

## Texas City / World War II Oral History Project

### Audited Transcript

Interviewee: Mary Anne Reed

Interviewer: Vivi Hoang

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Transcriber: Vivi Hoang

Audio audited by: Luke Alvey-Henderson and Rebecca Snow

(Sound of adjustments to recording equipment.)

[00:07]

Vivi Hoang: This is Vivi Hoang. I'm here with Mary Anne Reed. We are in the meeting room—we are in, I'm sorry, the genealogy room—at Moore Memorial Public Library in Texas City, Texas. This interview is for an oral history project about Texas City during World War II. Today is June 11, 2012.

Ms. Reed could you share with me your full name, please?

Mary Anne Reed: Mary Anne Reed.

VH: Okay, and when is your birthday?

MAR: January 9, 1932.

VH: And may I ask how old you are?

MAR: I'm eighty.

VH: And, let's see here, how old does that make you in 1941?

MAR: I was nine years old.

VH: And where were you born?

MAR: I was born in Bryan, Texas, and I grew up there.

VH: Okay. How and when did you come to live in Texas City?

MAR: We came in 1962 in the fall. My husband became a partner in an architectural firm here and that was the reason we moved here.

VH: Oh okay. Had you been to Texas City before, or was that your first time?

MAR: I had never been here before. It was one year after Hurricane Carla and Texas City was a mess. (Laughs.) I cried. The trees were down. So we bought a lot in Dickinson, planning to move over there, to build a house, and by the time we could afford to move, I just loved Texas City and I wouldn't leave for anything. We're even retiring here.

VH: Oh, that's wonderful. Tell me a little bit about what about Texas City you love so much that you decided to move here.

MAR: The people. The people are just remarkable. They're friendly, they're resilient. Many of them have been through a number of difficult times and have just bounced right back. And we love the library. In fact, my husband designed it; that was one of his first projects. (Laughs.)

[2:18]

VH: Great, great. Well, I'd love to hear more. You had said that when you first go to Texas City, you know, the city had recently gone through a hurricane. Can you tell me more about your observations, your first impressions?

MAR: Well, there were no trees to speak of, you know. 'Course, I'm sure there were a few that survived. We were looking for a place to live and it was very difficult to find a place. People—it had been hard enough to repair their own homes without repairing rental property. But we finally found an older house and were very happy there for a year or two.

VH: And then?

MAR: And then we moved on. (Laughs.)

VH: Oh okay, I see. Do you know about how soon after that hurricane you came to this area?

MAR: It was one year.

VH: Oh, okay, it was one year. Okay, I didn't know how soon after. Great. Well, you said you were born in Bryan and grew up there. Tell me a little bit about your family.

MAR: Well, it was just what was the normal family then. Father and mother and there were three daughters and I was the oldest. In fact, I still am. (Laughs.)

VH: What did your parents do?

MAR: My father worked at Texas A&M in the Texas Forest Service. And my mother was a homemaker at that time; later on she worked at the Bryan Building & Loan.

VH: Okay. When you were growing up, did you know what you wanted to be, or is that something that came along later on?

MAR: Well, I always loved art, drawing. I made paper dolls all the time (laughs) and loved anything that had to do with art. So I knew that I wanted to go into something in that field. I majored in art education in college, so. Although I never actually taught art, I incorporated it in teaching elementary school.

[4:27]

VH: I see. And where did you go to school?

MAR: It was called TSCW [Texas State College for Women] then. It's called TWU now.

VH: Where is that school?

MAR: Denton. Denton, Texas.

VH: Okay. Texas Women's University.

MAR: Mm-hm. It's Texas Women's University now.

VH: And after you graduated from college, where did you go after that?

MAR: Well, I married immediately afterwards. My husband had been to A&M and we had been high school sweethearts, dated all through college. So we married that August and he went directly into the Air Force and we were stationed at Riverside, California. That was my first time to go to California.

So we enjoyed being there and then later on, we moved to Los Angeles, where he went to the Art Center School for a while. He already had his degree in architecture but he

wanted to pursue photography also. And from there we moved back to Bryan and he worked with his stepfather, who was also an architect.

