

Texas City / World War II Oral History Project

Audited Transcript

Interviewee: Wanda Applegath

Interviewer: Rebecca Snow

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[0:04]

R: This is Rebecca Snow, at Moore Library, and I'm sitting here talking with Wanda, Mrs. Wanda Applegath, and the date today is June 12, 2012.

W: Yes.

R: And we are here to talk about what Mrs. Applegath's life, what it was like during World War II. And so I want to say, to start off, thank you very much for coming.

W: I'm glad to do it.

[00:32]

R: Well, we're glad to have you. We understand, of course, that you did not live in Texas City during these years.

W: I did not. I lived in southern Illinois, near the tip, the southern tip of the state, where the Ohio and Mississippi join, about fifty miles from there, north of there.

R: And you were in Murphysboro?

W: Murphysboro was the town, I went to school, to college in Carbondale, and lived there much of the time.

R: But you were born in Murphysboro.

W: I was.

R: And then you grew up there. Can I ask you a few questions about, you know, your family, did you have—

W: I was the oldest of six children. My mother was quite young when I was born, eighteen. My father was twenty-three. But I was the oldest of the six. There were—a brother after me, then a girl, another girl, and then twin boys.

R: Six, six. So you had five younger siblings, but you were the oldest. Can I ask you what your father did? What was his profession?

W: My father was a coal miner. He was German. And I can remember growing up that they said, in Germany, you had to learn a trade. And his trade that he learned was as a baker. And I do not remember his working at a bakery, ever. But that he as a young man, I suppose, had been made to do that. But then later he worked in the coal mines, there were several coal mines in that area. And he also worked at a shoe factory that was in the town, Brown Shoe Company that was in Murphysboro.

[2:20]

R: And did he actually emigrate to this country, or—

W: No, he didn't. His older siblings did. His family came from Germany in 1887, and he was born in 1897.

R: He was a native. But they still had the idea, like in German culture, that someone had to learn a trade?

W: I think that was it. Now that I'm older, and have read about such, I think that, yes, you were apprenticed to somebody, perhaps.

R: And what was Murphysboro like in those days, during your growing up?

W: Murphysboro—in addition to the coal mines out from town, there was a shoe factory in the town. Railroad yards—one of the railroads, there were three railroads through the town, and one of them had what was called “yards.” It was a switching place, I guess, and lots of railroad tracks there—it employed quite a few people.

R: So it was like a major transport, maybe.

W: Well, I don’t—it wasn’t really a major transport, it was—

[3:35]

R: (unintelligible) near the river?

W: It may have been. It may have been the main line of one of the three railroads. I know it was not the main line of all of them.

R: But did you grow up hearing, having the railroad around, you heard the trains?

W: Yes. And that’s interesting, because I have written a memory, memories of my childhood, and I mentioned there were three railroads through my town. One a block from us, one three blocks, and one, oh—two miles perhaps. But I never thought about the noise. You know, when you’re used to something all your life, it’s just normal.

R: Definitely. I think the trains are great. I like them. In college once, I had a little, tiny little room in a house that was right—the tracks were right outside my window. And I liked to watch them come through.

W: Did it keep you awake at night?

R: It woke me up, I think. But it wasn’t—it was up in Vermont, it was not a big city.

W: I think, too, that something children today do not realize, that—I’m talking about the 1920s and ‘30s, maybe some into the ‘40’s—every town or village had a railroad through it, I think.

R: I think so.

W: Where I grew up. It might have been just a little spur, off a main line, and it may have been just one train coming through a day. But you could get from your little village, whatever it was, to the world beyond. You may have had to make several stops, and changes, but you could move.

R: Yes, that was the big—you're right. That was the main means of transport. Even up in Maine, we still have the tracks. We saw, when I was young, now I'm almost sixty—when I was young in the '50's and '60s, you hardly ever saw a train. But they had been there, and they were much more common, of course, in the older days. And people used to travel from Maine down to Boston in trains. Now, that's a thing of the past.

W: A thing I remember too, about being so close to the tracks, there were many open cars with coal, c-o-a-l, (laughs) and you could walk along the railroad track and pick up a chunk of coal that had fallen off.

[6:05]

Not enough to run your household, but if you were walking along the tracks and saw this lump of coal, you picked it up and took it home.

R: There you go. That's great. And so, was it a dangerous job that your dad had, at all? Being in the mines?

W: I can remember his saying—my father is not a particularly—was not, a literate man, by any means, but I can remember his saying—there'd been someone new, someone young, in the coal mine. And there'd been an accident, and this young person had rushed up to see what it was. And Dad said at home that night, "I rushed the first time. But you don't rush after that first time." Because you see this bloody mess, I guess.

R: Oh dear.

W: There'd been a fall in the mine, and people had been—someone had been killed.

R: So they did live with that, that was something that they—

W: I suppose so.

R: But it didn't transmit it so that you all weren't scared about—

W: It did not occur to me, Dad may not come home tonight.

