

Museum of History and Industry
Historical Society of Seattle and King County

Transcript

Doris Eason - taped interview, March 23, 1985
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Side A

This is an interview with Mrs. Doris Eason on March 23, 1985. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for the Museum of History and Industry.

Q. Let me start by asking you how you learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Doris Eason I was in Portland at the time. My first husband and I were on a hike out into the hinterlands around the city - we had no car. When we came back into town, and got the streetcar to go home, everyone was talking about it.

Q. Were you alarmed?

Doris Eason Oh, yes. But my mother was very active in the peace movement, so I wasn't surprised. I remember a group of experts being very serious once at one of the International Institutes, I believe it was in Iowa, warning that the young people my age were going to have to face up to whether they wanted to be conscripted or not. When Roosevelt put in conscription, it seemed to follow that when you do that, there's a war on the way. Of course, no one knew any specifics about it, but they felt that the trend was there. So I was not surprised.

Q. Were you yourself active at that time in peace movements?

Doris Eason Not active, no, other than attending lectures and things like the Niagara Peace Council.

Q. How did you come to Seattle?

Doris Eason When I was married the first time, we lived in Portland for four years, and then he was transferred up here, and we came to Seattle.

Q. Through his job?

Doris Eason Yes.

Q. How did you come to work for the Seattle Housing Authority?

Doris Eason Well, there was such a difference between Seattle and Portland. Oregon is a very interesting state, but our stay there had been a sort of sleepy time for me because I didn't get into anything in the city. When I came to Seattle, somehow immediately I went to the YWCA, and they almost embraced me. I had been active in YW work back home, and it drew me right into everything. Within a few months after I came to town, I was sent on a conference at Asilomar, and I became active in the young

married women's group, and my special interest was always in integration.

I met Mrs. Steinmetz, who headed the Christian Friends for Racial Equality here, and got into a lot of activities centered around integration programs.

Q. How long had the war been on when you came to Seattle?

Doris Eason We came in the early winter of '44.

Q. And you went to work for the housing authority?

Doris Eason Well, I decided after getting so involved in community activities that domesticity and raising children was not for me, so when my husband was transferred again to California, I decided to stay here and see what would be my future.

Immediately, through my contacts in doing volunteer work, I was in touch with the head of the Urban League, and he said, "Why don't you go to the Seattle Housing Authority? It's dedicated to an integrated program, and I think you would do a good job there."

So I went there as a group worker.

Q. What does that mean?

Doris Eason They called us "Project Services Advisors." We were supposed to have a two-fold job: one, to help the in-migrant war workers become acclimated to the community, to know what was going on in the outer community because they were so isolated in their housing centers, and, two, to bring programs to them in the housing centers. Each center had a community building, and we had programs for the kids, like softball leagues and dancing, and we taught them dancing, and had charm school, and things like that.

These teenagers there had been a rather unruly bunch at the temporary project where I started. Having their own activities - and they even put out their own newspaper - helped them become a healthy group of kids rather than destructive.

Q. How many projects were there in Seattle, and where were they?

Doris Eason I forget exactly how many there were, but I can name them. There was High Point and Delridge, out in West Seattle, and Holly Park and Rainier Vista and Stadium Homes in the Rainier Valley, and there was Duwamish Bend, which was a huge temporary project. "Temporary" means that the units were of temporary construction, and were slated to be torn down after the demand for housing was met, and they were removed in, I think, 1952, when they started clearing out all those temporaries.

Then we had two dormitories on Michigan Street, out near Duwamish Bend, and we had a unit over on Magnolia, mostly for military. And we had a temporary area up near Sand Point also.

Q. Was Yesler Terrace considered to be a wartime housing project?

Doris Eason Yesler Terrace was the first development built, and it was for slum clearance, and under a different law. They had rent subsidies from the very beginning.

This program of housing where for every substandard house you tore down, you had to replace it with one - that was in the law of 1939 or in that period. Believe it or not, it was not so much a slum clearance program as its first priority, but to make work for people.