VH: So Mr. Reed is from Bryan as well.

MAR: Yes. Mm-hm. And all this time I taught at various schools in California and then in Bryan.

VH: Okay, were they—did you teach a certain grade level, or—?

MAR: Elementary.

VH: Elementary school. Now, the focus of this oral history is the World War II years so I was going to ask what—you said you were nine years old in '41—what you remember from that time.

[6:34]

MAR: I have a very vivid memory of the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed. We happened to be—it was on a Sunday—we happened to be visiting my aunt and uncle, who had a farm in Hutto, Texas.

And I can remember the whole family gathering around the little radio that was in the living room and the adults were so concerned and upset and worried about this that I immediately discerned that something terrible had happened. I had absolutely no idea where Pearl Harbor was. I thought we'd be bombed [at] any minute. (Laughs.) Later on, the adults took me aside and explained that we really were far away from the fighting but our country was going to be at war.

It's funny, one of the—I was sitting on the floor and I can remember exactly the pattern of the rug where I was sitting because I was sitting there looking at the floor while the adults were discussing this terrible event that had happened to our country. And I'll never forget that; you know, it's very vivid in my memory.

VH: Why do you think that memory stands out in your mind so much?

MAR: I think children are influenced by the way their parents feel and by the way they react to things. And also my aunt and uncle and grandmother were there. It was one of those things that I'll never forget. (Laughs.)

[8:30]

VH: Did you notice a change in—did you notice how your family was affected by news of that, after that happened?

MAR: Well, my father was too old to be in the service so we were not directly affected. But my best friend had two older brothers who were both in the war. I guess that was, those were the closest associations I had with people who were involved.

I can remember we would make cookies and send them and we'd write letters and that sort of thing. I was in the Girl Scouts and we knit little squares that were to be made into afghans for the service men. I can't imagine how many we made. I've often wondered whatever happened to them, if they really made it to the war front. (Clears throat.)

We would gather any scrap metal we could find; in fact; we'd walk along the railroad track picking it up. We would save any aluminum foil or any type of metallic paper that we could find. And everyone saved rubber bands; everyone had a big ball of rubber bands because rubber was in short supply and rubber was very much in demand, of course, for tires and other things in the war.

[10:24]

Certain foods were rationed: butter, but margarine came to be (laughs) during those years. We would get a block of this white substance and you'd have to put coloring in it and then mix it up really well. Then we would try to reform it into a block. But everyone knew; it really didn't taste like butter.

And meat was rationed so Mother would try to cook strange things that we had never eaten before. The three little girls in the family were very picky eaters and we wouldn't eat any of it. (Laughs.) I can remember Spam. She even fixed brains and eggs one time and tongue. We just turned up our nose at all of it.

We really missed sugar; sugar was rationed. We all liked cookies and cakes and things. But my grandmother got a recipe for molasses cookies and so she would bake those but they weren't very good. We didn't like those either. (Laughs.)

VH: Was molasses not rationed?

MAR: Molasses must not have been rationed. Either that or she had a private source; I don't know.

Gasoline and tires were rationed. I remember one time that the family was driving to Austin in our 1936 Chevrolet. You couldn't buy new cars during that time. Maybe it was a '38 Chevrolet. Anyway, I remember it was old. We were not happy—the girls were not very happy with it.

But we were driving to Austin and one of the tires blew out, so my dad got out and put the spare on and we went several more miles and it blew out. And you couldn't just go to a store and buy a tire. You had to have a special certificate to get one. So we drove into Austin on the rim. We just—we didn't have any choice because there was no other way to get there.

And there was a song about someone in an airplane who had been shot in the war. It was called "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer." So we girls sang "Coming in on a 'Rim' and a Prayer" all the way to Austin. My father almost lost his mind. (Laughs.) Mother finally turned around and told us we'd better be quiet. (Laughs.)

[13:36]

The next day he had to go to the rationing board and get a special certificate to get a tire. The tire—they sold retreaded tires; they were not new rubber. But anyway, he was only able to get one and we had to just hope we didn't have another blowout. So that was an adventure.

