Mrs. Usselman: I've done other paintings; I haven't done anything of that.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, you're back on the mainland, your father is working in Long Beach

...

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: ... for the Navy.

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum.

Ed Metzler: And you're growing up, your moth ... when the war was over, do you remember when the war was over?

Mrs. Usselman: Absolutely!

Ed Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mrs. Usselman: I just remember that I had been home from school that day. I think I had a cold or something, and I remember ... my mother then was working.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: And we had after-school programs that ... for children for work ... working parents. So, my mother ...

Ed Metzler: So ...

Mrs. Usselman: ... was working, but I was at home. And I remember I was watch ... listening to the radio 'cause that's what we had. We didn't have TV then. So, I was listening to the radio and I heard them announce that the war was over. And I remember being so excited, I do remember that.

Ed Metzler: And was everybody else excited ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yes!

Ed Metzler: ... like your parents?

Mrs. Usselman: Yes! (laughter)

Ed Metzler: For example (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: Yes, absolutely!

Ed Metzler: I mean, I've heard great stories of parties that were thrown when they actually got the word.

Mrs. Usselman: I'm sure there was parties, I don't ...

Ed Metzler: They didn't invite you (unintelligible) ... (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: No, they didn't invite me to the party (laughter).

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: I think they invited me to my bed (laughter), go to sleep.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, well, you were only eight, so, I mean, you know ...

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: ... I wouldn't expect you to be the life of a ... of a beer party ...

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: ... and celebrating that (chuckles).

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: And, let's see, so your brother is younger than you by how much?

Mrs. Usselman: About eighteen months younger than me.

Ed Metzler: Okay. So, you were about eight when the war was over.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And so he was like six and a half or something like that. So, the war is over. All of a sudden, they don't need all these people working for the Navy anymore, I assume, so what did your father do? Did he stay with them?

Mrs. Usselman: My father ... he did not. He, aft, let's see, I'm trying to think. The war was over in '45, wasn't it?

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: We moved out of Long Beach to Granada Hills, California which is a little ways out in the country in '48.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: So, in '48, he decided that he wanted to live, not in the city anymore.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And he designed and built this ... bought some property and built this house, went to work for a company, private company.



Ed Metzler: But it's in southern California

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: It's just not ...

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: ... in town.

Mrs. Usselman: Not ... not in Long Beach.

Ed Metzler: Probably is now in town.

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter), oh yeah! Oh yeah ...

Ed Metzler: 'Cause I think all of southern California is a town.

Mrs. Usselman: ... it's totally bor ... grown up now.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: When we moved out there, it was all orange trees and horses.

Ed Metzler: Wow!

Mrs. Usselman: But it's all built up now.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, did you stay there through your childhood years?

Mrs. Usselman: Yes.

Ed Metzler: And went off to school somewhere or what happened?

Mrs. Usselman: Uh hum. In ... In love. You as a ... yeah ...

Ed Metzler: As you were growing up, as you became a teenager, you went to high school somewhere.

Mrs. Usselman: I did, San Fernando High School.

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: And then did you go to college?

Mrs. Usselman: Nope, I got married.

Ed Metzler: Well, you got your M.R.S. (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter). I got married at the very young age of sixteen.

Ed Metzler: Wow.

Mrs. Usselman: And Allen (sp?) is my oldest child that's here with me.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And I have five children.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And ...

Ed Metzler: And so, have you lived most of your life then in California?

Mrs. Usselman: Most of my life in California.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And so, do you ... and what happened to your father? Your father continued to work?

Mrs. Usselman: My father had a very good job with this small company that became very large, and they made airplane parts for jets, and all those kinds of things that jets were getting into at that time.

Ed Metzler: Right.

Mrs. Usselman: And he had a very big, big, uh, part in that company.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And that's where he worked until he couldn't work anymore.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum. So, he passed away how long ago?

Mrs. Usselman: In '77.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: My father had diabetes, uh, got it when he was in his 30s, and it took its toll, so it ...

Ed Metzler: It does, yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: ... so, he was rather young; was still in his 60s.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, and your mother?

Mrs. Usselman: My mother died at 93 in 2010.

Ed Metzler: Okay.

Mrs. Usselman: She lived with me for a while before she died.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, hum. So, what else do you remember about life in Hawaii that you'd like to tell me?

Mrs. Usselman: Life in Hawaii was ... I loved Hawaii, and I still would be there today if I could be (chuckles).

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: It's ...

Ed Metzler: 'Cause you've gone back repeatedly you said.

Mrs. Usselman: Repeatedly, yeah. For some reason, the first time I went back after leaving when I was a child, I was an adult, and it was in '74, that first time I went back, and I got off that plane, and I felt like I was home.