Q. Oh, I believe you! A kind of WPA sort of project.
So Yesler Terrace predates the war.

Can you guess how many thousands of people were housed in these Seattle projects?

Doris Eason Well, I was reading just today that by 1945, Seattle had gained 100,000 extra people during that year.

Q. And the projects you've mentioned don't include the King County projects.

Doris Eason No, they don't. These were all within the city limits.

Q. There were quite a few King County projects as well?

Doris Eason In Kirkland, Renton, and White Center.

Q. Any up north?

Doris Eason No, I don't believe so.

Q. You've mentioned demountable units, that were just temporary for the duration of the war - were there any that were built to be permanent?

Doris Eason Well, yes, not of that construction, but the three developments which were slated to be permanent were Holly Park, in Rainier Valley, which is still there and had 900 units, and High Point in West Seattle had 1300. Some of them at High Point have been taken down for space reasons or for enlarging the units, making a five-bedroom out of a two-bedroom unit so I don't now what the count is now. And then Rainier Vista, also in Rainier Valley, which had 500 units.

Of course, they were the really nice construction, with oil heat and electric stoves, whereas the temporary housing just had coal and wood ranges, and space heaters for heating the houses.

So the ruling, during the time I worked there, was that if you spent a certain number of years living in temporary housing, then you could apply for permanent housing. So most people who lived in permanent housing were graduated, you might say, from temporary housing.

Q. What did they look like inside? Were they comfortable? Were they attractive? Did they wear well, or did they tend to wear through quickly?

Doris Eason I think the construction was very good. They did wear well in the permanent housing. They were small, except Yesler Terrace. In the original plans for Yesler Terrace, those apartments are quite spacious, with a good space for the living

rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms. They (the permanent housing) were just like a lot of the crackerbox housing that was built here and there during the forties.

But I am pleased with the way the Housing Authority has always kept them up. They are in very good condition outside and in. We've never been ashamed of the housing in Seattle, though in some other cities, they've deteriorated and gone downhill. In Seattle, they always kept them up, and they always had a surplus in their budget until President Nixon came along and said that that money had to be used up before they could get any rent supplement money. By then, we were in the low rent program for everyone. That was a sad thing because the Housing Authority had been so frugal about operations and conscientious in keeping up the buildings.

Q. Did each Housing Project have a central area where there was a playground and communal buildings?

Doris Eason Yes.

Q. How was it planned?

Doris Eason The Community Center was usually part of the office building, or adjacent to, and then the field and playground were right near the office. And that's the way it is now.

a brief pause.

Q. Who lived in the Housing Projects? Where did they come from and what were they doing here?

Doris Eason Well, in one month in the Applications Department, we took applications from people from thirty-eight different states - these were the war workers. During all the time that I was with the Housing Authority, which was twenty-eight years, we went through all the recruitment periods that Boeing had, and all the departure and layoff periods that Boeing had. As Boeing breathed, so our operation functioned.

We had people from everywhere. The people that I worked with in the group work, when I was Project Services Advisor, a good many of them were from Montana and Idaho and Minnesota. And then a fair number from different states in the South, though I don't remember specific states.

When Boeing recruited, they went all over.

Q. So Boeing actually sent out recruiters to localities. Do you know what those recruiters told people? Did people come to Seattle with stars in their eyes?

Doris Eason Oh, they certainly did. And the tragedy of it was that so many people gave up jobs like a fireman in a city with a good pension plan and security, and came here and found, yes, wages were higher than what he had at home, but the cost of living was also higher. So it was somewhat tragic.

Q. Was there a racial mix in the people that Boeing was recruiting?

Doris Eason Yes, there was. There seemed to be no particular race that they were concentrating on - it was everyone. According to the statistics from the thirty eight different states, when we had this one month of applications, of 461, 278 were white, and 170 were Negroes, and the rest were other races. It was close to 50% that were minorities.

Q. Did that title "minorities" include American Indians?
Are there any other ethnic groups included in it?

Doris Eason Yes, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Polynesian, Mexican...

