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Mary Giannone

Rosie the Riveter  
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
David Dunham  
in 2014

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Mary Giannone, 2014



Mary Giannone with three of her four daughters



Mary Giannone and daughter



Mary Giannone and Ralph Carrado Giannone

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## Interview 1: July 6, 2014

Dunham: Today is July 6, 2014, and this is Tape 1 with Mary Giannone. We're here in her lovely home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Thank you so much for inviting us today. We usually start at the beginning, so what is your full name and date of birth?

1-00:00:21

Giannone: Mary Maietta Giannone.

Dunham: Is Mietta your maiden name?

1-00:00:32

Giannone: Mary Maietta is my maiden name; Giannone is my married name. I was born in Burlington, November 21, 1920. So now you know how old I am.

Dunham: So you have a birthday coming up this fall.

1-00:00:56

Giannone: Right. I'll be ninety-five.

Dunham: Can you tell me a little bit about your family history? Do you know when your family first came to the United States, how far back?

1-00:01:05

Giannone: My mother was a child when she came to the States, and she grew up here, more or less. My dad came here from Naples, Italy when he was a young man, nineteen or twenty years old, I don't know exactly. They were both immigrants; they didn't speak English at all. My mother more or less grew up here; she was a child when she came over. They were married in Burlington, and my father was kind of—I don't know what you would call him—a tile setter in different churches. He was a simple, quiet man, rather tall. Mama was small. They had eleven children. They were all born and brought up in Burlington.

Dunham: Where do you fall in the eleven children?

1-00:02:09

Giannone: I fall as the third.

Dunham: What brought them to Burlington?

1-00:02:20

Giannone: Workwise. I had an uncle who came from Italy also, and he worked on the railroad. The Italians came over to help to build all the railroads, and my dad worked for them. Then he didn't like it, so he went into a different occupation. They were a quiet Italian family. I lived in an area where there were groups of Italians, mostly from Italy, and they were quiet people. I can't say too much about the family background other than they enjoyed being here in America.

Dunham: Your mom came young, so did she come with her parents?

1-00:03:10

Giannone: Yes, she came with her mother.

Dunham: Did you know your grandparents on her side?

1-00:03:12

Giannone: I just knew my grandmother; my grandfather had died over there in Italy. I don't know too much about the background of my father's side because he was very quiet and withdrawn. He came from a poor family and didn't want to go back there. There was nothing there for him. Mama came from a very well-off settled family. Her father was in the jewelry business. Other than that they were very close-mouthed. You know what I'm saying. Very deep involved in their own way of life. But they were good people, honest people, hard working.

My school days were in Burlington. I'm a graduate of Catholic High School. I come from a Catholic family.

Dunham: Was your school predominantly Italian American then?

1-00:04:12

Giannone: No.

Dunham: What was the mix of your school?

1-00:04:18

Giannone: It was just Irish. I went to an Irish Catholic School. Eventually also—I must say this—my parents gradually began to learn to speak English. When they came over here they were young, they were ignorant. Other than finishing school, high school, two years after finishing high school I met my husband.

Dunham: Could I just interrupt you for a moment? How were the Depression years for your family?

1-00:04:49

Giannone: Those were very sad years, very hard, 1930s, I don't remember too much of that.

Dunham: But you had eleven siblings among you, so was it—?

1-00:05:01

Giannone: Yeah, as I said, my father was a hard-working man. He would work seven days a week. My mother was a good, decent, honest woman. Quiet. That was their style of life, Dave. They didn't have money to go anywhere. They didn't have a car. They didn't have anything—we didn't know what it was to go to a movie because there was no money. We were poor. But we were clean and decent. That's what made me proud.

Dunham: What was life like in Burlington in that time? Can you describe it?

1-00:05:35

Giannone: At that time, like all American small towns, quiet hardworking people, everybody being neighborly, friendly. The Italians grouped, more or less stayed by themselves. Most of them were laborers, or they worked on the railroad to build up the railroad.

My brothers and sisters were very quiet. That's the way we were brought up. There was no such thing as what you hear today: gangs, people not getting along. You didn't hear that. People helped each other, they respected each other. This was America. And those who came from Europe were glad to be here. That's how my parents felt.