R: Oh, no, no. Nothing like that. Probably the actual chances were remote.

W: That's right. This was not something that happened routinely.

R: Right, right. And so what about your mom, now? She was a housewife?

W: Yes, but she also later worked at the shoe factory.

R: She did. Was that when you were like in high school?

W: Yes, yes. And maybe even college.

R: So you got to be—when the war came, actually you were already in college. I think.

W: Let's see—'41, I was. I finished high school in '37. And I had been in college for a while.

R: So when you were at home did you have like—let me see, so during the war probably you were living some of the time in the college town, and then coming home some of the time?

W: The college town was just eight miles away—

R: Oh I see.

W: And I commuted when I went to college—lived at home most of the time, and commuted.

R: Okay. So, then, I wanted to ask a little more about how the house was run, and sort of thing. Like your mom, if she was working, did you have like animals, chickens and—

W: No, no. We lived in town, we did not. And we also had very few dogs over the years. My mother used to say, "I would rather have flowerbeds than dogs."

R: Okay. Yes. So, how did you get your groceries? What kind of store was that?

W: There was a little mom-and-pop store, not far from us. And we bought on credit there, and then when Dad got a check the bill was paid, and the store owner took out a little brown sack about that size, and put, oh, five, six pieces of penny candy in it.

[9:30]

R: For every time he got paid.

W: Uh-huh.

R: That's a nice thing. And so, as a child, did you actually go to the store, did you walk there yourself?

W: Oh yes, it was close. Half a block.

R: Okay. And did you have to—how about, since you were the oldest, did you have to do chores? Did you have to help your Mom?

W: You know, I'm sure we did. We had a very modest house. Did not have running water.

R: Like a latrine in the back, or something? Outside?

W: There was a pump. You had a—off the back porch, there was a thing, a step down, and another little porch or stoop called the well curb. Isn't that something? These are things I hadn't thought about in a long time. W-e-l-l c-u-r-b. And this curb down had the well on it.

R: Okay. So the well was dug right there, and they put (unintelligible)

W: And it had a pump on it.

R: And so you weren't piping it in to the house yet, at this point.

W: No. No, no no.

R: So you had to go out and pump it, prime it.

W: We didn't—you know, I don't remember priming it though. We had a—

R: (unintelligible) was always used? Or maybe it was the kind. I remember priming the pump.

W: To get it started. You poured water in it.

R: Yes.

W: I do not remember. And I could go out and pump by myself.

R: Then, I'm not familiar with it, so maybe there is a situation where it wasn't dry, and you didn't have to. Maybe it was something about the water level, I don't know. So you remembered pumping, and carrying the water.

W: Well, but that was just—this well curb was just an extension of the back porch. So I didn't walk down the back forty to do it. (Laughs.)

R: Okay. But you don't remember doing, having a lot of chores like having to do, like help with the cooking, or the washing machine, washing—

W: We didn't have a washing machine. I realize now that I'm older, my mother worked hard. Her mother lived with us or we lived with her. I think maybe my grandmother had owned that house.

[11:42]

R: So that was the two of them, then.

W: The two female adults.

R: Because if they didn't even have a washing machine, which a lot of people didn't—

W: You had a rub board.

R: And that was probably outside?

W: Well, in the summertime, or when it was warm enough, you worked on the back porch. And we had some sort of a thing (laughs), a wooden frame that would hold two washtubs. One was soapy water and one was the "wrench"—the rinse water.

R: Someone had to carry that. And did they have to heat it up?

W: Yes, and—

R: I wonder if there was a fire.

W: And when it was warm, when it was not co-oo-ld (shivering for emphasis), I think they built a fire in the back yard. In a little spot in the back yard, and had maybe cinderblocks up on each side, that would hold the water there. Or they—surely they just didn't do teakettles of water. It'd take an awful lot of teakettles of water.

R: Most people had—I think they could have done it on a stove, but I think most people would have a big fire underneath. But so, when you were in high school, you weren't worried about like doing that kind of labor, about doing the washing and things. Because there were two, you didn't have to—

W: No, washing dishes and—you know, there was no running water. (Laughs.) Washing dishes, drying dishes, setting the table before you ate. But I do not remember doing much cooking as a child.

[13:38]

R: Okay. Maybe with the two women in the house, you didn't have to. And how did your mom feel about you going to college, going off to college?

W: Well, that's interesting that you ask that, because that has come to my mind in the last few weeks or months. I did well in school.

R: Good.

W: The ice company—there was an ice company in town where ice was made, and then, I guess, taken to the neighborhoods. Someone from the ice company talked, perhaps with my father, about my going to work there after high school. And I realize now my mother put her foot down and said, "No, she is going to college." Now we lived very modestly, very modestly. But I should appreciate the fact that my mother was determined that I would go to college. Because I—

R: That came from your mom, not as much as from—not your dad.

W: No, no, no no. I mean, that is right. As the valedictorian of my high school class—

R: You were the valedictorian. Good for you.

W: Well, but this was just a little high school. (Laughs.)

