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Oral History/Abby Jansen

Abby Jansen

Southern Adventist University, abigailjansen@southern.edu

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HIST 155, Fall 2015/Abby Jansen

Student Interviewer's Name: Abby Jansen
Interviewee name Sylvia Royalty

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in one sessions on November 3 and lasted approximately thirty-five minutes. It was conducted in the home of Silvia Royalty in Collegedale, TN. Only the interviewer and interviewee were present.

About Sylvia Royalty:

Sylvia Royalty, my great grandmother, was born on March 11, 1926 in Cincinnati, Ohio. She lived there most of her life, where she met her husband, Harold Royalty (Papa). When he was drafted into World War II, she remained at home working. During the interview, she discussed what it was like to be at home during the war, and the experiences she had while he was away.

Interviewer: Abby Jansen (AJ)

Interviewee: Sylvia Royalty (SR)

AJ: Well I just have some questions for you, and we will just start with some basic ones. This is just about you, will you tell me when and where you were born?

SR: Cincinnati, Ohio

AJ: And what year was that?

SR: 1926

AJ: Ok so will you tell me a little bit more about you and Papa? Where you met, how you met, and how you ended up here?

SR: Well, I met Harold at work, where I was working at Bluebird Pie Company in Cincinnati and he came up there and went to work, and that's where I met him.

AJ: Now did he live up there?

SR: No, but his brother did, his folks lived in Danville, Kentucky. That's where he came from... Danville, Kentucky.

AJ: Do you remember the year that you and Papa got married?

SR: Well (begins to laugh) I can't remember the year, we would be married 70 years in February. What year would that be?

AJ: 70 is 2016? So that would be 1946?

SR: That would be right because they bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941.

AJ: Speaking of World War II, how did Papa end up in WWII? Was he drafted?

SR: Yes, he was drafted. They drafted you back them days.

AJ: Were you married when he was drafted?

SR: No, we got married on his first furlough back home. He was going to, leaving for Germany.

AJ: So he was first stationed in Germany?

SR: Well I don't think they were stationed any certain place, they were on the move. You know them over there when they was in service, you know over in Afghanistan right they had a place to live but they kept on the move, they didn't have a certain place for anything. At night, they dug a hole and slept in a hole. Harold said sometimes it would rain at night and he'd be so tired he would wake up with mud and everything in your hair. And then course they didn't have no cafeteria or anything, they just had that old canned food, K rations they called them.

AJ: How long would Papa be gone at a time?

SR: Hmmm, he was gone, I don't know how long it was that he was gone. But he came back to take South Pacific training. They um , the war was over in Germany and they came back to take South Pacific training to go to, you know, Japan or wherever it was that they were sending them. And while he was home on furlough, we went over to Coney Island one night. And Coney Island was down the river from Cincinnati and you had to go downtown to catch a boat and go up the river to Coney Island. It was a, well it was a, like it had all those rides and things.

AJ: Like an amusement park?

SR: Ya, that's what it was. So we come back that night and it was bells was ringing and people was everywhere. Do you see somebody?

AJ: No, it's just your clock ringing Granny.

SR: and they had signed VJ day so he didn't have to go to the South Pacific. So they stationed him over at Camp Aderbury, Indiana for oh... I bet he was over there about 6 or 7 months before he got out, but he was over there where they was discharging a lot of the men, so he came home every chance he got.

AJ: So were you living in Cincinnati during all of this?

SR: Yeah I was, I had finally found an apartment. A two room apartment, honey, with a bath. Back them days, you couldn't find a room, you couldn't find an apartment, all those people that come in to Cincinnati to work in those defense plants and these people had a house like Tanya and Erik, they would rent out all of the upstairs and extra bedrooms. They would rent all their rooms out, you couldn't even rent a room. And finally, I was living next door and this apartment, my neighbor was fixing up this upstairs apartment and was fixing it up for her friend, they were older. But just before they got it finished, this woman died, that was going to move up there. So I asked her, she was telling me about her friend, and I asked her maybe if I could rent her apartment. So I got an apartment right next door to where I was livin'! We had a bedroom and a kitchen and a bath, but we had a private entrance to go on up the steps and we didn't have to go through nobody's house or nothing. We was tickled to death to get that. We never knew when we was going to get an apartment.

AJ: So with people working in the defense factories, were you still working at the pie factory?

SR: I was still working at the pie place cause I wasn't old enough to work in no defense factory.

AJ: So how old were you then and how old did you have to be to work in the factory?

