**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Nona Penner**

Interview Conducted by

Tanya Finchum

March 15, 2016

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

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**Interview History**

Interviewer: Tanya Finchum

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The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Nona Penner is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 15, 2016.

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**About Nona McLemore Penner…**

Nona Penner was born in 1925 on a farm in Colony, Oklahoma. She attended an Indian school in the Cobb Creek area and in high school was a member of the basketball team. Her mother had been allotted land and the family farmed. After graduating from high school, which was during the time of World War II, Nona joined a couple of friends and went to Oklahoma City where she obtained a job as a riveter. She worked at Douglas Field for Douglas Air Craft. She was a shooter and worked closely with a bucker.

While a “Rosie the riveter” Nona worked on C-47 planes and recalled making the tin wall between the cockpit and the pilot. She roomed with other women and they actually planted a victory garden in the front yard of their apartment building. Often she would join others and travel to Norman, Oklahoma, where they would dance with Navy men. She also recalled rationing, especially sugar and nylons. When the war ended, the riveting job ended as well and Nona returned to Colony. While she worked those two years as a Rosie, Nona managed to save a little money and learned much about responsibility and hard work.

In 1946, Nona McLemore married Daniel Penner and the newlyweds worked toward owning their own farm. Dan also had an ‘off-the-farm’ job and worked for Tinker Air Force Base from 1960 until he retired in 1984. He passed away in 2004. At the time of the interview Nona continued to own two farms, both designated Oklahoma Centennial Farms, one from her side of the family and one from Dan’s side. They had two daughters, Donna Black and Patty Huffman, and they joined her for the oral history interview.

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| **Nona Penner**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Tanya Finchum  March 15, 2016  Yukon, Oklahoma |  |

**Finchum** *Today is March 15, 2016. My name is Tanya Finchum. I’m with Oklahoma State University, and today I am in Yukon, Oklahoma, to speak with Nona Penner. This is part of our* Rosie the Riveter *series, so thank you for having me today.*

**Penner** Thank you for being here.

**Finchum** *Let’s learn a little bit about you first like when and where were you born?*

**Penner** I’m Nona Penner. I was born on a farm in Colony, Oklahoma, which is in Washita County. That’s where I grew up, on the farm and went to school at Cobb Creek. First school I went to was Cobb Creek. We had to walk about a half a mile to school. I had a brother and two sisters my age and we all walked to school together. We had to walk across two bridges, and it was kind of scary to me because I was the youngest and they had to lead me across the bridge to school. (Laughs) My dad was on the school board there and we all were together.

I lived on the farm with—we had a large home, white house. I can still see it. We all worked together, raised gardens. And horses, I had my own. I loved my horse. We all studied at night by oil. At first we just had kerosene lamps, but next we kind of graduated to where Daddy had a generator for us to have electric light. We all sat together and used the generator to use our radio mostly and our lights for our room. Sat together, studied together, and talked about what we was going to do or had done that day and was going to do the next day.

We usually had duties to do. We had to take care of the chickens and our yard, gardens and other chores around the farmhouse. We had a big farm. Daddy raised all kind of garden stuff. We had especially a big garden of sweet potatoes and corn. We always worked with our neighbors. We had neighbors that would come over and work with my mother to can. They canned corn and other things from the garden. That’s what we used in the winter, and Daddy usually raised pigs for our meat in the winter. And cows, he always had milk cows.

My dad was a planner. He planned for what we was all going to do. He didn’t really plan for what he was going to do. (Laughs) He just made sure that we got the milking done and took care of the milk, which we had to use a hand crank separator to separate the milk from the cream. Then we’d save the cream and make our butter. We made butter. Sometimes we could make enough butter to—by shaking the jars. Daddy would have a hand crank butter churn, and we would make enough butter that we could take it to town and sell our butter. (Laughs) We all hated to leave our things at the store where we’d take things to sell, especially our chickens and eggs and things that we worked with—prepared.

It was a good life that I had. After I graduated from high school or even while I was still in high school, I worked for Red Cross folding gauze into bandages for the home front. So many women, and girls, and people, we all worked together to make bandages after school, and the Red Cross would deliver them to where they had to send them, the home front.

**Finchum** *When you say “we”, brothers and sisters?*

**Penner** Yes, my brother and sisters. Two sisters that was our age—my age rather. I guess they was a little older. Kinfolks, too, that lived close, they worked there too. Like Aunt Beulah and Uncle John, they lived close, and they came and worked especially when we did garden work and butchering our pigs, or doctoring cows and things on the farm we had to do.

**Finchum** *Let’s back up. What year were you born, 1925?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *What year did you graduate from high school?*

**Penner** Let’s see, 19…what was it?

**Donna** Forty-seven?

**Penner** You’re supposed to remember all this stuff.

**Finchum** *Forty-seven, does that sound right? No, let’s see. Twenty-five plus eighteen is what? Forty-three? Forty-two, something like that?*

**Penner** Yeah, something like that.

**Finchum** *Something like that.*

**Penner** I can change that part.

**Finchum** *Yes, you can, you can correct that. While you were helping your dad on the farm, what was your mother doing?*

**Penner** Mother would be cleaning chickens and fixing our meals. She would dig potatoes, and we had to do the garden. When we had a garden ready why she would…

**Finchum** *(Daughter showing photo) You played on the basketball team? In 1941?*

**Penner** Oh, yeah and that’s me and that’s my—let’s see. That’s my sister there, Bobbie, she was younger than me.

**Finchum** *And this is you?*

**Penner** Yes, and…

**Finchum** *Were you a senior?*

**Penner** I must’ve been because I believe she was probably a junior at that time.

**Finchum** *Those are pretty cool uniforms!*

**Penner** They were red and red satin.

**Finchum** *Looks slick.*

**Penner** Yeah, they were red satin uniforms.

**Finchum** *What was your number? Did you have a number? Do you remember what your number was?*

**Penner** I don’t.

**Finchum** *Must be on the back of your—if they even had numbers.*

**Penner** Must’ve been. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Cool. So the house you grew up in was a two-story white house?*

**Penner** It wasn’t two-story, but it was a big house. There was a lot of us, and we usually had company like Aunt Beulah and them. They lived close and had kids, and different kinfolks that would come to visit for the weekend or just for the night. Mother always had pallets down on the floor. We didn’t mind it. It was fun for all of us to lay down and go to sleep. We did good because we knew we had to get up in the morning and go to work, do our chores and take care of ourselves.