R: Well, what—maybe, how many—fifty people in the class?

W: Oh, no. Three hundred to five hundred.

R: There you go. Okay.

W: But three of us—we were so close together that there were three valedictorians. (Laughs.) All girls. But that gave you a scholarship to a state school, eight miles away. But this scholarship paid tuition and book fees, which totaled—this was on a quarter—the school, the college, was on a quarter system, not semester. But three fall, winter, spring quarters, which were about twelve weeks. The fee for the quarter was \$7.50.

R: Was that including tuition?

W: That was \$5 tuition (makes air quotes around "tuition" with hands), or whatever they called it, and \$2.50 for book rental.

R: Wow. Well, I think it must have cost more. Maybe it was the state was paying for some of it?

[16:16]

W: No, I think, my mythical next-door neighbor, who graduated the same year, or anyone—I'm using that term generally, paid the same amount. \$7.50 gave you book rental and instruction.

R: That seems low. I was thinking maybe twenty dollars, or forty dollars, or something.

W: No, now we're talking though, about 1937. I finished high school in '37.

R: Yes. Well, I know that the way the state system works, like up in Maine, I went to the state university and as a resident, you know, when you live there you can pay less. So my first time there undergraduate was like a thousand dollars for the semester. And even though that was like now, twenty years ago, that still was very cheap. But it was not like the cost, what it cost to somebody out of state.

W: Did you go to Orono?

R: Yes. Yes.

W: I worked in the registrar's office for many years when I was in college, so I was familiar with the names of lots of other—where lots of other colleges were.

R: No, but that is striking, that's so striking. And did you feel like it was cheap at the time? Or were you even aware of the (unintelligible)?

W: We didn't have enough money to feel that that was cheap.

R: Okay. You didn't get like, allowances and—

W: No.

R: And did you work during high school? Did you have any kind of jobs?

W: I didn't—I didn't work during high school.

R: So you were busy studying.

W: I have never, never in my life—ninety years—clerked in a store. And I feel that I have missed an important part of growing up by never having clerked.

R: Well, maybe you have. Maybe you have. I don't know, I've done a little myself. But then—so when you went to college, this was still before the war. This was '37. But at that time, I think, Hitler was getting going. I think the world war started, I mean—

W: Wasn't that—

R: The war in Europe was '39. No, you're right, '39. I guess my big question is—you were commuting, so you were still living at home. And how did you get those eight miles?

W: Some of the families had cars. And Sara Lee Shook got to take her family's car one day a week, and Dorothy Horner took her family car one day a week, and you paid them. I believe it was \$2 a week, for transportation.

[19:15]

R: That's great. And it is nice to know about women doing things at that time, and driving their car, going to school. And they were still young ladies. You were still only—how old were you when you graduated high school?

W: '37. I was not yet seventeen.

R: Yes. You were a little younger than they are nowadays, I think.

W: And I was younger, and far more naïve than many of my classmates, because I had—this is terrible, just bragging on myself.

R: No, we want to hear it.

W: When I was—I've forgotten the grade now, I think it was fifth grade—the authorities promoted me at midterm.

R: To the next year.

W: That's right. So I did the fifth and sixth grade in one year. Supposedly.

R: That's great.

W: And it wasn't that I—I know now, it was not that I was that bright, but I think I was quick.

R: Well, somebody noticed something. Whatever it was. Yes. And did your classmates resent that?

W: I don't know. I don't know. I was—

R: It's so long ago now, do you remember anyone snubbing you when you got into the sixth?

W: I was *never* in the (clicks her tongue twice, makes air quotes with hands) in the "in crowd".

R: Ah.

W: And I think, too, about the fact that I believe I never went to a private party when I was in junior high or high school. I went to church regularly, and the church had a youth group and there was a lot of social life built around that.

R: That's great. What was the church?

W: It was a Baptist church, a Northern Baptist church. Did you have Baptist churches in Maine?

R: Oh, yes. I'm sure, yes. There's one just a little ways from my parents' house.

W: There is a difference to me between the Northern Baptists and the Southern Baptists. I think the Northern Baptists is more liberal.

R: Huh. Uh-huh. Could be. Yes. I don't know. Yes, there must be some kind of regional differences, depending on the culture perhaps, too—or the history. I'm not sure. So, when you went to college and you were commuting. Well, let's jump up to—did you go a whole four years to—Southern Illinois, is it?

[22:19]

W: Well, it was called Southern Illinois Normal University. SINU. Have you ever heard the term "normal"?

R: Yes, used in schools, but I never knew why they called it.

W: I think it's because they prepared teachers, a "normal" school. And why "normal" fits in with that, I don't know.

R: Maybe it's even an acronym, I don't know.

W: But it was Southern Illinois Normal University when I was there. And there was just one degree, a B Ed, Bachelor of Education. It is now SIU, Southern Illinois University. Even before—I guess by the late '40s, it was giving a BS in something, and the B Ed, and had begun to give a Master's in Education, I'm sure.

