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Marion Gabler

Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Julie Stein
in 2010

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Marion Gabler

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Interview 1: August 24, 2010

Begin Audiofile 1

Stein: Okay, my name is Julie Stein. I'm here on August 24, with Marion Gabler, and this is our first tape. Usually the way we start out is just by asking you your full name and where and when you were born.

1-00:00:22

Gabler: Full name, Marion Gabler. Born in Freeport, Michigan. What else?

Stein: When?

1-00:00:29

Gabler: Oh. January 7, 1924.

Stein: Okay, now tell me a little bit about your family. You said you came from a large family?

1-00:00:44

Gabler: Well, I was the first, and over the years my mother had different men and different kids, and when she finally got married the last time, why, she had seven with one fellow. So they were all back in Michigan, or most of them anyway, and I go back there for the family reunion.

Stein: Did you all grow up in the same house? Was everyone living together?

1-00:01:15

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Back in those days the mother got the kids, so no question. No question. The men disappeared.

Stein: Did they all just travel on, or what?

1-00:01:27

Gabler: Well, when I was born my father was in prison, and by the time he got out, she had another baby. That's just the way it went.

Stein: How many brothers and how many sisters?

1-00:01:47

Gabler: Well, let's see. I had four brothers before I had any sisters. I was almost seventeen when I finally got a sister. So I had three sisters and five brothers.

Stein: Okay. Did you have a lot of responsibilities, the oldest sibling?

1-00:02:14

Gabler: Oh, it didn't seem like it at the time. When we lived up north we were expected to pick the potato bugs off of the potatoes. That was a big chore we didn't like. We had to harness the horse and go out into what they called the slashings and pick up pine knots, which now I remember with pleasure, but then we'd holler, "Oh, there isn't any more pine knots out there." But it was a

good life. Back then you participated with everything with your family. There was nobody else within miles, so that was good.

Stein: Did you grow up on a farm?

1-00:03:11

Gabler: Part of the time. I went to two schools every year, so I was in the cities, I was in the farm. In this picture, I'm about three, and I was living on my grandfather's farm. That's it, my mother would bring us back to grandpa and grandma. She's get a nice place to live, she'd go bring us back. We could say, "Hi, Grandma and Grandpa," and "Goodbye," with the same anticipation. I'm sure they got very lonely at times.

Stein: Where did your grandma and grandpa live? Was it close by in Michigan?

1-00:03:44

Gabler: Two or three different towns, but in Michigan, the same area.

Stein: So they had a farm.

1-00:03:57

Gabler: They had a farm most of the time until he finally retired.

Stein: Do you know what they used to grow?

1-00:04:00

Gabler: Well, yeah. He had horses, and they grew rotated crops. I still can't go back to Michigan and look at the field after field of corn, field after field of soybeans, never anything else. You know they're using all kinds of fertilizers. It isn't good for the soil.

Stein: Certainly not.

1-00:04:25

Gabler: When I grew up we had a manure spreader, we loaded it, we took the manure out to the fields. He planted corn one year, wheat the next, and maybe two or three years of hay. But it was all called rotation of crops, and I don't think he ever bought fertilizer.

Stein: Were there ever blights or crop problems because that, or do you remember?

1-00:04:53

Gabler: Well, no, I don't remember it, but during the Depression my mother said he took the potatoes out of the basement, threw them on the manure spreader and took them out in the field and spread them rather than to sell them for like, I don't know what, ten cents a bushel or whatever. He wouldn't sell them for the price that he could get, and that was during the Depression. But us kids was always happy. We were always well fed. We didn't know there was a Depression. I didn't know about those children running in the streets with no

families in Chicago, which was probably 150 miles away. I didn't know anything about that until I was a lot older, into adulthood.

Stein: Do you remember any changes that were caused by the Depression or having an awareness of it in any way?

1-00:05:52

Gabler: Well, yeah, my grandparents had started bank accounts, and I think we got cheated out of two bucks or something. It was enough that I had heard about it, but it wasn't very much money. [laughs] My grandmother had egg money for groceries, and he had the milk money for whatever farm costs there was. They worked hard.

Stein: Were they born in Michigan, or do you know how they came to—

1-00:06:31

Gabler: They lived in West Virginia when my mother was born and moved to Michigan, I think, because my grandfather's brother had married my grandmother's sister, and they were up here in Michigan, and it sounded like a good place for farmers. He hadn't been a farmer, but they came up here and eventually got a farm.

Stein: I guess they learned real quick.

1-00:07:00

Gabler: Well, he probably grew up on one, but in West Virginia a farm is rock piles and a little field about as big as this, and another hill and another little field, not farming like they do here in Michigan. But he had been a—they built framework for stone quarries, so a framework for a stone quarry is just like a barn structure. So he was a carpenter before he became a farmer.

Stein: Oh, wow.

1-00:07:34

Gabler: But I spent a lot of time on their various farms. [shows photographs] I kept this one because here's where I'm three on one of grandpa's farms. Here I'm probably twelve or thirteen on another of grandpa's farm. There I'm—There I'm very pregnant for my first child. My husband was in service, and here's where I worked at the bomber plant.

Stein: Oh, wow.

1-00:07:59

Gabler: That's the only picture I've got of that time in the factory—

Stein: You've got nice pants on. That probably wasn't very common for women, right?

1-00:08:13

Gabler: That was start, nobody— You couldn't buy women's pants before the war.

Stein: Did they start making women's pants, or did you have to wear men's pants?

1-00:08:22

Gabler: I think by the time I got in the bomber plant they were making slacks. We never saw a woman in a bandana before the war. I do have my badge on in that picture.

Stein: Oh, yeah. Gosh, this picture of you is precious as a three-year-old, with your legs crossed all lady-like. [laughter] Well, I guess to stay sort of in the thirties, did your mother work ever?

1-00:08:50

Gabler: She was a housekeeper. That's how she met these various men. [laughs] She always took the kids, once she'd get established, she'd take us kids. That's why we moved around so much.

Stein: Okay, did you ever live in other homes?

1-00:09:01

Gabler: Sure, every time she got a different job as a housekeeper. This is where I graduated from high school, very poor picture. But we lived on three acres with tents like gypsies, and we had a party for my graduation. This is my grandma and grandpa. We had a party out there. We were just as happy in those tents, as later on my dad built a house, but he got the house up but not finished inside before he was drafted. So he was in the Navy at the same time my husband was.

Stein: What theater did your father serve in?

1-00:09:49

Gabler: He was a Seabee.

Stein: That's a construction battalion?

1-00:09:55

Gabler: Well, I think so. When I knew where he was, he was around Mississippi, down around the gulf. He had something to do with the Navy, so I don't know whether—I thought they were constructing. He ended up in the hospital, and I don't remember now what that was either, but—

Stein: So it sounds like you moved around a whole bunch as a child with your big family.

1-00:10:26

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Two schools a year except maybe two.

Stein: Was it the same schools? Did you go back and forth, or it was a different school every time.

1-00:10:38

Gabler: It was off with Mom to a different school. Back to Grandma's to the same country school. Off with Mom to some other. Back to Grandma's. For a while it was always the same country school when we was with the grandparents.

Stein: But a different school when you were with your mom. What was it like living in these other people's home? Was that—

1-00:11:02

Gabler: It was always home. Just like this. This is home. If I hang my hat here, it's home. If I don't hang my hat there, it means I'm not comfortable, and it's not home.

Stein: Were you usually comfortable in the home—

1-00:11:15

Gabler: Oh, yeah. We had a happy childhood, none of this psychiatric looking back and blaming somebody else for all your troubles.

Stein: Did you have to work yourself as a young person?

1-00:11:33

Gabler: No. I think I got my first job when I was probably in twelfth grade, and I was a babysitter one summer.

Stein: You never had to work in the home alongside your mother.

1-00:11:45

Gabler: Well, when you say work, you plant a garden, you can, you maybe dust once in a while, help with the laundry. Those kind of things weren't work. When you think of work in those days, you was getting paid for it and doing it somewhere else. We'd walk several miles to pick strawberries, in one area we could pick strawberries. Another area, we walked so far and got a ride and picked string beans. Those were just like a week or two now and maybe never happened again. So it was always friendly, always fun.

Stein: It sounds like a nice job.

1-00:12:37

Gabler: Well, it was. My mother never worried about anything, and so why did we? I don't know how we got back and forth to Grandma's as often as we did. Some of those times we didn't have a car.

Stein: Yeah, do you remember hitchhiking or taking a bus?

1-00:12:52

Gabler: No, we was there. She probably found somebody with a car. I can remember my—we were three years apart, me and my first brother. I was probably eight when Ma and her present husband pulled in, and she got out of the car with a baby. I can still remember hollering, "Mama's got a baby, Mama's got a baby." I run across the yard. Oh, my brother had been with her because he wanted to go play, and I wanted to hang around and hold that baby. That was the third brother.

Stein:

That must have been quite a surprise. Didn't know he was on the way.