**Finchum** *Did the house have indoor plumbing?*

**Penner** At that time. At first, we didn’t. Then we graduated where we had a bathtub and indoor plumbing. Mother had to make a shower curtain across the room so we’d be separate from our bathtub and stairs. (Laughs) Yes, we all knew to respect each other’s privacy, so we made it okay. The bathroom was part of the first part of our room. The first room in that was a separator room where you had to use it to separate milk. The first floor had three stairs to go up to the kitchen. That’s where we did most of our running up and down, three steps. Yeah, we was close to the kitchen. Mother was cooking most of the time.

**Finchum** *Would she fry her chicken or bake it?*

**Penner** She did all kinds, but mostly fry. She liked to catch the chicken. Mother would catch the chicken, and she had it down pat. She had a special place in the pen to feed the chickens. They’d come in, when the chickens got in the pen she had a special hook, wire hook. She could hook the one she wanted to have for dinner. She did. She would wring its head off and scald it so she could pick it clean. She butchered it and cut it up into parts for cooking, frying mostly. Used the lard from the pigs they butchered, the lard, and it was lard.

**Finchum** *Would she cut a pulley bone?*

**Penner** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Would she? You can’t get those anymore at the store.*

**Penner** Always broke or gone.

**Finchum** *Gone.*

**Penner** We always wonder who’s going to get the pulley bone and who was going to get to pull it.

**Finchum** *So you had two sisters older than you?*

**Penner** No. I had one sister older than me and one younger.

**Finchum** *And then a brother? So there were four of you?*

**Penner** Then we had younger ones after that. I had two—couple of sisters and brothers after that. I still have two brothers.

**Finchum** *How many total children?*

**Penner** There were seven of us.

**Finchum** *So it took more than one chicken.*

**Penner** Yes, a lot of times it did. We learned to share.

**Finchum** *You mentioned you had a horse?*

**Penner** Oh yeah.

**Finchum** *What was the name?*

**Penner** The first one was Buck. Our grandpa gave it to us. We all shared that horse, Buck. The next one was Chief. He was a bigger horse and he was just our horse, not just mine, and everybody rode him. He was good. He would—there was a creek that ran through our farm, and the horse could jump the creek with three or four of us on him. (Laughs) He was a good horse, big horse.

**Finchum** *No saddle?*

**Penner** We had a saddle, but when two or three rode it at a time usually there was just no saddle. Everybody’d just hang on like ticks. (Laughs) Three or four could ride him, be good. He was good to us.

**Finchum** *After you finished your chores, what would you do for fun?*

**Penner** We always played in the yard with—we had all kinds of games. Balls, hide and seek, where we would play—somebody’d be “it,” the rest of us would go and hide. “It” would go and find them. Then the ones they found would run to the base and see who got there first and who would be “it” next, but the first one found would usually be “it.” We played marbles. We had marbles, and we could shoot, play games, with them. You’d just line up the marbles and take turns shooting. See who could hit the most marbles at one time.

Jacks, we had jacks that we played with, jacks and balls. We had to take turns. Usually we’d just have one ball, sometimes we’d have two balls, but usually one ball and three or four jacks. Then we’d graduate and get five or six jacks. Bigger ones did more, get fancy with them. We’d throw up the jacks and catch them on the back of our hand instead of in our hands. Some of us could do—got to where we could do it.

We’d have balls that we played with, baseball. Mother made us some balls, softballs, to play with. We learned to catch and play that way, with handmade or homemade balls.

**Finchum** *How would she make those?*

**Penner** She would sew material with her hands. Maybe a piece of material that she could find or whatever was available.

**Finchum** *What would she stuff it with?*

**Penner** She’d stuff it with cotton, which we would pick in our own cotton field. We raised cotton. We’d pick the seeds out of the cotton and then it would be soft, a soft cotton ball. We’d run races, see who was the fastest or whatever. We played Annie Over where we’d throw the ball over the house and see who could catch it. The one that caught it would run around the house with it and touch someone on the other side that was trying to escape and get on the other side. (Laughs) Then they would have to be “it” next. That kind of games is what we did.

**Finchum** *With seven it was easy to do that.*

**Penner** We could play, yeah.

**Finchum** *You went to a country school grades one through eight or…*

**Penner** One through four. Then we consolidated with Colony.

**Finchum** *Then into high school at Colony?*

**Penner** Then we had to go to the bus—we had to ride a bus to the school then. The bus was homemade. They put—it was really a truck with a bed on it, and it had benches down each side of the bus. I don’t think they were padded. When we’d get loud, I remember that we had a good bus driver and he’d stop going and shake his finger at us. Some of the boys, (laughs) they had to be shook at. I guess the girls did too, because this one girl, she was arguing with a boy. He wanted her lunchbox and she wouldn’t let him have it, so she hit him in the head with her lunch bucket. It started bleeding. Our bus [driver] had to stop and fix him up.

**Finchum** *Lunch bucket?*

**Penner** A bucket. It was a syrup bucket. We all used a lot of syrup on our plates at home. In our meals we used a lot of syrup. I believe the syrup was furnished, maybe, to us at one time. Like commodities now. I believe that syrup and it might’ve been sorghum or something else, but we used it. She had a syrup bucket with her lunch in it. She hit him with her lunch bucket and it started to bleed. We thought he was dying, you know. (Laughs) We was all very excited, but he was a good neighbor and kind of got him straightened out.

