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Marian Nelson

Rosie the Riveter
World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Robin Li
in 2012

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Marian Nelson

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Interview 1: January 13, 2012
Begin Audiofile 1

Li: This is Robin Li speaking with Marion Nelson on January 13, 2012 in Tacoma, Washington as part of the Rosie the Riveter 2010-2012 Project. This is Interview 1, Tape 1. Thank you so much for sitting down with me today and sharing your stories with me.

1-00:00:54
Nelson:

You're welcome.

Li: I understand that you worked at the munitions plant in Hastings, Nebraska during the war, and then also you were a military wife both in the US and Europe. But before we get into that I wanted to talk a little bit about your family background and get a sense of where you came from. I read the two family history books you wrote, *Just Over the Rise* and *The Book of Ruth*, but I wanted to make sure some of that background got onto the tape for people who might be looking at this interview in the future. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

1-00:00:59
Nelson:

My parents were, I think, extraordinary. They were so family oriented; they made sure we had a good time growing up. I think my mother made that number one. She always arranged parties for us for the whole neighborhood; in fact, the kids were always at our house, which I thought was great. I'll never forget all the fun times we had putting on plays and charging a button or pin to get in, a huge, huge pan of popcorn. Yeah, those were the days, but we didn't have any money. It didn't seem to matter because I think we were happier than anyone in the world even though it was hard.

Li: Were both of your parents from Fargo?

1-00:01:57
Nelson:

My mother came to Fargo to work in a laundry when she was about twenty or so, but she came from Minnesota. She was born near Fergus Falls, and her father was a cavalryman in the service of this country during the Indian wars, and he was a scout. He went out with his horse and scouted for the enemy. And if there was a noise, at nighttime his horse would wake him up.

Li: Wow. So your mother grew up in a military family—

1-00:02:36
Nelson:

Well, yes, I guess you can say that, although I think he was in only maybe three or four years during the Civil War time. But they lived in a little farm in Minnesota, and I understand it was a dirt floor. They were very poor, didn't always have shoes. But they were a wonderful family. I loved all her sisters and brothers. And a family that has that many relatives I think is pretty lucky.

Li: Was your father from North Dakota?

1-00:03:16

Nelson: Actually, my father's family came from England, made their way across country to Indiana and eventually came to North Dakota. My father was born just outside of Fargo on a farm. His grandparents on his mother's side were from Sweden. They came to this country from Sweden, bringing a family of five children. They had dairy cows. My Dad's father married one of the girls, Millie. They had two little girls and my Dad. A horrible epidemic came across the country and took the lives of Millie and the two little girls.

Li: Oh, my God.

1-00:03:56

Nelson: My Grandfather left Dad with the maternal Grandparents to raise and he left for the West coast a few years later when Dad was about thirteen. Dad never saw him again.

Li: Wow.

1-00:04:12

Nelson: So his Grandparents raised him, and he spoke Swedish his first six years or more until he went to school, I guess. He was confirmed in Swedish and he later came to Fargo, and that's where he met my mother.

Li: Wow. Did you speak Swedish growing up at all?

1-00:04:39

Nelson: No, I never heard a word of Swedish. He seems to change. He took on English, and I really couldn't even hear, unless— that area is full of Norwegians and Swedes and up north is a lot of German communities, so we were used to accents. I guess I might not have even noticed it in him because I couldn't tell.

Li: What year were you born?

1-00:05:02

Nelson: '21.

Li: '21? And what day?

1-00:05:06

Nelson: December 2.

Li: You were born in Fargo?

1-00:05:11

Nelson: Um hm

Li: Were you born at home?

1-00:05:16

Nelson:

Yes, and they put me in a rocking chair, made a bed in the rocking chair because the place was so small I understand, where I was born. My sisters were six and eight when I was born, so I was kind of a straggler. I had a wonderful place in the family, but I was always the little one.

Li:

What was your full name when you were born? What was your given name?

1-00:05:43

Nelson:

It was Marion Louise Corey.

Li:

So can you tell me a little bit about your childhood in Fargo?

1-00:05:56

Nelson:

Um hm. I don't remember the house where I was born. I don't think they had electricity or any plumbing there. We moved across town to a house Mother rented, because Daddy was always driving a team, working, and taking merchandise all the way around Fargo right then. That was his job before the trucks took over. But we moved to that house, and it was a big house that she rented for \$25 a month, but the thing was it was big enough so they could put a wooden partition in the downstairs so she could rent out the front. And that way she could get the rent down to \$10 a month. She was very wise in how she managed things because there wasn't much money.

Li:

Yeah.

1-00:07:03

Nelson:

Then we had the upstairs for the bedrooms. So it was really small. We had a pot-bellied stove in the dining area, and that was our dining-living room and everything, and a little tiny kitchen. She made our meals on a little kerosene stove; you know the kind that had a big gallon tank at the end? You turned it over and all, and then the kerosene run down to the burners. She cooked all our meals on those two burners while we were there and washed the clothes. I don't think she had a washing machine there, I don't recall.