1-00:13:38

Gabler: I didn't know where she was or anything. I didn't care. When you were on that farm, you just lived.

Stein:

Can you describe the life on the farm a little bit because now fewer and fewer people actually are living on family farms.

1-00:13:56

Gabler: Well, Grandpa would get up probably 4:30 and fix the fires and go out to do chores. Grandma would get up, and I think she went out and helped milk. She always helped milk. They were milking by hand. Then they'd come back and have breakfast. Grandpa would go out and do whatever had to be done. In the winter time he—I don't know what he did, fixed the tools that needed fixing, or what. Grandma always had housework and canning and washing clothes and whatever. Out in the woodshed, oh, yeah, we could always stack wood when Grandpa split it, things like that. She had the old fashioned wooden washing machine that you pushed something back and forth, back and forth and do the wash. She'd hang them on the line.

Stein:

That's hard work.

1-00:14:58

Gabler: Well, it probably was.

Stein:

Somebody strong.

1-00:15:02

Gabler: Yeah, it probably was.

Stein:

I can't imagine what the winters must have been like.

1-00:15:09

Gabler: I can't imagine them either because now these kids go by here in the dark either in the morning or at night to go to school, and sometimes it's morning and night they're walking in the dark. We had usually a mile and a half to walk in the country. I can never remember at all walking in the dark.

Stein:

Really.

1-00:15:32

Gabler: Well, you had to go to school, at least start at 8:00 to get there, a mile and a half. Usually at this country school when we were with the grandparents, the teacher lived somewhere along that line and would walk the last bit —

Stein:

What was school like, especially since you have these experiences of pretty different schools?

1-00:15:57

Gabler: Well, it was always—a couple of times I was in the town school, didn't like that at all.

Stein:

Why not?

1-00:16:07

Gabler: Well, the first school I can remember being in town, I was probably in the third grade, a communal toilet. I wet my pants once rather than to go to the bathroom where other girls could see me.

Stein:

Oh, there were no walls?

1-00:16:25

Gabler: Well, there was walls, evidently, but no—I don't know if it was walls, there wasn't any door. Separate ones. Oh, man. I must have been very shy. I did outgrow that. But the teacher in the first grade, would be up there learning to read, and maybe when they get back, the second grade go up and do the same thing. Some of the older kids might be assigned to help these younger ones. That was a good atmosphere in the schools to have all eight grades.

Stein:

In one room, at the same time?

1-00:17:09

Gabler: Yeah, I don't think they invented kindergarten. Well, they might have had it in city schools. I don't think they invented it until my brother three years younger, I think he didn't have to go to kindergarten either. They would start out in first grade. So it was nice.

Stein:

The country, were they all one-room schoolhouses with all the grades together?

1-00:17:33

Gabler: The country schools were.

Stein:

How about the town school?

1-00:17:40

Gabler: In the third or fourth grade we was in a school in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that had two rooms, so it was up, I think, about fourth grade in one room and

fourth to eighth in the other. So it was still mixed grades. I don't think I was ever in a school that had one room each until after I started high school.

Stein: Do you remember, did you have to buy your own books and bring all your own supplies, or did they have that at the school?

1-00:18:18

Gabler: Michigan never anything like that. You could always buy used stuff from somebody else, but back then they kept the books so long it would probably use the same books, keep them in the family, over and over. I don't know how old I was before they got these paper books that you do your spelling in the book, you do your arithmetic in the book, you throw it away. Back in those days you had a book.

Stein: And you kept it.

1-00:18:55

Gabler: Yeah, and if you didn't need it, you could sell it to somebody else in the same school.

Stein: At the country school, do you know how far people came from? Were there some kids who were walking—

1-00:19:05

Gabler: Two miles?

Stein: Uh huh.

1-00:19:07

Gabler: Probably. Ours was always about a mile and a half.

Stein: Because it sounds like it was pretty isolated where, at the farm at least, there weren't so many neighbors close by.

1-00:19:21

Gabler: Well, for a while there was a house maybe a quarter of a mile further that had several kids that would walk our distance, and then we'd all walk together. But nobody was driven to school. Everybody walked, including the teachers, most of the time.

Stein: Even in the Michigan winters?

1-00:19:43

Gabler: Yeah, I guess so. Michigan winter, when you're living it, is just something that's there. It's not an ordeal. The people that live in Michigan think I'm crazy to live out here. Hardly any of them want to—well, maybe for a visit, but definitely don't want to move out here. My oldest boy is sixty-six, he don't want to fly even. He's offered to come out on his motorcycle, and I told him I'd rather have him stay in Michigan than come out here on a motorcycle.

Stein: Smart idea. Keep him safe. So other than going to school and being on the farm with your family, were there other activities that you remember doing as a young girl?

1-00:20:41

Gabler: I was probably in the seventh grade when I heard about, what was that? It might have been 4H, so anyway, I walked a mile and a half to the school and then another half mile or something to this person's house. I didn't go very long. I couldn't learn crocheting from my mother because she didn't know how to do it right, and one teacher taught me how to crochet, and I went home and showed my mother I could croquet. She says, "Well, that's just the way I do it." Somebody else showed me.

Stein: Did she make clothes for you?

1-00:21:22

Gabler: Oh, yeah.

Stein: Were most of the clothes made at home?

1-00:21:22

Gabler: I had relatives in Lansing that would bring coats. I hated to see a winter coat come in the door.

Stein: Why did you hate that?

1-00:21:33

Gabler: Because very few alterations, and then I had to wear it.

Stein: You didn't want to wear a coat?

1-00:21:38

Gabler: Well, I didn't want to wear an old lady's coat.

Stein: Ahh.

1-00:21:41

Gabler: But it was wool, and it was warm, and shorten it or whatever, I wore it.

Stein: People talk about the Sears catalog or the clothing catalogs being a big event.

1-00:21:57

Gabler: Oh, yeah, that was a big event when it was new. It was a practical event when it was old because it always ended up in the out house. [laughs] When I was in my fifties we had a couple from town out to play cards, and we had sold our farm and was living in a hay barn that we had converted into a cabin because our home was a hundred miles away. So we was in this converted hay barn and had an outdoor toilet again. So this city gal had to go out to the toilet in the middle of the night, and I suppose she had a flash light. Anyway, she come in thrilled. She'd found a Sears & Roebuck sales catalog with a certain date on

it that she needed for a treasure hunt. She knew she'd be the only one with a Sears & Roebuck catalog.

Stein: And she found it in an outhouse. [laughs]

1-00:23:00

Gabler: I never heard what kind of mileage she got out of that.

Stein: Let's hope something good.

1-00:23:02

Gabler: It was just funny that it was out there.

Stein: Yeah. Do you remember sort of improvements like plumbing or flushing toilets or indoor toilets coming?

1-00:23:19

Gabler: Well, I think they had a telephone down in West Virginia from my husband, who was the youngest of fifteen, next to the youngest of fifteen. They had a telephone before we did. I spoke on a telephone at a fair, and my voice was so scared. They played it back, I was so scared. I was probably in high school at that time. When we married her last husband, we moved into a farmhouse that had a radio, we had never had that before. I was twelve or thirteen, so we could listen to Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights. I don't know about this same farm he had the well in the kitchen, but it was still a hand pump, you pumped all your water.

Stein: But it must have been easier than it was indoors at least.

1-00:24:16

Gabler: Oh, yeah. You carry it to the stove to heat up the laundry and stuff. It was a lot handier. But that was the first indoor water we had.

Stein: That's sort of a thrill.

1-00:24:31

Gabler: Well, everything was new and wonderful wherever we went.

Stein: Did you as a family have a religious upbringing? Did you go to church or—

1-00:24:41

Gabler: No. My grandfather read the Bible to himself every night before he went to bed, and that was our only exposure. Well, once in a while in the cities, we could go to Sunday School, the kids. My mother would see that we went to Sunday School if it was close by when we were in town. But that was it.

Stein: I just am curious when you said you were living in the—

1-00:25:10

Gabler: Three tents?

Stein: Yeah, was that, how old were you then and where was that?

1-00:25:14

Gabler: I graduated from there, so I was seventeen.

Stein: That was when you were just done with high school, and do you remember was that farm land that you—

1-00:25:22

Gabler: They bought three acres, and it was the first land that they had bought. So in the spring as early as possible evidently, they set up the big tents here, and they had their double bed in there and one or two babies. And cooking and so on, and then back here, here was a small tent that sloped this way and another small tent that sloped that way. So my older brothers was in here and me and some of the younger kids was over here. And it was just fun. Daddy finally built a house on the hill over here. I think that was after I got a job. First summer I was babysitting, but then I got a job in Lansing.

Stein: They were just—

1-00:26:25

Gabler: Camping out—

Stein: Until they built the house, is that the idea?

1-00:26:27

Gabler: He got the basement in before winter. They lived in that, because I came back from Lansing to visit them in that basement. Then they got the upper on, but didn't finish that off. They were sleeping upstairs. And he had to go to service, so they must have finished it off after he came back. My husband and him both were in about—I don't think more than two years.