**Finchum** *What would be in the bucket for lunch? What would you take?*

**Penner** We would take maybe a biscuit with syrup on it, and maybe butter on it—syrup and butter. Something from the garden usually. A tomato or—I don’t really remember what else, but we had…

**Finchum** *Did you have fruit?*

**Penner** …we always had a good lunch. I don’t remember what fruit we had.

**Finchum** *Would your mother make your clothes?*

**Penner** She made a lot of my dresses, yes. Some of our clothing, the boys especially, was furnished. Just like now some of the clothes are furnished from—I don’t know, DHS, who furnishes clothes for the children. They would bring truckloads of uniforms, and we all wore the same kind of clothes. I know now that they brought—we’d all have the same kind of jackets. I don’t remember what else. The whole suit I think.

**Finchum** *How often would you get a new pair of shoes?*

**Penner** Let’s see, on our birthday usually they managed for us to have some kind of a tennis shoes.

**Finchum** *Would you get an allowance?*

**Penner** I did not.

**Finchum** *Remember having your money for the first time?*

**Penner** Yes, I do. My sister, younger than I, I remember we both got a nickel and we went to the store and bought suckers. That’s what we got.

**Finchum** *Candy.*

**Penner** Candy. And that was Payne’s Store, Payne’s Store in Colony. We’d get to go there once in a while. So that’s when we got to spend our nickels. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *How would you get your nickel?*

**Penner** By washing our teeth. That would be a reward, kind of an incentive for us. Still works that way, really.

**Finchum** *Were your parents from Oklahoma?*

**Penner** They were. My mother was Indian enough that she inherited a quarter of land. Her family lived there and the family next door were Irish. Dad farmed and he started farming for my mother. Then they got married. Finally, they got married and they went to the county seat in Cordell, Oklahoma. That’s where they went to get married—in a buggy. They drove a buggy.

They were so excited when they left the courthouse, Dad forgot to pay. They have to pay when they get married. I guess still do. So they got in the buggy and started home. They was going fast, as their horse would take them I guess. Some of the men in town was hollering, “You didn’t pay! You got to come back!” So he said several men on horses chased them down and caught them. When they stopped him he thought they was going to trick him, like a chivalry. When he found out he didn’t pay, then they had to go back to the courthouse and pay. (Laughter)

**Finchum** *Probably wasn’t much. A dollar or two.*

**Penner** Probably, which would’ve been quite a bit for them.

**Finchum** *That’s true.*

**Penner** (Laughs) That was funny. Mother was always making something. If she wasn’t sewing or embroidering, crocheting with her hands, she would be cooking, or cleaning vegetables, or meat, or something.

**Finchum** *Always busy.*

**Penner** The house was—our house…best I remember it was always clean. Everybody had to pick up their own—take care of their own clothing and their own room.

**Finchum** *I notice on this picture it’s 1941. Pearl Harbor happened in December of ’41. Do you remember that day?*

**Penner** Yes, I do. Yes, I remember Pearl Harbor.

**Finchum** *Do you remember where you were?*

**Penner** We were in a cotton field. Yeah, we were picking cotton. Everybody started hollering. Somebody had a radio, we could hear what was happening. I don’t remember a lot that went on that day, but we did know what was going on. At night then when the news was on the radio everybody got around the same radio so we could all hear the news.

**Finchum** *Did any of your brothers have to go serve?*

**Penner** My brother was drafted into the Army, yes. Yeah, they drafted him into the Army. There were several men in our county that was drafted at the same time. They had to meet in Cordell and a bus took them to, I believe, to Oklahoma City to be—where they had to join the Army.

**Finchum** *Did you have a blue star for your window?*

**Penner** We did. I don’t remember what it was. It seemed like mother made one and her sister made one. Aunt Beulah made one for their boy, too. Maybe it was for something else. Anyhow…

**Finchum** *When you finished high school, what did you do?*

**Penner** What did I do? I went to a bus station. Went to Oklahoma City, got a job as a riveter for the Air Force. It was called Douglas Field at that time. Several of us girls went together.

**Finchum** *You just decided one day to go try?*

**Penner** Several of us. Two or three had already gone. Then there was three or four of us that went after that. We found out they could go and do it, we thought we could too.

**Finchum** *Did you have to take a test? Some kind of test?*

**Penner** Yes, a physical, which I’d never seen, known what it was for, or why, but it was terrible. They touched me, you know. (Laughs) I was—I didn’t want a physical. Nothing wrong with me. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Did you get to pick what kind of job you would do or did they assign you?*

**Penner** No. They assigned us to where we were needed. They knew at the time if we could count rivets. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Did you have to work the gun?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Was that hard to learn?*

**Penner** No, it wasn’t hard, but I was a shooter. We had a, we called it a tool bin where we could go and get so many rivets. There wasn’t just a bucketful or something. You just got a few. They furnished an apron, a little white canvas apron to put our rivets in, to carry them in. They checked out the rivet guns. We had to check out a gun and shoot the rivets. I was the rivet shooter and another girl was the bucker, because we had to have two to shoot rivets. We worked on—the first plane was a C-47. We put sheet metal, which to me was just a big sheet of tin. Made the wall. We made a wall between the cockpit and the pilot. It was our job to do that. Then we put sides on the plane and different kind of areas.

**Finchum** *Kind of a team effort? You had to work with your bucker.*

**Penner** Yes. We couldn’t shoot. We had our own signals. I couldn’t see her, she couldn’t see me, but she knew when I was going to shoot. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *What if you missed?*

**Penner** We’d make a mess, then usually ruin a rivet. We’d have to take it out, straighten it up, and put in a new one. That was our role. We could do it all alone.

**Finchum** *Were the planes new or…*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *…used? New?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *You were building new planes*.

