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Oral History Project/ Margaret B. Jenkins

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Student Interviewer's Name: Alyx Yaeger
Interviewee Name: Margaret B. Jenkins

Time and Location of Interview:

The interviews were conducted in two separate sessions. The first interview was conducted on October 22, 2015 and lasted approximately 25 minutes. The second interview was conducted on October 29, 2015 and lasted approximately 40 minutes. Both interviews were conducted at the assisted living home, Morning Pointe of Collegedale at Greenbriar Cove in Ooltewah, Tennessee. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present at both interviews.

About Margaret B. Jenkins:

Margaret B. Jenkins' full name was Margaret Virginia Mabry when she was married to her husband, William M. Mabry Jr., who passed away on July 4, 2013. Margaret is known currently by her maiden name of Margaret Bolton Jenkins. She was born on March 25, 1923 and is currently 92 years old. Margaret was born in Humboldt, Tennessee and lived most of her life in Sheffield and Florence, Alabama. She married at age 21 on August 8th of 1944. She and her husband had two children by the names of Trip and Tina. Margaret was part of the Honors Society in school and worked during World War II while her husband was in the Army. This interview covered Margaret's routine activities and struggles she had in her life before, during and after World War II and the effects it had on her. This interview took place in the privacy of Margaret's room at Morning Pointe in Ooltewah, Tennessee.

Interviewer: Alyx Yaeger (AY)

Interviewee: Margaret Jenkins (MJ)

AY: So, to start off, I am going to go in chronological order. I remember you saying that you were a teen during the Great Depression...

MJ: Mmmhmm. (Agrees)

AY: And that was starting in 1929.

MJ: Mhmmm. (Agrees)

AY: America suffered from the stock market crash, known as the Great Depression, and you mentioned that you were living with your mother at this time?

MJ: Mhmm. (Agrees)

AY: How was your household negatively affected by the economy, if at all?

MJ: I can't remember that it was.

AY: So you would say that there was really no effect to your family?

MJ: uhuh. (Agrees, nods head)

AY: Did you know of any other house holds that were affected?

MJ: (Nods head no) Mmmm.

AY: Okay, as a result there were no extra steps that you could do to help out with the neighbors or your own family. Many families during the Great Depression thought that it was a sign that the world was coming to an end because of such terrible living conditions for such a long period of time. Did you ever personally feel this way?

MJ: No.

AY: Okay. The Great Depression ended in 1939, and roughly at the same time, the United States instituted the Selective Training and Service Act on September 16 of 1940 and this required all men between the ages of 21 and 45 to register for the draft for the war. Did you know anyone who was drafted?

MJ: Well, I actually um, my husband... I was married at that time. But my husband volunteered.

AY: Okay.

MJ: He was with the volunteer unit. And he said he knew he was gonna have to go so he volunteered.

AY: Oh, so he volunteered because he knew eventually...

MJ: Yeah.

AY: ... He was going to have to go. Do you know if that was for the American Red Cross Specialty services? I know that they took in volunteers to help...

MJ: No, it wasn't Red Cross.

AY: Do you remember what?

MJ: It was the service ordinance.

AY: Ordinance?

MJ: Army ordinance.

AY: Okay, where was it located?

MJ: Well.... (long pause).... I think he actually, he was drafted in Memphis.

AY: Oh really.

MJ: I mean that's where he volunteered.

AY: How long before the draft did he decide to volunteer? (long pause)... Like years before, or right around the same time?

MJ: Close to the same time.

AY: Close to the same time... Uh, did you know anyone who wanted to or tried to avoid the draft?

MJ: Yeah, um my husband had a cousin who um started farming to keep from going. And he made plain that's why he was doing it.

AY: And was he successful?

MJ: I... (begins chuckling).. He never was real successful in anything.

AY: Okay. Well, nearly 400,000 women during this time served in the armed services. Did you ever consider joining the military at all?

MJ: No.

AY: Did any family members consider doing that, who were women?

MJ: Um, I had an aunt who worked. She didn't consider going into the service but she worked um in one of the munition plants.

AY: And how long did she do that? Throughout the entire war?

MJ: Oh, honey, I don't remember all that... (starts chuckling)

AY: Okay. That's fine. You mentioned earlier in other interview that you lived and worked in New York at one point in time. How long did you live in New York?

MJ: In New York?

AY: Mhmm.

MJ: I don't remember anything about that.

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AY: Oh, where did you live then? I remember you working for a doctor and I thought you said it was in New York.

MJ: Well, he was from New York.

AY: Oh okay.

MJ: But, but he, he worked at uh one of the big hosp—Bellevue hospital there, before he came to Florence, Alabama which is where I was living.

AY: Okay, and then you worked for him...

MJ: I worked for him.

