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Oral History Project/ Margaret Jenkins

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Student Interviewer's Name: Cassia Hosanna Reid
Interviewee Name: Margaret Bolton Jenkins

Time and Location of Interview:

This interview was conducted in one session on November 6 and lasted 32 minutes. It was conducted at the Morning Pointe home of Margaret Jenkins in Collegedale, TN. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present.

About Margaret Jenkins:

Margaret Jenkins was born in Humboldt, TN and spent most of her growing up years in Florence, Alabama and then moved to San Francisco when she was married. After the war she lived in the town where the atomic bomb was tested, Oak Ridge, TN.

Though she does not have the experience most WWII veterans have, she still can share about her brother husband and father. Her husband and father served in the East Tennessee Valley Ordnance and her brother was in Iowa Jima and was also the great General MacArthur's secretary. We will also be discussing her opinions and feelings on different aspects of the war. This interview was at her home at the assisted living center in Collegedale, TN.

Interviewer: Cassia Reid (CR)

Interviewee: Margaret Jenkins (MJ)

CR: Okay, hi Mrs. Jenkins.

MJ: Hi

CR: Hello, so this is November 3. It's Tuesday and we're doing this where? Where are we doing this?

MJ: We're doing it at Morning Pointe

CR: Morning Pointe, and this is in Collegedale.

MJ: Yeah, Greenbriar Cove

CR: Oh, Greenbriar Cove! (Laughs) Okay, and so what is your name?

MJ: Margaret Bolton Jenkins

CR: Margaret Jenkins, and when were you born?

MJ: (Misunderstood my question to be where) Humboldt, TN

CR: Humboldt, TN, and how do you spell that?

MJ: H-u-m-b-o-l-d-t

CR: I'm just curious, how far is that from here?

MJ: It's on the western part of the state.

CR: Oh, yeah I used to live in western Tennessee myself.

MJ: Where'd you live?

CR: I lived in Westmoreland. It's um about 10 minutes from the border of Georgia. It's a little small town. So, my name is Cassia, and I'm working with Southern Adventist University. I'm doing an oral history project and trying to figure out different histories for people from WWII. So what type of work did you perform while you were here at WWII?

MJ: Well to begin with I wasn't here.

CR: Well yes (chuckle)

MJ: I was in Northern Alabama

CR: Northern Alabama

MJ: Florence, Alabama

CR: Florence, Alabama

MJ: And I did...assisted doctors

CR: assisted doctors...So before you were telling me about this doctor that came down from Bellevue

MJ: Yeah

CR: So you were an RN?

MJ: No, I just learned from experience.

CR: So the doctor sort of taught you what to do.

MJ: Right.

CR: Wow that is neat. So they didn't require much for you to become a doctor back then.

MJ: Well I didn't become a doctor. I just assisted the doctor.

CR: So you were like a doctor's assistant, sort of in training.

MJ: Right.

CR: Neat, neat so you served in Florence, Alabama and did you serve during just WWII or did you serve during other wars like Korean, Vietnam?

MJ: Just two

CR: Just WWII. Okay, so what was your maiden name?

MJ: Bolton

CR: Bolton. So where were you born and raised

MJ: I was born in Humboldt, TN.

CR: Were you raised there?

MJ: I was raised in Florence, Alabama.

CR: Florence, Alabama. So when did you move?

MJ: (misunderstood the question) When I got married went to San Francisco. My husband was stationed there.

CR: So I was reading about the Ordnance (TN Valley), so did he actually get deployed or did he just stay in the base and produce sulfur?

MJ: No he actually went overseas. He was overseas two years.

CR: Neat, so exactly where did he go?

MJ: Well he was in Russian held territory when the war was over.

CR: So did he disable bombs or...cause I was reading about that and there wasn't much information on the internet about what they did. So do you know exactly what he did.

MJ: He was on the ground behind the troops that were fighting assisting them.

CR: Neat so he was giving them weapons and different things like that.

MJ: Right

CR: So he was basically doing what they were doing here except overseas.

MJ: Right.

CR: Right, okay, so when were you married?

MJ: Dear I can't even remember. (chuckles)

CR: That's okay, that's okay. (chuckles) so...

MJ: It's just been so many years ago that I can't remember exactly.