**Penner** New ones.

**Finchum** *Not repairing old ones. Besides the apron, what else did you have to wear?*

**Penner** When we’d go to work we had to have our hair tied so we wouldn’t get hung up in machinery somehow. To go to work, at first I was in a carpool. There was three of us that rode together kind of in the same apartment house where we all lived. We’d go to work. We’d have to have our long sleeves and gloves. We’d go to Douglas Field. They’d let us out to go into the plant where we was…to go to work we had to have a—go through a security gate. We had to open our lunch bag and show our identification every day. Maybe sometimes there would be another gate to go through to make sure that we were safe. Then we’d go to work on our assigned places, that’s where we’d go.

**Finchum** *Do you wear pants, or a jumpsuit, or what?*

**Penner** We had to wear long…

**Finchum** *Pants?*

**Penner** Yes, slacks. Shirts.

**Finchum** *Was there a different odor, smell, with that type of work?*

**Penner** Yeah, you could smell it. It was a metal smell. I could smell it. There was lunch areas where we could go to eat, sit to eat, and was also like little places. I don’t know now what they call it, like restaurants…

**Finchum** *Cafes.*

**Penner** …we could go and buy our lunch if preferred or could afford.

**Finchum** *Did they smoke a lot?*

**Penner** Yes, everybody smoked. I didn’t. At that time, I didn’t smoke.

**Finchum** *Was the person that trained you a male or female?*

**Penner** A female. Of course the instructor was a male telling us what we could and couldn’t do and what we was allowed to do, I guess.

**Finchum** *Were there other men that worked there?*

**Penner** There was but it was mostly women where I worked in the riveters, where we’d shoot rivets.

**Finchum**  *Did the men seem to have a problem with women working?*

**Penner** No. Not where I was. We all worked together.

**Finchum** *Do you remember what you got paid?*

**Penner** I think it was about seventy-five cents an hour.

**Finchum** *And how often? Once a week or two weeks or…*

**Penner** Yeah, every two weeks. I had that here, but…

**Finchum** *Yeah, there’s one over here. We weren’t sure if it was seventy-five cents for the day or was it an hour.*

**Penner** For the week.

**Finchum** *For the…*

**Penner** I don’t know what—remember now what it was. Maybe—it was probably an hour, maybe a week. It wasn’t much.

**Finchum** *Wasn’t much, yeah. Could you spend it however you wanted?*

**Penner** Yes. Usually I’d be so homesick I’d want to go home. I’d buy a bus ticket and go to Colony. My folks would meet me at the bus station, which was about five miles from home. Course they was happy to see me coming in there. (Laughs) Likewise. I didn’t go every week. I couldn’t afford it every week, but I had to spend my own money. Once in a while I could buy something, like a dress. I bought a dress one time just to wear home. It was taffeta, I think. It was a real fancy dress for me. It was a dress, but the bottom skirt was plaid and the top part was a solid color with a ribbon on it. Oh, it was super. Anyhow, when I went home they thought the queen had come because I had wore something besides my work clothes. (Laughs) Something I’d bought myself. It was extra.

**Finchum** *Would you buy nylons or were they too hard to get?*

**Penner** We couldn’t get them. I didn’t have any nylons. I think one of the girls there had nylons, that was with us. We had…like these girls now—one of them. (Gestures to photo)

**Finchum** *Yeah, it looks like they may have…*

**Penner** She was the one that would’ve had them on. She and Beddie. I forget her name, this was Beddie.

**Finchum** *All your hair is curly. Did you have perms or is it natural curly?*

**Penner** We had permanents or we rolled our hair on wire. Like I remember on the sack of coffee you could roll the top down, and it was metal through the top of the coffee sack. We’d save those and raise them up, you know, roll our hair on it. Wet it, and course when you combed it out it was curly. (Laughs) We used different things that curled our hair, learned to help it do it. Marie, her name was Marie. I don’t remember where she went to, but the four of us were together a lot. This was my cousin here. This is Claudia. (Gestures to photograph) That was our friend that lived there close to home.

**Finchum** *Did you all four share an apartment?*

**Penner** No. We just run around together.

**Finchum** *After you’d get off from work what would you do for fun in the afternoon?*

**Penner** We worked different shifts and usually when we worked—I guess we called it swing shift. Went to work at three. Or maybe we got off work at three. Anyhow, Norman was a naval air base down in Norman, Oklahoma. They had—the Navy was there. They had buses that would come to Douglas Field and pick up the women from the swing shift that wanted to go down there and dance with the Navy. Several of us did that. Several buses of us. We all wanted to go and dance with the Navy. The music was old time. I heard a lot of it on the TV last night and just loved it. The big band, nickelodeons, is what we had to dance by. Nothing live.

**Finchum** *Kind of the USO’s or something different?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Was it USO’s?*

**Penner** Yes, but it was all Navy.

**Finchum** *When they shipped off, would you keep in touch with any of them?*

**Penner** No, I didn’t. Anytime we’d go to Oklahoma City, they’d be there and be planning to dance and we did. We danced with Navy, any of them that…in the—like you said, the USO’s. We just danced with each other and they was happy to dance. I didn’t really know a lot about it, but I caught on. (Laughs) I think I could still do it. It was so fun, very good time for us, all of us. Of course there was curfews. We had to leave and that was for our own protection I think. Everybody respected it.

As far as drinking or eating out, we didn’t do much of that. We couldn’t afford it. If we drank a Coke, we was doing good. Maybe one Coke would last all evening. (Laughs) Then we’d all go to our own ways. Everybody had their own way, apartments and places to go—most. But they did health checks on us quite often. All of us. Anybody that was outside on the street. They would do a health check on us.

**Finchum** *What would they check? Blood pressure, and that type of thing?*

**Penner** Vitals.

**Finchum** *Oh, vitals.*

**Penner** And see if we was doing good, I guess. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *If you weren’t, they would’ve pulled you off of the gun?*

**Penner** No, they took us in. Wrote home. Wrote to Mama, tell them I need a new tooth pulled or I needed help. No, I never had any problems because my folks all kept up with most of that stuff. The way we lived, they would take us to the clinics and check us out, our blood pressure.