Q. By the time you came to Seattle, the Japanese-Americans were gone from here?

Doris Eason Yes.

Q. Were the King County Housing Authority Projects integrated?

Doris Eason No, they were not. That was a big difference between their operation and the Seattle Housing Authority.

I don't know how they got away with it, because there was a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) and there were federal laws under the housing agency at the time, and there was even a race relations director. She was a woman I knew and she later became head of the Civic Unity Committee here in Seattle, the first commission that was set up to watchdog minority affairs in this city. Her name was Irene Miller, and she became quite a figure in Seattle.

Q. But the Seattle Housing Authority itself maintained integrated housing. Was that always easy to do?

Doris Eason It was hard to do, because when you had people out in the field who are not under your direct supervision, they found all kinds of ways to get around it. One of my jobs later on when I moved into the Applications Department was to do an audit of records and to examine the placement map. Every office in the Projects had a placement map, and they were supposed to keep good control on keeping the community integrated. To do that, we had to have a preference system, you might say; "preference" in that we had so many more Negroes who needed housing than whites that we had to place them as we had spots for them. It wasn't quite fair in a way. When the 1960's came along, all the protest was made that it was not fair to keep the communities integrated, that the blacks had as much right to be segregated as not - the "black is beautiful" period. I think that "tipping" came into play. We had studies that more or less indicated that there was a tipping process if the minority population became more than 30%, then you would tip, and it would go almost all black. People could absorb a certain percentage of Negroes, but when it got over that amount, they panicked and left or would not live there.

Q. What was the housing situation like in Seattle outside of the Housing Authority, not only for blacks, but for incoming workers of all kinds? How crowded was it?

Doris Eason It was very crowded, with people sleeping in the streets almost. In fact in the 1945 Annual Report which summed up that whole period from 1941 to 1945, it says, "Within a short time the hotels and boarding houses were so crowded that workers were sleeping on mattresses thrown on the floor, or sharing beds in relays, or sleeping a half dozen or more to a room. Trailer camps became so tenanted that there was barely room to park a trailer or pitch a tent anywhere near Seattle."

 And of course this hurt production because people were taking time off from their jobs to find housing, and some people went back home, and some wanted to go back home.

Q. Were Seattlites eager or reluctant to rent to the newcomers?

Doris Eason That I don't know, but I think there was a little reluctance. I remember the phrasing of disliking these newcomers, suspicious just like any Yankee native.

Q. Were restrictive covenants in effect in the city of Seattle?

Doris Eason Oh, definitely.

Q. How did they operate?

Doris Eason They were written into the deeds of the houses in certain areas of the city. I used to do a study of them for the Christian Friends for Racial Equality which was one of the main groups here trying to get people together so that they would understand one another and therefore get rid of the discrimination. But all of Magnolia had restrictive covenants, and all of Broadmoor, of course, and they would even lump people in with animals. For instance, "for the life of this property, there shall be no Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, or pigs" - something like that is how they were written. It was pretty cruel.

 And there was a tacit agreement even up until 1952 that there shall be no Negro living north of Helen Street, which was about where the Japanese tea house is in the Arboretum. That was an unwritten law among realtors, was that north of there, there would never be any Negroes.

 Well, what happened was this. One of the first breakthroughs was when Benjamin McAdoo designed a house for Dr. Browning, who was a rather affluent dentist who had come here after the war. They built in the East Howell area, in that little valley where East Howell Street is. They gained the property by subterfuge - I think they had a friend buy it for them - and then they built a lovely house. They were the first ones in that area.

 And McAdoo was gradually able to get little duplexes and little houses in that whole valley, so you'll find that that's more or less an expansion of the Madison area where all of them were crowded in together before that.

Q. In the Projects during the war, are there any incidents that stand out in your memory in terms of racial integration?

Doris Eason Oh, yes, the number of people that, after they had a positive experience, - and there were many many positive experiences - because Negroes at that time were far from belligerent. They were so gentle - not accepting their lot, so

much - but so willing if someone went one-tenth of the way, to go the other 90%. And to make allowances for blunders. Sometimes when we aren't aware of feelings, sometimes people say things that they don't realize are so hurtful.