Stein: Was he, this wasn't your biological father, but it sounds like he was—

1-00:27:03

Gabler: Well, he adopted us when he went into service. Us older two had unknown fathers, and he couldn't adopt his third one because he did have a father, but my mother went and found this fellow in Grand Rapids and took him to a lawyer, and he couldn't read or write. My mother said the lawyer was so patient, over and over and over explained to this man that he wasn't signing his life away or anything. He just had to sign a paper saying he'd never supported that boy.

Stein: Okay.

1-00:27:39

Gabler: He finally got him to put an X down.

Stein: And that was enough so that he could be adopted.

1-00:27:46

Gabler: Well, he didn't adopt him. He just wanted—he had to prove that he had been supporting him for the last several years. So then she got him on the—oh, man, that was the most money coming in when all those, let's see, six, seven kids, no, five kids, six kids was on, probably seven. My oldest brother was still home, but he was working on a farm. I was away. She probably had seven dependents when he went into service. That was a big paycheck. She sold this and bought a eighty-acre farm while he was in, the two years he was in service.

Stein:

How big was that first farm that she sold?

1-00:28:44

Gabler: Three acres.

Stein:

She sold three acres and got eighty.

1-00:28:46

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein:

That's amazing.

1-00:28:48

Gabler: Yeah, it was on time, but it still was awful cheap.

Stein:

Yeah, and was that because his pay, your father's pay, was based on how many dependents he was supporting?

1-00:28:56

Gabler: Sure.

Stein:

Okay, because that's so different from today where you just get a paycheck based on the job and they don't really—

1-00:29:03

Gabler: Well, I don't know. I imagine in service you get paid by the dependents, yeah, I wouldn't know. Most of these young people going now probably don't have any dependents, but still I bet that's the way it works.

Stein:

So were you adopted by him officially?

1-00:29:23

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein:

Because your father was—

1-00:29:23

Gabler: Unknown.

Stein:

Unknown, okay.

1-00:29:26

Gabler: The fact that we knew him had nothing to do with it. None of them ever did any contributing to the upbringing of the kids.

Stein:

What was your father, your adopted father like? Were you close to him?

1-00:29:40

Gabler: Oh, after he got older I was. I was totally indifferent for years, but when he ended up in the Veterans Hospital and no place to go, I'm glad it was my husband that invited him to come live with us. So he lived with us for—well, he needed help with a bandage on his stomach, so I'm changing the bandage. My mother kicked him out, they got a divorce finally in their seventies. Anyway, yeah, we were close in those later years.

Stein:

So a lot of this time is right in the midst of the Depression.

1-00:30:25

Gabler: No, I think they began to get out of the Depression.

Stein:

When the war started I guess.

1-00:30:28

Gabler: Before that.

Stein:

Do you remember any of the New Deal programs or anything about FDR?

1-00:30:43

Gabler: Oh, well. I don't know who was President when they got the—was it FDR that got the WPA going? Because my dad, he was not too successful on this farm up north, but he got a job surveying those—what they call the slashings, all them woods around up north in Michigan. He would be out there, and he got a car because of that, I guess.

Stein:

And that was a WPA project.

1-00:31:20

Gabler: Um hmm. Nobody before had ever cared what was out there that I know of. So that was probably just a paid job, but it was good while it lasted.

Stein:

Yeah, and do you remember hearing your parents talk about the President or about the Depression or these programs, or are they just happy to have that job?

1-00:31:40

Gabler: At the time we lived here today, gone tomorrow. We never planned anything. I'm sure they planned to load up and move back down to Hastings area where my grandparents lived. When he got down there, he got a job in a factory for the first time. After that it was just more or less like it's going to be for the rest of their lives, not so much moving.

Stein: Okay, more stationary at that point.

1-00:32:15

Gabler: I was gone by then. It did help me decide that I was going to have all of my children by one man, which I did. I had four Eye boys.

Stein: So these are the pictures from your high school graduation. Did you go to just one high school, or did you move around then, too?

1-00:32:38

Gabler: Went to ninth grade in Mancelona, Michigan, and the beginning of the tenth we moved to Hastings or Freeport, so I went the rest of the tenth grade and all of the eleventh. That was one of the years I stayed in one school at Freeport. If I go back there now, I'd go to the Freeport reunion, even though I didn't graduate from Freeport.

Stein: Because that was the longest stretch.

1-00:33:09

Gabler: Well, yeah, because I was born in Freeport, and that was the place I went back to every time we went back to Grandma and Grandpa. I knew the people around on the farms and in that city. I probably don't know any of them now. But Hastings, we went there for the last year, and I graduated from Hastings. And that's where my two boys live now. Two of them are gone.

Stein: Do you remember what types of classes you like in high school or whether the outside of school stuff that you were most interested in? What were your memories of that time?

1-00:33:49

Gabler: We always lived out of town. I don't remember participating in anything to do with school.

Stein: No dances?

1-00:33:58

Gabler: Oh, heavens no.

Stein: Why not?

1-00:34:00

Gabler: Well, it didn't occur to me for one probably. Twelfth year I had a big sister in the school, and I met her once.

Stein: Someone you were with or—

1-00:34:17

Gabler: Yeah, she was supposed to answer any questions or help me in any way. I only got lost once and had to go to the office to see where the chemistry room was.

Stein: Was it a big building?

1-00:34:29

Gabler: Well, Freeport had all twelve grades in a, I don't know how they did it now, but it was a square building, the upstairs was the junior high and high school. We probably had two rooms. I can remember there was a typing room. The downstairs was grade school, so if there was any school activities in that place, I never heard of them. If there was any in Hastings, I didn't hear of them either because I wasn't interested. I knew one girl in the ninth grade, and she was my friend, and that's all I needed. If we wanted to walk downtown, we could, or walk over to her place; she lived in town. I just didn't need anybody else. So consequently when I was in line—my name was Rohrbacher—the guy ahead of me was Reed, and he looked down at me and he says, "Well, I didn't know you was a senior." Neither did anybody else because—

Stein: Was this at graduation?

1-00:35:36

Gabler: Yeah, this was at graduation. I didn't know any of the seniors. But because I started Latin up in Mancelona—Freeport didn't offer it—I was taking tenth grade Latin, tenth grade Geometry. I don't know, I was probably in twelfth grade English, but you couldn't tell by that, and whatever else I had. I was on a college course, so I had to make up the Latin and the Math. So that's how come nobody knew I was a senior.

Stein: Oh, because you were taking different classes.

1-00:36:16

Gabler: Lower classes, yeah. Make-up classes really.

Stein: Because you had kept switching schools?

1-00:36:20

Gabler: Well, because Freeport, I was in most of the tenth and all of the eleventh, didn't offer that stuff.

Stein: Right.

1-00:36:27

Gabler: Latin, especially.

Stein: Were those some of your favorite classes?

1-00:36:33

Gabler: Oh, favorite classes always had something to do with reading. Chemistry was pretty good because the boys knew that they could get the professor there to talk about Ford motor cars or buttermilk biscuits, and as soon as they got him on that subject everybody else could do whatever they pleased. I always had a

book to read inside of my Chemistry books because I didn't know when he was going to get off onto those subjects. Yeah, that was pretty good, anything to do with reading, and I still like reading the best.

Stein: So you weren't going to dances. Was there a lot of dating in high school or did you have a boyfriend?

1-00:37:17

Gabler: If there was, I didn't know anything about it. I went through there in a reading frenzy, probably. You never had enough to read before, my mother one year signed up for true love stories. I read every word in those magazines when they come. You just don't realize, nothing to read? My grandparents told me, and my mother, too, I guess, that I learned to read behind the kitchen stove because she had wallpapered, behind the stove she'd wallpapered with newspapers. I don't know how much of it I could read, but I that's how I learned to read they said.

Stein: Wow.

1-00:38:07

Gabler: Grandpa got the paper, but I don't remember ever reading it except the funnies. But I was a lot younger then. By the time I got old enough to really enjoy reading, I wasn't around him so much any more.

Stein: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

1-00:38:40

Gabler: Well, Pearl Harbor, that's so long ago.

Stein: That's right.

1-00:38:44

Gabler: I don't remember hearing that exactly. All of a sudden there was talk of war, but I was working in Lansing at the TB Sanitarium with my best girlfriend from high school. And I don't know how long the war had been going on when we heard that the Willow Run was hiring, so we went in to tell the head doctor of this sanitarium that we was going down there and look for work. He says, "Well, you know, I could freeze you right here," but he didn't. He could have made us stay because it was a hospital type place, necessary.

Stein: And freezing means that—

1-00:39:33

Gabler: Yeah, we couldn't move.

Stein: Because it was necessary for the war effort?

1-00:39:38

Gabler: Well, yeah, that was. But evidently the Willow Run bomber plant needed help so bad—

Stein:

Yeah.