**Finchum** *Indian clinics?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *How long did you work at Douglas?*

**Penner** Oh, maybe two years. Then the war ended and VJ Day. They just closed the plant right then, that day. We didn’t have a chance to do anything except check in our tools that we had checked out. Check in our tools and say our goodbyes. We all had to go back to our own apartments, pack up, and go home. That’s all we could do.

**Finchum** *They didn’t give you a choice whether you wanted to stay on? Nothing?*

**Penner** No. I imagine some of them did. Maybe some of them.

**Finchum** *But not riveters?*

**Penner** Not riveters, right. I imagine some of them did that was maybe in office work or something else, but me, I was a riveter. I went home immediately. There was unemployment that you could draw. Forget how much it was for. This one girl—there was an article in the paper this week about Rosie the Riveters, and she wrote that she had went through this and that and she told us that her husband, and her son, and the whole family had followed her footsteps. It was a neat story, I was going to bring it and show it to you.

**Finchum** *Were you sad to be going home and out of work?*

**Penner** No. I was happy to go home.

**Finchum** *And that the war was over.*

**Penner** And that the war was over. Everybody was dancing and singing in the streets and everywhere. We just had to say our goodbyes. I had to go downtown to the bus station in Oklahoma City, catch a bus. I think they called it the Trailway bus that took us out Highway 41 to Cobb Creek Station. That is where we had to go, where the bus station was. My parents was always there. I would write Mother, and we could use the mail service, but I couldn’t use the phone service, didn’t have a phone. No telephone. It’s hard to imagine, but it works that way and we did alright.

**Finchum** *You could write letters back and forth home?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *With a stamp or no…*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *…stamps?*

**Penner** Yeah, we had to have a three cent stamp.

**Finchum** *So the mailman was an important person.*

**Penner** Yes, very. We would write letters back and forth to Mother.

**Finchum** *Did you save any of those?*

**Penner** Yes, I have a couple of them, not many of them…

**Finchum** *That’s good.*

**Penner** …she wrote and that I wrote.

**Finchum** *Were you married during that time or later?*

**Penner** No.

**Finchum** *Later?*

**Penner** I didn’t know my husband at that time. His school wasn’t far from mine, which was about seven, ten miles apart.

**Finchum** *Was he in the military?*

**Penner** He was in the Navy, yes. When he came home from the Navy, I was home and that’s when I met him. We had seen each other at school, because his school had to come to my school to practice basketball, because they didn’t have a gym and we did, so they’d come to our school to practice. I had seen him. Not really met him, but I knew who he was. We knew all of their team, they knew ours, but we were just two different schools. That was good. A lot of us made good friends that way and folks. They were German folks and very good.

**Finchum** *So when did you get married?*

**Penner** Then after I met him we started going together. He had a car. He was a twin and he and his brother together had a car. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *That was a step up wasn’t it?*

**Penner** It really was, yeah. He could come by.

**Finchum** *Got married in 19—what? Forty-seven-ish or 1950s?*

**Penner** It’s been too far for my mind.

**Donna** Forty-seven.

**Finchum** *They say ’47.*

**Penner** Something like that.

**Finchum** *Did you work once you got married?*

**Penner** No. We worked together on the farm.

**Finchum** *The family farm?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *One hundred and sixty acres or…*

**Penner** Yes. Yeah, we worked together and built the little house for our own, on his folks’ place I guess it was. He stayed at home. He drove a tractor, drove trucks and worked in the hay and different things. Kind of work that was to be done. Milk cows, I know we’d get up, it would still be dark in the morning. We’d get up and milk maybe ten or twelve cows, (laughs) and quarreled around.

**Finchum** *A little bit different than doing a rivet gun.*

**Penner** Yes. I didn’t want to get dirty, but I got used to it. We had to feed cows and clean them up too and then milk.

**Finchum** *Had a dairy?*

**Penner** We milked by hand at first and then we had a little electric milker. I think it was run with a battery. It was an electric milker. He could do it; I never did do it. I’d usually hold the bucket or something else. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *Did you raise chickens yourself at that point?*

**Penner** Yes, raised chickens, but mostly [my] mother-in-law, his mother, would order chickens by the mail, in the mail. They’d come and the postman would bring them to the house. She’d be ready. She’d have a brooder ready for the new chickens. Take care of them with some kind of heater and water, feeder, had everything ready for the new chickens. Went with her a lot to the chicken house. I like the little chickens, didn’t take long to be big enough to fry. That was part of it, we knew it. We had a good life together. We bought a farm after a year or two we’d been married. He decided he wanted his own farm, not work with his folks. I just thought, ‘Well I want one too.’ (Laughs) So we worked and I got a farm too. I still have it.

**Finchum** *You do?*

**Penner** Yes. (Gestures to photograph)

**Finchum** *It’s been in the family for over a hundred years?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *With your grandparents and parents.*

**Penner** Yeah.

**Finchum** *It’s a centennial farm.*

**Penner** Both are. I have one and he has one. It’s wonderful. I can’t believe anyone would do it, but we did. We did it. Mostly wheat is what was on his farm and different kinds of grains and feeds. They raised pigs and all kinds of stuff. Then on my farm I think it’s mostly wheat, alfalfa hay and a creek that runs through where everybody loved to play. There was a little waterfall in the creek, it’s Cobb Creek. We just called it Horseshoe Bend because that was kind of the run of the river, like a horseshoe, so that’s the way it got…everybody calls it Horseshoe Bend.

**Finchum** *And it’s Cobb or Copper Creek?*

**Penner** Colony, C-O-L-O-N-Y.

**Finchum** *The creek?*

**Penner** The creek is Cobb.

**Finchum** *Cobb, C-O-B-B?*

**Penner** Yes, C-O—Cobb Creek.

**Finchum** *To have water on the property was a main thing back—well, still is I guess.*

**Penner** Yes, it is. My nephew’s there now. I guess we’ll hang on to it for as long as I can. After your folks had pioneered and everything through there and raised the kids and just took care of everything. That’s something to really be proud of, I think, and band together. It changed hands down the line a time or two, but it’s still mine. It’s fun to think about it even. They say—my nephew was here the other day, he said, “Now if you all was going to travel where would you want to go, Grandma? Where would you like to travel to?” “Horseshoe Bend.” (Laughs) That’s okay. I can’t travel far and I know it.