I think we got about four gallons of gasoline a week. My father was in a carpool going back and forth to work. We lived in Bryan, and College Station was several miles away. So he and some of his friends bought an old car and they called it "the taxi." They'd ride back and forth to work in that.

We had—shoes were rationed. And with three daughters in the family, I don't think my parents got a pair of new shoes during the whole war (laughs) because our feet would grow and we'd have to use their stamps for shoes. But I'm always amazed to see how many shoes my grandchildren have because we had one pair. (Laughs.) Possibly, after the war, we were able to have two. (Laughs.)

VH: Did that mean, since you were the oldest, did that mean your younger sisters would get hand-me-downs?

MAR: Oh yes. Although I think we pretty well wore our shoes out. They would make—they had some fabric shoes that they made that you didn't have to have stamps for. But if you wore them out in the wet grass, they'd fall apart, so they must have been glued together.

So anyway, those were not real hardships. Those were—compared to what people in other countries had, and even other parts of our country. 'Course, so many children our age had fathers who were fighting in the war.

[15:54]

VH: You had talked about the food rationing.

MAR: Yes.

VH: Your mother had to adjust her cooking. Could you talk about, give me some examples of what were common meals that you ate?

MAR: Well, all the ladies' magazines had helpful hints about what to serve. I remember one time that she—we had Spam and she put cloves, whole cloves in it, she scored it and put whole cloves in it and glazed it with mustard glaze to try to fool us into thinking it was ham (laughs).

VH: Were you fooled?

MAR: No, we figured (unintelligible) (laughs). But flour was not rationed. And so, you know, we were able to eat various pastas and breads and things like that. And egg—my dad had a victory garden and even though we lived in town, they bought some chickens and they also got a cow. So we had plenty [of] milk and after we got the cow we had butter, even. We had vegetables; my dad grew beans and tomatoes and Mother would put them in jars. She would can them. So we did pretty well. We had eggs from the chickens.

A lot of people who lived in town did this because if you had room at all, then you'd have a garden and at least chickens.

The cow was an interesting experience. (Laughs.)

[17:51]

VH: Oh yeah? Tell me about that. In what way was it interesting?

MAR: Well, this cow had one horn that sort of hung down where it wasn't supposed to be. The other horn was up and one was down. And so we girls named her Veronica Lake. Veronica Lake was a movie star who wore her hair over one eye. (Laughs.) And so Veronica Lake was quite an experience.

We never had anything really to do with her care, milking or anything—never learned how to do that. But my dad had been reared on a farm, and so he was able to handle the cow. (Laughs.)

VH: Do you remember what were your household responsibilities at that time?

MAR: I—of course, we were expected to make our beds before we went to school. And we would help with the housework and definitely wash the dish—there were no dishwashers in those days. We washed the dishes and dried them. Mother had a chart. We had to take turns; otherwise we'd fuss about it.

[19:07]

VH: I forgot to ask: What's the age difference between you and your sisters?

MAR: One of them is two years younger than I am and the other is eight years younger. She was just a baby when the war started. It's interesting that being eight years younger, she was almost in another generation because she grew up—you know, during the war she was a baby and grew up during that time whereas my [middle] sister and I were already in school.

So she was—I don't think she'd be considered one of the Baby Boomers but she was just a little ahead of them. My sister and I were definitely children of the Depression. And then the war years made it different.

VH: During the war years, do you think, did you have an understanding of what was, of the larger picture of what was going on?

MAR: To some extent. My dad listened to the news every night and we would be with him and he would interpret what was going on. We always had a map on the wall to see where the fighting was taking place.

We went to the movies every—of course, there was no TV—we went to the movies every Saturday and they always had a newsreel. We would see the Nazis doing their goose step. We thought that was ridiculous. Of course, no one liked Hitler or Mussolini or Hirohito. They were all totally evil. We had absolutely no argument with the war; we were completely in the right. Anything our people did was just fine with us.

And the newspaper—those were our main sources of information.

[21:31]

VH: Did there actually happen to be any Italians or Japanese people living in the Bryan area at that time?

MAR: Yes. We had a large community of Italians living in, near the Brazos River, down in the rural area. They had farms.

VH: Okay.

