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Oral History Project/ Billie Humbard

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COVER PAGE

Billie Humbard was born in Chattanooga, TN in 1928. As a teenager, about the age of 14 or 15, the family moved to Hastings, Nebraska for a period of time until her father was relieved of his duties. Mrs. Humbard was only able to attain a high school education. Back in Chattanooga Mrs. Humbard was reunited with her childhood friend and now husband Huebert E. Humbard. The Humbard's got married on January 16th, 1946. The couple was happily married for 46 years and from this long union, a daughter was conceived. They now also celebrate the life of their granddaughter. However, sadly, Mrs. Humbard mourns the loss of her beloved husband who passed a few months ago after battling cancer and asbestos poisoning.

Although the war yielded unfavorable changes in her life, Mrs. Humbard is thankful for the years she had with her family and the fact that they were able to survive during this world crisis. The joys and memories she shares with her husband will never be forgotten.

Student Interviewer's Name: Deneicia Rice (DR)
Interviewee name Billie Humbard (BH)

Time and Location of Interview:

The interview was conducted in two sessions on October 27th, 2015 and November 4th, 2015 and lasted approximately two hours in total. It was conducted at Morning Pointe Assisted Living at Greenbrier Cove in Ooltewah, TN. Only Deneicia Rice (interviewer) and Billie Humbard (interviewee) were present.

DR: Mrs. Humbard, so what was it like here in Chattanooga? What was your childhood experience like?

BH: It was nothing like it is now. The neighborhoods were safe where we lived. The mother and father if they both had jobs would do their work and the kids stayed home. And nobody ever worried about anything happening to us or being robbed, or anything like that. We feed for ourselves. If we was hungry we found something to eat and we were safe and cared for and loved, and that's all we expected back then. We didn't have money like kids have today, we just didn't have it. Both parents worked where they could get work and kids were left alone, and the parents never had to worry about us because we didn't have such things going on back then. And people were very poor, not really poor, but we survived.

DR: How did the war change your lifestyle? What was the shift like?

BH: Well the shift to me as a teenager was we left our home and went to Hastings, Nebraska. And I started school in Hastings, Nebraska.

DR: Why did you guys move to Hastings, Nebraska?

BH: My father worked with the government and was assigned to go there and build huts that were used to store ammunition. And my father was over these people that were building these huts and the war was going on. And the snows in Nebraska, us being from Tennessee, was unreal. My father would have to climb out the top floor get on the roof slide down to get a shovel and shoveled the snow so we could open the front door. That's how deep the snow was. Clothes were rationing, shoes were rationing, food was rationed. Everything you had to have a rationed card for or you didn't get. If your shoes wore out before the next pair was due you was up the hill without a paddle in deep snow. (Light chuckle) You couldn't buy butter; you couldn't buy sugar. Are you recording me. Put it on pause for a minute.

DR: Yes ma'am, ok!

(recording pause)

(recording resume)

BH: Don't think you wanted that on there. (Light chuckle)

DR: You can say whatever you want on here!

BH: So anyway my father was drafted into 3rd Army division at the Battle of the Bulge. His name was William T. McCourd with Patton's 3rd Army division where he was captured and imprisoned by the Germans for a long period of time. I don't remember how long he was in the camp.

DR: How would you describe they ways that the war changed your life and others around you?

BH: After the war and during the war jobs were plentiful, made enough money to live on and not worry where the next dime was going to come from. It changed everything completely. A lot of people say Roosevelt knew that Hawaii was going to be attacked. And he let it happen to start the war building, mechanic, Rosie the Riveter. And after the war began building big planes, homes, etc. So life was considerably better off.

DR: Can you remember the name of the school you went to?

BH: No. I know they didn't even have a cafeteria. In snow that deep you had to walk another mile and a half home to get a sandwich and a whole mile and a half back. (Chuckles heavily)

DR: So how long did you guys live there?

BH: I don't remember.

DR: OK, that's OK! So as a teenager was moving scary?

BH: No, I never had thought of being scared back then about anything. I knew I'll be taken care of one way or the other.

DR: So what was your relationship like with your parents?

BH: Very good, till my father came home from the war. And then the whole world fell apart. As I told you before he was a prisoner at The Battle of the Bulge.

DR: And you were the only child?

BH: No I had two sisters, I was the baby.

DR: What was the name of your two sisters?

BH: One was Rosillie the other was Gerallie. And Gerallie died very young.

DR: What did she die from?

BH: I don't remember.

DR: So Rosillie was the oldest?

BH: Yes, she's the oldest.

DR: And how old were you at the time? Were you a teenager still?

BH: Yea, yea, I was. A very young teenager, maybe 14 or 15. I don't remember. But when dad came home from the war he wasn't dad. He would get violent.

DR: This book I read, called *Unbroken*, it was based on a true story. I read it for the class I'm doing this project on now. And it explained to me how when the men leave for war sometimes they're not the same.

BH: He was captured in a German prison. A camp with no food, no medical care, nothing! (Sad look upon face)

DR: Did he look different, like smaller maybe?

BH: Yea he was very thin, very angry. I can remember running up through the field to meet him. We knew he was coming home. He would have to take the street cart to get home. And I went running up through the field and jumped in his arms and grab him around the neck. I even remember what I had on. But that memory is very plain(accurate). Of seeing him again and jumping up on him. He held my bottom and hold me up close.

DR: You say you remember what you had on?

BH: Yes, a red pants suit! (Grinning)

DR: What did he have on?

BH: I don't remember; I guess it was his army uniform. There was a write up in the paper when he was captured and all of the kids in the school knew my daddy was captured and the teachers all knew it.

