

Texas City / World War II Oral History Project

Audited Transcript

Interviewee: Willie Mae Hazzard

Interviewer: Rebecca Snow

Date of Interview: April 10th, 2012

Place of Interview: Moore Memorial Public Library, 1701 9th Avenue North, Texas City, Texas 77590

Recording Format: MTS

Recording Time: 1:01:51

Transcriber: Rebecca Snow

Audio audited by: Vivi Hoang and Luke Alvey-henderson

[0:00]

R: My name's Rebecca Snow, and I work for the Moore Memorial Library, and I'm here talking to Willie Mae Hazzard. Shall I call you Mrs. Hazzard?

W: Call me Willie Mae.

R: I can call you Willie Mae. Good. Welcome. We're so glad you're here.

W: It's good to be here.

R: We're here on April 10, 2012. We're here so that we can ask Mrs. Hazzard some questions about her early life in Texas City. She was living here during the years of World War II. And that's going to be a little stretch, because that's going back to when you were quite young. So we realize that. And so basically, you said you came here—I think you said you came here in—

W: 1942.

R: '42.

W: In July of 1942.

R: Where did your family move from?

W: We moved from Alvin, where I was born.

R: Oh, Alvin, okay.

W: We moved here during the summer, hot summer, I remember that. I was about eight and a half.

R: And you remember it.

W: I remember it. In fact, I remember my second-grade teacher in Alvin. Mrs. McAllen—I remember? So I remember back further than I realized, when I started thinking about all this.

R: Yes, and sometimes it gets obscured, but then some of it will come back, and you'll remember it. So, your parents, your mom and dad, why did you move here?

W: My dad got a job at the tin smelter. And we moved with his horse, named Tarzan, and a German shepherd dog named Old Bill. Dad, my daddy rode the horse to work because we had no car. We had family move us in. We moved into a two-bedroom house with four children. Mom and dad, we were three girls and a boy.

R: Okay. So you were—

W: I'm the oldest.

R: You're the oldest. Okay.

W: I'm the oldest of four. And when I was seven, the boy was born, so he was the baby, and the only boy. I wish—

R: So then you had two younger sisters.

W: I had two younger sisters. One sister is thirteen months younger than I, and we were able to start to school together, so I wouldn't have to walk to school by myself. The school board let her start early—

R: In Alvin.

W: In Alvin.

R: Oh, good.

W: So we went through school together during our school years.

R: And so she was actually younger, but she got to be a grade ahead.

W: She was—and then when we came to Texas City, the schools had high and low. And they changed at the semester. And when we came from Alvin, we were—

R: Okay. I'm sorry, I'm interrupting you. But high and low—

W: High, like high first, low first. Low first, high first. Low second, high second.

R: They separated the students out into ability?

W: Mm-hm. Yes.

R: What they thought was ability?

W: Evidently. Well they just went from low third to high third. And then from high third to low fourth. Each semester, they were promoted.

R: You mean, you actually started in low and then went to high?

W: Here's what they did with us.

R: Okay.

W: They started us in high third at the beginning of the year. They gave us a test, and we were promoted to the third grade in Alvin. We came here, they gave us a test and we were in low third. And I'm sorry I said semester, [I meant] a year. So we were in low third for a year, then high third for a year.

R: So Alvin schools did this system too?

W: No.

R: Just Texas City.

W: Just Texas City. So we were promoted to high third. And when we left, I was being promoted to high eighth. So in that process, when we moved from Texas City to League

City, we were supposed to be in the high eighth and they put us in the ninth grade. So we skipped a whole year. The school—

[4:30]

R: But then, they actually had each child do two years of each grade?

W: No. It must have been semesters.

R: Maybe semesters?

W: It must have been semesters. Because when we left here, we were promoted to the high eighth for the beginning of the next year. And I would've graduated in December.

R: Okay. But actually going to League City meant, because of this system, you missed a whole year?

W: We were promoted a whole year. Yes, we missed a whole year. (Laughs.) We missed the low third and the high eighth.

R: Wow.

W: So we graduated a year earlier than we would have. And my sister graduated two years earlier than she would have.

R: Because she started a year early.

W: Because she started a year early. So she was barely sixteen.

R: So you didn't find that hard when you went to high school. You didn't think you were—

W: No, we didn't have a problem. Thank goodness.

R: Good. So that's interesting how that worked. So your dad worked at the tin smelter?

W: Worked at the tin smelter.

R: And where did you live?

W: We lived at 21st Street, Fifth Avenue South. Which is now BP, or one of the plants.

R: Way down there.

W: Way down there. There used to be a turn there, but they made the road go all the way through. There used to be a great big sign that said "turn," right there at the end of Fifth Avenue and 21st Street.

R: And the tin smelter—so he really did ride to work?

W: On a horse.

R: But what did they do with the horse during the day?

W: (Laughs.) That's what I don't know. He tied it up somewhere, I guess.

R: Yes, yes.

W: He rode the horse to work, and we walked to the store and bought our groceries, and then they would deliver the groceries to our house.

R: Oh, good. So you didn't have a phone.

W: Unh-uh. No phone.

R: How about—and no electricity?

W: We had electricity and believe it or not, people find this hard to believe here in Texas City. We had a pump in the backyard, for the water, and we had an outdoor toilet.

R: Okay.

W: Here in Texas City.

R: Oh no, that's what I'm finding, when people are telling about those years, is most everyone is having a privy outside, and they have pumped water.

W: Now we pumped water in the—

R: But your pump was in the back?

W: In the backyard.

R: Okay.

W: Well, over to the side, between the two houses. But it was in the back.

R: Right. And were you happy to move? Do you remember if you were happy to move to Texas City?