SR: I was 17, I quit school. Just to show you how smart I was. But anyway, I thought about it so many times but if I hadn't of quit school, I would have probably never been an Adventist and I would have never met Harold, so the Lord worked it out for me.

AJ: So was Papa an Adventist when you guys met?

SR: Oh no, he was strict Church of Christ. Strict Church of Christ, he said he would never enter the door. And I said, well that's alright with me! If you wanna go to your church, I won't say a word. You go to your church, I'll go to mine. But of course I wasn't an Adventist at that time, but I knew that if I was going to ever be anything I was going to be an Adventist.

AJ: What made you want to be an Adventist?

SR: Well, I was raised in the Baptist Church and uh, my cousin, Omer, told me that he became an Adventist and he told me that we was keeping the wrong day. I didn't believe him. I was only 17 and I didn't know much about a Bible, of course even though I went to Sunday School all my life. But you didn't learn that much, you know? I could say the books of the Bible and a few verses and all that you know. So I decided that I was going to find out and show Omer, my cousin, where he was wrong. Well and I was really sincere because I thought

that if I was Baptist and something would have happened to me, I would have been ready you know. And then when I found out I was keeping the wrong day, it was a shock. So I got my Bible and I just prayed and prayed that the Lord would show me, you know, and I thought, I didn't know where to start. So I decided I would start in Matthew because that's when Jesus lived was in that part of the Bible. You know the Lord showed me the Sabbath as plain as day and that's the strangest thing that I can't understand how these *preachers* s'posed to be educated and smart, how come they can't see it. You ever thought about that?

AJ: I have Granny, I have, and I don't know either.

SR: You know I wonder if they know it and just don't tell it.

AJ: I don't know.

SR: So I decided then and there that if I was ever anything, I would be an Adventist.

AJ: So you were 17 when that happened?

SR: I hadn't met Harold at that time, I was 18 when we got married. He was 19 the 4th of December and we got married the 6th of February and I would have been 18 in March. There was 3 months and 7 days difference in our ages. So but anyway, I guess he thought that I would eventually be a Church of Christ because his brothers and sisters had married people and they had changed you know. But I told Harold, I'm not gonna change. But anyway, he came around. I was baptized after Sonja was born and I would get up and go to church. I caught a, we had streetcars running by the house, trolley cars or whatever you want to call them. And I had to go to a certain part of town and then I had to get off of that and catch a bus to church. That was kind of an ordeal, but anyway, I'd get up and go and I didn't ask Harold to go or nothing. He didn't even know when I was baptized.

AJ: So when you were 18 or 19 and Papa was away in the war, what was it like being newly married in Cincinnati with Papa gone?

SR: Well, it didn't really bother me. I worked everyday. And you know I was off on weekends, we did get Sabbath off and worked Sunday.

AJ: Did you have to specifically ask to not have to work on Sabbath?

SR: No, that was the way it worked. That's like McKee, being off on Sabbath and working Sunday.

AJ: Oh ok. So when we talked the first time, you were telling me about the rations and the stamps that you had to have to buy certain things. Can you tell me a little bit more?

SR: Well they rationed sugar, they rationed gasoline, they rationed shoes. I can't really think of anything else, but I know those three things was rationed.

AJ: Did you ever have difficulty finding things or being able to purchase them? Did you ever have to borrow sugar or did you even have a car to use gasoline?

SR: Well I reckon, of course I wasn't keeping house at that time so I had no trouble. Only thing would be if you wanted to buy a pair of shoes. You could buy these canvas pair of sandals or something but if you wanted to buy a pair of leather shoes you had to have a stamp. And they only allowed you so many a year, but I don't remember how many now.

AJ: I was doing a little bit of research about what it was like to be on the homefront during the War and they mentioned Victory Gardens. Did you guys have a garden?

SR: My cousin did! They had a plot of ground and they had different places and they had so much they would number 'em and people would plant the gardens.

AJ: So different people would plant in their garden?

SR: Yeah, uhuh. And McKee they used to use the big field over here headed to Apison. I think there's some buildings over in there now but they plowed up a bunch of ground for two or three years and people at the bakery could mark it off and we had a little garden over there, besides this one back here (she points to the backyard).

AJ: Do you remember any propaganda or did you listen to the radio to listen in about the war?

SR: No, I didn't pay much attention to that.

AJ: So if you didn't really pay attention to it, do you remember how long Papa was gone?

SR: Probably about 2 years or so.

AJ: What was it like when he came back?