Dunham: Did most of the children in your community go to the Catholic school that was predominantly Irish? Yeah, so there was a fair number of Italians, but the majority were Irish.

1-00:06:42

Giannone: It was a mixture, Dave. People just were quiet and minded their own business. They helped each other. Food was cheap. Stuff like that.

Dunham: Did you learn Italian growing up?

1-00:07:01

Giannone: Yes, I speak Italian. Parlo Italiano, poco.

Dunham: Did you ever have to do translation—or your siblings—translation for your parents?

1-00:07:12

Giannone: No, because my mother and father spoke Italian among themselves, but they made a mistake in not teaching their kids enough Italian. They wanted to learn to be Americans. That was the way the immigrants came. Even today the immigrants come and they want to learn American; they want to speak English, in other words. No, they were just proud to be here, Dave. It's all I can say.

Dunham: Do you know what parts of Italy they came from or where your family—?

1-00:07:38

Giannone: Yes. My people were from Naples. My husband's people were from Sicily, which is south of Italy.

Dunham: You never went though as a child to Italy.

1-00:07:54

Giannone: No.

Dunham: But later in life you've had a chance to visit a couple of times.

1-00:07:58

Giannone: Right.

Dunham: Your one grandmother that you did know, did she live in Burlington with you?

1-00:08:04

Giannone: Yes, she did.

Dunham: What was life like for her?

1-00:08:08

Giannone: Hard. Because she came here—her first husband died in Italy, she came here due to the fact that one of her brothers helped to bring her here. She was a widow with three children. She settled here, bought her own home, took in borders to get along. Life was poor in those days, but it was clean and decent.

Dunham: She had her own place and borders there in Burlington. Was she nearby, though, in the same neighborhood?

1-00:08:36

Giannone: Yes, right.

Dunham: Having eleven children, your dad was working seven days a week. It must have been very demanding on your mom.

1-00:08:44

Giannone: It was.

Dunham: You were third oldest. Did you play a role in helping raise your younger siblings?

Giannone: Not really. My mother was a strong, independent woman. She took care of us good. She had her good days and bad days like all women do. [laughs]

Dunham: What would a typical day have been like for your mother when you were growing up?

1-00:09:06

Giannone: Dave, what a question to ask a woman. It's hard. She worked. She took care of us. She fed us. She cooked.

Dunham: It's hard to imagine now. I'm trying to imagine having eleven children in the 1930s.

1-00:09:18

Giannone: They didn't have electric dishwashers, they didn't have electric washing machines, we didn't know what television was. We were lucky if we had a small radio. That was life, Dave.

Dunham: When you weren't in school what did you do for fun? I know money was tight, you didn't go to the movies and stuff, but—

1-00:09:39

Giannone: If I had a nickel to go to the movies, Dave, I was lucky.

Dunham: What did you do instead?

1-00:09:44

Giannone: My enjoyment in life was, I used to love to roller skate, ice skate. When I was in high school I was kind of athletic.

Dunham: What did you play?

1-00:09:54

Giannone: I played basketball for four years.

Dunham: That's our favorite sport.

1-00:09:58

Giannone: I played basketball for four years. I love music; I was in a choir, all-state choir. I was just the average high school girl. But I loved it. I loved it. All my brothers and sisters were the same way. Except my oldest sister. She didn't care for school so much. She went to work in the mills. But my brothers and my other sisters, they all fought their way through, with school. School was important.

Dunham: What was Catholic school like then?

1-00:10:39

Giannone: Wonderful. Quiet. A lot of art. You didn't hear about what you hear about today, gangs of kids on the streets. Life wasn't like that. Life was more or less very American, very quiet, everybody working, doing their share of everything.

Dunham: What year did you graduate high school?

1-00:11:05

Giannone: Nineteen thirty-nine.

Dunham: What came next for you then?

1-00:11:26

Giannone: The war was creeping from Europe; Hitler was getting dangerous. America was trying to stay out of it, minding our own business. By the time '40, '41

rolled around, Dave, it was getting frightening. Boys were getting taken out of school, out of college. A lot of it seems so far away, but I was a happy young woman, especially when I met my husband.

Dunham: Which was after the war started?

1-00:11:44

Giannone: No. Ralph was—it was 1940, '41.

Dunham: Did he grow up in Burlington?