R: Well, education—to get teachers, that was an important thing, for the state, right?

W: Oh, yes. It was. And at that time—this is probably getting far afield, and I realize—

R: That's okay. We can do that.

[23:31]

W: At that time, when I first went there in the late '30s, maybe through '41 or '42, you could go two years and get an elementary certificate. So not everybody went four years and got a Bachelor's, by any means.

R: So if you got the elementary certificate, could you still teach in high school (unintelligible)?

W: No, no no. You could teach in a country school, one through eight, or in a city elementary school.

R: So it was a little less. Well, yes, two years compared to four. But you were set to go the four years.

W: From the beginning.

R: From the beginning. And so if you were getting your degree in education, was there any particular subject that you liked more than others, or were you allowed to—

W: Well, I think my major was in English and the minor in Social Studies, perhaps. But oddly enough, I did not teach. I got a degree. I did not teach a single day of my life. I worked in the registrar's office when I was in college, and then just stayed on.

R: So you actually started working while you were going to classes.

W: Yes.

R: Did that start right away, or was it—

W: I think I did not the first year.

R: And was that your idea, or was that your parents' idea?

W: No, it was an opportunity, to be offered a job!

R: Yes!

W: And I don't—oh, this is long before your time. There was a program called NYA, NYE, NY-something, that must have been state funds.

R: Was it the National Recovery Act?

W: No. It wasn't NRA.

R: After the Depression?

W: This was some sort of a—

R: 1938. Well, if you went there in '37. Because we were still hurting on the Depression, I think, up until World War II.

W: That's right. Until '40 or '41. I think of the '30s as being the Depression years.

R: So there was maybe some kind of legislation that actually provided some employment?

W: It seems to me there was a federal fund, also. Wanda Newsome Gum was head of it, that I remember (laughs), the faculty member. But I've forgotten. It was NY something. It was federal or state funds, and I think it might have been federal.

[Referring to the National Youth Administration, offering jobs and training to youth. Part of WPA from 1935-1939, then under Federal Security Agency, closed in 1943.]

R: So you *were* a clerk, then, if you worked for the office. Or what was your position? We don't know if you had a title, but (unintelligible) you worked like just twenty hours a week or something?

W: When I was a student?

R: When you were a student.

W: No, I think not—

R: Not even that.

W: Not twenty hours a week. Maybe—not even ten, probably. Maybe six.

R: So if you were also commuting, you were having to come home at night, right? And then when you graduated, who came to your graduation?

W: My mother. And that was all. I don't know why Dad didn't. But my mother came.

R: And your siblings?

[27:05]

W: No, I don't think so.

R: Did your other siblings come to school, go to college?

W: The second child, a boy—

R: What was his name?

W: William, Junior. Bill, Billy. I feel sure he was dyslexic. He just had—just did not read, had so much trouble reading.

R: It must have been, yes.

W: And then the next was—

R: So school wasn't really something for him.

W: No, it wasn't.

R: In those cases, in that case—

W: In fact, I think that my father went to the school authorities when Bill was maybe his second—two, two-and-a-half years into high school, and got an excuse for him. So he wouldn't have to go to school anymore.

R: When he was how old? I mean, what grade?

W: Well, he had been on the high school level two or two-and-a-half years.

R: So he got permission to pull him out. And so he just ended up in the workplace, or working?

W: He went to work eventually, or maybe not eventually, but worked for a car dealer, because he was good at motors. He worked at Cardwell's, in their shop. Surely not as a teenager, but later on. That became a lifework later on.

R: That must have just been something, because if he knew his cars, you have to be pretty smart to do that. Yes. That's unfortunate.

W: And my—the next child (laughs) was a girl, and since I worked in the office, the registrar's office at college, I saw all the applications for entrance that came through. And I remember—this is really telling you family secrets. And I remember—

R: Well, think about it, because it is, because this is then going to be—

W: I remember on the back of the high school transcript, the last sentence was: " I recommend that Susie Q, Susie Jones—written in hand—be admitted to SINU, (clucks tongue), Principal."

R: The principal of the school?

W: Of the high school.

R: Of the high school, okay. Huh! They just did it like—huh.

W: But I remember that Mr. Nicklaus, our principal, wrote on my sister's thing, "I do not recommend that she be admitted to college." And I don't remember seeing any others like that.

R: Unbelievable. And you didn't tell your sister.

W: Oh heavens, no!

R: But did she get to go?

[30:15]

W: No, she didn't go. But the reason she had applied, (laughs) she had been invited to some—what do sororities call their parties—rush parties? She had been invited to some rush parties her year, and wanted to go, and part of it I guess, must have been that you had to fill out an application for admission to the college, in order for the sorority to legally invite you.

R: So she may not have been really a serious candidate.

W: Oh, no, no, no. She was never a serious candidate for college. But she was glad to go to the parties.

R: So then you stood out, in your family, as being the one to go to college.

W: And I'm sure that it was thrown up to the others, cruelly so, from their angle.