W: I guess I really didn't think that much about it. We were moving, and it was kind of a good time—I don't really remember. As traumatic as it was when we left because—

R: Oh, when you were in eighth grade.

W: Eighth grade, that was traumatic. I thought our lives had ended. (Laughs.)

R: Oh, because you were so—

W: A teenager.

R: And so your dad, do you remember what he did? What kind of work he did?

W: When he worked at the tin smelter, I don't remember what he did there. But when he moved, when he changed jobs, and I don't remember what year he changed—

R: But he changed jobs.

W: He changed jobs and went to work at Stone Oil.

R: Okay.

W: And he was a stillman operator. Whatever that is. (Laughs.)

R: I don't know. I'll have to look it up.

W: But that's what he did.

R: Okay. So then you left—but actually, we're talking about the years before you were twelve.

W: Right, right.

R: Because when you left, then World War II had started. Let me check my dates here—so, in '42, in '47 the year [the war] was over. You left before the disaster.

W: I left after the disaster. I was here during the disaster. It was the time of the disaster, also.

R: I hope none of your family—

W: No, thank the good Lord. The guy that relieved my dad—from his, he was working midnights. The guy that relieved him was killed.

R: I'm sorry.

W: Yes.

R: So then you were actually—if you were nine—you were twelve when the war ended. So when you came in '42, we had already gotten in; in January we had started to get in. Pearl Harbor was in December of '41. So if you came in '42—you said you came in the summer?

W: July.

[9:16]

R: Okay. Of course you didn't have any older brothers or anything like that going.

W: I had an uncle.

R: Did you remember like when you were over in Alvin, anything about Pearl Harbor, they said anything about, "We're at war?"

W: I don't remember anything about that until we came to Texas City. And then we found out, I heard them talking about drafting. And I was concerned about whether my dad would be drafted, and they assured us that those with big families or those with families were the last to be drafted, and he probably wouldn't be. However—in, it must have been, '45, I guess, he was drafted.

R: He was drafted. With four children?

W: He was drafted, with four children.

R: And working in, we don't remember whether he was working at Stone Oil or—

W: No, and I can't—

R: That's okay, that's okay.

W: I think he was still at the tin smelter at that time. I'm not sure. He sold the horse. He got rid of the things that would be hard for us to take care of. And a week before he was to leave, they surrendered. And he didn't have to go.

R: Oh, that's great.

W: But we'd already sold the horse that we were crazy about. (Laughs.) We didn't get her, get him back. And so, he didn't have to go.

R: Well, that's good. And he was relieved, I hope.

W: He was relieved. We were relieved, of course.

R: Did you remember like how he, how did he find out that he was going to go? Did they send—

W: They sent a letter in the mail, if I remember right. And he was sent a letter. And he was given so much time to get things in order. I remember him talking about he didn't have much time.

R: And who was going to take care of you then?

W: I guess we would just take care of ourselves, because I don't remember anything—and we had family in Alvin, also. Uncles and aunts.

R: So when you said you had the horse, did you ride the horse too?

W: Oh yes, yes. I cut my teeth on [the] horse—on the saddle horn. (Laughs.) I used to help my dad brand calves, out in where—about the same area that we live now. It was all pasture then.

R: Okay, so in that area where you were living—tell me a little about what you were doing there. Your mom, she did all the housework, and she washed clothes and—

W: Oh, goodness, yes. Washing clothes. First we started out with a big pot in the back yard with fire under it, and she put the clothes in it and beat them with a stick to get them clean.

R: And you helped?

W: I helped.

R: What did you do to help?

W: I didn't get around the pot, we weren't allowed that, but we helped rinse the clothes in the cold water.

R: Okay, so she first, she put the stuff, the clothes in.

W: And took them out, with the stick. Used, I can remember, lye soap that she used to make. I don't remember how she made it, but it was lye soap that she made. And then we graduated, and I'm trying to think how old I was when we got our first washing machine that had the, oh what do you call it, the rollers—

R: The wringer at the top.

W: The wringer at the top.

R: My mom had one. And then you feed it through.

W: Feed it through.

R: Being very careful.

W: Sometimes it gets hair, and sometimes it gets arms. (Laughs.)

R: You had to be very careful.

W: In the wringer, so we had to be careful. But I can remember doing the clothes—

R: Did she have it like plugged in, right outside?

W: We had it in the barn.

R: In the barn.

W: At a barn, out in back of the house. One of the rooms out there, there were some rooms. And then we would hang them on the clothesline. Wait for them to dry. Bring them in, fold them, and do it all over again the next week. We were—

R: And ironing, would there (unintelligible).

W: Oh we ironed, and she taught us how to iron by—oh God, I never do that now, but the sheets and the pillowcases. (Chuckles.) And we had to iron those. And that's the way we were learned to iron, and then we graduated to clothes.

R: So you ironed like when they were not quite dry yet, maybe?

W: We sprinkled them, and wadded them up, and put them in a basket. And if we didn't get them all ironed that day, we'd, later on, we'd put them in the refrigerator, if we had room. Or the freezer.

R: Did you have a refrigerator outside, or anything?

W: No, we had one in the house.

R: And it was big enough that you could put the clothes in it.

W: Well, I remember—now that brings back another memory back. I remember in Texas City having an icebox. And we had to put blocks of ice in it. And we had a card that we put in the window, how many pounds of ice we wanted. And the iceman came by and delivered ice.

[14:18]

R: And was he, did he have a car?

W: He was in some kind of a truck that had the ice in the back.

R: So you didn't have a car yourself.

W: Unh-uh. And I don't know how long we were without a car. Because I remember, I think must have been—

R: You said you walked to the store. What store did you go to?

W: It was a store on the corner of 21st and, let's see, 5th Avenue. What was the—I'm trying to think of the name of the store.

