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Oral History Project/ Lillian Samuel

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Student Interviewer's Name: Mallory Morgan
Interviewee name: Lillian Samuel

Time and Location of Interview: 2:00 pm at Morning Pointe Assisted Living Center

This interview was conducted in one session on October 27, 2015 and lasted approximately thirty-three minutes. It was conducted where Mrs. Samuel is currently residing, Morning Pointe Assisted Living Center in Chattanooga, TN. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present.

About Lillian Samuel:

Lillian Samuel was born in Loudon, TN January 11, 1927. She has spent her entire life in Tennessee, although moving through cities such as Cleveland and Chattanooga. She was married right out of high school to a serviceman in the Navy, Kenneth McKay. From there, they had a child and she experienced family life on the home front during WWII. Years later, she was remarried to Charles Samuel who served in the army thirty-six years. This interview covered topics ranging from life in America during WWII, rationing, propaganda, and her husbands' involvement in serving our country. This interview was conducted on October 27, 2015 at Mrs. Samuel's residence in Morning Pointe Assisted Living Center.

Interviewer: Mallory Morgan (MM)

Interviewee: Lillian Samuel (LS)

MM: Alright, so first of all, I'd like to get to know you a little better before we talk about your husbands, tell me about where you grew up and the education you received?

LS: I grew up, well, I was born in Loudon, Tennessee in Loudon County and we lived in Philadelphia which is six miles from Loudon and we lived there until I, before I started school, about the year before, then we moved to Newport, Tennessee where my mother and daddy worked in the hosiery mill and they went there to go to work but they already worked in the hosiery mill so they moved and we lived there til I was in the eighth grade of school and then we moved to Cleveland Tennessee and then I went to Allen's School there and into Bradley and then I didn't go to college but I got married when I eighteen and that was after high school. My husband graduated and went into the Navy and we married on a three-day pass during the war.

MM: So that actually brought me to my next question, tell me a little bit about your spouse and where you guys met and then mention again when you got married.

LS: Well that was my first husband now, and I was married to him for eighteen years. And we met in school and we dated a year and after he went in service we wrote letters everyday.

MM: So your first husband was in the service also?

LS: Yeah, he was in the Navy.

MM: And what was his name?

LS: Kenneth McKay. Kenneth Robert McKay.

MM: So what about your second husband?

LS: Well I married him in 1966, I believe. And I was divorced for about three for four years and then I met him. He'd been married before and I had to and I had two girls and he had three children and when we got married, met at a dance and went together about three years and then we weren't gonna marry anymore (chuckles lightly).

MM: And what year was that?

LS: When we married? 1966.

MM: You mentioned your five children together, tell me a little bit about them.

LS: Well, I had the two girls and he had two girls and a boy. We had been married two weeks and his wife left his children down in Decater, Alabama by themselves in a house so he had to go get 'em and we kept them. The youngest girl, Rosanne, was eleven at the time and she graduated from high school. And the boy, he was in college when he went there. But the other girl never lived with us very long. She got into...everything...Bad company, I guess.

MM: So you were living in Tennessee with the five children. I know you mentioned last time, but I think I might have understood wrong but during WWII were you married to Kenneth or were you married to Charles?

LS: I was married to Kenneth.

MM: Okay, so he was the one fighting in the war in the Navy?

LS: I believe, yes, well he didn't go oversees or anything, the war was over and he had been in about two years and he had enough points—if you had enough points, you could get out and he got out, he didn't like it.

MM: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about your daily life in America when we were at war from 1941-1945.

LS: From 41 to 45? Well, we went to school, I did, and to church, we had to walk everywhere we went 'cause we didn't have a car. My daddy was an alcoholic and deprived us of a lot of things we could've had. And my mother always had to work in the hosiery mill...it was pretty rough. Compared to life now it was pretty rough.

MM: So, I know from my research that I did, that rationing was a major part of life in the war period. And actually according, wait, now what age were you at this point?

LS: In the 40s, well I was married in 1944.

MM: I know in my research I found that 73% of women thought the rationing system was, well they understood it, but some thought that the rationing was confusing. What was your opinion on rationing?