**Finchum** *How would you get to Horseshoe Bend?*

**Penner** I would just…

**Finchum** *Walk?*

**Penner** No, somebody’d drive a…

**Finchum** *Pickup?*

**Penner** …car.

**Finchum** *Or a Gator? Whatever those four-wheel drives are.*

**Penner** Yeah, just the road goes right by the farm. Course there’s a road all through the farm too where they can drive, but it’s interesting to see and be into…there’s different kinds of animals that have been raised and lived there. The deer are not as plentiful as they were. They still find out there’s armadillos and different kinds of animals there. I’m not interested in them, but they’re funny to watch.

**Finchum** *They are.*

**Penner** Kind of amazing to see.

**Finchum** *Is the house that you grew up in still standing?*

**Penner** It is getting dilapidated now. No one is in the house, but no one has lived there to keep it up. I don’t think it’s repairable even now. It’s kind of sad to look at it, but it had its days.

**Finchum** *Had its days. Gave you all a good foundation it sounds like.*

**Penner** Yeah, that’s it.

**Finchum** *When you come home from working as a Rosie, you were good with mechanical things at that point or no?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *You could fix things around the house?*

**Penner** Yes, I took care of a lot of stuff. Worked with different people around there. I wasn’t home long before I got married. So that’s when you start working for others too, helping them along...

**Finchum** *Sure. How many children did you have?*

**Penner** I had two girls. They’re both here. They don’t know it, but they are. (Laughs because one asleep) They’ve been very helpful for me and excited about today.

**Finchum** *When did you first tell them about being a Rosie? Back when they were in high school or a little older?*

**Penner** Yeah, they knew I was a Rosie all the way.

**Finchum** *Contributed to the war effort yourself, didn’t you?*

**Penner** Yes. They sure was excited about today. That’s good.

**Finchum** *What was the hardest part about being a Rosie?*

**Penner** I guess on the work part we had to sweep up our areas that were cluttered up maybe with any kind of debris, if we had dropped rivets or broke something. I hated to repair stuff there. Had to sweep up the floor, big floor. I don’t know.

**Finchum** *Would they have Spam in the lunchroom?*

**Penner** I don’t remember what it was.

**Finchum** *People associate World War II with Spam, the canned meat.*

**Penner** And peanut butter.

**Finchum** *Oh, peanut butter? Didn’t know that.*

**Penner** Yes, and…

**Finchum** *I just wondered if they served it in the cafeteria, rations.*

**Penner** Probably did.

**Finchum** *But you took your lunch most of the time?*

**Penner** Yes. You just had like forty minutes maybe for a lunch period. Maybe an hour. I don’t remember how long it was, but by the time you walked to the lunch area you’re spending your time and getting your lunch you might not have time left to eat everything, whatever. I always took my lunch every time I had time or had something to take.

**Finchum** *Was the building air conditioned?*

**Penner** The building—yes.

**Finchum** *That was good. In Oklahoma heat that’s good.*

**Penner** That long building that’s out there now is where I worked. Have you seen it?

**Finchum** *I’ve seen it, yes.*

**Penner** The plane that I worked on or the same style of a plane, C-47, is on a pedestal there at the front of the entrance of the Douglas Aircraft.

**Finchum** *Did they have any midgets working there? Short people?*

**Penner** Oh yes.

**Finchum** *To do the smaller jobs, fit in smaller areas?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Really?*

**Penner** They surely did. Something to see, you know, if you weren’t used to them. They’d hang together, two or three of them together. They’re just fun, good, fun people. One of them works down here at the bank, the Yukon National Bank. There’s a midget that works there and she’s so friendly and great. She owns a farm too out here somewhere.

**Finchum** *Just sounds like they tried to get the right person with the right job, if they could.*

**Penner** Oh yeah, they carried the mail. They did a lot of jobs. They put rivets in the rivet bins so we wouldn’t get too many, or keep the tools clean and straight, hung in the right place so they’re easy to handle and get a hold of when we wanted to.

**Finchum** *Were there any African Americans that worked with you?*

**Penner** That worked with me? No.

**Finchum** *Or any around?*

**Penner** Yes, there was a few.

**Finchum** *Just a few.*

**Penner** You know where my…Jim brought me a…

**Donna** Oh, the *Tinker Takeoff* did a special interview with an African American lady, and she was a Rosie, and her sons have also…I’ll find it.

**Penner** It’s on the table right there. Right here. I’m sure I—I just loved it because I knew what she had done, been through, I feel like it.

**Finchum** *You can relate to it.*

**Penner** Yeah, I kept the article.

**Finchum** *Would your clothes get greasy?*

**Penner** Not much, just for—the rivets were greasy. Had to…

**Finchum** *How big are they? How big would a rivet be? About like a...*

**Penner** That end of a pencil.

**Finchum** *Oh, small, okay. So it’d be easy to slide out of your hand.*

**Penner** Yes, very. You find it, Donna? There it is.

**Finchum** *Okay.*

**Penner** See, she was a riveter and I thought that was so good that she took time to do that.

**Finchum** *I think it took courage to go from the farm to the city.*

**Penner** It really did.

**Finchum** *Being a girl and not married.*

**Penner** Yeah.

**Finchum** *Finding a place to live.*

**Penner** That was scary. I had to ride a bus around town. I wasn’t alone though, there were other girls with me. I know it was three that was with me, all the time we were together.

**Finchum** *That helped.*

**Penner** Some girls, yes. We did okay, but if I didn’t know where to go, well one of them did. Could follow a bus route or different things to do.