MAR: Most of them that we knew lived there. But there never seemed to be any animosity toward the local Italians. I guess we didn't, we probably just didn't connect it, that they were from Italy.

VH: It was so far removed.

MAR: I think that probably some of the German people may have been discriminated against somewhat but not to a great deal, you know.

VH: What makes you say that? Even if it wasn't a lot, what did you hear about?

MAR: I can remember people saying something: "Oh, well, they're Germans," you know. But the Germans that—German people, people of German descent that we knew personally, were very much opposed to the Nazi regime. They were very indignant that this had happened to their country, their former country.

[23:06]

VH: You had mentioned one thing I wanted to ask about, collecting scrap metal and rubber bands. What would you do with the rubber bands?

MAR: I don't really remember. I'm sure they had a collection place for them because they had places where you took your newspapers and your foil and your scrap metal so I assume we must have taken the rubber bands—but it was so much fun to make that big ball. I guess (laughs) we were reluctant to take that down. I knew people who had huge balls made of rubber bands. (Laughs.)

VH: You were school-aged at the time. Going to school, how were your studies affected by the war? Were they affected in any way?

MAR: We would have assemblies and we would sing patriotic songs at the assemblies, at all the assemblies. I remember that very vividly. Of course, we all said the pledge of allegiance. And in geography, we made a point of, the teacher would make a point of telling us where the battles were going on.

And we had—they sold what they called war stamps at the school, where you could bring, the children all had little books that you could glue these stamps into. For ten cents you'd get a stamp and when you filled the book it would have the value of \$25, I think it was. So that was a way of helping the war effort because that helped to finance it.

You also could buy, were savings bonds. I think they started at \$25 and you could get them in several denominations.

[25:33]

VH: Do you remember any special events going on in town itself related to the war?

MAR: They would have rallies to sell these bonds and stamps. But I don't remember really anything else.

VH: Do you happen to know—you may have been too young to see this, but I know in Texas City, there was this influx of people, because of the industrial site here. Was there any sort of change to Bryan?

MAR: Well, you know, what's now Texas A&M University, it was A&M College at that time. It was an all-male school and they were all military. So all these young men went in as officers. I think A&M probably furnished more—I may not have this correct, but I think A&M furnished more officers in World War II than any other school. So we were very conscious of these young men going into the war. We would sometimes see their names in the paper for one reason or another.

Let's see. And then of course some of the leadership at the college were military people. So we knew some of them went into the war. General Rudder was one of them whose name I just happen to remember. He was a very famous general during the war.

[27:32]

VH: How did your best friend's brothers fare?

MAR: They both came back. And I'll never forget when my friend's mother heard that they were coming back. Oh, she was so happy.

VH: Tell me about that. How did you hear the news?

MAR: Oh she—of course, we were dancing around. We were very happy about it. One of them, I know, was in the European war. I think the other one was in the Pacific. So both of them were right in the thick of things and could very well have had problems. But they both came home unharmed.

VH: Do you remember about how long they were away?

MAR: I don't remember. It was at least, you know, several years.

VH: One of the days—you said one of the days that stands out vividly in your mind was the day Pearl Harbor was attacked. Do you remember where you were on V-E Day?

MAR: No, I don't. I was trying to recall when we talked about this and I don't actually remember.

VH: How about V-J Day?

MAR: I don't remember that either. I do remember hearing it, you know, and being happy and cheering and so forth. But I don't know where I was. I might have been in school because I was in high school when the war ended.

[29:11]

VH: You had mentioned with the rationing of gasoline you were limited to four gallons a day, I mean a week.

MAR: A week.

VH: And you shared that great story about driving into Austin on the rim of the wheel. Do you, does that mean when your dad, when he went to the office the next day to get that certificate, did your dad drive that car on that one wheel—

MAR: He probably drove my aunt's car.

VH: Okay. That's so funny.

MAR: That was quite an experience. (Laughs.)

VH: And—I just want to make sure I understood correctly—your father and a friend had another car that they shared in town.