R: In 1941, so if you went in '37—

W: And I didn't—

R: —you must have been graduated when Pearl Harbor started?

W: No, because I was working enough in the office that I did not take a full load. Instead of four courses, I might have had three. And I can remember that Sunday afternoon, that Pearl Harbor was bombed. I was lying on the living room couch. Music—somebody had the radio on, and it was music, and it wasn't raucous music, just music that was interrupted with the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

R: Were you alone in the house, or were you (unintelligible)?

W: No, I think other people were in the house.

R: And what was the general message?

W: Oh, "It's happened." But I didn't—I think I did not feel that someone was coming over to shoot us down immediately.

R: Well, Pearl Harbor was a little bit removed too, I mean, geographically.

W: Yes.

R: But some historians have said that young women were less affected, unless their husbands or boyfriends actually were in the service. Their world was less affected by it.

W: And also, women were not in military service yet. In 1941. At least I think they weren't.

R: I know that WACS sort of started. (looking at a paper) It says March, '42, they passed the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps.

W: All right, that's WACS.

R: No, they were accepting women as reservists, and they created WAVES. And then—

W: That was the Navy.

R: November, the Coast Guard made the SPARS. Marines, the next February—which was a whole year later. Women's Army Corps in June '43! So that's, actually—if we went into the war in early '42, or '41, '42—

W: End of '41.

R: Then that is actually almost a year and a half later. And they said only 271,000 women served.

W: In the whole war! In the women's—

R: In the whole war period, some 350,000.

W: Okay.

R: So it wasn't a lot of women. (Laughs.)

W: No.

R: But so, did you ever think about, "Well I'd like to be in the service, too"?

W: No, no no.

R: How about your siblings? This younger brother or—

W: Well, the brother next to me, who was two-plus years younger than I. But men were drafted. They got draft numbers and you didn't have much choice about it.

R: And so did he get drafted?

W: He was. He did not—I'm pretty sure he did not enlist. But he was drafted, and he fought in Italy.

[34:28]

R: Wow. And was he anxious to go? Do you remember anything of that?

W: I don't—I don't remember that.

R: Okay. But you also knew your future husband, he was a friend of yours from college?

W: Yes.

R: And so when he went into the Army Air Corps, you were still corresponding with him? Or were you corresponding with (unintelligible)?

W: First of all, I commend you for saying Army Air Corps.

R: Yes, I learned that lesson. (Wanda laughs.) Not the Air Force.

W: I had met him through two fellows from my hometown, who were also— Fred was majoring in chemistry, at the college. I met him through two young men from my hometown, who were also majoring in chemistry. I guess his senior year he asked me to go to a party. The chemistry club, I think, was having a picnic or something. And we dated some, then.

R: And you were still in school, you were at the same (unintelligible)?

W: Well, I might still have been a student at that time. But I stayed on. Even after I got my degree, I continued working in the registrar's office. I never did go out into the real world beyond.

R: Right. And you still had a social life—a social life like with the people you knew in college.

W: Yes. Students at college.

R: Even though you had to go home every night.

W: By that time, though, I may have been living with someone in an apartment. A girl in an apartment in Carbondale.

R: Okay. So you remembered Pearl Harbor. Do you remember how the college, where you were working, did it change at all during the war?

W: Sometime during the war, we were assigned a Naval student contingent. These were young college-age men. One of the ways you could enlist in the navy was as a V-6 or V-8 student, and it gave you a deferment, but you had to make your grades in college.

R: So these were local boys?

W: Well, our area.

R: From that area. From Illinois. Yes.

W: Oh! No, I am wrong about that. These fellows who came on campus were not necessarily from this immediate area, from my immediate area. And perhaps after they enlisted, they signed up for college and got a deferment on that basis.

R: Do you think they were like being trained to be in the service? Were they trained in like the things your husband had to take, like chemistry and—or he didn't have to take, but it stood him in good service.

W: You know, I'm trying to remember now, did they wear uniforms on campus? I think they must have worn simple uniforms on campus.

[38:07]

R: Something set them apart then, and they were definitely enlisted, but they were there going to school.

W: Yes.

R: So you were affected by them, and was there anything else, were you writing to like people, did you write to more people than your future husband?

W: Yes, yes. You just—I like to write. I was not madly in love with anyone. But I did write to—that's interesting because the other day I was thinking about someone named Nathan. Nathan Utley. (Laughs.) I don't know whatever happened to him. I wrote to a lot of men, young men.

R: Do you think acquaintances, or friends would say to the women, you know, or to the men, "Will you please write me?" That was something you could ask.

W: Yes.

R: Without any reserve, even if it was—

W: “Hey, Jane, I heard from so-and so, I heard from Bob Helwig the other day,” or this that or the other. And you’d share.

R: Like an email nowadays, perhaps.

W: Yes, probably so. Yes, that’s a good way to describe it. It wasn’t that fast.

R: But what about the censorship? Did that get in the way of the letters, the enjoyment of the letters? Do you remember the censorship?