1-00:39:44

Gabler: They were recruiting down south and men and boys and even their families were coming up to Michigan, and, of course, whole families come, too. I don't know how long it took them to build those—they had these big, long, two-stories high dormitories for women and more for men. I saw some of them here in California. It was like they opened this up, and it would be two small mobile homes, and every one of them was two. That was for young married people, so after we got married, we had one of those for a while. My girlfriend still stayed in the dormitory. But that was 1943, it got on here, so the war had been on for a couple of years. It took them a while to build that big bomber plant. So anyway, we went down there and got the jobs, Rosie the Riveter.

Stein:

Let me take one step back before we get into that, but you said that you were at the TB Sanitarium. Was that right after high school or what were—

1-00:41:04

Gabler: It was probably one year, I think the first year after high school I babysat.

Stein:

For your family or friends?

1-00:41:09

Gabler: No, no, for a couple with two boys. Then this girlfriend got a job at this TB Sanitarium. She was recruiting two or three other girls from high school who ended up at that sanitarium, too. But when it come time to go to Willow Run, just her and I went with this fellow. And his girlfriend, it was, had a car. And the girlfriend couldn't get a job because she was seventeen. He was seventeen, too, but boys could get a job in the bomber plant at seventeen. We were eighteen. I was nineteen; you had to be eighteen. We were nineteen.

Stein:

Were you excited to get out of the TB sanitarium?

1-00:42:01

Gabler: Oh, no, that was fun, too. Any work that I ever did, it was fun. My son once intimated I didn't have sense enough to know that it was a nasty job or something, because he always complained about his jobs. He'd go in, it was, "Oh, wonderful job." Wouldn't be there six months, it was time to quit, so terrible. Mine were always good. We got acquainted with all the people in that sanitarium. I probably got an inactive TB bug. I was checked once and had a reaction, and they checked it and said that I had been exposed to TB, but it was dormant. So it's always been dormant as far as I know.

Stein:

Yeah, lucky.

1-00:42:57

Gabler: Yeah, yeah, wasn't too concerned about it back then. But there was one area where the nurses wore masks when they went into those few rooms there. I don't remember if we did or not. I was a floor girl, and this girlfriend was the dietician's helper, so she stayed in the kitchen. But I was out there getting acquainted with all the patients.

Stein:

Before you were really working completely in the war effort at Willow Run, do you remember any changes that happened because of the war?

1-00:43:38

Gabler: Well, they had blackouts in Lansing where this TB Sanitarium was.

Stein:

Were you living in the—

1-00:43:45

Gabler: We were living at the sanitarium, a big dormitory. The cooks were the—what do you call them, that look over the young girls?

Stein:

The chaperones?

1-00:43:56

Gabler: Yeah, they had two, past middle age maybe, cooks, and they were the chaperones for that dormitory.

Stein:

Were they women?

1-00:44:05

Gabler: Oh, yeah, it was all women. Then we had a nurses' dormitory, all women. If there was any men around that sanitarium it had to have been a couple of doctors.

Stein:

And the patients were—

1-00:44:22

Gabler: Mixed, oh yeah, had a floor for the women and a floor for men, then that little section of intensive TB. That was only about six or seven rooms. They believed in fresh air.

Stein:

Yeah, did you have to ration there?

1-00:44:46

Gabler: No, at the TB Sanitarium, I think that was before rationing. I don't know how long into the war before they got rationing, but it didn't affect me personally. Well, the gas did before the war was over, but the meat didn't because when I was working at Willow Run we always ate out. We just had a room; we never thought about cooking.

Stein:

You would eat at a restaurant every night, or at the cafeteria.

1-00:45:24

Gabler: Well, this Willow Run living area was probably two miles from the factory. They had something called the cattle car, which was a truck with a big enclosed flatbed, where we'd either stand or sit on a side bench. That's where you'd meet to go to the bomber plant, or you could walk. There was a trail that you could walk, and we did that all the time when it was nice weather. This complex had these dormitories, those little housing for married couples, a big recreation building that was open twenty-four hours including the restaurant. So if we worked midnights, we could go there for breakfast and play games or whatever. If you worked there in the afternoon shift and got off at midnight you could go and have breakfast and do the same stuff. It just didn't matter, it was always open.

Stein:

Wow. So had you heard about the plant before you ended up working there?

1-00:46:37

Gabler: Barely. That kid got hold of the information that they were hiring evidently. We knew his girlfriend; we didn't know him. The only reason we went, we heard it through them. Got down there; why, here was all these strangers from other countries, I mean other states. It got to be, "Oh, boy, here's somebody from Michigan."

Stein:

Like a rare local.

1-00:47:06

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein:

Where were they mostly from?

1-00:47:08

Gabler: South.

Stein:

Just the deep South?

1-00:47:10

Gabler: Men coming out of the hills and mountains and so on. The Eye family already had two or three of these fifteen kids was up here. So they talked—

Stein:

The Eye family?

1-00:47:26

Gabler: That was their last name, Eye, E Y E. Their mother and father and youngest brother was still home. Well, Ralph was my husband, and his youngest brother were still home. They four moved out and bought a place in Inkster, and my husband and his dad both got a job there.

Stein:

They moved specifically for those jobs.

1-00:47:56

Gabler: Well, they came up specifically because the jobs were available, and two or three of the kids was already up here.

Stein:

Okay.

1-00:48:08

Gabler: I don't think any of them was working in the bomber plant. But when I first married my husband we moved in with his folks, who had a two-bedroom bungalow. That didn't work out too good. So we got one of those little rental places here. Then he had to go into service.

Stein:

When did you and your husband get married?

1-00:48:34

Gabler: When?

Stein:

Um hmm.

1-00:48:36

Gabler: We got married August 28 in, gee, I forgot the date.

Stein:

Was it—

1-00:48:45

Gabler: I was nineteen, so twenty-four and nineteen is '43.

Stein:

'43. Was that right after you moved there? After you started working at Willow Run?

1-00:49:05

Gabler: Well, I don't know. I was still living in that dormitory, so that's before I was married, so that might be '43. A lot happened in a short time. We got married in '43, and my husband went into service in December, and my son was born in May.

Stein:

Wow, right because here's a picture of you pregnant in 1944.

1-00:49:33

Gabler: Yeah. I was an illegitimate child myself, so I was real happy that I was married nine months and one day when that kid came. [laughs]

Stein:

Oh, wow.

1-00:49:50

Gabler: I couldn't wait for that big bump to get off of there.

Stein:

I bet. I'm so curious what this social life was like at Willow Run.

1-00:50:01

Gabler: Well, we'd get there early and sit around and talk until it was time to go to work. I run a rivet gun, and I think my girlfriend actually did a riveting gun where a man bucked. The women did the riveting, and the men reached their arm in there and held that big hunk of steel against, so the rivet would squash.

Stein: Okay.

1-00:50:27

Gabler: Men always did that. Women didn't.

Stein: Was it a hard physical job?

1-00:50:31

Gabler: Well, evidently. It must have built quite a muscle. You're reaching, up here the aileron is shaped like this, this side is straight, so the inside there you go all the way down there and around the bend and come back, it's probably about that wide.

Stein: Wow, so the man's arm was inside, and the women were doing the riveting from outside.

1-00:50:52

Gabler: On the outside, yeah. Every one of them rivets, probably that far apart. All that aluminum had to be riveted, that buckler had to be back there. I only filled in for that kind of riveting once, and the rest of the time I ran a squeeze gun.

Stein: What's that?

1-00:51:14

Gabler: Well, you put this aileron has a part about like this.

Stein: An aileron, can you explain what that is, too?

1-00:51:24

Gabler: Where's that picture?

Stein: Is it the back of the airplane on the wing?

1-00:51:27

Gabler: No, this is the wing. There's the aileron, that thing standing up back there at the tail end. There was two of them.

Stein: That piece way end of the tail?

1-00:51:41

Gabler: Yeah, and I think the aileron part that we worked on, right through here it swivels, so if that great big plane wants to curve, those two ailerons cause it to have a little reason for turning in the back.

Stein: Okay.

1-00:51:59

Gabler: I don't think they could turn very rapidly, they're too big. But when they wrote that song about coming in on a wing and a prayer, it was either this one or the B-17. I think the B-17 had four engines, and the B-27, maybe that was the one with two.

Stein: The B-24 had four engines, right?

1-00:52:22

Gabler: Yeah, and I think the B-17 did, too. Right in here in the middle of that aileron it was a box about like this that you had to rivet in place. It was solid aluminum so that that's where they hooked all this gear that did the turning. To do that you had a squeeze gun about this big, and it had a bit right about here down at this end. You squeeze the lever—

Stein: Trigger?

1-00:52:52

Gabler: And it would squeeze. You put the rivets in all these holes, and then squeeze, squeeze, squeeze all the way around that. So actually I didn't have a bucker. The buck was on the rivet gun.

Stein: Okay.