There were little awakenings, and the experience in the Projects was a positive thing for integration in all my associations with the people. I worked right on the Project level for seven years in this big development at Duwamish Bend, down near Michigan Street, where Airport Way comes in. Time and time again, people as they were leaving would say, "I'm from the South, and I didn't think I could stand living here next door to a Negro, but I'm telling you they were the finest people I've ever met, helpful, and friendly, and clean. I've lost all my prejudice."

Q. White families coming from the South must have tended to bring their prejudices with them. Were they more prejudiced than the norm in the Seattle community?

Doris Eason Yes, they were.

Q. How would you compare the Northwest black norm with the blacks who were coming in from out of state? Is there any way to generalize about that?

Doris Eason I would say that the Negroes who were living here - and of course, there weren't very many - were so integrated. I'm thinking of several friends of mine, one who grew up in Ballard, for example. They were so integrated, that it's like the Jewish people in Germany - they were more German than they were Jewish until Hitler came along and divided them again.

The same was true of the Negroes who were here. I don't believe that there was any problem at all, but when the southern (Negro) people came because there was such high visibility, and such a number of them... But their standards, by and large, were just as good if not better because being in an all black society, they had an awful lot of standards that they lived up to in terms of dress and behavior that weren't necessarily the important thing to the Negro in Seattle who was integrated into the whole community.

In other words, I belonged to a social club which was all Negro women except for me, and I couldn't keep up with them, they were such high powered ladies. They just dressed so beautifully, and their homes were lovely, and everything.

Q. You make them sound a little bit like over-achievers, working awfully hard.

Doris Eason That's possible, yes.

Q. It almost sounds like there might be seeds for conflict in the black community between the old-timers, and the new-comers. Did you see any of that?

Doris Eason I don't believe so. I didn't see it, but there might have been. I'm sure that an old, established Negro family here in Seattle might have resented the big influx, and some of them being laborers because they were war workeres.

Of course, there weren't any jobs in Seattle

anyway, and so when I say that about "laborers," I'm really off the track because the (Negro) people in Seattle who were here before the war workers came were working as Red Caps down at the railroad station, or in a shoeshine stand. Some of the best families in Seattle - these were the only kinds of jobs that they had. And the post office.

Q. For white and black, coming to an urban environment like this in wartime, it seems like there must have been profound adjustment problems. There must have been a lot of things that needed adjusting in their attitudes and their lives. What were some of those things?

Doris Eason Well, in the schools, the established kids didn't want to have anything to do with the war worker kids. I remember one time I went to Franklin High School to talk to the advisor and explain where our kids were coming from, and that a lot of them were semi-rural, having come from Montana and Idaho. Everything is sort of semi-rural over there - even the biggest cities that you hear the names of are just little tiny places, like Bozeman, MT. It was hard for them. They were really just wholesome kids, but rejected.

Q. The big city must have posed temptations that were hard to resist. You weren't isolated on a farm ten miles from the nearest general store, you were in the middle of a city that was awake twenty-four hours a day in wartime. Did parents have any trouble controlling their children? How were those kids "unruly" that you described before?

Doris Eason Well, the problem was that they had been shooting out the lights in the tunnel that went to the floating bridge, popping those lights - that was one of the damaging things they did. Mainly, it was vandalism around the Project, too. They tore out the bushes just for the heck of it, and things like that.

Q. Were their parents working?

Doris Eason Yes, those parents were mostly working.

Q. So was it an issue of supervision?

Doris Eason Yes, that's right.

Q. There's a word, "Okie," that was pejorative, and often applied to people from many different states than Oklahoma, usually rural people who had what is considered a Southern accent and were white. Were there any or many people like that in the housing projects in Seattle?

Doris Eason There must have been, but I don't remember any specific family that fit that category.