R: Well, Davison or Gonne, Gonne—G-o-n-n-e. There were different ones.

W: But it was the grocery store on the, straight up 5th Avenue about half—

R: It wasn't Pick n' Pay yet.

W: No, that was downtown.

R: That was downtown. Okay. So this was close to you.

W: Yes, it was within walking distance. About a half a mile, probably.

R: And they delivered everything.

W: They delivered the groceries for us. We would go up and buy them. And then we'd walk home and later on that day they'd deliver the groceries.

R: And do you remember anything about like, during the war Texas City was supposed to be doing things like the blackouts?

W: I remember covering the windows—

R: Anything like that?

W: —covering the windows at certain times when the whistle would blow.

R: During the day?

W: During the night. If it was night, we covered the windows. And we were supposed to turn the lights out. And then we—

R: And how did you cover them?

W: We used quilts, blankets, and covered them.

R: Were you rushing to do it, or did you really think it was something that happened, or you knew it was just—

W: We knew it was practice, but we knew we had to do it as if it were real. Because we never knew when it would be real.

R: And who told you it would be—like did they talk about it in school, or did you go to any meetings, they go to your mom?

W: I don't remember that. Now my mother and dad may have. I don't know how they—because we didn't have a telephone. We had a radio.

R: You had a radio.

W: And Daddy had a crystal set radio that he made. We had another one too, but I remember him talking about a crystal set, whatever that is.

R: I've heard it, but I don't know myself.

W: But I remember the rationing stamps. We had to ration sugar, and rationed I think flour? I'm not sure, but there were several things. But the main thing I remember—

R: You said fats, usually, butter?

W: Pardon?

R: Butter?

W: Margarine.

R: Margarine.

W: And margarine was introduced. We thought that was something great, because you, that's where you mixed it with the, mixed the color in? The margarine was white and then you mixed the color in, made it look like butter.

R: And that was good?

W: (Laughs.) We thought it was.

R: Exciting, right? Something new.

W: And because butter was hard to get, too.

R: Well did you have any—I didn't ask about how self-sufficient were you, for like, if you had a horse, did you have cows? Did you have like milk and butter, eggs, chickens?

W: We had milk. And Momma—we churned our butter.

R: So did you have a cow, or a couple of cows?

W: Yes, we had cattle. Because—

R: How many?

W: I don't know, probably eight or ten. And when the calves were born, then we had to brand the calves. And I remember riding the horse. My job was to hold the rope on the saddle horn while Daddy roped, he'd rope it, then I'd get on the horse, hold the calf tight with the rope while he branded him.

R: Wow. So you had to keep it tight.

W: Had to keep it tight.

R: So you had to move the horse around.

W: I had to keep it tight. So, I remember doing that, when the calves were ready to be branded. And Daddy's brand was 4-T. And the four represented the four children he had, and the T represented his middle name, which is Thomas.

[18:33]

R: 4-T. Were the cows near your house?

W: No. They were in the pasture, down the road. About where we live now, if I'm not mistaken.

R: Was it out by Moses Lake? No.

W: No, we're out around Mainland Bank. In that general area, all that was pasture, when we were—

R: And did he have to pay for it? Or did people just get to—

W: Now that I don't know. I think he leased the land for the cattle. Because when we moved to League City, he took them with him and leased another piece of land right across the street from where we lived.

R: So how did you get over there to milk them?

W: Horse? (Laughs.)

R: The one horse?

W: Yes, as far as I know. Now see, I don't—

R: Like do you remember mornings him going over to milk?

W: I don't, see that part I don't remember. I do remember in League City, him milking.

R: Oh, League City milking, uh-huh?

W: But I don't remember in Texas City. Now see, my mother might remember that.

R: But do you remember buying milk? The milk being delivered? Like, drinking it, in the refrigerator? Was it in like a store-bought—

W: No, I don't think so, no. Not in Texas City that I recall. During the first years.

R: And how about chickens, and stuff?

W: No, we didn't have any chickens.

R: So eggs, you had to buy eggs.

W: We had to buy eggs.

R: And meat?

W: And the meat. We lived on, not a whole lot. We didn't have a whole lot. But we always had enough.

R: Okay.

W: We didn't—there was no excess of anything. But we had a close knit family. And Daddy liked Texas City. But when the explosion happened, he decided we needed to leave. I'm sorry we did, but I enjoyed League City, after we got some friends and settled there.

R: Once you get settled in. It must have been hard at first.

W: That was not until '47, so—

R: Mm-hm. That's after the war.

W: After the war.

R: So, for the rationing, do you remember, did you guys have sugar? Did you buy sugar?

W: Very little. Very little. We had the stamps, what they called rationing stamps. I think I still have some, at home.

R: Wow. I'd love to see them.

W: Would you?

R: Take a picture of them, if you don't mind, yes.

W: We had tokens. And I'm trying to think what the tokens were for.

R: They had tokens, I think, well I know they had coupons for, they rationed gasoline.

W: Gasoline was one.

R: But you didn't have any farm like things you would have put gasoline in, maybe a tractor?

W: We didn't have a tractor.

R: You didn't have a tractor.

W: And I don't know how long we were without a car. I really don't. But I know we eventually got a car, but I don't know when.

R: Yes. Well, if you were living near your work, and then you could do that, then it seems like you wouldn't need it.

W: But I remember walking to the show downtown from the Heights.

R: You did. Well, was that called the Heights?

W: Mm-hm, that was called the Heights.

R: Right near the industry and everything.

W: Mm-hm. Well, where we lived down on 5th Avenue, 21st Street, 5th Avenue was called the Heights. And we went to Heights Elementary School.

R: Okay. You did.

W: It's still called the Heights.

R: It's still the Heights Elementary School, but it's a different building. The oldest part is—

W: Yes, the oldest part they tore down and then they left the—they had built some outside—

R: Like the gym or something? Auditorium?