LS: Well you got these coupons, a coupon book and you knew what you could have, you know, you couldn't buy anything that you didn't have a stamp for, like shoes and sugar, butter, or anything like that but we didn't have much money to buy anything with anyway. We used those coupons. There was four children in my family, two girls and two boys, we used those. They were helpful.

MM: So did you think the rationing system worked well?

LS: I though it did, because you knew what you could get and what you couldn't get.

MM: So what did you not like about it? I guess the fact that you couldn't get what you wanted to all the time?

LS: I guess. I remember they used to say you couldn't buy nylon hose and my aunt worked in a hosiery mill in Loudon, Tennessee and she worked where they make silk hose, I guess they were and she used to get them, maybe one pair for us, because you couldn't buy hose.

MM: I know you mentioned this, but many items were rationed in America during this time, I know you said sugar. I know gas and tires and chocolate and other foods. Do you remember what types of rationing affected you and your family during this time the most?

LS: I know that the shoes, in our family we never had, we had to wear shoes with holes in them a lot because you could only get so many pairs of shoes and

I guess us being the age we were, we wore 'em out before we could get another pair. Had to go barefooted in the summertime.

MM: How long was it between when you could get a new pair of shoes, do you remember?

LS: No, I don't remember.

MM: I guess long enough to wear a hole in them? (chuckles)

LS: (lightly chuckles) Yeah, I'd walk on the ground some.

MM: Well, let's see here, in my research I also found that during this war time there was about 280,000 Tennesseans who worked in war manufacturing, were you or anything closely related to you ever involved in war manufacturing? And if so, in what area?

LS: Not with the war, no.

MM: What did you do during this time?

LS: Well after I got married, I had a baby and next year I always stayed home and kept house, washing and ironing, and all that.

MM: So during this time while your first husband Kenneth was in the Navy, you had one child?

LS: Two. One while he was in the Navy and another one after he came home.

MM: Okay, what was your main source of income during this time?

LS: Well when he was in service, he grew a paycheck and I did to, I think it was \$50 a month and then after that, he came home and worked in the grocery store. He was a butcher and then he ended up going into the grocery business, him and another fella, so we lived pretty good then. I have no idea how much money he made then.

MM: I know the countries involved in WWII relied heavily on propaganda in support of the war effort. Do you remember or what propaganda, like media or print, do you remember coming in contact with in America?

LS: Say that again.

MM: In WWII, obviously there was a lot of pro[agenda to get American in support of the war effort, you know like many woman were having to take on rolls on manufacturing and building airplanes. I know a lot of people think of Rosie the

Riveter. So do you remember seeing things like that or any kind of posters or things on the radio that contributed to the war effort and supporting it?

LS: We didn't even have a radio then. And the way I found out about the bombing in Hawaii was, we were at church one night, on a Sunday night, and somebody came in and told us that they had bombed Pearl Harbor. Me and my sister and my brother were there and we got out of church and ran home, scared us to death. You didn't know what was gonna happen.

MM: I can imagine that was terrifying.

LS: It was.

MM: During war time, many Americans were involved in home front activities through planting victory gardens, purchasing war bonds, or producing soldiers kits, did you participate in any kind of home front activities?

LS: Well, any home front activities, yeah we had blackouts and you had to turn, wherever you were they had to blow a sound, and you had to turn off all the lights anywhere, all the street lights, and everything would go out and it would be pitch dark. It was frightening at that time.

MM: So you remember that vividly?

LS: I do.

MM: So when the war finally ended in 1945, what post war changes affected your family the most?

LS: Well my husband, at that time, came home from the Navy and my brother, my oldest brother, went in the army 'casue he was of age and you parents had to sign for you to go in. My mother signed for him to go in. They had to meetings that you would go to for the army wives, and then families could go if they had a son.

MM: Did you attend those meetings?

LS: Some of them I did.

MM: What would they talk about in those meetings?

LS: Well, while the war was going on they'd talk about the war and how you could protect yourself and you were a homebody so you needed to stay home and keep everything together, keep it a happy home as much as you could because of the people that would be gone, because they were in the war.

MM: Yeah, now that I have a better idea of what you were doing this time, I want to ask you a few questions about your husbands' involvement in the army.

LS: My second husband?

MM: Both of them, you can answer about both of them.

LS: My first one, he was just in two years, I don't remember much about his.