SR: WONDERFUL. I told you he was back on VJ Day and never did have to go back overseas, he just stayed at Camp Anderbury over in Indiana and that's not too far from Cincinnati, so he got to come home quite a bit and by that time I had an apartment. So anyway, that worked out real good.

AJ: So by the time he got back you had the two room apartment that you were telling me about earlier?

SR: I had the apartment before he got out, but he was over at Camp Anderbury so he would come home. Yeah I saved up all of my money, all of his checks he sent me I never cashed. So I had money, I paid for my furniture and when he got out, course you couldn't buy no new cars or anything, but we had enough money saved that we could bought a little, it was kind of like a.... coupe, I think they called them. And my cousin had one, her husband had one and course he didn't use it during the war and it was really nice and clean and everything so Harold bought it from him, and Harold paid cash for it. I had a real good girlfriend and me and her would go to shows, go out to eat, and stuff like that so that helped.

AJ: So was she married or was her husband serving in the war?

SR: No, she wasn't married and the last thing I knew, she had gone to live in New York City and we just kind of lost contact and she was just the sweetest thing. She had the prettiest red hair come down long and it curled under. All she had to do was just brush and it was the prettiest stuff, had the prettiest head of hair, a real pretty color of red.

AJ: Did you have any other friends with husbands that served?

SR: No, and all my family wasn't living in Cincinnati at that time. I had a lot of cousins and that and of course my one sister never did live in Cincinnati, she lived in Kentucky. And Dorothy and Charlie got married and had Flonny and they were living in Kentucky. Flonny was just tiny baby and course it was in the winter and uh, I can't remember what kind of work Charlie was doing down there but it wasn't real steady during the winter time. So Harold and I went down there and talked him into coming back to Cincinnati. Well, he got a job right away and course we only had one bedroom, but then about two weeks, we went down and got Dorothy and Flonny and she was just a little tiny thing but we just loved that baby. So we brought 'em back and I don't know if you know what a roll-away bed is but well we had a three quarter roll-away bed in the apartment. Of course Dorothy and Charlie couldn't find no apartment so I guess for about three or four months we let them have our bedroom and Harold and I slept in the kitchen on the roll-away bed. That's the way we lived, honey, that's the best you could do. Then people started going back home, you know they started closing the defense plants. So then they started getting some apartments, so I guess about 3 or 4 months they got an apartment. And they was about a mile and something from where we lived. I had quit work because Harold wanted a baby and I couldn't get pregnant. He thought they was something wrong with me, so he wanted me to go to the doctor. Doctor couldn't find nothing wrong with me, he just thought I was too hyper. I used to be really hyper, so he said that the only thing he could suggest was to quit work and maybe I'd calm down a bit. So as poor as we were, I quit

work. And I guess 6 or 7 months later I finally got pregnant. I would take a walk over to Dorothy's every morning. Dorothy didn't feel real good after so I go over and clean her kitchen and take Flonny and put her in the stroller and take her for a walk when the weather got kind of nice. I'd go over there again in the afternoon, I done a lot of walking. So anyway, but you know we got along when they was living with us with just two rooms, honey. I don't reckon we ever had a disagreement or nothing, we got along just fine. Course Flonny, we all just spoiled her. Harold would get off of work and go to see her everyday after we got through, we done a lot of walking. We didn't have much money but we would o to a show every once in awhile. But most of the time Harold and I would just go outside and take a long walk. Poor as church mice, but you know money, it don't buy happiness. It's nice to have, but it don't buy happiness.

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Original Questions

1. When/where were you born?
2. Where did you and Papa meet?
3. When did you get married?
4. How old were you when you got married?
5. Where were you working during the war?
6. Was your family living close to you at the time?
7. Could you work in a defense factory to make war materials?
8. Was Papa drafted or did he enlist?
9. Where was he stationed?
10. How long would he be gone at a time?
11. What was it like being home with him gone all the time?
12. What did you do when he was able to visit home?
13. Did you continue working at the same place all during the war?
14. How did you encounter rations?
15. What difficulties did you have with the rations?
16. Did you have a garden? A victory garden?
17. Do you remember any propaganda or posters?
18. Did you ever listen to the radio?
19. How did you keep in contact with Papa?
20. Do you remember anything about an anti-communist movement?
21. Did you have any friends with husbands that served?
22. When did Papa get out of the war?
23. What was is like to have him home again?
24. Did you stay in the same place after the war?
25. Where were you living? House vs. apartment, not geographic location
26. What did you and Papa do when the war was over?