1-00:53:10

Gabler: I told somebody here once years ago that I was Rosie the Riveter, years ago when I first started coming here, I guess. And she says, "Well, they called us Rosie the Riveters out here, but in the shipyards it was mostly welding."

Stein: Yeah, Wendy the Welder. [laughs]

1-00:53:30

Gabler: I never heard of that one, but Rosie the Riveter got its name out here. We sure didn't—I didn't hear about it back there.

Stein: You didn't hear about the name or the song or anything?

1-00:53:45

Gabler: Well, I might have heard the song, but I didn't realize it was a big thing out here. It wasn't a big thing back there. Everybody that practically—well, no, I guess not. Not everybody worked there, but so many did. My husband when I met him—I met him out here at one of these impromptu ballgames. The guys would be out there, well, we was walking across, and we saw these guys playing workup softball. So we got in it because all the guys was there. We were having a ball, and these other two guys, Ralph said, him and his brother were out cruising looking for dates. They saw two girls in that ballgame, so they stopped and played the rest of the game just to get acquainted with us.

That's how I got acquainted with him. And he worked at the bomber plant, rivet repair man.

Stein: So what were his responsibilities?

1-00:54:52

Gabler: If me or Elaine was the regular rivet gun, if you made a mistake, if the bucker wasn't working right—whatever, it might slip off and make a dent in that aluminum—anything that was wrong with a rivet, they called the rivet repair man. He'd come with his thing of frozen rivets and drill out the hole a little bigger, or whatever was necessary, put in maybe a frozen rivet if it had to be bigger.

Stein: What is a frozen rivet?

1-00:55:27

Gabler: I don't know what. They were frozen.

Stein: Were they literally cold?

1-00:55:30

Gabler: Frozen.

Stein: Wow.

1-00:55:35

Gabler: I guess they'd squeeze better frozen.

Stein: Oh, maybe because it expands when it gets hot or something like that?

1-00:55:43

Gabler: I don't know why. Who cared? [laughs] But I met him here. I would never have met him in the plant. We walked down there where he worked a time or two after we got acquainted with him, but by then the war was closing down. They wanted you to look busy. They weren't ready to lay anybody off yet. But it was tapering down, so we'd take a walk. That's the first time we'd walked over and seen how big the place was.

Stein: Oh.

1-00:56:15

Gabler: Because it was an area where we went a certain way and got to the ailerons. That's where we'd wait or goof off or whatever. So when we had all this time, we walked over to the big areas where the plane was almost done before it would go outside to be finished. There was a lot of—well, not a whole lot, but you could always see some, the dwarfs or little people.

Stein: Yes?

1-00:56:45

Gabler: That could get into the tight places for like bucking rivets or whatever. They were needed.

Stein:

They had dwarfs as buckers?

1-00:56:55

Gabler: Yeah, it was in the areas where grown men couldn't get.

Stein:

Wow. Were there a lot of them?

1-00:57:00

Gabler: Well, I didn't see, I never worked around any of them, but if you stood at the gate, doors there waiting to go in or out, the people that were coming out or going in, there'd be like one or two amongst the crowd. They were just more of the guys. Like one of them—they're smaller—one of them would goose the guy just as they went by, wheeling around like this to sock somebody, the guy knew who it was, but it was good relationships there.

Stein:

Yeah, I imagine that that must have in some ways been a really good job because I bet it was pretty hard at those times to find work.

1-00:57:46

Gabler: Well, find work? No, that was the time they were begging people to work.

Stein:

Well, right, but if you were a dwarf, it would probably be harder to find a good job in a factory, but—

1-00:58:01

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. That probably was their main break into society.

Stein:

Yeah.

1-00:58:05

Gabler: They always been treated like circus people before. I don't know. I had never given it a thought.

Stein:

Well, it takes, I guess, all kinds of people to put these planes together.

1-00:58:19

Gabler: Well, I can't remember; back then Michigan was kind of pure white. I cannot remember any other nationality.

Stein:

Really, there were no black workers.

1-00:58:35

Gabler: Not that I can remember, and no other nationalities.

Stein:

Asians, or it was all white?

1-00:58:41

Gabler: Well, I didn't know about the Asians in California being rounded up.

Stein:

What did you hear; do you remember when you heard about that? After the war was over?

1-00:58:50

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Years and years later. Yeah, it wasn't anything to do with us.

Stein:

Yeah, you were right in the middle of the country.

1-00:59:01

Gabler: And the news weren't—actually, the people today are told how poor they are. Oh, boy, you poor, poor suffering people. I'm not sure too many of them that believe it. Right there where you had your hand out. Back when I grew up, I just was lucky that we always could go back to Grandma and Grandpa.

Stein:

Right.

1-00:59:28

Gabler: Always. She'd find some way to get us there.

Stein:

I'm going to change the tape because we're nearing the end of—

Interview 1: August 24, 2010

Begin Audiofile 2

Gabler:

[looking at photographs] This is me and my husband before he died, relaxing here at this place.

Stein:

Oh, look at that. Oh, you guys look like you were kicking back, taking it easy.

2-00:00:12

Gabler: After the rainy season was over, and we was finally enjoying the sunshine.

Stein:

Wow, that's really nice. Okay, this is Tape 2 with Marion Gabler, it's still August 24.

2-00:00:26

Gabler: I think I wrote 25 on one of those papers

Stein:

Oh, that's not a problem, don't worry. So here's a question. A lot of people when you talk to them who were Rosies, or did different war industry work, said that when they got to their job they got this feeling of freedom or independence that they hadn't had before. Was that something that you experienced?

2-00:00:48

Gabler: I was always independent. I was always the oldest kid in the family, and the family was the only thing in those days. I always had confidence. So, no, I didn't feel anything different. It was just pleasure. Oh, boy, I leave Hastings and go to Lansing, work in the TB Sanitarium, wonderful. Oh, boy, this guy's going to go down to Willow Run, and we're all going to apply for jobs, wonderful. I finally get married, he goes into service, we have babies, wonderful. But he did die unexpectedly at fifty-five.

Stein:

That's young.

2-00:01:32

Gabler: Three years later this fellow came in, and he was wonderful, too.

Stein:

That's lucky. That's more than a lot of people have. Two great husbands.

2-00:01:39

Gabler: Yeah, two really good guys.

Stein:

Yeah. So did you and Ralph get married at Willow Run?

2-00:01:50

Gabler: We went over to—I left that all up to him. He got a justice of the peace at Belleville, which I don't know how far it is away from Willow Run, but justice of the peace. And when we got there he came in out of his garden, sleeves rolled up, and got the next-door neighbor to be the other witness. My best girlfriend was there for my witness. We just got married in his living room. I recommend that kind of marriage to anybody, especially after going to some of these elaborate ones. Then having some of the elaborate ones crash.

Stein:

Right.

2-00:02:31

Gabler: You might just as well went to a justice of the peace. So the second time I got married at the American Legion, and the only preacher that would come and marry us was the local one that knew me. The Methodist preachers acted like it was sacrilegious.

Stein:

Why was that?

2-00:02:48

Gabler: When they found out I didn't want to go to their church and get married.

Stein:

Oh.

2-00:02:53

Gabler: Yeah, this fellow that we knew where we went to Sunday School, being the youngest boy, he was Southern Baptist. He was so tickled. He didn't know I'd already asked four other preachers, and they had turned me down.

Stein: They didn't want to marry someone outside of the church, is that the idea?

2-00:03:10

Gabler: Yeah, evidently. They certainly didn't want to marry them in the American Legion, so we had a wedding there and a reception and square dancing and stuff at that second one. But it still wasn't in a church. It wasn't real elaborate. My husband was from here, and his sister came from Oregon because he paid her way, and two cousins from Chicago drove up because he was sixty-five and never got married. The curiosity got them to—

Stein: To come all the way to California?

2-00:03:49

Gabler: No, we got married in Edwardsburg, Michigan. He came back to get married there. That's how come I had such a crowd. My friends and relatives were all there. They said I had 300 people, and he had six.

Stein: Wow.

2-00:04:09

Gabler: But it was two good marriages.

Stein: Yeah. Were a lot of young men and women at the factory meeting each other, going on dates, getting married? Was it a very social place?

2-00:04:24

Gabler: We were social; my girlfriend and I were sociable with who we met at the time. Neither one of us ever knew or cared what was going on other than in our own personal lives. So I don't know what was going on. One of the inspectors who had been married I don't know how many years, we were—of course, my girlfriend and I weren't married; she was an inspector there in that aileron department, a blond, and she intimated that she was having fun. She felt liberated. Well, I knew it was because her husband was in service, didn't think too much of her. But that was the only romance I ever heard of or can remember now.

Stein: How did you end up working on ailerons? Was there a training program?

2-00:05:19

Gabler: You went in, that's what riveting was all about. You took riveting lessons for a week or two, and they just assigned you to places. We got it. But back then we probably would have took whatever they give us.

Stein: I bet. I read that Willow Run built an entire school that was to train people. Do you remember that school? Is that where you took your training?