CR: No it's okay. It's okay. So did you have any children during the war?

MJ: No, I didn't have any children till after the war.

CR: That's good, that's good. It's hard to bring children up in war.

MJ: That's what I felt.

CR: Makes sense, makes sense.

MJ: My father was gone and their father would have been gone, so.

CR: Makes perfect sense.

MJ: I waited till he got home.

CR: How old were you about during the war?

MJ: Umm 21, I think.

CR: 21, wow so you were quite young. Wow, wow, so what was your family's background?

MJ: Well my mother was divorced from my father. In fact, this happened a lot during those years. He just walked off and left us and so she divorced because she didn't want to be tied to him when he wasn't there.

CR: Makes sense.

MJ: And he went to Arizona and he did exactly the same thing he did in Alabama. He married a woman and had two children. had a boy and a girl by her just like he did my mother.

CR: Wow!

MJ: His health was bad he had tuberculosis.

CR: Was he a veteran?

MJ:Huh?

CR: Was he a veteran?

MJ: Yes.

CR: What war was he in?

MJ: WWII

CR: WWII also, so this went on for quite awhile.

MJ: Oh yeah!

CR: So when were...did he...were you alive when he went to war?

MJ: Yeah.

CR: Do you....what was that like for your family?

MJ: Well when he first left he didn't have any family. It was later that he had family. I lived with my mother in Florence, Alabama and i did that mainly to help. Because if I lived there and was able to supply a salary, I was able to help her. Because she was alone and working in a department store.

CR: So he went to WWII, so do you know what he did over there, or did he talk about that much.

MJ: He was on the ground, right behind the troops that were fighting.

CR: So he was also in the Ordnance.

MJ: (Nods)

CR: Ahhh, so your husband sort of was in the footsteps of your father and did basically the same thing.

MJ: (Nods)

CR: Neat, neat so what was your main...were you... what kind of training were you given? Were you given any training while you were there? Cause I know during the war, they had some training where, for example, there was an attack on America, like what would you do.

MJ: No I wasn't given that kind of training.

CR: You weren't?. So who was your supervisor?

MJ: Dr. Cashman.

CR: Dr. Cashman. So what did you like or not like about your work?

MJ: Well he seemed to like everything I did. Cause I did everything from painting the office. We just... we didn't have any young men, you know, you could hire to paint. So, I painted the office and helped him too.

CR: Wow.

MJ: I didn't have any complaints.

CR: Wow that's very good. Was it unionized?

MJ: No.

CR: That's good. So how did you feel about unions during the time? Were you against them or for them?

MJ: I didn't know enough about them to be either one.

CR: Did you have any special rules or things you had to follow because it was the wartime?

MJ: I don't recall any.

CR: That's good, that's good. So you're basically out of it, totally out of it.

MJ: Uhuh

CR: That's good. How did you feel about the war in general?

MJ: Well in general it bothered me.

CR: Could you expound a little bit?

MJ: Because I just didn't like war.

CR: I understand, I understand. Did you know what was behind the war or was it just war in general that bothered you?

MJ: War in general.

CR: War in general. How did your family and friends feel about it?

MJ: Same way.

CR: Same way. In what ways did the war change your activities or habits? Because, I mean, you could probably tell there was a war going on. What particular things made it so obvious that a war was going on, even though you weren't necessarily connected to it.

MJ: Well, things were rationed.

CR: Ahh. So what kind of things were rationed?

MJ: Hose, certain types of food.

CR: Did you know anybody or did you have a victory garden?

MJ: No I didn't have one. I knew about em but i didn't have one.

CR: Was there a lot of pressure to have one?

MJ:No.

CR: No, wow! How did you cope with the wartime shortages? Like, how did you do different things so that it wouldn't be so bad when it came to the shortage?

MJ: Well I can't recall. I just did the best I could. (chuckles)

CR: Did you use less cooking oil?

MJ: Oh yeah!

CR: I heard they would take grease and use it for greasing the things overseas. Did you give up your grease?

MJ: Not that I remember.

CR: Not that you remember and did your childcare activities change? For example, you knew mothers, correct, during that time?

MJ: I knew what?

CR: You knew mothers during that time.

MJ: Yeah.

CR: Did you see their parenting change as the war went on?