MM: So Kenneth was in for two years? In the navy?

LS: Mhmm.

MM: And then what about Charles? Was he drafted into the army or did he enlist?

LS: His mother wouldn't sign for him, he was eighteen and his mother wouldn't sign for him to go in before then so he went in the day the he was eighteen, he joined the army. And he was a senior in high school and he went and took his basic training and came home for a leave and while he was at home he got to graduate with his class because he had missed it all because he was still in the army and doing so well he got to graduate with his class.

MM: So what were, Charles and Kenneth, what were their years of service in the army?

LS: Charley was in, Kenneth was only in two years and I think Charles was in thirty-six years.

MM: Do you know what years those were?

LS: Well I don't remember 'em, but I've got 'em. (Gets up to get army record). He joined on his birthday and February the 3rd in 1944 and... (trails off)

MM: Well if he joined in 1944, then it was thirty-six years later, I guess. Because you said it was thirty-six years that he was in the army?

LS: I think so. He got so old, he was in the reserves, he was in the regular army for sixteen years and he stayed in the army reserves the rest of the time and he got so old he had to get out. (chuckles)

MM: Yeah, do you know what rank he held when he was in the army?

LS: It was Colonel.

MM: So I noticed you have many of your husbands medals while he was in the army. Can you tell me what some of them were for?

LS: Right there they are. (Points to medals on wall.) All of those on the bottom, across there, were made when he first went in, he was a, he shot the pistol and won those medals and a rifle, he was on the rifle team and a pistol team. Most of those medals on the bottom was what they were for and those on the top were medals for that too.

MM: So they were medals for, like, drills?

LS: No, they had meets, they had four men that would go to a pistol meet and they'd meet different places and they'd get medals rather than pay or anything, they'd get medals for it when they won. He was quite a sharp shooter. He won a lot of medals and loved it.

MM: What about the ones that, here I'll point to them, (gets up to point to medals), what were these for?

LS: That's what they were for too. They all come from different times. The first one is when he went in, they were, he was shooting then and got medals but the longer he stayed in, he stayed in different groups that would shoot and he shot a lot of them.

MM: What about the ones that have the '345' on them?

LS: Where is that?

MM: It's this kind of crisscross, that has two rifles.

LS: Oh that's his, they had to wear that on the uniform and that 345 is the number o the reserve or unit.

MM: And does the flag with the bullet casings have any meaning?

LS: That was the flag that they had over his grave, and folded it at the cemetery and gave that to me right then when they folded it. And the bullets are what they shot...(trails off)

MM: In honor of him?

LS: Yeah, the bullets are what they shot, he's buried at the National Cemetery, they get sort of away from the grave and do that shooting. My son-in-law was out there and he picked up those bullets. Most people don't think about them and go get them and I kept thinking, what would I do with them. So that's what I did with them. (points to the bullets arranged with the flag)

MM: I like it, it looks good. Do you mind me asking what year he passed away?

LS: In, '09. July the 15th, 2009.

MM: So I know you mentioned briefly last time that we met, that he fought in the Philippines?

LS: His first assignment was in the Philippines.

MM: Was that still during WWII?

LS: Oh yeah. That was in '44 and '45, he was there.

MM: Do you know where he was when he was in the Philippines?

LS: No, I don't know if it tells on here, (looks back at army record). He trained with the, his basic training was in Fort Benning, that was February through April of '45. I don't think it says, it just says Philippines.

MM: Do you mind if I see that? So what exactly am I looking at, is this a copy of?

LS: Just his record. I have another paper but I didn't look for it last night that tells where he was and what date and what year and what month and all but I could not find that paper. (chuckles)

MM: It's okay. So I noticed on his record, you and Charles had no children together?

LS: (shakes head no) We had five to raise, we didn't have time to have anymore. (chuckles) Really didn't want anymore.

MM: Five is a lot.

LS: Mhmm. The ages they were, let's see mine were 11 and 15, and were 11, 13, and 15.

MM: And those were Kenneth's children?

LS: Charles and mine.

MM: I thought you and Charles didn't have any children together?

LS: We didn't but we raised those children.

MM: Okay. Is this him? (points to picture on backside of record)

LS: Mhmm.

MM: You must be really proud of him.

LS: Oh I am.