W: The gymnasium that belongs to the city now was our gym.

R: Oh. Okay.

W: Because I remember saying, "That's where we went to school." And our children started to school there.

R: They did.

W: Yes. That was interesting. And they said, "Well, the windows are still in," (laughs) when I told them that's where we went to school. They were surprised the building was still there.

[23:04]

R: Right. Well a lot of them do get torn down. And so you went to the Heights until you were like, did you go to another school when you got to be like sixth grade or so?

W: Sixth grade, we transferred, after sixth. It was through sixth, we went through—excuse me. We went to low third through high sixth, and then we transferred to the old Danforth building. High school met in the morning, and junior high met in the afternoon. For school.

R: Yes, because I think Texas City got so busy, was that it? They got so crowded?

W: Crowded. So crowded. And I don't know what year they did that, how long that had been going on.

R: I don't remember myself either, but I can look it up.

W: So I don't know if that was during the war or not. But I know there was—

R: Yes, I think it was, because it didn't just start in '47. I mean, the war was over in '45.

W: In '45. And that had been, I don't know how long.

R: So when you went actually to Danforth, that was in—do you remember going the whole day at Danforth?

W: No, it was half a day.

R: So it was half a day. So if you went to Danforth—

W: No, we went all day, during the day at Heights, but then once we got into junior high, we went in the afternoon.

R: Junior high was seventh grade or sixth grade?

W: I believe it was seventh, eighth.

R: Usually it was seventh, because it's only later they started making it sixth. So if it was seventh grade, then you are already—have to see, have to check it, because I'm trying to think. If you left in '47, maybe that would've been 19—maybe the war—and so you remember, when your dad was having to go in the war, were you at Danforth then?

W: No.

R: You were still at the Heights.

W: I think we were still at Heights.

R: Then maybe you're right, maybe it was after the war.

W: Because I believe in the junior high, it would be, seventh would be '46, and '47 would be eighth.

R: Right. Did you find you had any less, like do you remember your mother saying oh she couldn't bake as much because of the rationing or did she complain about it or just—

W: No, she just, my mother was not a complainer. She adjusted to whatever she had to do. I cannot believe she did some of the things she did, with as little as we had. But she was something else. (Laughs.) I'm telling you. She could fix a dinner in nothing flat, with thinking there's nothing in the house to cook.

R: Like just maybe some potatoes.

W: She'd have gravy, and potatoes, and eggs, scrambled eggs, and she'd have something that would fill you up.

R: Yes, yes. And when you came home from school, did you get to eat anything when you came home?

W: She'd usually have some cookies for us. But not a whole lot. We just had a few, and we didn't have it all the time. And she'd bake cakes. But I can remember having—and I don't know why we were short on milk, because we always had a cow, but that part is sketchy. But I remember her making water gravy, and hot chocolate with water, because we didn't have the milk.

R: Right. That's what a friend of mine would say, when they were short, and they were doing macaroni and cheese and it's, "You're rich when you get to put the milk in."
(Laughs.)

W: (Laughs.) That's true, that's true.

R: Because you can, you can get by with those things.

W: And I've always liked milk, I still drink milk. And my grandmother asked me, just before she died, "Now that you're married and can have as much milk as you want, do you have enough?" And I said, "No, because now it makes me gain weight." (Laughs.) So I'm still rationing my milk. That's sketchy, because I don't remember why we didn't have enough milk.

R: It could have been just a temporary thing. Do you remember like any celebration? For the war? Was there any kind of parade?

W: I was wondering about that, and I don't remember anything, any talk of a parade, with us. There could have been one, and there probably was one.

R: Mm-hm. Maybe there—yes.

W: But we didn't hear.

R: You said, you did have the radio. So did you, do you remember your parents listening to the radio, or did you listen at all, like to the soap operas and stuff?

[28:04]

W: Oh yes. I listened to "Let's Pretend."

R: "Let's Pretend?"

W: It was a children's show, and it was for children. And it was a, "let's pretend we're doing this or that," and we didn't miss it. I can still sing the jingle. (Laughs.)

R: And did they have it on Saturdays, or at night?

W: Must've been Saturdays.

R: You remember it during the day.

W: Mm-hm. So it must've been Saturday, that that was on. And I remember listening, Momma listened to "Stella Dallas" and "Inner Sanctum"—what were some of those others? We were talking about those just the other day. "The Shadow." "The Shadow Knows." What else was on?

R: Was it kind of like the TV used to be, where you'd come and people would turn the radio on, and everyone would be quiet, and sit down, and you couldn't talk?

W: Oh yes ma'am, we're listening to the radio, we don't want to miss anything! So, yes, it was a family time.

R: That's nice. And so you stayed in that house. Did you remember if your father owned it, or did the company own it?

W: We owned it. He bought it. And that's the first house I think we ever owned. At that point. Then he bought the one in League City.

R: So your mom did the clothes and stuff, and then what else, how about your clothes? Sometimes World War II they said was hard because of finding clothes to buy? But a lot of people still made their own clothes. Do you remember, your school clothes, do you remember your mom making them? Or did you buy any of them?

W: My mother traded with a lady, momma would do the ironing and she would do the sewing, because Momma didn't sew that well. So they traded off. She would do her ironing, she would do our sewing. And we had a lot of feed sack dresses.

R: Mm-hm, I heard that, that they were great material, and very nice clothes.

W: And we were excited to get them.

R: And so, did she have to dye them or anything? No.

W: No, they were print. A lot of them came in print. And we wore hand-me-downs from relatives, too. Most of the time.

R: So for any of the other things, like buying shoes and everything, you don't remember having to wait in line or anything, like for those or where you would go to get them?