MJ: Not really.

CR: Not really. (laughs) So did you...was there less...was it more sober during the war or did people in America feel like, oh, I mean there's a war going on but it doesn't really affect us. Was it sort of like that?

MJ: No not really.

CR: So how could you tell it affected people. Like, how did you notice it affecting people?

MJ: Well different things were rationed.

CR: Did it affect like who was in the workforce? (Jogging her memory...I knew the answer.) Like, did you notice...

MJ: Yeah, because the young men were in war.

CR: So could you tell me a little bit more about young women in factories and how that affected the economy and different things like that?

MJ: I didn't really know any women that worked in factories.

CR: Oh, you didn't, but did you know any mothers whose daughters were in factories or did they talk to you about it?

MJ: No.

CR: So your spouse was in the service?

MJ: Yes

CR: So what was that like for you, with your spouse being gone?

MJ: Well it was difficult because, we were young and hadn't been married long and were very much in love. So it was hard but we wrote a lot of letters.

CR: Wrote a lot of letters. So when he wrote a letter to you, what was it like. Was it like, he told you what was going on or he just said I miss you, I love you.

MJ: He couldn't tell me what was going on because it was secret.

CR: Oh, so he was in the secret operations?

MJ: Yeah, he just told me he missed me.

CR: So what was it like post war?

MJ: Well when my husband came back, we moved to Oak Ridge, TN and that is where they made the atomic bomb, you know and it was a different kind of life because everything was secretive. We had badges with our numbers on them, but it was interesting.

CR: So could...How close were you to the atomic bomb.

MJ: I don't really know because that was kept secret even from us.

CR: So how did they regulate it? Did they take names of everybody that was in town and how did they do that? Why did you have to wear badges?

MJ: Everybody was registered because there was a secret operation going on.

CR: So did you know anything else about it?

MJ: No. I was secretary to the purchasing agent for carbine and carbon.

CR: Ohh, so were you around the day it actually went off?

MJ: Yeah.

CR: What was that like?

MJ: Well it was bewildering for me.

CR: Was the ground shaking where you were? Did you even...

MJ: No

CR: know what was going on?

MJ: No, I knew what was going on but it didn't....the ground wasn't shaking it was too far from it.

CR: So, did they evacuate people from around the site? Well, because...did they know how lethal this thing was?

MJ: I think so.

CR: Wow, so you sorta knew what was going on but were you expecting it to be that bad?

MJ: Probably not.

CR: I was curious, did people die during the test?

MJ: Not that I know of.

CR: Not that you knew of. That's good, that's good. So when they actually bombed Japan, what were you doing. When did you hear the news?

MJ: I'm sorry I don't remember.

CR: You don't remember. No it's okay. When did you hear the news the war was over?

MJ: On Thanksgiving Day.

CR: Wow, how did you react to that?

MJ: I was out in the street running and screaming and hollering (her face lighted up)

CR:(laughed) I can imagine, I can imagine. So were there a bunch of soldiers coming home, like...? Did your husband come home that day?

MJ: Well they started. He was actually on a ship, he'd been in Europe and he was at Marseille, France and they were on the ship to go to Marseille, France. I don't meant France I meant to Japan and when they announce the war was over they just turned the ship around and came to the States. It was Thanksgiving Day.

CR:Wow!

MJ: What a day!

CR:I imagine. That must have been amazing.

(Computer shut off on me because of GPU problem and I didn't notice for about 8 minutes. Talked more about the ship and the parades and her husband.)

CR: So was there hoarding going on during the war?

MJ: Hoarding?

CR: Yeah, like people hoarding food and hoarding clothes just in case?

MJ: I heard that there were but I didn't know of it. If anybody I knew was doing it I didn't know it.

CR: Wow. So did you think it was right for America to be at war?

MJ: Well i don't really think they had any choice.

CR: That makes sense. It makes sense.

MJ: I guess I accepted it.

CR: So were you around during any anti-war protests?

MJ: No.

CR: That's good though. That's really good.

MJ: Yeah.

CR: So what did they do with the war news? Did you listen to that much because your husband was in the service?

MJ: Oh yes! Gabriel Heeler was an announcer and he would say things like, " Our boys are dying on Iowa Jima today" that kind of thing. You couldn't keep from listening to it and you didn't wanna listen to it.