2-00:05:53

Gabler: Well, if it was a school it was just like a line up there with no walls around it. People were riveting, and you learned how to—I suppose, the right touch on

pieces of that material, whatever, aluminum. So it wasn't a school set up with chairs and desks and books and all that. It was two or three weeks of riveting scrap metal.

Stein: Is it hard to do? Can you explain how you rivet?

2-00:06:35

Gabler: I assume that the person on this side puts the rivet in. You may put all of them in—I mean several of them—and you rivet, and the guy in the back bucks. He knows where you're bucking, and you know where he is, and maybe once in a while that was one of the mistakes if he wasn't bucking the right rivet.

Stein: What would happen in that case? Would it—

2-00:06:58

Gabler: That's why they called on Ralph Eye, the rivet repair man. I can't remember that happening in our department. He came once to our department with his freezer on wheels, but it wasn't in our immediate area. He might have just been up there and came over to say, "Hi." He kept—I suppose it was called a gut wagon, that's what my sons called the wagon.

Stein: A gut wagon?

2-00:07:36

Gabler: The wagon that came around with food you could buy, a bowl of soup, a sandwich, whatever. He'd buy a frozen ice cream bar and put it in his cart, his freezer.

Stein: Freezer cart?

2-00:07:52

Gabler: Yeah, then when he went to eat—this was a period of time this went—when he'd go open up his freezer it would be gone. It happened over and over. He'd watch it like a hawk. It happened anyway. So he made a tiny hole in this frozen ice cream bar, put croton oil in it. I never heard of it before, but you could get it at the drug store. Put two drops of croton oil in there, and seal it over a little bit, stays in there. It's a very strong laxative. So the candy bar disappeared, and he just waited, and pretty soon his boss was making trips back and forth to the bathroom. So he jumped him about it, and the guy admitted it. Just for the heck of it, the guy had been stealing his ice cream bars.

Stein: I guess he got what was coming to him.

2-00:09:02

Gabler: Yeah. I never heard of croton oil other than that one time.

Stein: Did you normally take your meals off of the cart, or did you have a cafeteria?

2-00:09:11

Gabler: Well, might be. I can't remember eating, but we never ate in our room. If we had a snack—like one time we ate a watermelon, but we'd bought it in town and carried it out there. I think I got a picture of a couple of boys we picked up on the way. Somebody was sitting on that watermelon. But we definitely ate that like out there in the yard. Other than that, we ate all of our meals somewhere. Neither one of us was the type to starve to death. I just can't remember actually eating because it was such a mundane affair; you eat three times a day.

Stein:

I know. I mean some of these mundane details are actually really interesting to try to capture, but I don't know if they sound boring to you. But do you remember what your hours were, did you have a break in the day?

2-00:10:09

Gabler: Oh, yeah, we must have had a lunch break, and I don't know about the other times. We was on three shifts, rotating shifts.

Stein:

Were people working all twenty-four hours all throughout the day?

2-00:10:20

Gabler: Three shifts a day, I think some of them could have a reason; they could ask to stay on one shift, I don't know. We always took our shifts, didn't matter to us. This Willow Run was running twenty-four hours a day.

Stein:

Did you ever work the night shift?

2-00:10:44

Gabler: Yeah, once every three months, and the day shift and the midnight shift, and I don't know what's in between. Eleven to eight, or eleven to seven, I don't know the day and then the afternoon, afternoon shift. Midnight shift, afternoon shift and day shift, period. You took your turns once a month.

Stein:

Okay, that must have been—

2-00:11:06

Gabler: Fun.

Stein:

Yeah, working in the middle of the night?

2-00:11:14

Gabler: You get on that same cattle train. Cattle cars, they called it. A whole bunch of—you'd be gone, night and day.

Stein:

Would they have a whole dormitory, like a whole group go at the same shift, or were there people sleeping all the time?

2-00:11:31

Gabler: Sure, we never knew, we never got acquainted with anybody in there.

Stein: Really?

2-00:11:36

Gabler: Well, in those days when you had a girlfriend, one was enough as far as I was concerned. I never wanted to be in a group of girls. If I was in a high school, and there was a bunch of girls over there giggling, tee-heeing and so forth, always about boys or what else did girls talk about, cosmetics maybe? I don't know, I never got in those groups. I was always uneasy. I didn't want to talk about boys. I didn't want to talk about, well, anything.

Stein: You were happy to be by yourself?

2-00:12:14

Gabler: But with one girlfriend, you could do all these things, sing songs or take walks or whatever, there was always more relaxed. Of course, I never had a friend I didn't like. I don't have friends that I don't like.

Stein: That's a good quality. Were you and your friend bunked next to each other in the dorms?

2-00:12:43

Gabler: Well, every room would have two twin beds in it, I suppose. When the TB Sanitarium first started, we were in separate rooms because there were a lot of single rooms there. Then we got a big room at the end where we could have sort of a social life. We had two twin beds and the big kind of a living room. Other girls could come in there and just spread out a little, do something besides lay in bed. So that was fun.

Stein: A double room, that was at—

2-00:13:22

Gabler: Well, that big double room, it was at the sanitarium before we left. It had been just sort of like a store room, and they cleaned. They let us have it for a bedroom and a social room. We didn't tell them we was going to have a party or anything, but a party would be like having ice cream from the kitchen. It was just no trouble with—the kind of trouble they have nowadays. Oh, there had been no thought of having a boy try to sneak in. I never heard of panty raids. That kind of stuff just didn't happen, and if it did, it must have happened in the big city.

But after we got here, we had that, I suppose every one of those rooms had twin beds. I never was in any others but our own.

Stein: So it's just the two people in that room.

2-00:14:16

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein: Oh, that's nice. I thought it might have been a big room with lots and lots of beds.

2-00:14:22

Gabler: Oh, no. My husband was a lifetime member, this husband, of youth hostels. Youth hostels has that set up in a lot of countries.

Stein: Yeah.

2-00:14:35

Gabler: You go your separate way as soon as you get inside the door. We used that a lot when we went to—I finally went to England with him, and there's a lot of youth hostels over there. Some of them had a family room, but most of them was dormitory.

Stein: Own room. Were there chaperones at Willow Run for the single women?

2-00:14:56

Gabler: Nope. I don't think you need chaperones. It just happened that those at the TB Sanitarium, they both happened to be cooks, they both lived in that same dormitory with us. But if they'd have moved out, we wouldn't have had any. Nurses didn't have any. Of course, they were all ages, and the nurse's aides lived in that same dormitory with them.

Stein: It sounds like you were not socializing with all of them, but did you have a sense of who the other workers were? Was it mostly women or mostly men or a little bit of everything.

2-00:15:37

Gabler: It was all women at the sanitarium, and there was no sexual division of so many men or so many women. Those dormitories, that one, was all women. Somewhere else on the same—over there somewhere was the men. I didn't see any trafficking between the two buildings. If there was, it was certainly not anything we saw. The married couples when they put those—I wish I could remember where I'd see them, in California here because, oh, maybe it was Kansas. I went out to Kansas once because my youngest boy was out there with his buddies working, and they had those two-piece—well, they're built like a regular travel trailer, only they opened up like that. There was the two travel trailers, side-by-side; the door's up here in front. I had a picture of that, and your couch made into a bed. And you had a shower, a little tiny bathroom and kitchen.

Stein: That's what they had for all the married couples?

2-00:16:56

Gabler: So that was the other housing that was available there.

Stein: Yeah. Was the general population of all the people that were working there, was it mostly young people?

2-00:17:05

Gabler:

Oh, yeah. Well, if a man was thirty-four and came up from the South without his family, he seemed young. I think most of them were young people. Of course, when Ralph came up with his folks, his younger brother was still in high school, and he and his dad both worked at the bomber plant. His dad was on maintenance. I saw him once or twice there. And he had a brother-in-law that worked there on maintenance. So there was all ages, but mostly young people.

Stein:

Sometimes people talk about mothers who had grown-up children coming back to work at factories. Did you see any of that?

2-00:17:59

Gabler:

Well, if I did, why would I care?

Stein:

You weren't so interested in that, huh?

2-00:18:08

Gabler:

If there happened to be like that inspector that said she felt so free. She didn't have any children. I don't know how many years she had been married, but she was out making whoopee. Well, I hope her husband was having an equal amount of fun wherever he was at. [laughs]

Stein:

Was there a union?

2-00:18:34

Gabler:

No, never heard of that.

Stein:

When you were working on these B-24s, you were working on one really small piece. Did you ever get a sense of how it all came together? Did you ever see the completed planes? Or what was your—

2-00:18:55

Gabler:

Well, toward the end when we were supposed to be looking busy, and when we went for a walk way over there on the other side, we saw the plane. This was a real wide work area. That plane inside was just about all there. But then they'd put it all outside. I don't know what they did outside. But it was really big. Yeah, and never until we actually had that time on our hands. We were not even concerned about what the rest of the factory looked like. I always enjoyed it. But I enjoyed being a cook in the schools when I finally got a job after many years of doing nothing.