Q. Do you remember any incidents with poor white families? Incidents that might indicate a lack of education or a different perspective than people were used to in Seattle at that time. I'm thinking of a story you told me about a family that painted their apartment.

Doris Eason Yes, but that was a black family, from the deep South.

Side B

Doris Eason He was a sharecropper, from the South, who had come up here with his family as a war worker. They painted the whole inside of their house a deep purple - I don't know whether it was to protect them from the outside, or just what. But anyway, it was a deep purple.

When they moved, we had to charge them to renovate that apartment, and bring it back to standard. And they had to do it in installments, but they paid every cent of that bill.

They were so conscientious, so the fact that they painted it purple had nothing to do with their feelings of worth and obligation, living up to their responsibility.

Q. Now most of the people living in the Projects were war workers at either Boeing or the shipyards?

Doris Eason Yes, and servicemen later on. Servicemen were eligible. In fact, you couldn't get public housing during those years without being a war worker or a serviceman. That's what it was for.

Q. Was Seattle a hospitable place to servicemen, in general; to black servicemen, in particular?

Doris Eason I think so because we had the USO right downtown that was designed to be an integrated USO, and then there good program for people that came there, who were mostly Negro because, again, the tipping process was in place. When there were more than 30% Negro, it became almost all black. Out in the Madison community, there was also another center where the good longtime residents from Seattle pitched in and helped with both USO's, in keeping them going.

Q. What happened in a USO?

Doris Eason Well, it was entertainment as well as help. I manned the information desk many, many days, and we helped with housing, if we could, or help for a pregnant wife, or any problem that came up, they could come and seek counseling.

Q. So it wasn't just dancing and coffee, then.

Doris Eason No. It wasn't. They had discussion groups. And they did have a lot of dancing and a lot of parties, and we had a battery of hostesses. Senior hostesses took care of the younger girls, as chaperones, more or less. Then there was a battery of younger girls who were called junior hostesses. We'd take a bunch of junior hostesses up to Whidbey Island for a dance, for example, on a bus, and take them on tours.

Q. Was this a racially integrated group of women?

Doris Eason Yes. Not too many white girls, but there were

several.

Q. The black servicemen in Seattle - did you have an opportunity to talk with any of them about what it was like in the segregated army?

Doris Eason Oh, yes, all the time. It was difficult because they were laying their lives on the line, like everybody else, and yet being treated like second class citizens. The opportunity for advancement was very limited, and the opportunity to serve in anything other than servant roles was limited. There were lots of (Negro) cooks and lots of stewards and people that waited on the officers. The opportunity for mechanical training was limited, I know. Almost every black fellow that was accepted in the Navy was in the stewards branch right away, which was either cooking or polishing the boots of the officers - a servant's role.

Q. How did black servicemen cope with that? We were at war, they were in uniform, and yet the country that they were fighting for does not seem to have allowed them equal opportunity. How did they cope with that?

Doris Eason They were very bitter, they really were. When they got to talking among themselves, in particular, it was a very common topic and the bitterness would come out, and they would express it to one another. But then they'd try to bring in a little humor, too, because you can't endure just suffering. So they would make a little twist of humor. And there were little things they could do to assert themselves in little ways, where they'd jive somebody who would maybe take it seriously, and they were just pulling their leg all the time, and making fun of them behind their back. There was so much cruel, domineering condescension.

Q. Were there places in Seattle that were basically off limits to black servicemen? Any theatres or restaurants?

Doris Eason I don't believe so, not in Seattle.

Q. So there were no racial incidents, as far as you know, that involved servicemen?

Doris Eason No, I don't think there were.

Q. Who organized this integrated USO?

Doris Eason I think it must have been the community that asked for it. It wasn't under any particular auspices, because a lot of the USO's were under YWCA or some other auspices. But this was not committed to any other agency.

Because of the way I learned about it, through the good stable citizens of the community, I thought it was probably their handiwork, that they saw the need and the problem, and asked for help. And through the national USO program, they were able to establish this place.