1-00:11:58

Giannone: No, Ralph was a Middlebury, Vermont boy. But he went to UVM after he graduated from Middlebury High School. He was an athlete. He played football for four years; he won a scholarship. He loved school. He played football when he was in college. So then the war was getting bad. It was getting bad, so a lot of the boys were volunteering. As I said before, Ralph would volunteer, but he was going to school. As I said before, he beat the draft by one day. There's a picture over there that shows you where he was saying goodbye to me.

Dunham: We'll take a photo of that. How did you meet?

1-00:12:43

Giannone: How did I meet him? That's a long story, David. I was working in—remember the story about the old Woolworth stores? And Kresge's?

Dunham: I don't know Kresge's.

1-00:13:07

Giannone: Well, that was another big company like Woolworth. I was torn between—when I got out of high school I went into office work for a while. I didn't like it, and the war was getting bad. So I thought, "I'm going to volunteer to work in the defense plants." And I did. We had to be trained. Now remember, you're in a dark area. All over the country was dark. Anything that was done, it was done at night time. So we used to have to get up in the morning to meet this truck. They would pick up girls who were volunteering to go to the school to be trained to learn how to work on these necessary, I would say, gears that the boys would use and need. As we were trained we were shipped to a special plant. And the plant we were shipped to from Vermont was from Burlington to Springfield, Vermont. I worked in the plant for one year—

Dunham: This is the Fellows Gear Shaper Company?

1-00:14:33

Giannone: Yes, in Springfield.

Dunham: So the training, you could have gone to several different companies from where you trained?

1-00:14:32

Giannone: Here from Vermont we had our own big plant, so it was Gear Shaping. But I had a dear friend who went all the way to California because she wanted to get into one of the big plants out there. These are the girls who worked on the planes themselves. But with me, the girls I worked with, we were trained to work on these big machines in these big factories. Like I told you in my letter, the plant never closed.

Dunham: How long was the training, do you remember?

1-00:15:02

Giannone: About a week.

Dunham: And were you paid during the training?

1-00:15:07

Giannone: Oh, yes. If you earned ten dollars in those days you were earning big money. This is how we were trained, by going to one of these schools. They called them schools.

Dunham: Did you join a union?

1-00:15:19

Giannone: No.

Dunham: Were all the people in your training local, or were some people coming from other parts of the country?

1-00:15:27

Giannone: No, the girls—if you were from Vermont, like my sister-in-law, she trained, she worked with me. I had a dear friend who worked the night shift. But mostly—in the plant at night there was mostly the men that worked. The girls worked during the day. It was frightening, Dave. It was hard.

Dunham: How was it frightening?

1-00:15:52

Giannone: It was frightening because we had to get up at 5:00 in the morning to be in the plant by six o'clock, and it was dark. You'd work until noon. You'd have your lunch. And remember, we had to wear uniforms, and as you see [shows a photo] that's the way we looked.

Dunham: Can you describe the uniforms you wore?

1-00:16:17

Giannone: Yes, it was like a blue dungaree, like a blue linen, whatever you want to call it. And shawls on our heads, just like you see the pictures of Rosies. They were calling us Rosie the Riveters because we girls worked on these big

machines. We made gears. Different types of gears that went on the planes, the tanks, the big trucks, the Jeeps, and all of our stuff was—

Dunham: How did you make them? What were you actually doing?

1-00:16:49

Giannone: I worked on a machine, a duo-press, and this machine was big. You were given these gears. They were not finished, and the machine you worked on finished these drills. Now, the men worked on the big gears. The women worked on the small gears.

Dunham: When you first started working there were any of the men giving any of the women a hard time? Sometimes we've heard—

1-00:17:19

Giannone: Yeah. No, it was not like that. No. The women were shown very much respect. Because we were needed. Let's face it, we were needed. Our boys were all going over there.

Dunham: You said frightening. Frightening in what way?

1-00:17:33

Giannone: What was frightening was when night fell, everything was dark. There was nothing open.

Dunham: Right, It was blackouts and you had to cover your headlights.

1-00:17:45

Giannone: Exactly. And you peek out the window, and you see these men walking the streets to check to see if everybody's house was closed, dark. Because Burlington had the air base, Ethan Allen Air Base, the fear of planes coming overhead was scary. Every house had a star in their windows to show that they had a boy who was in the service. That was hard for many mothers to see their young boys, nineteen-year-olds! They were drafted, the war was so bad.