DR: Wow! What was it like with everyone knowing? Did people send letters?

BH: No, our life went on, about the same. It was not discussed! Except have you heard from your father or just ordinary conversations. And we would say no we haven't heard anything yet. And that was a difficult time.

DR: Wow, so did he ever tell you stories about what happened inside?

BH: Ahh, I also had an uncle who was captured at the same time and was in the same prison camp. And his feet and legs were frozen. Oh God! I'm going to cry. (gets teary eyed) And gangrene set in and he turned over in bed one night and his leg just fell off and he kicked it out of the bed. And he ends up having the other one amputated. So he lost both legs in that German prison.

DR: Can you tell me a little more about your uncle?

BH: He was in Atlanta in the care center because he had lost both legs. And he ended up marrying his nurse that he had there. And I don't remember her name.

DR: Did he (your dad) ever talk to you about the experience?

BH: No, no never! One foot and leg was injured and he never tried to get compensation. He was alive! But he wasn't the same man that left, not at all. He would take spells of being very angry and we walk on egg shells to keep him from blowing up. Momma would say be quiet, just leave him alone. It was a trying time for him to adjust and for us to adjust to him. It was very difficult, there was crying, mom and dad didn't get along. They divorce and they got back married. They went to Rossville, Georgia.

DR: How did your mom handle it?

BH: As mom handled everything else.

DR: She stayed strong for you guys!

BH: Whatever came up she handled it. That's the way I was in my marriage. My husband would look at me and say you're my secretary you tend to it. (Chuckles lightly) Yeah! No matter what it was, plumbing, moving, packing, etc.

DR: That's ok. So what was it like while your dad left for war?

BH: Oh, we lived in an area, East Chattanooga, Levindale. We stayed in the homes that was provided by my mom's job. Only people who worked there could live in the homes. They sold them for \$1500, big homes. And the payment was \$5 a month and that was taking out of the pay. And things got bad, women got laid off. There was no money back then. And we would get behind those \$5, we couldn't pay. And my mother would send me to the mill to tell the lady she would give it to you as soon as she could. (Light Chuckle) Nobody got anything back then.

DR: Now that your dad was off, what type of work did your mom do?

BH: She worked in a United Hosiery Mill sewing Buster Brown brand socks to support us. And before the war my dad would walk miles and miles to a WPA job. Roosevelt started this program and they didn't hand out money back then. You worked or you didn't get money. Dad would not spend the money he made. Because every dime was important back then.

DR: Lets backup and go back to you because it's supposed to be about yourself. Did you worry if our side would win or not?

BH: No! I didn't worry about the war, nothing else!

DR: Did you ever receive letters from your dad?

BH: When he could he would call. Or mom would receive telegrams.

DR: Ok, but before we start talking about them. Before anything happened what was your normal lifestyle like?

BH: The normal routine was like any normal family. Ahh, mom and dad worked, things were very bad financially back then. And dad then went to work for the government building these little huts for ammunition in Nebraska. And we all went to Nebraska and I went to high school partly in Nebraska. When the war was over we came back to Chattanooga. And my husband who was a neighbor boy I had known since I was 6 years old and he was 9 and was in the navy and this was after the war was over. And he was stationed in St. Pedro, California.

DR: And this was your husband?

BH: Yes! And I hated that little ol' Humbard boy! (Chuckles heavily) He was coming on a leave after the war was over and he called his mother. His mother and my mother are best friends and so he called and ask his mother to ask my mother could he have a date with me. (Grinning) After the war was over we moved back here and started life anew. And it was a new life. The jobs were plentiful; the money was good. The whole economy boomed up until a few years ago when it collapsed again. (chuckles heavy) We've seen good times and bad times. Worst time in my life has nothing to do with the war. I lost my only child with cancer and few months ago; lost my husband. (teary eyed) And going back reliving the times when I was just out of my teens. Going to Atlanta, where they brought the soldiers amputees, everything. My sister and I would hop a bus every Friday, go to Atlanta for the whole weekend helping them learn to walk, to dance. Get on the stage and sing and play and it did us much good as it did the boys there and we were young, just a great time. Time in my life I will never forget. And they seem to be so grateful to the volunteers that would come to help them and entertain them.

DR: When did you and your husband get married?

BH: 16th of January, 1946, 46 years!

DR: And what was your sister name?

BH: Rosalie, she has already past too. I have nobody can I have you? (Chuckles lightly)

DR: Yes, Of course!

BH: Well I have a granddaughter that lives in South Florida and she don't talk to me. I'm old! (Chuckles)

DR: Could you tell me a little bit more about your husband?

BH: The sweetest kindest man you will ever meet. My husband was totally blind. He was 61 or 62 when he began to lose his site. He ended up with bladder cancer which they say was cause from the asbestos on the ship. He was under treatment for that for five years. Then

he developed Parkinson's and had three strokes. (Crying) And then he got cancer in the lungs and passed away. One of the nurses said that that is the sweetest man I will ever know.

DR: Did he ever talk to you about his experience in war?

BH: Yes, I think it was eight trips he made around the Atlantic and two across the Pacific. And in the ship ahead of the convoys, so if there was danger he knew it before the other ships behind him.

DR: What type of job did you do?

BH: Well I worked for three Urologists.

DR: What was it like after the war?

BH: When my husband was discharged he went to work with his father and built so many churches around here. Several homes and buildings. Florida was beautiful back then and the living was great. We did good for ourselves.

DR: Well thank you so much for your time and being willing to share your story Mrs. Billie.

BH: You're such a sweetheart anything for you darling. Oh, you're so welcome. Come see me anytime Hun. (Smiling)

DR: I will Mrs. Billie!