W: No, I don't think—I don't think we had to, I don't remember waiting in line to get them.

R: Maybe in Texas City that didn't happen.

W: No, I don't—

R: (Unintelligible.)

W: And we didn't have shoes, good shoes that often. With four of us, we had to take turns with our new shoes. We didn't all get shoes at the same time.

R: But did you go barefoot to school at all?

W: Unh-uh.

R: Always with shoes?

W: We always had shoes on.

R: And socks?

W: And socks.

R: And the socks, did your mom make the socks?

W: No, we managed to buy the socks, but we didn't have many pair.

R: And where did you buy?

W: (Laughs.) At that grocery store.

R: At the grocery store.

W: That grocery store had socks, and needles and thread, and little things like that.

R: And toys?

W: Toys?

R: Did you guys get toys?

W: We had dolls, and a wagon. Paper dolls. And I loved paper dolls. In fact, I think I played with paper dolls more than I did my dolls.

R: Because you could dress them.

W: Dress them and—

R: Did you draw them yourself, or were they already made up?

W: We would get some that were made, and then we made most of them ourselves. We had more fun, tracing the dresses and then designing a dress to go on.

R: Yes. Very creative. I remember doing that.

W: Do you?

R: And then all the cutting out, and then they put them on, and they went to different places and all that.

W: Oh yes. Our imaginations ran wild.

R: Did you have actually the cardboard paper dolls though? The dolls themselves, or were they always just paper?

W: Some of both. Once in a while, for Christmas or something, we would get the cardboard.

R: Something a little sturdier.

W: But most of the time it was paper.

R: But you had actually real dolls, too.

W: Oh yes. We had cheap ones, but we had real dolls. (Laughs.)

R: And did you get to go to the cinema, did you go to the movies?

W: No, not while we were smaller. When we were up older, we'd go to the movies and see the—called serials? They were continued, you'd see part of it and you'd have to come back next week and see the rest of it. So that was a treat.

[33:00]

R: With your school friends, or with your mom and dad?

W: Usually it was with my mother, or my siblings.

R: Or your siblings. Your dad didn't go

W: No, not very often. And then we went to church. At first Daddy didn't go, and then at first Momma didn't go. I started when I was about ten, going with a friend.

And then she would tell us, "If you go to Sunday school and church, you don't have to do dishes on Sunday."

R: Your mom said that.

W: My mother said that. And then gradually, she started going.

R: What church was it?

W: First Baptist Church—uh, Heights Baptist Church—

R;Heights, okay.

W: in Texas City. Then she started going.

R: How did you go by yourself, if your parents didn't go?

W: Someone would pick us up.

R: But how did you even decide you wanted to do that?

W: A friend invited me to come. Yes, a friend of ours invited us. And so we said okay. She was picked up, so they picked us up every Sunday also. And so by then, I'm wondering, I think they picked my mother up also, because we didn't have a car.

R: Mm-hm. At that time you didn't.

W: And I don't remember when we got our first car, or even what kind of car it was.

R: But that's okay. But I was wondering, when your mom's listening to the radio, do you remember your dad listening, or either of them listening to the news, of the war news? Did they listen to any of that? Maybe they did, and you didn't catch it.

W: Yes, they probably did, and I didn't catch that. But I know he listened.

R: Do you remember him listening at night?

W: I remember him listening, and listening to see what was happening during the war.

R: And did you have to be quiet?

W: But I don't—we were probably out in another room, at that time, because—they didn't share with us a lot about the war.

R: And often adults didn't talk to children the way they do now, yes.

W: And so we did—

R: And then did any of his brothers or sisters or—

W: His brother had to go.

R: His brother did.

W: His only brother did go.

R: And was he still from Alvin, or something?

W: Yes, he was from Alvin.

R: He went out of Alvin. And he didn't have children, or married?

W: No, he was not married at the time and had no children.

R: And did you know that uncle?

W: Yes, I knew him very well.

R: You did? Do you remember him going?

W: I remember him going, I remember seeing him in his uniform. And I remember when my grandmother passed away, we had to find out where he was. And it was hard to find. But he was in, I think they ended up finding him in Arkansas. And he was able to come home for the funeral. I remember that.

R: So you don't know if your uncle actually went overseas.

W: I don't think he did. I don't think so. And my mother's brother, one of my mother's brothers, was in the war. I remember him coming home and everybody taking their

picture with him in his uniform. And I think he may have gone overseas. But there again, they didn't talk much about what went on with us.

R: With the children, right? Yes. And so if you remember, did you ever play like, do you remember the boys at school playing war games or like "I'm Hitler," or I'm like, "You go after the Japs," or anything?

W: They heard a lot about Japs.

R: You did hear about the Japs.

W: Yes. It was the Japs. They would always say, "You're a Jap, and I'm going to shoot you." And I didn't like that. (Laughs.) But they did play—

R: And you didn't know what a Jap, what that word means.

W: No, I didn't. I thought, "Well, that's not nice."

R: And you don't remember like any—there were German families, or Italian families? I don't think there really were much in Texas City.

W: There were in League City, and the Clear Creek area, that's now Clear Creek, it was not Clear Creek then. And they had to go to prison during that time. They were put in prison, just simply because they were Japanese.

R: Japanese, or German?

W: Japanese.

R: The Japanese. Because I didn't think they interned the Germans. But there were Japanese living—you knew, you mean, you met them?

W: I went to school with them, after we moved to League City.

R: And they had just gotten out, of that (unintelligible)?

W: Evidently they had. That's vague too, but they were watched—I'm trying to think if they were put in, some of them—

R: I think most of the Japanese were interred [put in internment camps] in this country, I think.

W: I'm thinking the same thing. Either that, or they were watched so closely they couldn't move much without being watched. That's vague, too.