W: It seems to me—surely they did not seal their envelopes. But I can remember seeing (pounds fist on table to mimic stamping) black stamps, or a black stamp on the envelope that indicated it had been read, or censored.

R: Yes, so maybe it was not invasive— something that bothered you.

W: But I didn’t have any great state secrets to let go of anyway. (Laughs.)

R: Right. They may not have had any, either. Maybe they were just instructed not to say about where they were, what they were doing.

W: I suspect that is quite true, I imagine.

R: But did you—when they told you anything like you knew one was in the Air Force, or someone else was in the Army—did you think about—did you follow the war? Like through the radio, or from any maps in the house, in your parents’ house or in your apartment?

W: I’m sure we must have looked at maps. Because we had—there were college students, ex-college students who were in Germany—I mean, Europe. I hadn’t thought of that. You’re bringing back old, old memories.

[40:57]

R: And so the other thing is too, is that we’re asking about the fact that people’s nationalities were looked at. Now, actually, your ancestry was German.

W: Yes.

R: And so was that—did anyone raise their eyebrows, or—

W: No, because—not that I know of. You must remember, too, that I think it was a different story probably in World War I. People—and by World War II, people maybe were a little more cosmopolitan.

R: Well, they weren't about the Japanese.

W: No, but see, they're "different" from us.

R: Okay. So, you felt—so as a German—

W: And I'm exaggerating, I hope you realize.

R: Yes, of course you are. Did your parents talk about that, or anything, the fact that he must have had relatives in Germany. Do you remember—

W: He had not kept up with them.

R: He hadn't.

W: But I do remember, speaking of that latent animosity—we had an exchange student in our home from Germany in—

R: In your parents' home.

W: In my parents' home.

R: During high school?

W: No! No, no, no. Not my parents. In—(points to herself).

R: In your house.

W: In Fred and Wanda's household. We had a German exchange student in 1965-66.

R: Really. Okay. You were here, wow.

W: Yes, we were. He graduated from Texas City High School. And I remember thinking beforehand that we would not talk much about Germany. See, '66—that was just roughly twenty years after the end of the war.

R: Exactly.

W: But I think we never got into deep discussions with Hartmut about the animosity that might have existed long ago.

[43:11]

R: Yes. Well, it was such a big thing for the country of Germany. I mean, my sister lived in Germany seven years, oh, like—

W: As a military wife?

R: No. She was an academic at the University of Heidelberg, in the School of Public Health, for seven years, and I was living in Turkey, so I would visit her. This was like in the '90s, 1990s, so that's only—

W: Twenty years ago.

R: Twenty years ago, yes.

W: Twenty, twenty-five.

R: Right. And when you would walk up the hill or something, and then there would be some kind of enclosure there—an old place like with stone, like a little amphitheater, in the open ground. And she would say, "Well, you know what happened there. That's where they had the Hitler rallies, rallies for Hitler." And there was no plaque saying, "This is why they were built, this is what the history was," because the Germans, you know, they didn't want them. So, I mean, that's still, I think—something so big that they lived through, and they experienced. Yes. Well, everybody who had anything to do with it. So you were even noticing that even twenty years hence, you were still hesitant to—you didn't want to rub him the wrong way, or open up any wounds, or things like that.

W: I think that is true.

R: (Unintelligible.) So, nobody burned Hitler in effigy? In Carbondale or (unintelligible)?

W: I do not remember any of that.

[45:03]

R: Do you remember parades? Maybe the (unintelligible).

W: You mean anti-Hitler?

R: Well, I actually was thinking of parades for—just patriotic, like selling war bonds.

W: Like American Legion.

R: American Legion? War bonds, because they told you to do that—

W: Now war bonds were a big thing. And also, not everybody could buy a war bond. The smallest bond was \$25, I think. I really think so. But you could buy stamps, and amass them in a book until you had enough to buy a bond. And it was not—sometimes at the theater, the movie theater at the college town, would sell stamps. 25¢, and you had a book to paste them in.

R: And would they have like a rally, or would they come up on stage before they showed the feature?

W: I don't remember that.

R: Don't remember that. Some writers have talked about that there was actually really almost intimidation towards the public to buy war bonds, and to spend your money that way. Do you remember that?

W: No, but I am not saying, "Oh, I don't believe that," because I think it could have—I would guess the towns—or organizations within a town, looked at it to some extent as a contest, to see whether the Elks or the Eagles, or the Rotary could sell the most bonds.

R: Right. And how were you feeling about the war in general? I mean, your brother was there. Your father didn't go.

W: Oh, no. And he had also missed World War I, because he was his mother's support, his widowed mother's support, supposedly.

[47:13]

R: Do you remember feeling worried?

W: About my brother?

R: Concerned, about your brother—

W: You know, I don't remember—

R: Or any relations, maybe, if you weren't that close with your brother?

W: I do remember the boy, the family across the street from us, or maybe it was across and one house down. Mother came in one night—we knew there something was going on over at their house, and it turned out that he had been killed. And Mother said, "If that happened to me, I would want to get out and walk for hours."