Dunham: That was particularly hard for your mom.

1-00:18:34

Giannone: It was. It wasn't only for my mom. All moms, and sisters, and young brothers. But it was war, and we were proud to fight.

Dunham: How did you get news of the war and/or stay in touch with your loved ones?

1-00:18:49

Giannone: I don't think—they had the big theaters that showed—you'd go to the theater for a nickel or a dime, and you'd see on the Pathé News it would show you what they were able to get there in the wars. And there was the great Ernie Pyle, who was a reporter.

Dunham: I saw the article you sent. Can you tell us about him?

1-00:19:15

Giannone: He went out to the Pacific, little bit of a guy, and he took pictures and shipped them back to the States. That's how we saw—and sometimes we'd get the news report by the papers. There was no TV. None of this modern stuff you see today. We didn't have that. We didn't have that. Life was quiet in those days, so different from today, so different.

Dunham: I know your family, Italian Americans, several of you serving, and all in the community around you. But were there ever, since the Executive Order 9066 did come out and mostly affected Japanese who were incarcerated. But did you ever hear of any Italian Americans or German Americans out here who were incarcerated—

1-00:20:12

Giannone: No, mostly the Japanese people. Because of the attack on America. We did no harm to them.

Dunham: In your community did you—you had relatives back home too. Was there ever any challenge of communication or worrying about them over there since Italy was also on the other side?

1-00:20:36

Giannone: There was a bitterness that the Italian Americans felt against the people over there. Mussolini became—well, I think very hard to say that. But he got involved with Hitler, and it was a big mistake on his part. The American Italians resented what he did to America. There was a bitterness against Germany at the time. It was hard, and it took many, many Americans a long time to appreciate what the Germans were at the time. I'm not going to say any more than that, Dave, because that goes way back.

Dunham: I don't want to belabor this much more, but we have a relevant researcher who's really interested in the Italian American community. Were there any—that you're aware of, and maybe among the elders in the community too—who had any split within your community?

1-00:21:40

Giannone: Not in my community, not in Burlington, Vermont. In fact, I feel this way: all Italian Americans, Irish Americans, English Americans, they're practically American. This was a land of opportunity.

Dunham: Yeah, I appreciate that. I'm wondering too if despite the fact that you had sons in the military, daughters serving in the plants, did you or others that you know of ever experience any prejudice towards Italian Americans, again because of presumption?

1-00:22:20

Giannone: Never, never, never. If there were I knew nothing about it. No, there was no resentment, Dave. We were proud to be Americans. We were proud to know that our country was being protected.

Dunham: No, I understand that. Sometimes, even if you are doing that, it doesn't mean that somebody's not going to single you out based on your ethnicity.

1-00:22:46

Giannone: If they were, Dave, I know nothing about it. That's the honest truth.

Dunham: You were starting to tell me—you said it was a long story—how you met your husband. Was that connected to your working at Fellows?

1-00:22:57

Giannone: No. Ralph was at school when I met him. He was in his third year at UVM, and he used to come into the store where I worked. He was looking for another girl. Finally he saw me. He kept coming back. [laughs] That's how I met my husband.

Dunham: What store was that?

1-00:23:17

Giannone: Kresge's.

Dunham: And then you started dating in the early part of the war, this is?

1-00:23:26

Giannone: This was in 1942. I married him in 1943 when he was able to get off the base. Then I followed him to Maxwell Field on a troop train.

Dunham: What was that like, riding on a troop train?

1-00:23:41

Giannone: Wonderful. I was the only woman. I was still in my bridal outfit.

Dunham: Was he with you?

1-00:23:45

Giannone: Yes. That's the respect the men had for women. I was the only woman on this train from Burlington, Vermont all the way to Maxwell Field. I stayed on the base with him until he was shipped back to Maine. Then he was back to me, I followed him, and then I couldn't follow any longer because I was carrying my own first child. Then from Maine Ralph was shipped all the way back to Georgia. From Georgia he was shipped overseas.

Dunham: When you went down to Maxwell Field—that's Alabama?

Giannone: Maxwell Field, Alabama.

Dunham: What was life like for you there? How long were you there, and what was it like?