Ed Metzler: Hum!

Mrs. Usselman: There was something about the fragrances of the island and the feel of the island, and I just felt like I was home! And so, I always have felt like that every time I go back.

Ed Metzler: Hum, that's interesting.

Mrs. Usselman: I ...

Ed Metzler: It's in your heart.

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter), it is!

Ed Metzler: You just can't be there, that's all.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: So, you went back for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pearl Harbor?

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: What was that like?

Mrs. Usselman: That was really very nice. I think it was sponsored by the Masonic Lodge because my father was a Mason.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And we'd gone back through them. And it was really nice. The senior citizens of Hawaii, in some organization, had made all these (unintelligible) leis in gold that they ... we all ... and I still have mine.

Ed Metzler: Uhm!

Mrs. Usselman: And just lots of little things. And then we went out and saw the ... the memorial 'cause that would be the first time I'd saw the Arizona memorial.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum, uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And then the last time, not the last time I went, but several years later, I went over to Ford Island and saw the museum there.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And was very impressed with that.

Ed Metzler: Yeah, and I guess the USS Missouri is there now.

Mrs. Usselman: It is.

Ed Metzler: And I don't remember ...

Mrs. Usselman: And I ... I got to tour that.

Ed Metzler: Okay. Don't remember how long ago they ... they took her there, but that, yeah ...

Mrs. Usselman: I kind of remember, I think I was there the day it came in.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: When they brought it back over, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Uhm, uhm. So, being there during probably one of the most important events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: That changed everything.

Mrs. Usselman: It ... it changed everything as we ... the Lur ... the world as we knew it (chuckle) changed completely, yeah.

Ed Metzler: Yeah. So, it changed your life, too.

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah.

Ed Metzler: You ever have dreams about your experiences there?

Mrs. Usselman: Not ... no. I don't have any really bad experiences other than what I mentioned.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Just that ... that day, and the things that were happening were different, but I don't remember being terrified.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: Just ... I think my parents handled it very well.

Ed Metzler: They did! Sounds that way.

Mrs. Usselman: Because there was a woman that my mother took care of that day of the bombing and ... and took us ... took her with us when we were evacuated, and she was hysterical all the time.

Ed Metzler: Really?

Mrs. Usselman: Yeah. So, my mother kind of kept her settled down, too. But my mother was amaz ... I ... when I think back and think of her age, I'm amazed!

Ed Metzler: Yeah.

Mrs. Usselman: But she always was on top of things.

Ed Metzler: And you know, that generation, we, you know, you look ... you look at what seventeen- and eighteen-year-old kids were doing ...

Mrs. Usselman: I know!

Ed Metzler: ... when you look at, first, when you or I were seventeen or eighteen, I don't think we could have done it or would have done it.

Mrs. Usselman: No.

Ed Metzler: Or known how to do it.

Mrs. Usselman: Right.

Ed Metzler: And then you look at the current generations, and you know (laughter) ...

Mrs. Usselman: (Laughter), they wouldn't ...

Ed Metzler: ... they wouldn't have a clue (laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: ... no (laughter).

Ed Metzler: So ...

Mrs. Usselman: I know. It's all different.

Ed Metzler: It is all different, that is ... that is a good paraphrase. It's all different now. Well, what else would you like to tell me about your experience before we end our interview?

Mrs. Usselman: I ... I can't think of anything more. I ... I can tell you ... I ... I think I wrote down stuff just because I wanted to make sure I didn't forget anything. I think we've covered it pretty well.

Ed Metzler: Will you be able to leave that with us?

Mrs. Usselman: Sure.

Ed Metzler: So, we can include it with your ...

Mrs. Usselman: You're [s/b I'm] very happy ... to let you have it.

Ed Metzler: And we'll put it in the files along with the information, and that way we'll have a full record of it.

Mrs. Usselman: My mother was going to write some of this stuff down, and she did write something.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And the only thing that I can remember that she wrote was about the night that my father came back which was the Monday night.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: The 8<sup>th</sup> of December.

Ed Metzler: Uh hum.

Mrs. Usselman: And she wrote, "That night, after dark, I heard his bicycle on the porch. He was dirty and unshaven, but he was the most beautiful sight in the world to me."

Ed Metzler: (Laughter).

Mrs. Usselman: That's what she wrote. And I put that in there because it meant something to me.

Ed Metzler: Yeah! It meant something to her and to you. So, that's ... that's very moving. Okay, well thank you so much for spending the time with me.

Mrs. Usselman: You're welcome!

Ed Metzler: We ... I'll go ahead and end the interview now.

(end of interview)

**FINAL** copy  
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