AY: ...In Florence, Alabama. And how long did you work for him?

MJ: Um, about a year.

AY: What kind of work did you do for him? Were you just an assistant, or...

MJ: Well, he was a urologist.

AY: Urologist.

MJ: And I did everything back in those days. You know, the young men were all gone and if we worked, like if I worked for a doctor I did everything he—I even painted the inside of a office—I did everything. (Chuckles)... Assisted him and everything.

AY: Did you have any medical degrees to do this, or...

MJ: No, I just learned.

AY: On that topic, did you ever treat any men who were injured because of the war while working for the doctor?

MJ: No.

AY: Did you take up any other jobs during the war? I know that there were a lot of men who left to the war so there was a lot of open jobs... Did you take up anything?

MJ: No, all I did was work for doctors.... Or, the doctor.

AY: By the late 1940's... there were a lot of women working in factories; working on airplanes, and taking up the men's jobs. Did you know anyone personally, women, who did that?

MJ: Yes, I had an aunt who did it.

AY: Did she do that through out the war?

MJ: I don't remember exactly how long she did it, but she did it for a pretty good while.

AY: Did you ever consider doing this?

MJ: Mmmm. (Disagrees)

AY: No? Also on this topic, many women reported feeling that they were treated unfairly by being paid less then the men's wages for equal work, did you experience this while working with the doctor? Or did you feel that this was fair?

MJ: I thought—I felt like it was fair.

AY: And why did you feel that way?

MJ: Why do you do anything? (Chuckles)... Well, I had no reason to feel otherwise.

AY: Was it just normal for you at that time...

MJ: Yes...

AY: ...For everyone?

MJ: ...yes.

AY: Okay. And do you remember what year you worked for the doctor? Was it before World War II, after, during?

MJ: Oh me... it was... it was during World War II.

AY: Okay.... And why did you cease working for him?

MJ: Well, I worked for him 'til my husband came home. And uh, we moved to Oakridge, Tennessee. That was an interesting experience... living in Oakridge.

AY: And why was that?

MJ: Because it was different from every other place.

AY: Was there a lot more people there?

MJ: Well, it was more that they were making the Atom bomb and they were keeping it a secret. So it was—a lot of things you might know you were pledged that you wouldn't tell.

AY: And did you have to pledge that you wouldn't tell?

MJ: No, I worked for the purchasing agent... I was his secretary.

AY: Purchasing agent of what?

MJ: Carbide and Carbon Company.

AY: Interesting. And did your husband know about the atomic bomb, too?

MJ: Um.

AY: ...or information about it?

MJ: I think he did, uhuhh. (Agrees)

AY: Well, that's interesting. Did you take up any other responsibilities during the war, like donating items or volunteering?

MJ: Yeah we, uh, we donated things at times.

AY: What kinds of things? Do you remember? I know that they needed like oil, and tires, clothing at times.

MJ: Yeah, something like that... hose.

AY: Was your husband involved in any other branch of the military other than the Army?

MJ: No.

AY: No? And you mentioned his military rank was sergeant first class, generally for men they must have 15-18 years of experience in the military prior to being ranked in this position, was this true for your husband?

MJ: Mmmm (disagrees)

AY: Do you know how many years of experience it took for him to get that rank?

MJ: I thought he went in with that rank...

AY: Oh really...

MJ: ...But I could be wrong. It's been so long, though.

AY: And did he get any medal of honor after the war, or any awards, specialties?

MJ: You know, he did, but I don't remember what they were.

AY: Okay.

MJ: They were put away a long time ago. I haven't even seen them. His group went in behind umm the ones... oh let me see, I can't remember that. Um. I guess it was my father... that went in, and they went in right behind them.

AY: Your husband was a long distance from you for a long period of time during the war, did you feel that this had a positive or negative effect on your relationship?

MJ: Well, I really didn't feel that it did at the time. After he came home, and talked to me about it a lot, I realized it did.

AY: Have a negative or positive...

MJ: Negative.

AY: Negative, and in what way did you feel that?

MJ: Well, I just felt like he wasn't faithful to me.

AY: And did he outright come and say that or did you just, you know, feel that in your heart?

MJ: I figured it out from things he said.

AY: You mentioned that you wrote and received a lot of letters frequently to each other, many men overseas often times did not receive the letters their loved ones wrote to them, and even if they did, often times if they did they did not have the means to send letters back in reply...

MJ: Mmmhmm. (Agrees)

AY: ...did you ever feel as though he was not receiving your letters?

MJ: Mmmm. (disagrees)

AY: No?

MJ: No I really didn't.

AY: Did you have a difficult time receiving his letters?

MJ: No, not really.

AY: That's good, did you ever have any packages or give anything?

MJ: I tried to send him cookies and things like that ... (chuckles)

AY: What kinds of things did you write about in your letters?