Stein:

Doing nothing? It sounds like you were raising a huge family.

2-00:19:50

Gabler:

Well, I had a huge garden, but oh, those boys would have maybe a row of carrots to weed, or hoe a couple rows or something, and they could go play. I liked doing the gardening myself, and when it come to canning the only time

they were help was like peeling tomatoes or peaches. I like to can myself, too. But my husband called it a 365-day vacation.

Stein: Well, you put in some hard work, that's for sure.

2-00:20:25

Gabler: But I enjoyed gardening.

Stein: Could you garden at the factory?

2-00:20:31

Gabler: Oh, no. Back then I didn't know I liked plants. If I got a bare moment back in those days, I was reading. I didn't know I liked gardening until, actually, we bought that ten acres, and I started gardening. Hadn't thought about it for years. If I did think about it, I'd think about the hoeing we had to do or the weeding or the potato bugs on the potato vines. That's an interesting job, picking off all them and putting them in a can of kerosene.

Stein: Oh, wow.

2-00:21:07

Gabler: Yeah, try that some time for fun. You could build a little boat and put potato bugs in there. You find ways to play when you're supposed to be picking up potato bugs off of those plants.

Stein: It sounds like you guys came up with some creative ways to do your chores.

2-00:21:29

Gabler: Ma wasn't looking?

Stein: Right, right, well, you were still working, so she couldn't complain. Do you remember, was it a well paid job working in the bomber plant?

2-00:21:43

Gabler: Well, I think it was stupendous, but I don't know where the money went. At the time we'd been working for the TB Sanitarium for \$50 a month, and, of course, food and board. And they furnished uniforms for the first month, then you had to buy your own, that's probably through them. But you could get by with two or three uniforms. That \$50 a month was free and clear. My girlfriend was buying, oh, things for her hope chest. She bought a dinette set. I don't know where she put it. She was thinking of the future. Fifty dollars on me melted. I didn't have nothing to show for it.

Stein: What did you spend it on?

2-00:22:43

Gabler: I don't know.

Stein: It just disappeared?

2-00:22:48

Gabler: Sure. Once a month you'd be flush, and then pretty soon you wasn't so flush. But you didn't have no worries, as long as you was getting, as long as you was there; that was like a home, that TB Sanitarium. So then when we got here, we was paying our own rent and—

Stein:

You had to pay rent at Willow Run to stay in the dorms?

2-00:23:13

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Then you buy all your food and so on, so it was probably broke at the end of—I think it was paid every two weeks—it was probably broke at the end of the two weeks too.

Stein:

Was it about the same salary?

2-00:23:29

Gabler: Well, I don't remember anything about it except it was tremendous increase over the \$50 a month. If it was \$100 a week, it was a lot of money.

Stein:

Yeah.

2-00:23:40

Gabler: I was pretty sure we had to stretch it for two weeks.

Stein:

Do you remember where you would go to get your paycheck?

2-00:23:49

Gabler: No. Must have went somewhere. I can't imagine them bringing them around.

Stein:

Were there other sort of administrative places that you went frequently with their, like a lot of people talk about the Kaiser Shipyards; they had hospitals that were on site. Or child care. Were there other places like that?

2-00:24:11

Gabler: Well at my age I sure didn't need a hospital. Never knew where there was a doctor anywhere near, and who cared about babysitting jobs at that time. [laughs] I'd had my stint of babysitting. That was just by the week. Mother and Dad worked, and I stayed at this house and got room and board and maybe \$5 a week when I was babysitting. Go home weekends. So I don't know anything about the hospital, doctor; we never had to come in contact with any of that at the bomber plant.

Stein:

Do you remember there ever being accidents? I sounds like it could have been dangerous work—

2-00:25:03

Gabler: No accidents. So really it was just a fun time, a lot of fun time in my life.

Stein: I remember you told me briefly when we were talking on the phone that for your husband working there, it got really frustrating because everyone kept thinking that he was 4F, that he hadn't enlisted for some reason.

2-00:25:31

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein:

Can you talk a little bit about his experiences with that?

2-00:25:35

Gabler: Well, when he first went in there and got trained as a repairman, they were scarce; they had to stay. Then, by that time, I think four of his brothers, four or five of his brothers was already in service. He was tired of that feeling of people assuming he was 4F. I knew he wasn't going to sign up for an extension on that; by that time he figured there was enough repairmen, they could get rid of him. Anyway, he enlisted in the Navy. When we went over to tell his mother, she threw her apron over her head. "Oh, you'll be killed, you'll be killed," because all of her other boys was in the Army. None of them got killed.

Stein:

That's lucky.

2-00:26:27

Gabler: When his youngest brother, six or seven years younger than him, when he got old enough to—the war was over, of course—but he joined the Navy, too.

Stein:

Were people really ashamed if they were 4F, or did he just not want to be missed.

2-00:26:44

Gabler: Well, I think he was ready to get in it, with all those other brothers being in there.

Stein:

Yeah.

2-00:26:52

Gabler: He wasn't ashamed of being 4F. A lot of people—you heard of somebody shooting his trigger finger off himself so he wouldn't have to go.

Stein:

Right.

2-00:27:01

Gabler: There was talk of that once in a while, but no, I don't think there was any stigma with being 4F. The reason my dad got in was because of those frozen jobs. He was working in Hastings at a tool and dye place, made big dyes, and it was rated a government job, necessary.

Stein:

What were the dyes for, do you know?

2-00:27:28

Gabler: Well, they put one of these big dyes into a car factory, say, and they might just turn out fenders, or whatever they were; these dyes were big. So the company had all these, the regular people, and they knew—they told them, that if they left, they'd be drafted because they'd turn them in. So they were working for before-war prices per hour, no benefits beyond what they'd had in the past, which was probably nothing. Anyway, my dad, with seven kids at home—because I was the top one. I was gone—seven kids at home, he went down to Battle Creek and got a good paying war job. They turned him in as "no dependents."

Stein:

The old factories?

2-00:28:34

Gabler: Yeah, this factory turned him in down in Detroit, no dependents. So he got down there, a middle-aged man with seven dependents, and all these kids signing up. They had to keep him over a night or two down in Detroit while they checked on his background. Well, he had all those seven dependents all right, but because Bliss said, "Take him," they did. That's why he spent two years in the Seabees, the best thing that ever happened to him because he used that Veteran's Hospital, saved his life, before he came to live with us. He got good benefits by being drafted with seven dependents. Bliss did him a favor.

Stein:

I'm sorry, I don't totally understand. Were they trying to keep him, trying to make him not quit his job?

2-00:29:28

Gabler: They were keeping, they froze them jobs, the government froze them because they were essential to the war effort. What these molds made, of course, could have been some of them in the bomber plant for all I knew. Somewhere they had to mold that aluminum I suppose. But anyway, that was when you knew for sure they could freeze jobs, and you paid the consequences if you moved.

Stein:

So did he not get the salary that he was supposed to get from the military?

2-00:30:03

Gabler: Oh, yeah, he got the same pay as anybody else.

Stein:

Because they found out that he had those dependents?

2-00:30:10

Gabler: Yeah, they treated him just like any other person went in there. He just happened to have all that benefit check went back to my mother.

Stein:

Right, which allowed her to buy that big farm. So what was it like when your husband enlisted? Did you say he was in the Pacific when he was fighting?

2-00:30:28

Gabler: Oh, yeah. He was on an oil tanker. One torpedo, and that whole thing would have been gone, but it never took a hit. An oil tanker was highly dangerous if it was hit.

Stein:

Right.

2-00:30:46

Gabler: Anyway, I was pregnant, and I stayed there at the bomber plant for I don't know how long until—well, by that time it was getting pretty well boring and more boring. I could quit without feeling, the war effort was coming down some or whatever. Anyway, I went back home to Ma. She just had a baby, so she wasn't pregnant. The cow, and her pig, and me, and a friend that moved in with her, all of us were pregnant and my mother wasn't.

Stein:

You, a friend, a cow and a pig.

2-00:31:36

Gabler: [laughs] The only reason she wasn't pregnant was because she just had a baby herself.

Stein:

Did you keep working once you knew you were pregnant before you quit?

2-00:31:47

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Stein:

Were you still, in that picture you're seven months pregnant I think.

2-00:31:56

Gabler: I was living at my mother's—

Stein:

With your mom at that point because—

2-00:31:56

Gabler: My dad was already in service. That was just a short time. I was having false alarms. I went to the hospital once, false alarm. So that was in between false alarms there. I had him shortly after that picture was taken.

Stein:

If they found out that you were pregnant—

2-00:32:18

Gabler: I don't think it would have made any difference.

Stein:

They would have kept you working.

2-00:32:19

Gabler: Sure. It was more or less up to you, I guess.

Stein:

Okay.

2-00:32:24

Gabler: I hadn't even went to a doctor yet, but you didn't rush off to a doctor first thing either in those days.