[38:06]

R: No, they definitely—and there was even, close by here. Well, there was a prisoner-of-war-camp, pretty close, I think, in Hitchcock.

W: That might have been where they were, then. But no, I graduated with one of them. Nice guy, neat guy. Very popular.

R: Did he talk to you about what it was like?

W: Not a whole lot. I guess they just didn't want to talk about it.

R: How did you feel, or did you—

W: About the whole—

R: About like, oh you guys were put in jail, or put in prison?

W: Well, I thought it was terrible. Because why, if they were Americans, why would they be put in prison, just because of their nationality? And that confused me. Of course, like I said, the war wasn't talked that much about in front of us.

R: But I think there was a different feeling between—about our Japanese, the enemy Japanese and then the enemy Germans, too. I think they said that. The way that we felt. Because they were just different—further from us, as a culture, maybe. I don't know.

W: I don't know either. We did have quite a few in the Webster area.

R: Mm-hm. And so, you don't remember going out like looking for: "I'm going to see a U-boat" or "I'm going to see a Jap submarine," or planes coming at night?

W: We did hear sort of rumors, and we never knew whether they were true or not. It kind of got out that there possibly were some boats or submarines out around the Galveston area.

R: I think there were.

W: And I think they ended up saying there really were.

R: There really were, yes.

W: That there really were some. And then I remember that—

R: There were supposed to be watchers, too. People watching.

W: I didn't know that at the time. I found that out later. I remember, I think it was in '43, there was a storm that we didn't know about. And I found out later that the reason we didn't get reports on it was because—let's see, how did they say that—they didn't want the enemy to know that we were having a hurricane, which would make us susceptible to their coming in.

R: I'd heard about that. And so, do you remember when it happened, then what? Do you remember—?

W: I remember the storm. It came in, and we had water in the front yard about up past my dad's knees. And someone came, but we didn't have a car. Someone came by and offered to take us to Heights School. So my dad said, "Okay, I guess we'd better go." So he carried us to the car, and we went to Heights and spent a couple of nights, I think, until the water went down and we came back home. It was a pretty bad storm, I think, and I don't remember the name of it.

R: I don't either. But I do know the one you're saying, because other people have talked about it, and said that, yes, just for security reasons.

W: I found that out later, I didn't know it. Of course, we didn't know it at the time, naturally.

R: And then your dad and your mom, they must have wondered.

W: Yes, they must have gone through a lot that we didn't know about.

R: So, you don't think your mom and dad did any volunteer work? For the war effort, they had like marshals, or they had people helping with the blackout who would go around and make sure people's houses—

W: No, they weren't involved in—she was too busy raising four kids. (Laughs.)

R: She was too busy, and he was busy too, right. What did they do for entertainment?

W: They played Forty-two.

R: Ah! Card game.

W: That's dominoes.

R: Oh, dominoes.

W: Dominoes. They played Forty-two a lot.

R: Just the two of them.

W: Just the two of them—well, it takes four, so there was always some family member there. There was always someone living with us.

R: Oh.

W: An aunt and an uncle that didn't have any place to go, or some friends at work that needed a place to stay. There was always—our house was Grand Central Station.

R: But where did they sleep?

W: Oh, she'd find a place.

R: But you only had the two bedrooms, you said?

W: We'd go to the couches, and they'd go to the bed. (Laughs.) We'd go to pallets on the floor. And we took baths in a Number Three washtub.

R: And where was that kept? In the barn?

W: In League City—in Texas City we didn't have a barn. It was kept out on the back porch, but then when we used it, we put it in the kitchen.

R: In the kitchen.

W: She heated the water, and we took turns being first in the bathtub.

R: Yes. And so, you didn't heat up water for everybody each time. They said in the old—that the littlest would go first, and it would go up to the oldest.

[43:31]

W: At our house, we took turns having the clean water first. (Laughs.)

It sounds crazy and awful—

R: No, that sounds more fair.

W: But really, you couldn't keep filling the tub up, and pumping that water for six people.

R: No, no, and actually you know, it's just four people, and it probably does it very well. But nowadays we're so spoiled.

W: Oh, I know it, and we think that would be horrible.

R: (Laughs.) Well, we could do it. When I was little, we used to take baths together.

W: Uh-huh.

R: We did that.

W: We did some of that. Of course, that tub wasn't the—

R: That would be the bigger tub, yes. That wasn't good for it. But it was light enough, so who carried it in?

W: I carried, I helped some, and they would bring it in with some water and then carry the water in a bigger container and finish filling it up, from the pump.

R: As the oldest girl, did you have more work to do than your younger sisters, even though they were close in age?

W: Well, naturally I thought I did. (Laughs.) But not really. I was always the one though that had to set the example for the rest of them. I was old before my time, really, more mature—they tell me. They said I was sixteen going on twenty-four.

R: Wow. Like did you have to wash the dishes?

W: We took turns washing the dishes. We took turns drying, we'd trade around and fuss about whose time it was to wash the dishes. And the laundry was the same way.

R: Did you have to heat the water?

W: Oh, yes.

R: Of course. And you carried it in from the pump.

W: Carried it in from the pump. It was a chore.

R: And having to rinse it.

W: And then rinse it, and if the rinse water got too soapy, then we had to let it out and—we did have, let's see, how did—we had dishpans.

[45:40]

Yes, we had a dishpan, and we had one to wash our hands before we ate, and then we had a dishpan for the dishes, two of them.

R: And did you learn to cook from your mom?

W: Oh, yes. I learned to make my cornbread. When I was too short to reach the cabinet she'd put it on a chair.

R: Ah.

W: And I'd mix the cornbread up. She taught us how to wash clothes, how to iron, how to cook—she was a good mother.

R: Make the beds.