**Finchum** *None of you four had a car?*

**Penner** No. Didn’t even think about it. I guess that maybe a car wouldn’t have been available anyway, at that time.

**Finchum** *I don’t think they were making new ones during the war, or tires, and you couldn’t get gas. So you might as well walk or take the bus.*

**Penner** Yeah, and you meet people if you’re walking. I know my neighbors. I get up and walk around quite a bit, but…

**Finchum** *How did you get involved with this Rosie Association?*

**Penner** You just write to them. When you see it advertised, I guess, in the paper.

**Finchum** *And the main reason you did it was?*

**Penner** I wanted to meet the people that did the work like I did. Worked together, know where they worked.

**Finchum** *And the main reason you went to Douglas to begin with was what? To earn money or to help with the effort, or what?*

**Penner** Yes, I wanted to earn money and the war effort, of course, too.

**Finchum** *Both of them.*

**Penner** Now that pink… (paper)

**Finchum** *It tells a little bit…*

**Penner** That might be an order blank there. In there there’s an order blank where you can order any of the books, different things that are available through them.

**Finchum** *And you worked there for two years.*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *And your last paycheck was?*

**Penner** I don’t know; it was about seventy-some dollars.

**Finchum** *Enough for a bus ticket home.*

**Penner** Oh yes, that was more than enough I’m sure. We knew the bus driver because we went so much on the road. Two of the girls would get off at the same place I did.

**Finchum** *About how long would it take you to get from Oklahoma City to…*

**Penner** To Cobb Creek?

**Finchum** *Yes.*

**Penner** Probably two hours or more.

**Finchum** *One way?*

**Penner** One way because we had to stop at every station. Pick up somebody or let somebody out.

**Finchum** *So coming back on Sunday you would have to leave with that in mind. Get back in time to…*

**Penner** Yes*.* You had to keep track of where you was going and what you was going to do after you got there.

**Finchum** *Did you have a time clock where you had to clock in? A punch card? How did you clock in?*

**Penner** Yeah, we did have a—we was clocked in.

**Finchum**  *Would you do a forty-hour week?*

**Penner** Put in cards. We did.

**Finchum** *Did you have to do overtime?*

**Penner** It was on occasion was overtime, but usually a forty-hour was a good week. Then you’d be free for a few hours before you could go back. It was good training. Teach you to get up early and be on the job. Something I really never had to do.

**Finchum** *Being on the farm, you were used to getting up early.*

**Penner** Taking care of yours, if you had cattle.

**Finchum** *Is there anything I haven’t covered that you want to add?*

**Penner** I don’t know what it would be. But she was all riveter all the way. I thought that was neat. This came out in the…

**Donna** *Tinker Takeoff*.

**Penner** *Tinker Takeoff*, yes. Her husband works out there, and so they keep in touch, but I enjoyed all these girls. Her parents worked at the bus station where Cobb Creek—Cobb Creek was the bus station. Her parents—she lived there. That’s me and this was my cousin. They lived down the street from me. (Describing photograph of four women)

**Finchum** *Were they all in the rivet department?*

**Penner** No. Just that we all went at the same time on the same bus. This is a girl that worked with me. We’d go to the—like eat ice cream in the evening or go down the street to a dance or something.

**Finchum** *Was a riveter the job to have? Did it pay more than the other jobs?*

**Penner** I don’t think it did.

**Finchum** *Pay more than the bucker?*

**Penner** I don’t think so.

**Finchum** *I wouldn’t think so either, but I thought I’d ask.*

**Penner** I don’t know either, didn’t know. Never did know how much they made.

**Finchum** *Did you ever have to call in sick?*

**Penner** No.

**Finchum** *You always worked.*

**Penner** Always there.

**Finchum** *That’s your card, okay.*

**Donna** That’s her ID card.

**Finchum** *You’ve kept it all these years.*

**Penner** Yeah, I had to have a card to check in, check out.

**Finchum** *Would they start the morning with any type of routine like saying the “Pledge of Allegiance” or anything like that?*

**Penner** Usually music would be playing and it might be something that was patriotic. I don’t really remember what it was when we went in. Everything was patriotic around there at that time. Wondering who was doing what.

**Finchum** *Did two years fly by or go really slow?*

**Penner** They flew by. I loved what I was doing. I could do it and felt like I was doing good. Supporting myself. That was good and it was still good.

**Donna** How old were you when you left home?

**Finchum** *How old were you when you left home?*

**Penner** I think I was seventeen.

**Finchum** *Right out of high school?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Right out. Right out of high school. And your mother and dad said, “Okay, you can go.”?*

**Penner** Yes. “If you’ll be good.” They gave orders, and “Take care of yourself.”

**Donna** Was Uncle Dallas in California already?

**Penner** No. He was still at home when I left, when he was drafted.

**Finchum** *He made it back home? Did he make it back?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Do you remember that day?*

**Penner** Yes, sure do. The uniform looked so big, but he was a big boy anyway. Made him look little I guess. He did good.

**Finchum** *Lost weight while he was over there?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Wherever he was.*

**Donna** He didn’t leave the States. His job was here.

**Penner** Yes, he was in San Diego most of the time.

**Finchum** *They had them doing whatever needed to be done.*

**Penner** He could clean guns is what he did. Cleaned the guns, took them apart and…

**Finchum** *Well, did your husband get the GI Bill?*

**Penner**  Yes.

**Finchum** *Did he do anything with it?*

**Penner** Yes, he used it.

**Finchum** *What did he do?*

**Penner** GI Bill? He went to school.

**Finchum** Did he?

**Donna** Airplane mechanic.

**Penner** That’s him. (Gestures to photograph)

**Finchum** *With being a veteran, did that help with the loan to get the property, to get your farm?*

**Penner** Yes. It sure did.

**Finchum** *All of that helped to get America on the move, didn’t it? GI Bills and loans and all that after they came back. Rosies working, a lot of women stayed in the workforce after that. You did too just not out in the war [effort].*

**Penner** Not in the rivets.

**Finchum** *Not in the rivets. You worked at home putting food on everybody’s table. Didn’t raise cotton again though.*

**Penner** Everybody had a victory garden even in the flower beds. They planted vegetables in front yards. They’d dig up the front yards and make gardens in there.