Stein:

Were there special clothing you could buy? It looks like all the work clothes you were wearing might not fit so well if you're pregnant.

2-00:32:40

Gabler: That's what they called a maternity dress right there. It just kept getting bigger and bigger. It was bunched when I was little; it just kept stretching out. That was the maternity wear they had in those days. Now you can wear those jeans that's got a hole cut out; you can leave your belly hanging out now.

Stein:

By the time that you got big, you had stopped working at the plant?

2-00:33:07

Gabler: Oh, a long time before.

Stein:

Okay. You didn't grow up wearing pants around the farm?

2-00:33:17

Gabler: This was the first era that women could buy pants. I think I had my bandanna on. No, maybe that's just hair. Anyway, women never wore bandannas before that.

Stein:

Was that to keep your hair out of your eyes, out of the machines?

2-00:33:34

Gabler: Sure.

Stein:

Did you enjoy wearing these clothes? It sound like—

2-00:33:39

Gabler: Oh, yeah. Well, one winter up north it was so snowy my mother could only—I don't know if she could have got the pants kind, but she bought bibbed overalls for me to wear to school because we was walking in drifts. They didn't plow the roads between our house and that schoolhouse. We took shortcuts through the woods. The teacher wore jodhpurs and those laced up boots. She only lived a half a mile or so from the school, but that was the one and only time that I wore pants. That was during that winter. The idea of buying men's jeans and wearing them, that just never happened. Nobody ever did it. My mother wore dresses all the time; everybody wore dresses. That was the one big thing in styling that the war changed, women's slacks. I've got one dress in that closet I haven't worn in ten years, but it's there.

Stein:

You were a convert after the war, you stuck to your pants.

2-00:35:02

Gabler: I do have a dress.

Stein: A lot of people talk about Rosie the Riveter, this era, as really changing women's possibilities, as opening up doors that had previously been closed. What are your thoughts on what this time changed?

2-00:35:20

Gabler: Well, it put women in the factories. They never went back en masse to just staying at home and raising a garden and kids. So, yeah, it made a big change in the social atmosphere, but at the time I was living it myself, and it just seemed natural.

Stein: Yeah. Do you think, looking back, that it maybe changed your future decisions at all?

2-00:35:49

Gabler: No, once I started having children I never went out and worked until, well, let's see, my first job after years of staying home and just raising kids and garden and whatever, my first job was—some friends of mine said, "Leave it to Marion to find a one-hour a day job." I did. I was a hall monitor at the high school for one hour a day. That was my first job after my youngest one was in school. Then it was at the school, so I was off when he was off. Then when he went into seventh grade, I went to work in the school kitchen as a cook. So there again, I was off when school was off. That worked out real fine.

When I married Clark I was head cook at a school with, probably, was cooking for about a thousand kids. I was head cook there. I thought, "Boy, I'll miss this job," because it was really an enjoyable job. I took off with him and spent the first year on the road in a little RV, and I never missed that kitchen at all. Never missed any of my friends or relatives back in Michigan, didn't miss anybody at all. It was totally different, really enjoyed it.

Stein: Is that how you came to California?

2-00:37:25

Gabler: He had a place here, but he also had that motor home. So we could just maybe stay here in California a couple months, down in Mexico a couple months, back in Michigan—supposed to be there six months, but it was four—and just be on the road a lot. But he wanted to keep his roots, his place here in California. So we always came back here.

Stein: Have you heard anything about the Rosie the Riveter National Park or been—

2-00:38:00

Gabler: I went over there. I went over there with Mary, is that her name? Yeah, the yard and sidewalk was so well planned, was covered with goose poop when I was there, terrible. And geese had taken over.

Stein: Oh, no. These are the shipyards down in—

2-00:38:22

Gabler: Well, it was a walk in a grass park.

Stein:

Oh, yeah, with a memorial with that big structure and all pictures—

2-00:38:27

Gabler: Yeah, a memorial, and it went into a building where they had, gee, what did I contribute to that? Something or other. One room had shelves you could draw out, pictures or relics of some kind. I gave them something. I didn't make a note of it, so I don't know what.

Stein:

Like a souvenir from your time working as a—?

2-00:38:56

Gabler: I don't know, it might have been from Clark for all I know, but whatever it was, all this stuff was being stored with the idea that they'd have their own place to display it sooner or later. So I don't know if they got someplace to display all that stuff or not.

Stein:

They have the place, and are building it right now.

2-00:39:17

Gabler: Yeah, and I don't get over there because I can't find it. I went over there a couple of times, that area, but it was somebody else always driving, so I don't know how to get over there.

Stein:

Yeah, well, the visitor's center is not open yet, you're not missing it yet, but hopefully it'll be up soon.

2-00:39:35

Gabler: I don't know how to find Richmond Plunge. If you go on Cutting all the way out to the end, is that Richmond Point?

Stein:

I couldn't tell you.

2-00:39:43

Gabler: Well, the Plunge is open now, and I want to get out there and try that. I'm always looking for a warm swimming pool.

Stein:

So do you feel a sense of solidarity with the other women who did some of the work that you did?

2-00:40:02

Gabler: No. If you play cards, I feel solidarity, but that's about all. I've got a lot of card-playing friends. If you read, you're an individual. You don't do that as a group. I don't anyway. To read a book and have a book club that discusses it, never been interested in that. Reading is something you do by yourself, and playing cards you have card friends.

Stein:

Yep. Are there any other facts you have on your time during the war?

2-00:40:37

Gabler: Not right now. If I think of something, it'll be sometime later.

Stein:

Okay, then you can call me and let me know.

2-00:40:49

Gabler: If it was real important, I would. Did you get a picture of my plane there?

Stein:

Oh, let's take this, yeah, of the B-24. This was a Liberator? Is that what they called them? There we go.

2-00:41:00

Gabler: Probably. B-24.

Stein:

Did you know where they were fighting, where the B-24s were going?

2-00:41:11

Gabler: Nope. I assume they went over Europe at the time. They wouldn't be spending all that energy on blowing up an island somewhere, but I don't know.

Stein:

Have you ever met anybody who flew one?

2-00:41:25

Gabler: Nope. The last time I saw one was at that air show in Elkhart, Indiana, and it was just sitting there. They said at the time there was two of them left, and the other one wasn't flying. So this one is still flying because it was out here this past year, out here. So I don't know anything about them, though. I'm glad they're trying to keep this one going, one out of all those that we made.

Stein:

I know. I read somewhere that Willow Run made eight thousand six hundred and something planes, and they were making them one every hour, which is incredible.

2-00:42:11

Gabler: Yeah.

Stein:

Was the pace of work very fast?

2-00:42:13

Gabler: Well, not where we were. There was always ailerons lined up there. Nobody was cracking a whip to get them done in a short time. They was just a routine of work. There was no urgency about it. Just seemed to be a job that needed to be done.

Stein:

Did it seem more important than any other job because of the war going on?

2-00:42:48

Gabler: I wasn't thinking about that. No, I don't know if anybody felt a patriotic urge to get in there and really do something, it was just—everything I ever done the

people were enjoying their work. I hadn't ever worked in an area where there was constant complaining, probably would quit.

Stein: That's sort of lucky. Wow.

2-00:43:32

Gabler: Well, if you have a fault-finding attitude, it can shorten your life. It can ruin your life, actually, because it's been proven to contribute to Alzheimer's, a bitchy, dissatisfied attitude. So maybe that's why I've outlived so many.

Stein: And probably had a good time.

2-00:43:54

Gabler: Oh, yeah, I have. For the family reunion I was there for two weeks first of August, and this particular nephew didn't come to the reunion. I think he was working. But anyway, since I've been back, he just dropped dead, my sister's boy, and he was probably around sixty, massive heart attack. So you just don't know when these things happen. But when I do go, that's the way I want to go. I do not want to end up in a nursing home.

Stein: Yeah, yeah.

2-00:44:37

Gabler: My poor husband, this one, said—hell, he was so independent, always galloping ahead of everybody else to get there and stuff—when his time came that he was losing it, he was going to walk out to the Pacific Ocean until his hat floated. Well, Alzheimer's began to take its toll, and he had no idea it was happening. I didn't either for quite a while. But gradually losing every incentive you've got, he didn't have no opportunity to walk out into the Pacific Ocean. It just came on him that slow and gradual. It was kind of, well, an eye opener on how Alzheimer's works because I've never paid any attention to it before. They claim an active mind and good attitude and so on helps fight that. His mind was always active. He was a mountain climber and a hiker. He belonged to that hiking association and youth hostel over there in San Francisco. He was always doing that kind of stuff and reading the newspapers. To have Alzheimer's strike him was really out of the ordinary, it seemed like, but it can strike anybody.

Stein: Right.

2-00:46:08

Gabler: So I think that's it.

Stein: Okay, well thank you so much for all of your time and all of your memories. It's really a great story.

2-00:46:14

Gabler: I haven't sacrificed a thing, because I'm going to go play pinochle today.

[End of Interview]