Q. Was the Council for Minority Rights active throughout the period you were here during the war?

Doris Eason Well, they weren't very active as a group. It started out as a group of ministers and social workers, and operated up until about 1944, and melted into Christian Friends for Racial Equality, and then that became the big program in the city. It was started by a little old lady who used to be a missionary in the Philippines. She started by having a New Year Caller group, where people visited each other's homes on New Year's Day. That was quite successful in getting people together, and it was an opportunity to take some Caucasian who had no experience with Negroes to a fine Negro home, or an average Negro home, and have them see that they were just people, living like anyone else.

Then she started Christian Friends for Racial Equality which was mainly through the churches. She operated and got the cooperation of every church in the city, and they had their meetings at different churches. That was sort of the same social kind of thing, that people could get together in a friendly way and learn about one another.

Q. At the end of the war, Mayor Devin established the Civic Unity Committee. Do you remember that?

Doris Eason Yes, I do. That was the one that Irene Miller went to.

Q. Now the mandate of that committee was to promote racial unity of all the races, but I think its primary function was to smooth the way for returning Japanese-American internees. Did any of those folks come into the housing projects at the end of the war, or when they were released.

Doris Eason Yes, we had a number of Japanese families, but I don't get the feeling that we had a big influx when they returned. I don't think they returned and came to public housing as such. Again the criteria was war workere during the war, and then after the war, you had to be a serviceman, or in a serviceman's family.

So a lot of the Issei who came back wouldn't be eligible.

Q. The Civic Unity Committee that Irene Miller was on, how would you describe their work? How did it differ from the Christian Friends for Racial Equality? Did it have more clout?

Doris Eason Yes, it did. It was official, and it was a branch of the mayor's office. Any incident that occurred that could be reported and documented, even in employment in the city, went through the Civic Unity Committee, and they did a very good job.

Q. Was the Urban League active all this while, also, placing minority candidates in jobs?

Doris Eason Yes, they were very active, and working all the time trying to get opportunities.

I remember one of the big breakthroughs was when they were able to get a job in a laundry. The Troy Laundry was the first one in the city to ever hire a worker in their laundry, and that's the saddest commentary on the whole scene, that even a laundry worker job was not open to a Negro until that time. And

it was such a big breakthrough.

And after that, finally somebody got a job as a transit driver.

I can't think of any other big industry, but those two seemed to start the path toward more opportunity in employment.

Q. What about the police department, and bus drivers, and other city service functions - were blacks welcome in those jobs during the war?

Doris Eason No, they weren't. In bus driving, I recall that, where I was working at the time, we had the man who was the first Negro bus driver and that must have been about 1948. Prior to that, you could not get a job as a bus driver if you were a Negro.

As far as the Police Department, I know two gentlemen who were detectives on the police department in an earlier period than that. They were old-time Seattle residents who preceded the big influx of war workers. But, again, both of them are so fair-skinned that I don't know whether anybody really identified them as being Negro. They're two fine gentlemen, and quite active in senior affairs around the city, now.

Q. Would you say that the law was enforced in a non-discriminating manner, as far as you know?

Doris Eason I don't know. I wouldn't be able to say.

Q. Did you get any complaints, when you were working for the Housing Authority, towards the end of the war, from residents about discrimination?

Doris Eason I remember one incident, and it's sad because it shows how mixed-up we are.

There was a family when I was doing a lot of home-visiting in this big temporary project at Duwamish Bend. The man was very fair-skinned, and he had a brother who lived in another part of the project who was very black-skinned. And this fair-skinned man had a Caucasian wife, and he was passing as a Caucasian.

His wife was extremely prejudiced and she made miserable the lives of her neighbors who were black. It was so bad, in fact, that she would scream at them across the clothesline and call them awful names and so on.

So when I got the report of another incident involving her, I went into my boss and I said, "Let's evict them," and I told him the whole history.

He said, "Go ahead."