CR: Yeah it must have been hard listening to it, knowing that your husband was over there and not knowing if he was okay.

MJ: Yeah, I had a brother on Iowa Jima.

CR: Really? Could you tell me about that a little bit?

MJ: Well he was...he said he was...well, you know, they were bombing that place up something awful and one day he said he was just so tired from trying to run and get into the foxhole he just decided he just gonna stay there and if they bombed him, they bombed him, but one of the men who was there pulled him into a foxhole and the man that pulled him in the foxhole was Catholic. My brother was not but he converted to Catholicism because of that deed that the man did.

CR: Wow that's amazing. So did he actually make it out of Iowa Jima?

MJ: Pardon

CR: Did he make it out of Iowa Jima?

MJ: Oh yeah! He's still living.

CR: Really?

MJ: Yeah.

CR: Where's he at?

MJ: Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

CR: So what else did he tell you?

MJ: Well, he just told me that they bombed it a lot and that they spent a lot of their time trying to avoid the bombs.

CR: Wow. So did you see any war news on television or was it mostly over the radio?

MJ: Over the radio.

CR: So how did you feel about the enemy. Being a girl and not being over there? How did you feel about the enemy and different things like that?

MJ: Well, I didn't have a use for them.

CR: So you sorta didn't really feel against or for them, you just were sorta like, oh they're there.

MJ: Frankly I didn't think a lot about it. Because it was so painful.

CR: Oh. May I ask why it was painful?

MJ: Because they were our enemies.

CR: and they were possibly harming your husband and your brother.

MJ: Oh my brother especially!

CR: Wow! So where was the station of duty for your brother other than Iowa Jima? Was that the only place he went?

MJ: Well, he made it in the States. He was on General MacArthur's staff.

CR: Really!

MJ: Yeah, he was his secretary.

CR: Okay!

MJ: he had a real good position, good enough that he signed up to stay in the service after the war.

CR: Wow! So what did he tell you about that position?

MJ: Well he was secretary to MacArthur.

CR: So could you tell me a little bit about what MacArthur was like?

MJ: Well, my brother would laugh and say, " You know he presented to the public this figure of a man that had no fear that was not necessarily true.

CR: That was not necessarily true. So what kind of things was he afraid of.

MJ: What?

CR: General MacArthur what kind of things was General MacArthur afraid of?

MJ: I don't know that he told me he was afraid he just said he presented to the public a man that had no fear and that he was...really that he was just like everybody else. He had fears too.

CR: What made him so (garbled) What made him such a great general though?

MJ: Well I don't know.

CR: Your brother didn't tell you?

MJ: Well, not in so many words. They were so sworn to secrecy that they never got over some of it.

CR: Wow. That is amazing. Thank you so much.

MJ: You're welcome.

CR: So in general, how did you feel like the war changed your life? Like I know it must of changed something.

MJ: Oh yes! The person you loved left the States and you didn't know whether they were dead or alive or what half the time and of course we had to...things were rationed. Just the general feeling when you turn the radio on. That's all we ever heard was how bad the war was.

CR: So you didn't hear much encouragement over the radio.

MJ: No.

CR: So they were pretty straight with how it was. Was it at that time where they showed a lot of pictures of what was going on, as well as the radio?

MJ: Showed pictures on what?

CR: Television

MJ: We didn't have television...

CR: Oh wow.

MJ: till it was nearly over.

CR: Wow, so when you did get television when it was almost over did it change your view on the war?

MJ: No.

CR: Wow, so do you think it's better, comparing then to now, do you think it's better that they have television now to show what's going on, or would you rather just have radio?

MJ: Well, television's fine.

CR: Do you feel like it's better if they tell people the truth about what's going on or do like they do now and hide it and not say as much.

MJ: Well it's hard to say. Of course I think it would be nice to know the truth but maybe it wouldn't be the best for me.

CR: Mmmm. So you think they're hiding it for a good reason.

MJ: Probably.

CR: Probably. Wow. Well thank you so much Margaret, I really appreciate it.

MJ: Oh you're welcome .

CR: I hope you have a good rest of the day.

MJ: Is this the end of our interview.

CR: Yes.

MJ: Okay.

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