1-00:24:28

Giannone: It was great.

Dunham: Were you just on the base, or were you in the community too?

1-00:24:36

Giannone: I was on the base for a while, and then when the war was getting real bad—this was 1943 now—we were not allowed to be on the base any longer. So I had to come home.

Dunham: But did you get out in the community in Alabama at all?

1-00:24:55

Giannone: No, it was dark at night. There was no social life going on in those days.

Dunham: So you've already worked at Fellows at this time, or is this before you went to work at Fellows?

Giannone: No, this was after—I was married by this time.

Dunham: So it was after you were working at Kresge but while you were dating when you started working at Fellows. Is that correct?

1-00:25:15

Giannone: Yes. I left Kresge's to go up to Fellows. And Fellows is still operating today, I think. I don't know. I'm not sure

Dunham: I looked it up, but I wasn't sure about that. I know the founder, Mr. Fellows, passed near the end of the war, I see. So you worked the day shift your whole time there; is that right?

1-00:25:36

Giannone: Day shift.

Dunham: You mentioned lunch, twelve o'clock. Did they have any type of events or music or patriotic type of things?

1-00:25:45

Giannone: Nothing like that.

Dunham: How many of you were working on a team together?

1-00:25:50

Giannone: I can't remember how many women. But it was wonderful. Everybody was willing to help. This was our home. We were attacked.

Dunham: Sometimes things happened; do know how injuries were handled when they occurred? If someone had an injury on the job.

1-00:26:11

Giannone: They had doctors and nurses right there to take care if anybody got hurt on the big machines.

Dunham: What was the most challenging part about working at Fellows?

1-00:26:26

Giannone: That's hard to answer. I think the most challenging thing was you were scared because everything was so dark at night, and during the day.

Dunham: How long a ride was that in the truck that you came down in?

1-00:26:45

Giannone: From Burlington to Springfield? Maybe three hours, three-hour ride.

Dunham: That was five days a week?

1-00:26:55

Giannone: Oh, no. When you left school and you were brought to Springfield you had to find a place to stay. The plant would be about a fifteen-minute walk from where you lived.

Dunham: I thought it was too far to commute, but I didn't get that, so that's an important distinction.

1-00:27:11

Giannone: I left the plant because my husband was able to get a furlough, and we had planned to get married the first furlough he got. So I left the plant to come back to Burlington to get married.

Dunham: So let's talk about Springfield a little bit because you've lived in Burlington your whole life. Is this your first time—where did you live in Springfield? Did you have shared housing with other workers?

1-00:27:32

Giannone: Yes. People opened up their homes to accommodate girls, and men, who were leaving their homes to work in the plants. I think that went for every state that was associated with helping out during the war. Then there were the people that were helping out, the movie stars. They were trying to sell the bonds over the radios, through the movies, the war bonds.

Dunham: What was life in Springfield like? Who did you stay with?

1-00:28:10

Giannone: I stayed with my sister-in-law because she worked also on the day shift.

Dunham: So not with another family, but she had her own place.

1-00:28:18

Giannone: No, no. We boarded out. See, people opened up their homes. Say I had a big house and girls were in town looking for a place to stay. This is what it was like.

Dunham: And the two of you stayed with the same family there. Okay. And you say you had about a fifteen-minute walk to work.

Giannone: About that.

Dunham: We haven't talked at all about winters in Vermont. Winters can be very hard, right? How was that?

Giannone: You coped with it. We're Northerners, you know? You get used to the cold.

Dunham: Was Springfield about the same as Burlington?

1-00:28:58

Giannone: Oh, yes. Exactly.

Fukumoto: What was your job at the plant?

1-00:29:15

Giannone: I was a drill press—I worked on a press machine that was called a presser, that made, helped make gears.

Fukumoto: What did you actually do; did you have the tools, and you were—

1-00:29:22

Giannone: Yes, you were trained that way. You had to measure the gears that you were making to adjust to your machine. And you worked with magnesium.

Dunham: Were you working in pairs or as individuals?

1-00:29:51

Giannone: Each girl had her own machine.

Dunham: How long were your shifts? Eight hours with a lunch break?

1-00:30:01

Giannone: We had to be at the plant at six o'clock, and you had lunch at noon. You got off at 5:30, six o'clock so the night shift could come in.