R: And did you have the star on the door—was it a flag, or a star?

W: We did have a star in our window, but it was a gold star if the family member had been killed. If you were a gold star mother, you had lost a child in war. And seems to me that the flag we kept in the window was blue. It was not gold.

R: And do you remember V-E Day? Was there any kind of celebration?

W: Yes! Yes! I remember that.

R: You were working still at the college.

W: That was in May. I was at the college. And oh—just, the word got around before noon. Work shut down completely, oh it was—and then there was a service, word got around quickly that there was a service at one of the big churches in town that night, a thanksgiving service.

[49:01]

R: Yes so this is V-E Day. Now, other people I've interviewed don't remember that being celebrated, because they were maybe younger, but they remember the day when the Japanese (unintelligible).

W: But they weren't—but see, but that was the end, of course.

R: Yes.

W: The other was—

R: But you remembered the word getting around. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

W: That's all right. At college.

R: And there was a service at church?

W: And offices just shut down. I mean, you just walked around and talked how happy, how wonderful it was. And now if we can just get rid of the other side.

R: And there was a service at church?

W: At a—I think it was at the First Baptist Church, a thanksgiving service. Northern Baptist.

R: Did you go to that?

W: Yes. And I don't remember who spoke, but it was just lots of prayers of thanksgiving.

R: And had you thought that the war would go on so long?

W: Oh, I'm sure we didn't think so when it first started. America was a mighty force, dear woman.

R: And that they had already been fighting, before we got in.

W: That's right.

R: We thought maybe we'd go over and—

W: Supposedly the Axis had been worn down, to some extent.

R: So there was the idea that we'd go over there. Do you think the guys, that Fred was thinking we wouldn't be there that long? We don't know.

W: I don't know.

R: Long time. So, great happiness, then.

W: Yes.

R: But do you remember anyone coming back who was hurt? Or amputated?

W: I do not.

R: Or shell shocked or what they called?

W: I do not.

R: And then you went back to work the next day. One thing I haven't asked at all is how was the economy affected, like your nylons, and your sugar, rationed stuff. Now you weren't running a household.

W: No. But I went through rationing: sugar—

R: Tell me about that.

W: —soap powder, washing powder, butter must have been also.

R: Gas. (??)

W: Of course, that was the early days of oleomargarine. And has anyone ever said to you, talking about dyeing it?

R: Yes, you got it, and then you got the little packet of the yellow, and you had to mix it up.

W: So, when you—when the day came that you could get oleomargarine in sticks, that were already colored, child, you had arrived. How easy this is! (Laughs.)

[52:00]

R: You mean, so that was what you remembered during the war?

W: I remembered oleo, with that little red ball—pill.

R: So you had your own household, during the war years you were living in—

W: Well, part of the—let's see.

R: —Carbondale, but it seems like it was just part—

W: I guess toward the end of the war, I must have been living in an apartment with Mary Lou.

R: Do you remember like the cooking? Or like going and shopping and standing in line? Not getting meat? Did you have rations for meat?

W: Meat was rationed.

R: Coupons for meat?

W: But you know, that meat business was still—we married in early '46. Which was four, five months, very early '46. Groundhog Day, 1946. The war had ended the previous August. We went to Ohio State, Fred went to Ohio State to get a master's degree. And I can remember meat was sometimes still hard to get there.

R: Did people eat more chicken than usual?

W: Or beans.

R: Beans.

W: But in 1946, my mother would have been horrified not to have cut up a chicken. You know, women used to kill the chickens. (Makes a wringing motion with her hand.)

R: But your mother didn't have to, because she didn't have chickens, in your household.

W: No, no—but you knew someone at the edge of town who had chickens, and you'd buy a—oh, a nice fat hen.

R: And they would kill it for you?

[53:55]

W: Sometimes. But I can remember seeing my mother or grandmother—but maybe that was long before the end of the war—wringing or sometimes you'd chop off its head with an axe, and of course if the chopper did not get it hit the right time and strength the first time, then this poor old chicken would be flopping around. Ugh.

R: Right. But women—people were used to that. They had to cut it up, and maybe even take the innards out.

W: Yes, my mother would not have dreamed of buying parts of a chicken.

R: And do you remember about nylons? Did you have any trouble like getting nylons, or lipstick? Did you wear makeup?

W: Nylons were difficult to come by. But (laughs) there was a story in the local paper that a youngish, I guess they were late twenties, couple in our church—one of them had someone working for DuPont in the East. And the word got out that she had been sent a pair of nylon hose. I guess her relative, who worked at DuPont in the East. Oh, I can remember we laughed. Sunday when she came into church, and she was in the choir,

that there was a little space where you could see people go up into the choir, and we laughed about the fact we were really going to watch Kelly's legs that day to see if they looked any different.

R: So you really didn't have nylons then. They weren't available.

W: Nylons were a new thing. They came out in the '40s.

R: Okay.