**Finchum** *You remember seeing that?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Did yours in front of your apartment?*

**Penner** Corn, yes. People that didn’t know better would think we were crazy to plant corn in the front yard. (Laughs) We knew how to do it.

**Finchum** *And you’d have to share when it came in?*

**Penner** Yeah, or they’d…

**Finchum** *Help themselves?*

**Penner** Help themselves, yeah. It was the best. We loved sharing anything. I remember corn and carrots were some of the main things that we planted in the yard.

**Finchum** *While you were in Oklahoma City helping with the war on this end, what were your parents doing back on the farm?*

**Penner** They was raising chickens, and raising pigs, corn, cotton.

**Finchum** *And they would they still do the Red Cross, making bandages, and stuff?*

**Penner** Yes, they did.

**Finchum** *And war bonds and war stamps?*

**Penner** Yes, we all had bonds, even in high school or in school we bought postage stamps. They were war stamps of course. You get so many you’d fill up a stamp book. You’d have a book and anytime you bought a stamp you put it in the book.

**Finchum** *Then when the book got full what would…*

**Penner** You could cash it in for a bond.

**Finchum** *Then how long would you keep the bond before you turned it in for something else?*

**Penner** You could keep it until it matured to about thirty-five years—thirty-five dollars. I don’t know. Don’t remember all that.

**Finchum** *I’ll have to look it up because I’m not sure either.*

**Penner** I remember fun doing it. Trying to get more than somebody else.

**Finchum** *And you had to reuse a lot of things. You just didn’t toss stuff out if it…*

**Penner** Everything was rationed. We had to share ration stamps for oil for a car, or for gas, and our food even. We couldn’t buy…usually sugar is one thing that we couldn’t buy without a stamp. Sugar and coffee and flour, everything was rationed. We could just have so much. If you used your coupon for sugar, you’d just get so much. And then you wouldn’t get any more until you saved up enough rations to get some more.

**Donna** Did you have to stand in line to get a ration book?

**Penner** Sometimes. Depended on when they were available. At the courthouse is where I had to go to get my ration books. Then it got so they’d mail them to you. Then you’d know what day they was coming of course, wait for the mailman.

**Finchum** *Did you worry about someone else getting them if they were coming through the mail? No?*

**Penner** No, if I needed sugar and didn’t have a stamp I could borrow sugar from my neighbor or a stamp from her. We had good neighbors where we could do that, with some of them. I can’t remember everything that was rationed, but everything was rationed.

**Donna** Now did you get a ration book? And Aunt Gladys get one and…

**Penner** Yes, everybody got one.

**Donna** And your mom got one, and your dad got one?

**Penner** Depended on our age, if we was old enough to have our own book. My sister was older than me. I remember that she got one and she could buy hose, and I could wear them. (Laughs) Nylon hose. Just odd things like that.

**Finchum** *Did it have the seam up the back? The stockings have the seam down the back?*

**Penner** Yeah.

**Donna** Did you put makeup on your legs and draw a line?

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *You did?*

**Penner** Yeah.

**Finchum** *You did? How did you get it straight?*

**Penner** Oh, you would. (Laughs) You’d catch on, after a while if you messed up on one.

**Finchum** *Would you do that if you went to a dance?*

**Penner** Yes.

**Finchum** *Would you?*

**Penner** Sometimes we would. Sometimes you’d just paint it on. Painted a seam down a leg. We did that too, make it look like we had on hose and a…I guess they all knew different, but it was okay.

**Finchum** *Everybody else was doing it too, weren’t they?*

**Penner** Yeah. (Laughs) Sharing. Mostly makeup was that way. You just used what you had, fake what you didn’t have. Use something else.

**Finchum** *Figure it out.*

**Penner** That’s about what we did. I think I saved enough money when I was a riveter to buy some silverware. I think I still have some of it, which was very hard to get. You had to get a piece at a time. I think I’ve got some of mine. They’re different, too, than what you can buy now today. They’re big—the forks are big. (Laughs)

**Finchum** *While you were still there President Roosevelt died? Do you remember that? Like April of ’45?*

**Penner** Oh golly…

**Finchum** *And someone said there may have been a tornado that same day. Does that ring any bells? No?*

**Penner** I guess I was picking it up probably. I was probably in the field, I don’t know.

**Finchum** *No, while you we reworking at Douglas is when he passed away. Did you have a Roosevelt dime? I think that’s what they called them. They weren’t mixed at that point, they didn’t have the copper in them way back when. War pennies? War cents? Money was different during the war too, wasn’t it?*

**Penner** Yes, it was. No, I didn’t save money. I might have, but I have a lot of little—I’d saved a lot, but I’m not sure what they are anymore or what they’re for.

**Finchum** *You’ve got quite a collection of “We can do it” things around here.*

**Penner** Yeah, good.

**Finchum** *You did it.*

**Penner** I feel like I did it, yes. I did it as good as I could. All the women did, I think, they did as good as they could. Especially the ones that had to leave families and some of them left because they wanted to leave, for reasons. Some had to leave to provide for their families. It worked.

**Finchum** *Those of us who work now thank you for getting the door open for us. You did, women didn’t work much until…*

**Penner** You’d be afraid to work. We were afraid to get out in the workforce until we started it. It did kind of open a door, I guess. It’s good that you all are carrying on. It takes more than one really realizes to really keep it going.

**Finchum** *It sure does. Anything else you want to add before we close?*

**Penner** Honey, y’all think of anything you want to say?

**Donna** No.

**Penner** I think that we’ve hung together, and I’ve raised my family. They’re doing okay. We appreciate you and glad you can have a good job and come by.

**Finchum** *I thank you for spending the afternoon with me. It’s been fun.*

**Penner** Good, I hope you enjoyed it.

**Finchum** *Thank you.*

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*