Dunham: So you worked like eleven hours or so; is that right?

1-00:30:11

Giannone: We worked long hours.

Dunham: So they didn't have three shifts; they just had two shifts. The day shift and night—

1-00:30:14

Giannone: As far as I remember, yes.

Dunham: Did you ever have any problems with how the night shift left things, on your equipment or anything?

1-00:30:20

Giannone: No. Everybody did their own thing. You had that feeling, "I'm helping the boys." This war's got to come to an end. It was frightening, Dave. It was.

Dunham: So this was this clear sense of patriotism. But you also were making much better money.

1-00:30:40

Giannone: [laughs] Well, I remember coming home one day, and my envelope had sixty dollars in it. Because you worked a long time, long hours. And that was big money in those days.

Fukumoto: What did you do with it? Did you save it?

1-00:30:57

Giannone: Not really. I gave most of it to my mother and father.

Dunham: You still had a lot of younger siblings who were still in school.

1-00:31:10

Giannone: Right. Right.

Dunham: Most of your co-workers were from Vermont?

1-00:31:20

Giannone: Yes.

Dunham: You mentioned one that went out to California.

1-00:31:23

Giannone: That was a dear friend of mine.

Dunham: Do you know much about her experience, how it went from there?

1-00:31:27

Giannone: No, because once Jean left here I never—

Dunham: You think she went to Southern California maybe to one of the aircraft companies, Douglas maybe?

1-00:31:37

Giannone: Douglas. Jean worked in Douglas. She wrote me a couple of letters, and then I didn't hear from her any more. She never came east again. She just loved it out there.

Dunham: How did Springfield and Burlington change during the war?

1-00:31:55

Giannone: Burlington didn't really change for a good many years. I left Burlington in 1957 when my husband went and visited us here in Pittsfield. I can't tell you too much about Springfield because it mostly involved working all the time. There was no vacation with pay, none of that. People just were willing to work.

Dunham: Did you have weekends off?

1-00:32:28

Giannone: You had Sunday off.

Dunham: You were working six days a week. What did you do on Sundays?

1-00:32:32

Giannone: Rest. Wash clothes. Clean your uniform for Monday morning.

Dunham: Did things change in terms of what food you were able to have access to during the war, what things you were eating?

1-00:32:48

Giannone: Yes. You couldn't have butter. Very little meat. Vegetables you could have plenty, but most of the stuff was saved and sent to the boys.

Dunham: Did you most miss anything?

1-00:33:02

Giannone: Not really. I was never a big eater.

Dunham: Did you grow up having traditional Italian meals, or what types of things did you grow up with?

1-00:33:10

Giannone: Half and half, Dave. Half and half.

Dunham: Once your husband was—when you were separated while he was in the military could you correspond with him?

1-00:33:28

Giannone: All the time. I had such calluses on my fingers I've still got it. [laughs] I wrote letters every day. When the boys wrote letters, their letters were censored. They couldn't tell you where they were.

Dunham: Would they literally have sections crossed out?

1-00:33:46

Giannone: Oh, yes, definitely. Especially when my brother Frank, who was in the infantry, was stationed in Florida all his letters were crossed out. Then, of course, when the boys were shipped overseas, you didn't get any mail. Everything was censored. One good thing—I must say this before we end this—we had the best president in the world. Roosevelt.

Dunham: Tell about how you felt about President Roosevelt.

1-00:34:10

Giannone: He was great, brave.

Dunham: Did you listen to his addresses?

1-00:34:16

Giannone: All the time. On the radio. People respected him; they admired him. He was a true democrat. He was a good man. And his wife Eleanor. In fact, I think Reagan makes you think a little bit of like Roosevelt was. A deep, devoted president. Enough of that.

Dunham: I know you had your uniform that was for work. What you wore in your non-work time, which I know there wasn't a lot of, did that change at all during the war years. Sometimes I've heard that women's fashion began to change.

1-00:35:04

Giannone: Dress for women did not change. It isn't like today. Women went to church with a hat on—let's put it that way—and were dressed. The girls in my days, you didn't wear dungarees. You wore your skirts. In other words you looked like a woman. And the boys were the same way.

Dunham: When you got back up to Burlington and you were pregnant with your first daughter what was that like? Were you living back with your parents?