So we issued an eviction notice and I regretted it terribly because it was a heart-rending thing. The man came in, and he wept, and he pleaded, and he begged, to be able to remain because they didn't know where they would go. He made all kinds of promises, but my boss was the kind who would back up his staff, and since I had so much material on it, he stuck with it and the man had to move.

Now that wasn't that a sad case? In order to get along in the world, you had to adopt the worst traits of your adversary. (Mrs. Eason noted later that the woman in this couple

was not aware that her husband was a Negro.)

I remember, too, a woman who came in one time. She was a fairly attractive girl and she moved into an apartment, and she came in and complained that the black man next door was making advances toward her. And so one of our workers said, "All you had to do is say, No, just like you would to anybody. That's all you have to do is say, No, you're not interested."

But you see the tension is so great, that it's difficult to treat people in a normal way like you would anybody else.

Q. When you mention your boss, do you mean Jesse Epstein?

Doris Eason No, I mean the Project Manager, whose name was Harold Dawson. I worked for him for a number of years.

Q. Was Mr. Epstein as responsible as I think he was for the good record of the Seattle Housing Authority in integration?

Doris Eason Oh, absolutely. He was in the first planning of the slum clearance at Yesler Terrace from the moment of its inception, the dream of decent, sanitary, safe housing for people, it was to be for all people on an integrated basis. That was the foundation of the whole Seattle Housing Authority program, and he established it.

He was the first Executive Director, and left in 1944, I think, and he was with the program from the beginning and I think the first plans were made in 1938.

There were pockets of segregation in the Seattle Housing Authority, and it just depended on the manager. Some of them got away with it because they were skillful talkers.

I know Taylor Avenue Homes, a smaller development on Taylor Avenue on lower Queen Anne, it was just a tiny development but there were no blacks there.

Q. Did it ever happen in a larger housing project where there was integration, there would be de facto segregation because people would tend to cluster by race within the housing project?

Doris Eason I know what you mean, and I think there might have been some clusters according to the leasing officer that was in charge. When we would learn about something like that, we would request that they break it up. That when somebody moved out, they must move a Caucasian in that unit.

Q. What would you say was the effect of the war on Seattle in terms of housing? At the end of the war, what did we have that we hadn't had when we began?

Doris Eason I think that it became more of a melting pot city. There were such large communities of Scandinavian people, not necessarily directly from Scandinavia. I was always bumping into people from Minnesota - we were the next stop after Minnesota.

As far as the Negro population, I understand it was a very, very low percentage, and then after the war, because of the war workers, there were a lot more.

Q. When the Japanese-Americans returned to Seattle, you were in a

position, though they didn't come into the housing projects, to examine their re-introduction to society because of the groups you were involved with. How difficult was their re-entry?

Doris Eason I don't really remember.

Q. Did any Japanese-Americans come into the groups you were involved with?

Doris Eason Yes.

Q. What were their concerns, if it's possible to generalize about them? Were they interested in rights for all races?

Doris Eason I think they became moreso than they might have been before because the oriental community never was concerned about the Negro. In fact, the Chinese were notorious for discriminating in their restaurants and hotels against Negroes.

Ruby Chow was one of the worst. She wouldn't allow them to come into her restaurant; she discriminated against them.

Yes, that's right! That's one of the places that did discriminate against the servicemen, too. I remember that it was a serviceman who brought that to our attention about Ruby Chow's restaurant.

Q. Well, I'm surprised. Are you saying, then, that the oriental community was not very much involved in the organizations to get employment rights for minorities, housing rights for minorities?

Doris Eason I don't think they were. They were included in the concerns of the people, but I don't have the feeling they were activists.

Q. Do you have a sense of why that might have been?

Doris Eason I think that they were satisfied with their communities, with their own segregated communities before the war, because of the language problem and because they had their schools. I think they were happy with that arrangement. But of course when the Nisei saw what happened, that you could pick up a group of people and transport them because they were so easily identified, then when they came back, that's when they started branching out into the community as far as getting housing outside of that oriental section down in the center of town.

They were consciously doing that. I remember when housing was impossible for a Negro to get in outlying areas, that the Japanese were able to.