MAR: Yeah, there were I think six of them. It was an old, a real collector's item. It was an old car that they fixed up and they all chipped in to buy it. Then they all shared the upkeep. They continued to do that after the war; they continued to ride back and forth. It was a local landmark. (Laughs.) People knew what "the taxi" was.

VH: Do you remember what kind of car it was?

MAR: I think it was an old Ford.

VH: Okay. And what color it was?

MAR: Black. It was black. And shiny. Oh goodness, they kept it in mint condition.

VH: Where did they keep it? Or did it change?

MAR: No, no, it stayed at the leader's house, the one who drove it. I can't remember what his name was. But anyway, it lived at his house. Because he would be the last to go home and he would be the first to leave in the morning. He'd come along and pick them all up.

VH: Well I think—I'd like to ask you about when you moved here to Texas City but before I do that, wanted to just double-check: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your World War II memories?

[31:24]

MAR: Just that there was such a feeling of unity in the country. No one ever criticized our leadership. We all felt that we were doing the right thing. I never heard anyone say anything negative about our leaders. We were truly united.

VH: You said your father listened to the news on the radio?

MAR: Mm-hm.

VH: Did he also listen to the Fireside Chats?

MAR: Yes, I can remember those.

VH: Oh, okay, can you tell me a little bit more about that? Is that something you listened to as well?

MAR: President Roosevelt's voice was very distinctive. He didn't sound like a Texan. (Laughs.) We were interested in his dog, Fala, the little Scottie that he and his wife had. And he was always, you know, he would give us a pep talk. He would always try to help the country, to keep morale high. Made us feel that we were a part of it, that our support was important, and our sacrifices, which, you know, were negligible.

VH: So fast-forward to when you moved here to Texas City.

MAR: Mm-hm.

VH: Where did you end up settling after you rented in Dickinson and you ended up moving to Texas City? What area?

MAR: No, we never did rented—we never did live there.

VH: Oh okay.

MAR: We found an older house in Texas City.

VH: Oh okay, I'm sorry about that.

MAR: Mm-hm, on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

VH: Okay. And how did you like living there?

MAR: Well, it was much smaller than the house we had lived in before. (Clears throat.) It was not built on a slab; it was up on cinderblocks. We had a very cold winter the first winter we were here. We moved here in October. The bay froze over, it was that cold. The wind would blow under that little house. The house had no insulation at all. And our only heat was a big gas heater, free-standing heater. So we would sit around it and shiver. (Laughs.) It was not a very comfortable place to be that winter.

[34:05]

VH: What was the neighborhood like?

MAR: What?

VH: What was the neighborhood like?

MAR: It was a nice neighborhood. It was an older neighborhood. Very nice. It was about three blocks from the bay. It was on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Our neighbors were very kind. We had a baby, so the neighbors were very nice to listen. And then after about a year, we moved up to a larger house on 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and then we built a house where we lived for the next forty or so years. (Laughs.)

VH: Were you teaching during this time?

MAR: I didn't start teaching until my son started to school. By then, I had another son also. Then I taught at Northside School for a number of years.

VH: Oh, okay. Is that where you retired from?

MAR: I retired from Northside.

VH: Okay. And when did you retire?

MAR: In 1980—well I stopped teaching in '85 and I went over and worked with some people at UTMB [University of Texas Medical Branch] who were doing a grant where they needed someone who was familiar with the school district. I worked there the last two years and I retired in '87.

VH: I see. Okay. So you've been in Texas City for forty-something years.

MAR: Oh yes, for almost fifty.

VH: How would you say—you know, you had said you decided to move to the city because of the people—how would you say the city has changed and what about it hasn't changed?

[35:58]

MAR: Oh, we have trees. (Laughs.) In the time we've been here, the trees have grown up. We have had wonderful mayors who have all tried to beautify the city in every way they could. Of course, just in recent years, they have done a lot more building. But it's changed a great deal since the year after the big hurricane.

VH: Sounds like it. Well Ms. Reed, I think that's all the questions I had. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

MAR: No, not really. I think we're very fortunate to have our library. That's a very important part of our lives. It makes the quality of life in Texas City much better.

VH: We're very glad to hear that. Thank you so much for doing this interview.

MAR: I'm just glad to. (Laughs.)

[37:00]