W: Clean up, oh yes and I had to—

R: How about cleaning? You had to sweep everything?

W: We had to sweep with the broom, and then we had to mop with the mop. Got on our hands and—I can still see my mother on her hands and knees, with a brush scrubbing the floor, making sure it was clean.

R: And how about heat? What did you do for heat?

W: We had heaters—I can remember a wood stove that we had, a heater. Because I remember one time—no, it was an oil stove.

R: Kerosene, or something?

W: Oil heater. It got so hot it started dancing, and it scared me to death. Because the pipes went up through the ceiling. It scared me because I thought that the house was going to catch fire. But it didn't. Then we had a heater that you just plugged into the electricity, an electric heater, later on. And I'm trying to remember when we got our first telephone. Oh, that was in League City.

R: Was it in Texas City?

W: No, it wasn't in Texas City, that's right, it was League City. That was '47. So we didn't, we never had a phone here. And I don't know, I don't know where we went—

R: Do you remember like, well, did you like to go downtown? What was it like to hike— how long did it take you to walk that far? I mean, to go to the—

W: The only time we walked was when we went to the picture show.

R: Okay.

W: Then we would go to Alvin, to visit relatives. They would come get us. And the entertainment was going to downtown and sitting on the fenders of the cars and visiting with people. That's downtown on Saturday night. That's what everybody did.

R: They walked up and down.

W: They just walked up and down, visiting with people.

R: Yes. That's great.

W: That was our entertainment.

R: Do you remember the big, what was it, the movie theater that had that—

W: The Showboat?

R: Yes.

W: That's where we went to the show.

R: Do you remember was it that time that they had that tower, that lighted-up tower?

W: Yes, that was the most popular show in town. And I hate that they had to tear it down.

R: Because they had some other theaters, too.

W: There was a Texas, and a—Texas theater, on the other side of the street, further down. And there was a Jewel, I believe.

R: Mm-hm. And so you didn't go to the department stores.

W: Yes, there was—I remember going to the department stores. What was the biggest one? I forgot that. There was a Clark's department store that I remember going to.

[49:14]

R: And there was a five-and-dime, right?

W: Yes, and that was—

R: Woolworths?

W: Rocks. I believe it was Rocks. That everybody—if you couldn't find anything, you'd go to Rocks and it would be there.

R: And did you eat out?

W: No. We couldn't afford to eat out.

R: (Unintelligible.)

W: Don't ever remember eating out. Well, but I do remember—I guess we would get drinks, like a soda or something, but we never ate out. But I do remember when they were called "colored people" then, they couldn't eat with us and I never could understand that.

R: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

W: And couldn't drink at the fountains and that—

R: And you didn't go to the same school.

W: And we didn't go to the same school—and I couldn't understand why they couldn't drink out of the same soda fountain that we did. That confused me. I didn't understand all that. And I did not even know that my—my mother was not prejudiced. But I did not know how prejudiced my dad was until I was grown, because he went coon hunting with them, and had a lot of friends that he would go coon hunting with. And we were told to say, "Yes sir" and "No sir" and "Yes ma'am" and "No ma'am" to everybody that was adult. Including the colored. And people would say, "You had to say, 'Yes ma'am' and 'No ma'am?'" I said, "We certainly did." We were taught that.

R: And so you didn't see it from the way your father was talking, was acting. So, your father almost went in. So for the war—of course Texas City disaster happened, that was a big thing.

W: Oh my goodness.

R: But at school, did they talk about like, "Oh, do you have anybody, any stars on your"—do you remember that?

W: I remem—

R: Did the teachers ask that? Like when someone said, "Yes I have so-and-so, my older brother's gone."

W: I don't remember anything like that.

R: Do you remember seeing the stars on the (unintelligible)?

W: But I remember the stars.

R: You do?

W: And we would put them up for the two uncles.

R: And you had them too. Uh-huh.

W: And I'd forgotten about that.

R: And people looked at it, and actually, if somebody actually died—do you remember anyone dying, that you knew, in your family, your mom's family?

W: No, thank goodness no, I don't. I sure don't.

R: Well, how about FDR, when he died? Of course it was at the end of the war.

W: I remember when he died, because I remember—now, it's funny how things stick in your mind. But I remember reading in the newspaper his last words. "I have a terrific headache," were his last words. And I remember reading that in the paper the day he died.

R: And so you were actually only about thirteen or something like that.

W: Well, I'm trying—I don't remember when he died, but I remember reading about it.

R: And you read that—

W: And I read that.

R: At that time, that he said it.

W: And something else triggered—

R: But did your parents feel bad, about FDR?

W: I don't—see, they were—

R: You don't know their politics, what their politics were?

W: They never talked politics. And this is sad to say, but I don't think they ever voted, until we started voting, when we became adults. They just never talked politics.

R: Didn't vote for like, a president.

W: Not to my knowledge. And that's sad.

R: Well—

W: But that's the way it was then.

R: Yes, not necessarily.

W: And education was not a priority for the family, except my family. And I'm the only one out of sixty-something cousins, on both sides, to graduate from college.

R: Well, good for you.

W: And my mother made sure we finished high school.

R: She did?

W: Most of my cousins did not finish high school.

R: All three of your sisters, and your brother?

W: All four of us graduated from high school.

R: That's great. That's great. Because maybe your father, maybe, or your mother—did they do high school?

W: No, bless their hearts.

R: In those days, no.

W: They were from big families.

R: Mm-hm, yes?

W: My mother had to quit school to help take care of the rest of them. She only got to the sixth grade, and loved school. And when I graduated from college, she cried. Because she always wanted to go to school so badly, and never was able to. And smart—they both were very smart. Very sharp people. Daddy especially in math. But they made sure that we were educated.