1-00:35:41

Giannone: Right. Because where could I go? I couldn't wait for my husband to come home.

Dunham: How was that? Can you describe what health care was like and that process was like back then?

1-00:35:53

Giannone: In those days it was hard because you were separated from your husband, and girls from their boyfriends, not knowing if and when they were coming home. The experience I had watching my brother Frank come home seriously injured, good thing he wasn't married. I was fortunate that my husband came home alive and safe. My brother-in-law Mario, who was in the Marines and

fought in the Pacific, he was fortunate. He won't talk about what he experienced because it was too horrifying.

Dunham: What about your husband? Where was he during the war years?

1-00:36:33

Giannone: They shipped him from one place to the other. He was office personnel in the Air Force.

Dunham: Did he stay domestic, then, or did he go overseas?

1-00:36:49

Giannone: My husband went to Panama. He followed the troops that he was associated with.

Dunham: And then he was in a little after the war, you said.

1-00:37:07

Giannone: No, my husband came home in 1945.

Dunham: Oh, he did get to. Do you remember hearing about when the Italians surrendered in '43? Was that notable for you and your community?

1-00:37:21

Giannone: You've got me there, Dave. I can't remember the exact date. It was, I think, in 1944. I'm not sure.

Dunham: I'd read that they surrendered September 8, 1943. So I just wondered—

1-00:37:48

Giannone: I was married in 1943. It was shortly after I was married that the Italians did what they did to Mussolini. They were angry at him for what he did getting Italy involved in the war. But you know, France and Britain, the English, were good allies. The boys from Australia. In other words, I always felt that everybody tried to do the best they could.

Dunham: When did you give birth to your first daughter?

1-00:38:23

Giannone: Nineteen forty-five.

Dunham: When was it?

1-00:38:28

Giannone: It was in January. We were cold, all alone, and my husband didn't see her until—oh, my God, I was still in the hospital, she was a matter of days being born.

Dunham: So he was able to come visit.

1-00:38:43

Giannone: Yes. But then he had to go right back to Alabama. Then he didn't see her again until she was walking. See, that was the fear that we women at that time lived with, was the fear of not having them come home. Because we used to hear so much. The invasion in Normandy was terrible.

Dunham: What were those first months of raising—was your mom able to help?

1-00:39:13

Giannone: No, when my husband came home—I was still with my mother and father—he quickly in the middle of winter went searching for a place for me to stay until he got really free from the service.

Dunham: How did you first hear about the job with Fellows, or the training opportunity? Did you see images of Rosie the Riveter and that type of thing back at that time?

1-00:39:56

Giannone: No. Rosie the Riveter didn't start until we girls were already at the plant and the girls who worked on bigger machines and stuff like that. No. Let me think.

Dunham: Do you remember seeing those images later in the war at that time, or after the war?

1-00:40:19

Giannone: After the war.

Dunham: How do you feel about—?

1-00:40:25

Giannone: Proud. Proud that I did my share.

Dunham: You mentioned some of the other women went on to work on the bigger machines. So if you had stayed there longer, do you think you might have as well?

1-00:40:35

Giannone: Maybe, if I'd stayed. But once I got married I didn't want to go back. I wanted to follow my husband.

Dunham: Did you keep in touch with any of the women—did your sister-in-law continue to work there?

1-00:40:44

Giannone: She did, because she was still single. My friend Millie, who worked—these girls are all passed away now—she did the same thing.

Dunham: Now you had already met your husband, but were some of those women dating, either there, meeting folks at the company—?

1-00:41:08

Giannone: No. My sister-in-law Mary was not involved yet with anybody. She had a lot of responsibilities to take care two younger brothers and a sister. That was her reason to finally give up. My friend Millie Auclair, she just worked a certain length of time; I don't remember how long she worked. But she's no longer with me now either.

Dunham: Looking back, the experience at Fellows, do you think that impacted you for the rest—?

1-00:41:49

Giannone: Ever.

Dunham: Tell me about that.

1-00:41:51

Giannone: It stuck with me. It's because—I think it was the being alone so long and having dear ones over there. Remember I had a brother-in-law, husband, and brothers. Then after that war I had a brother who fought in the Korean War, and one in the Navy. And my brother Joe also, who was a Marine. My brother Joe, he's still living. And my brother-in-law Mario, he's still living. Both these boys were Marines. Any questions there, Dave?