Q. Although some of those exclusion agreements did mention Asians, didn't they?

Doris Eason Yes, they did.

Q. Did a lot of the people who had come as war workers go back home after the war?

Doris Eason Yes, they did.

Q. Were they eager to go? Would they have liked to stay?

Doris Eason I'd say it was maybe 50-50.

Q. I wonder what they were going back to. Should I think of them as farmers, by and large? Is that accurate?

Doris Eason No, I don't think so.

There was a big slump in employment, between 1945 and 1950, up until the Korean War came along and rescued us again. I don't now how war always brings employment, but it does. There was a great unemployment slump there, because I know between 1948 and 1952, I was dealing with families who were destitute. That was my job, and we were able to adjust their rent if they were veterans.

When they couldn't afford to pay their rent, I would help make an adjustment in the rent and arrange with agencies to give them vouchers for rent.

And during that period also, Boeing had that year long strike. You weren't here then, but they had a year long strike, and during that time, we took rent promises from the union to pay their rent for them. It was a whole year or longer.

Q. Employment after the war here must have just plummeted.

Doris Eason It sure did. I remember there was that great disastrous period, and then how the upsurge came when the Korean War broke out. I remember it quite specifically.

Q. War made big changes in your own personal life. You've mentioned how your husband moved on, and you decided to stay here. Was that a consequence of the war? Would you say that you would have reached those conclusions without the dislocations of the war?

Doris Eason I don't know.

Q. You met your second husband because of the war.

Doris Eason Yes, I did.

Q. Where did you meet him?

Doris Eason Well, I was chaperoning these junior hostesses to a dance at Whidbey Island, and he was in charge of escorting as he was a boatswain's mate on shore patrol duty. So he escorted us to the dance hall, and did the same as I was assigned to do - be a semi-chaperone, and make sure everything went all right. We met at that time.

Then we started going together and he was sent overseas for several months. When he came back, we decided we would get married but we waited another year.

Q. He was a Negro in the Navy. How did he find it? How hard was it for him?

Doris Eason Very hard. When he was drafted, he was older than

most of them. When we met, we were both twenty-eight years old, and he had been in for three years, I believe, so he was an older person.

Immediately, they sent him up here to be a steward, and so he was a very strong person, college-educated, and had also taken some training in flying on his own. He went to the captain in charge of the area he was assigned, and said he would go in the brig and stay in the brig for the duration of the war if they stuck him in a steward's job.

And they almost did, but they finally sent him up to Whidbey Island to be in the Aviation Patrol Office. When a southern officer would be in charge of the base, he'd be bumped to another division so he finally took the exams for boatswain's mate, which is like top sergeant in the Army, in charge of men. It was satisfying for him, but he had some real battles.

He used to tell the story in great detail about how he would have to appear before this one and that one, and when he'd find a northern officer, he'd get more of a hearing. He said the southern officers were just diehards - they just couldn't accept someone (black) in a role other than a servant.

Q. Did he find that it was as bad overseas as it was here?

Doris Eason No, it was not. He was stationed on Okinawa, and all the barriers were down there.

Q. Interesting that it should have been more segregated in the United States than at an overseas base.

What did he think of your work?

Doris Eason Well, he was very interested in it. In fact, he always called me a crusader.

The reason I loved my job so is because I was effective until the 1960's. When the 60's came along, the whole attitude of everyone changed because the cry was, "Black is beautiful! And we don't necessarily need to be integrated, we aren't going to ask for crumbs from your table, we're going to be people on our own! If we need to be together for strength, we will."

And so the tight controls that we had on placement of people in housing were more or less eliminated. So there was this tipping process at some of the locations, particularly at Yesler Terrace.

At Yesler Terrace, even before the war, we housed a lot of students who were low income, and finishing out their university work, at Seattle University for example. And because, of the hospitals up in that area, we had a lot of interns and resident doctors living in there, too.

It was a wonderful experience for everybody to be all mixed up and integrated, and to have some experience they wouldn't have had otherwise.