[54:16]

R: No, that's great. That's great. So many times people graduate from whatever today, and they don't have half the brains of somebody who had to be as resourceful as they were, in those days, when they had to fix things. Did your dad have to fix—I don't know, just working with the animals—

W: We always had cows and horses and coon dogs. (Laughs.)

R: And coon dogs.

W: And coon dogs. And I can remember him going fishing for catfish, setting out trotlines to catch catfish and we—

R: Where did he go fishing?

W: Somewhere around the area. I have no idea.

R: But he didn't take you.

W: No, he didn't take—he took everybody coon hunting, and I don't know why I missed out, but I never, no—

R: Or take your brother? Maybe he just didn't take girls?

W: He took my two sisters. And I don't know why he didn't, it wasn't on purpose. Maybe I didn't want to go, I don't know. But they went with him. And I can remember going

with him to set out the trotlines for catfish. We had a lot of catfish. But I don't know where he went. Somewhere around Alvin.

R: And so you felt like your mother was affected by the rationing, going back to that. But she wasn't one to complain. You remember the coupons.

W: I remember that, the stamps.

R: Did she use any other sugar, like to make the cakes? Do you remember if she ever—you said she didn't make a lot of cake, just some of the time.

W: No, because of the sugar. I'm trying to think—

R: People did like molasses, and stuff like that. They even used the juice from like—

W: Now I remember—

R: Did you get canned goods? At that time?

W: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

R: They used the juice from like the canned peaches and stuff.

W: No, I don't remember any of that.

R: But of course she would.

W: Mm-hm.

R: The moms were actually doing the cooking. But so really, in some ways, it doesn't seem like the war—you didn't feel like, "Oh, we're at war."

W: No, I never—

R: Even going to school, the teachers didn't talk to you about it?

W: No, I never did, I don't remember being—I don't ever remember being afraid, or concerned, or wondering what was going to happen, except when—

R: Or "Are we going to get killed, like we were in Pearl Harbor," they weren't talking about it to you?

W: Nothing like that ever went through my—and I guess it's because they just didn't discuss it.

R: They sheltered you. Must have been.

W: They must have, because—

R: And the blackouts? Did you think—

W: Well that was kind of—

R: Did your brother say, "Oh, they're going to have a bomb in the house," or something?

W: We thought it was kind of fun. (Laughs.) It was different, something that we had to do. But we knew that it was something we were supposed to do, in case we called it—in case there was an air raid. But it didn't scare me, and I don't know why. I guess because of my mother and dad.

[57:16]

R: And we didn't have the air raid, really. Yes. It didn't come, where you had to wake up and go outside. That's good to hear. And I think, I don't know how long we've been—

W: Well, I don't know. Longer than I anticipated.

R: This has been a good time, I think there's been some—

W: Well, I didn't know how I—

R:— really good illustration of what it was like then.

W: I don't know how much I was able to remember, not a whole lot.

R: Well, the war—no, but what you're remembering is probably has, in a sense, that it wasn't impinging on your life. And that's important, too, to find out.

W: Yes, I find we've led quite a sheltered life. Still, (laughs) I think.

R: Right. And so, did you have anything else that you wanted to say, like about your studies, or school, homework—did you have homework in those days? When I was young, I didn't.

W: Not a whole lot. I don't remember a lot of homework. I do remember in third grade, when we started, high third. We started a Spanish class. And I wish they had kept it up, it was a pilot program. And we had a Spanish book and when we started with the Spanish class, we could not speak English, we had to speak Spanish. And I forgot one day and said something in English. And I had to sit outside the door, and I was mortified because I had never, ever had to be disciplined and I was killed. (Laughs.)

R: Oh terrible. Just terrible.

W: But I still remember, I can just see the pages in that book and I can quote some of the words that were underneath. In Spanish.

R: I wonder what program it was, because they did a government one too, where they didn't have—because that's the best way, you're not supposed to (unintelligible).

W: Right, right.

R: You're just supposed to have to say that language.

W: And I wish they had kept it going, but that was the only time, just that one time.

R: And did you have Spanish, kids speaking Spanish in your school?

W: I don't remember a lot of them. No, I don't remember, that's what's funny.

R: Maybe they had their own school. But I didn't think there wasn't (unintelligible).

W: I don't think, no, I don't think so.

R: I don't think in Texas City there was.

W: I'm sure there probably were and I just didn't notice.

R: Sometimes in other cities there were. I don't think Texas City had a separate school for Hispanics.

W: No, we didn't have. I know that. We had separate for the blacks, but no. Because I remember when our youngest started to school was the first year that they integrated.

R: Well, the actual breakdown of like even in 1940s, which was ten years before then, but there's still only a very small percentage of foreign-born, which they call the people from Mexico.

W: Mm-hm.

R: Like out of almost five thousand people, just 230 people.

W: Yes, I don't recall.

R: So that's very slight. Very slight. Well. And so your mother didn't go to work in a factory! (Laughs.)

W: No. My mother never worked, she stayed home, and then she finally—

R: Well she worked. But she—

W: She worked at home, she was a homemaker. But she finally started working at an egg farm, when we moved to League City. And that was the first job she ever had. And she loved it.

R: Well, if your mom has some time, maybe we can talk, we can ask her—

W: Yes, that would be fun, I'll ask my sister to—

R: We can always go to a place too, she doesn't have to come here.

W: Okay.

R: You can see what you think. But I think we're done. So I want to say thank you very much again.

W: Well yes, I'm just impressed—

R: And I hope it was not too tiring, or—

W: No. I just didn't know—there were some things that you prompted me to remember, because I had forgotten.

R: Ah.

W: So, it was fun for me, too.

R: It's been very pleasant for me. And I think you've given us some nice pictures of really what your family was like.

W: Well, I hope so.

R: Yes.

[1:01:51]