Dunham: I'm looking through your notes because you wrote such a lovely introduction. Let me ask, if you don't mind, when your brother Frank came home severely wounded I know it was of course hard on your mom and all of you—

1-00:43:01

Giannone: He wasn't bitter. No, he was proud. He did his share. He was a wonderful young man. A lot of them were young men. I had a brother-in-law who was in the Navy; he was so proud to be there. In fact he was seventeen years old, he lied about his age, he wanted to get in. And he loved the Navy.

Dunham: Did any of the women who worked at the Fellows plant, did any of them lie about their age to get in, do you know? Did you have to be eighteen there?

1-00:43:25

Giannone: No.

Dunham: Sometimes—I've heard stories where employers were more than happy to look the other way, same as the military probably was.

1-00:43:44

Giannone: I don't know.

Dunham: Looking back on the other women who worked there at Fellows and elsewhere you've heard about working, how do you think it might have impacted opportunities for women and impacted their lives going forward?

1-00:43:58

Giannone: I think it made women more courageous, more than—"I can do it." A lot of girls did men's jobs. There was only one thing that a lot of girls picked up the habit—girls didn't smoke in those days; they began to smoke. Some, not all. But some. I don't think, Dave, that anybody felt resentful. They were willing. We all were willing. Yes, it was hard to see our young men come home crippled, stuff like that. But it was war. What could you do?

Dunham: Some women we've talked to—I know you were already married and with child—were working up till the end of the war and then didn't necessarily want to give up their jobs, or couldn't necessarily afford to give up their jobs.

1-00:45:02

Giannone: That I don't know too much about. I was one of the lucky ones. My husband came home, and he took care of me and my young daughter and got involved in working and tried going back to school to finish in night school, so as to finish his senior year at UVM. But it was too much for him. He couldn't do it. So he just gave it up and went into business for himself in the restaurant business in Vermont. Then we left Vermont because he had a bigger opportunity here in Pittsfield. We came in 1957, and we've been in Pittsfield—what, this is 2014, so we've been here a long time in Pittsfield.

Dunham: You raised your children—

1-00:45:51

Giannone: Well, three of my girls were born in Burlington, and my youngest was born here. I've been fortunate. I have very good girls. They were quiet girls, they did what they had to do, they were well-educated.

Dunham: Was there anything else, before we close today, that you'd like to share, either about the war years or in time since then?

1-00:46:19

Giannone: No, I think this has been a privilege to have you come here. How I got involved with Rosie the Riveter is somehow I've—oh, I heard about the convention that was going to be held in California, so I wrote to the office and said I was a Rosie the Riveter member. That's how I got involved.

Dunham: Have you visited the national park out in Richmond?

1-00:46:49

Giannone: No, the invitation came in 2010, but I couldn't go. It was too far.

Dunham: Well, you're always welcome. There's a beautiful national park there with stories like yours, and soon your story will be there too.

1-00:47:04

Giannone: Really?

Dunham: It's a beautiful park, and it has permanent exhibits now up.

1-00:47:09

Giannone: It's in Richmond. Is it a big area?

Dunham: Richmond went from 20,000 to 120,000 people during the war. There aren't that many people there now, but, with the Kaiser Shipyards mostly, it was—they had four shipyards there, and it was really booming—

1-00:47:34

Giannone: And is the Douglas plant still open, the plant that Jean worked in?

Dunham: Douglas down south. Yes, Douglas is still active, and in fact there's one woman who still works part time who was there in the war years who got some press recently.

1-00:47:49

Giannone: Well, you must have pictures of girls working on planes.

Dunham: Yes, absolutely.

1-00:47:53

Giannone: I was sure you did because my friend Jean went there, and she made big bucks. [laughs] Never came back either.

Dunham: We've interviewed several, and there were several other projects. Well, is there anything else you'd like to ask?

1-00:48:14

Giannone: I just wanted to say, I bless all the doctors and nurses and all of the ministers and rabbis and priests who were there to help our boys, and I just feel that veterans should be taken care of. If there are any still in Walter Reed Hospital, God bless them. And I'll end by just saying, I'm just darn proud to be an American.

Dunham: Thank you for sharing your story today.

[End of interview]