MM: Okay, thank you for letting me see that.

LS: He was a nice fella and he was good to me and he thought I was the smartest woman that he'd ever seen.

MM: That's always a good feeling.

LS: (chuckles) I know it. But I really wasn't, just because I sewed and kept house and did everything that his first wife didn't do, he thought I could do anything. And I did, I tried to do a little bit of everything. I love crafts, I got into every craft I could. Made things.

MM: What do you remember making?

LS: Oh I made baskets and caned chairs...made dolls, made my children's clothes. I made a set of wise men, of 6 of them I guess, and I taught classes in that and I taught chair caning classes, after I learned, they wanted me to teach everybody to do it. Just things like that, did ceramics and scrapbooking and I did that and I sewed and knit and crochet and smock, you know what all that is?

MM: Yeah, I do actually, I'm pretty crafty myself.

LS: (chuckles) Well good!

MM: So that's cool. Well I only have a few more questions. I'm gonna jump back to talking about the Philippines. Do you remember any stories that Charles told or letters he had written about his time in the Philippines?

LS: He would talk about the Philippines a lot, and things he did but he was just a young boy. He'd talk about going swimming and I've still got some pictures that he had when he was over there. And he worked in the mess hall, I think, because he was a good eater (chuckles). He always wanted food so he worked in the mess hall, which is the dining room, so he could get more food. Coming back on a ship they had these life saving boats that were on the side of the ship and he got in one of them and he'd been sleeping in one. It was coming a terrible storm one night and one of the fellas come and said you better get in here, it's gonna storm and you are gonna get washed away. He said that boat was torn off the ship, if he'd have been in there he'd have been gone.

MM: So he got out when the guy told him to?

LS: Yes!

MM: Smart boy.

LS: I know.

MM: Did he write you letters often?

LS: When he was in service? Well no he'd already, he'd been in the early part but, let's see, he was in the reserves when we got married. But he had already got out of the regular army.

MM: Oh okay.

LS: But my first husband, we used to write letters, we got a letter everyday. And he was send a letter, a special delivery that would come on Sundays, I'd get a letter everyday.

MM: Wow, I know I read that sometimes it was hard for them to send letters but that's really cool that he was able to send them everyday.

LS: Yeah, well they could mail letters free if it was service people.

MM: Oh okay. This is kind of a broad question, you might not know, I guess it depends on what they told you but I know one of the biggest threats to American soldiers during WWII was being captured and becoming a prisoner of war. Did he ever have any kind of experience of captivity or any of his peers?

LS: (shakes head no) I don't think he did.

MM: That's good! (chuckles)

LS: He never did talk about it if he did.

MM: Did he have any kind of PTSD or anything after he came back?

LS: Any what?

MM: Any posttraumatic stress disorder?

LS: No, he was pretty stable.

MM: Well that's good. So in what year, I guess we couldn't figure that out earlier, but did he return home from the war?

LS: If he was in sixteen years, the regular, now he went in at different times, he went in and got out of the army, went to school in Alabama and he got a law degree and a business degree and that was in...Business degree was in '51 and the law degree was in '55.

MM: He must've been really smart.

LS: He was...he was.

MM: Okay I have one final question. So looking back on this time period, how would you summarize life in America during WWII? What was your favorite part and what was your most hated aspect of it

LS: Well, let's see, when the war was over, it was in June, I don't remember what year, but I lived in Cleveland then, and we went, they had a parade in town, everybody went to town and there was just people up and down the road. And that was a happy time because boys would all be coming home. The time with Charles and him in the service, he had it pretty easy 'cause he went to every school that was available that he could go to. He was so full of education. (chuckles) But he liked to learn more, always learning, more at each school. But he would go, sometimes it'd be a week or two weeks and usually I'd go with him, well when the children weren't there anymore, that's when I'd go with him. But before then, I'd stay home and keep the home fire burning.

MM: So what did you not like the most about life during the war? Was it maybe rationing or?

LS: Rationing I didn't like but I don't know, it was just, you just couldn't go the store any buy what you wanted. You had to have your coupon, if you used it up, it was out.

MM: That's all the questions that I have. Do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

LS: No, I don't think so.

MM: Well thank you so much for answering my questions.

LS: I'm glad to.

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