W: You had rayon, which was heavier and saggy, or silk. Now when they talk about silk stockings, they mean silk. They don't mean nylon.

R: They were real silk. Then what did you wear? You wore the cotton, the lisle, or whatever you call it? Cotton stockings?

W: Well, or silk. A standard nice gift for the Sunday school teacher, if the kids went together to buy her, or put a dime apiece in the plate, and one of the mothers bought her a Christmas gift, a pair of silk gunmetal-colored hose was a very standard gift. Bit like a man's tie. Well you—no, no, you're young enough. Men's ties are not standard gifts now.

R: No, but in those times, right. (Unintelligible.)

W: But you've heard of a time when that was—

R: No, in my time too, that was like, yes, that was a good gift.

[56:53]

So it's hard for me now to get at the basic idea of what the war was like from the home front. Then maybe that's true, if you were not actually yet married to Fred. But if you married him six months after he came home, you must have been more than just "pals," corresponding?

W: We did write, we did write.

R: But I mean did you get more—do you think the relationship progressed?

W: I was surprised when he asked me to marry him. I thought it might happen sometime.

R: Okay. And when he came home, did he come back to his hometown?

W: He did.

R: And then, how did you see him? He wasn't in college anymore.

W: He came over—I worked in the college.

R: You worked in the college.

W: Yes, and he came over to the—I don't think—maybe he had called the office phone. But I believe that he came into the office. But we were not romantically involved. We wrote regularly.

[58:06]

R: And so that happened afterwards.

W: He came home in August. And we went out to dinner with somebody.

R: And you were not kids, at that point.

W: No. No, no we were not. Let's see, in '45, I was twenty-five and he was twenty-seven.

R: So my question is then, I guess, have I missed anything about how the war changed your life, did it change your life at all? Maybe it didn't. You were a young woman, you were working in the college, and that was stable, that was stable for you. You weren't running a household.

W: That's right. And that working at the college was just a continuation of having worked in that office as a student even.

R: But it was enough to keep you going, it was enough to give you a good living. And you weren't expecting to, I don't know, go to Chicago and become a clerk in a store, or something?

W: No. No, no, no.

R: Or teach—you never did teach.

W: I liked working in the office.

R: You liked working in the office. Okay.

W: And I think another factor was the fact that no one close to me was killed.

R: Yes. Yes. That's what I've seen interviewing, if they did not have that right next to them. Yes. Yes. And so, you felt really happy, and did you feel proud of your husband that he had been in the war? Do you remember that, feeling proud?

W: When he came back?

R: Yes. Or did he have a different air to him, that he had been all—

W: Oh, I don't think he did.

R: No?

W: He's a very quiet man. I liked him because he was tall. And I don't know why tall people, men, have appealed to me. But they're just supposed to be so much—it's a highly desired trait, tallness. Or at least I grew up thinking that. Did you?

R: I think a lot of people did. Yes, I do. It gives someone an extra—what do you say, cachet—an extra—

W: Panache.

R: Yes. Panache. That's what I'm trying to think. An extra panache, yes. That they just carry with them by virtue of that. Yes. But so, he was—so you didn't feel that there was suffering that you had to work through or anything like that.

[1:01:04]

W: But see, I didn't run a household either. That's interesting, your talking about suffering, because I have written a story about growing up in the Depression. Not a story—

R: Like a memoir?

W: Memoir. I was looking at it again. I think I'm going to do it for a club this fall. I end by saying, "Somewhere I've heard the"—now this was about growing up in the Depression. "Somewhere I have heard the phrase, 'Sing no sad songs for me.'" Have you ever heard that phrase?

R: Yes.

W: And I end my memoir by saying, "But sing them for the parents" during the Depression "who had, in our family—six children, not a steady income always—they're the ones that you can sing the sad songs for them. But not for me." Because I didn't realize how bad things were.

R: The children don't. Usually they don't. Unless one of the parents maybe isn't there, and you end up (intelligible).

W: Just harbors on it, I mean, just harangues about it all the time.

R: Yes. And like my parents were very struggling, and we didn't feel that. Except my older brother and sister, they're very careful with money. The oldest. And I think it did affect them, in a certain extent. It somehow filtered in, that there was something like, you had to be careful!

W: Frugal. (Laughs.)

R: And then the rest of us (laughs), I'm more like (making gestures throwing away money).

W: Well, and that may just—

R: And that also could be a reaction. I don't want to do that.

W: That—

R: When you watch people do that, pinching pennies. Well, I really do appreciate—do you think there's something else that you wanted to share and talk about?

W: You've been a mighty, mighty good listener. And I appreciate it.

[1:03:12]

R: Thank you. Well, it's very nice to meet here. I appreciate what you've shared. And even though it wasn't Texas City, it's still really valuable. We're really glad to get it down. And maybe someday we'll be just sharing it with Carbondale, you know, the archivist there, the library there.

W: (Laughs.) You may.

R: Okay, so thank you very much. We're going to stop.

W: Well thank you for asking me.

[1:03:44]