MJ: Well, 'course I wrote about the work I was doin', and uh how I missed him. That was about it.

AY: Okay. Did he write about his life at war? Any troubles?

MJ: He couldn't. They wouldn't let him.

AY: Really?

MJ: Mhmm. (agrees)

AY: And why was that?

MJ: Well, they just wouldn't—did not—it, it was secret stuff. And they didn't want it to get out.

AY: Hm. Interesting.

MJ: So he couldn't write what he was doin'.

AY: What did he write about?

MJ: It was mostly just how he cared about me.

AY: Okay. And how long were the letters? Less than a page?

MJ: Um. Yeah.

AY: Interesting, I didn't know he couldn't write about his life over there.

MJ: No, not anything that could be givin' away military secrets.

AY: Your life must have been majorly impacted because of your husband's involvement in the war.

MJ: Yeah.

AY: What sort of things did you do differently in your home life as a result?

MJ: Well, um, 'course a lot of women were in my position. And I had several friends, close friends, we went to the movies together.

AY: Oh okay.

MJ: And uh.... Spent a lot of time together.

AY: What kinds of movies did you see?

MJ: War movies. (Chuckles)

AY: Really, was that most of what was coming out at the time?

MJ: It was most of what was comin' out... We'd go, we'd get sour, lost, and go and sit there and cry for the whole thing. (Chuckles)

AY: Wow. And did your friends, did they have husbands involved in the war as well?

MJ: Right.

AY: They could relate.

MJ: They all did.

AY: Did you join any clubs, if there were any...

MJ: There weren't any clubs that I knew of.

AY: Any new hobbies? Sports?

MJ: No.

AY: After the war ended in 1945, men of course returned from the war and women celebrated and felt that it was time to start a family due to a stable economy because the depression was over. You mentioned you had your first child in 1947, in our last interview, and then a second child in 1950.

MJ: Right.

AY: Did you feel the reason you waited to have children until after the war was because you were waiting for the economy to stabilize? Or was it for a different reason?

MJ: Well, because I just didn't feel like it was the right time to bring children into the world.

AY: Because you didn't want your children growing up without a father?

MJ: Mhmm. (Agrees)

AY: Okay, well is there anything else you think would be important to add, or anything at all that you think should be included before we end?

MJ: I don't think so.

AY: Okay. Then just a couple more, quick, biographical questions. Could you state your full name?

MJ: Margaret Virginia Bolton— oh, that was before I married. Margaret Virginia Mabry.

AY: And what was your maiden name before you married?

MJ: Bolton—b, o, l, t, o, n.

AY: And, your birthdate?

MJ: Three, twenty-five, twenty-three.

AY: Okay, and what is your age right now then?

MJ: Ninety.... Two.

AY: And where were you born?

MJ: Humboldt, Tennessee—H, u, m, b, o, l, d, t.

AY: And, where are the places that you've lived?

MJ: Well, let's see... we didn't—they didn't stay in Humboldt, my mother didn't stay in Humboldt long. Moved to Sheffield—S, h, e, f, f, i, e, l, d. Alabama. Then Florence, Alabama.

(Knock at door. Audio edited and cut containing discussion with outside personnel.)

AY: Okay. And what date were you married?

MJ: What?

AY: What date were you married?

MJ: Oh. August the 8th. Um, I've forgotten the year.

AY: Do you remember how old you were when you married, and I can figure out the year?

MJ: 21.

AY: And what's your husband's full name?

MJ: William M. Mabry Jr.

AY: And how long was your marriage?

MJ: Um... 24 years.

AY: And what's your educational background?

MJ: High school.

AY: High school, and the names of your children?

MJ: Um, well we call my son "Trip", because he's the third, Mabry. M, a, b, r, y. Trip Mabry. And Tina Mabry.

AY: Tina?

MJ: Mhmmm. (Agrees)...Now, of course Tina's name changed when she married.

AY: Oh okay, that's okay we don't need to know her name. Um, and last question, are there any highlights in your life, like competitions or rewards, if you wrote a novel, anything like that you'd want to mention?

MJ: Well... (shrugs). The only thing was I did real well in school.

AY: Okay.

MJ: And I was in Honor Society... And umm... That's all I can remember I don't know what else... (starts chuckling)

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AY: Okay, that's fine. Okay, well...

MJ: Well, I'm a'go.

AY: I understand. Well, thank you for letting me do this interview with you.

MJ: Your welcome.

AY: It really helped a lot, and you were a good subject to do this on.

MJ: Well, I'm glad.

AY: Umm and I'll let you go to supper now...

MJ: Okay.

AY: Sorry to keep you.

MJ: It's alright.... (*muffles in background*)... Good luck.

AY: Thank you.