Li:

So did you girls grow up helping a lot around the—

1-00:07:44

Nelson:

My older sisters really were a help to her. They scraped all the old paper off the walls, and bought new rolls of wallpaper and brought them home and fixed sawhorses and put a door on it so they could roll it up and put all the paste on it. I was just too small to get involved with it, so I saw a lot going on, but I never was involved in the work. I was lucky. They did it all.

Li:

Where did you go to school?

1-00:08:22

Nelson:

I went to a really nice brick school in Fargo. It was maybe a couple blocks away. But I grew up very independent. When first day of school came, Mom

said, “Get up; you’re going to school today.” So I got into my clothes, and she gave me three cents for a bottle of milk and sent me off, and I just went to school. She said, “Go by and get Frances. She’s ready to go, too,” —the one that lived right in the front of our house—“so take her with you.” So that’s what I did. I took her, and we went to school. They put me in first grade and put her in kindergarten.

Li: How big was the school?

1-00:09:06

Nelson: It was quite a big school. I can’t tell you, it took up a half a block, maybe. It was kind of big because it served the whole of South Fargo. [stop tape]

Li: We were talking about your schooling in Fargo. Do you remember any favorite teachers from—?

1-00:09:28

Nelson: I do. I had a music teacher—of course, I was all into music or art all the way through school—but a music teacher who was so beautiful; I’ll never forget her. I don’t know what she got, but she died. And Mother took me to the funeral. I can still see her; I was just so sad. Then, later on in life, I had a teacher—we moved to the North Side at the middle of my junior high days so I was about twelve or thirteen I guess. I was just out of elementary school, and I had this other teacher named Miss Schroeder. In the junior high I had been in I got to where it seemed so boring compared to where I’d been for six years, and I began to daydream. Then when I moved to the north end, I went to a school that was *so* much friendlier and so much nicer, and the girls were just great. I began to have more friends, but I still was looking out the window, daydreaming. So, of course, she asked me a question, and I had no idea what it was she was talking about. I thought she’s never going to do that to me again. So we had a test—I remember this so clearly—and she put my paper back down on my desk—she gave us all our tests to look at—she said, “I thought you were hiding your light under a bushel.” [laughs] And I had a ninety-something on it, and so I just did better all the way through high school. I made National Honor Society, but I was mostly—yeah, I loved all the subjects but I mostly spent my time in the art room because I took an art course. I took three years of art and two hours a day; so that was my— But I did love the choir, the a capella choir and the glee club and all that. That was my life.

Li: So when you were in high school what were your aspirations for your future? Did you have an idea?

1-00:12:05

Nelson: Yes, I wanted to go to art school, or I wanted to go to California and work for Disney.

Li: Would you go to the movies very often growing up?

1-00:12:16

Nelson:

We did when we lived on the North Side, and especially after Mother had a heart attack, a very, very, bad thing for us. My sisters were already married and having their families, and I was thirteen or fourteen. She had this terrible heart attack. So she was in bed almost all the time I was a teenager. But I didn't mind at all. I just made sure I got home real early, and I was with her and remembered her pills and stuff. I wasn't even thinking about other things that the house needed because I was in school all day, but just so I was home with her. What was the question?

Li:

Oh, just going to see movies.

1-00:13:06

Nelson:

Yes, when I turned fifteen she talked to Dad and said, "I want you to teach Marion to drive because then we can get out and get our groceries and go to the movies or something when we want to." And we did—we saw "Gone with the Wind" when it came out, and "Gaslight," I'll never forget that. And we went to—it was the Fargo Theater. Those were such good movies, and we did do it then when I could drive.

Li:

So you had dreams of becoming an art school—becoming an illustrator for Disney?

1-00:13:45

Nelson:

I did. But they didn't come true. [laughs] I've taken a lot of classes since, college courses and stuff, but I never did attend a college. Right after I graduated I went to school to become a stenographer. So I did do some work in a lawyer's office at one time, \$10 a week. But it was my first job, and I loved it. Then after that I got a job—the week I got married I got a job working at a department store, at D'Lendrecie's Department Store in Fargo, a really upscale neat store, in the baby department. That was so much fun, I loved it.

Li:

So do you remember the Market Crash, because you would have been eight?

1-00:14:53

Nelson:

About eight or so, in '29, I was born in '21.

Li:

So you do remember that happening?

1-00:14:53

Nelson:

You know what? I remember it being talked about, but we didn't know the difference.

Li:

Why, because you didn't have a lot?

1-00:15:03

Nelson:

We didn't have anything to lose, but I heard about people jumping out of the windows in New York and stuff, and I couldn't quite figure it out. Of course, I

don't think I could back then. But it didn't affect our life any at all. We were just poor all the time, it seemed like.

Li: The Depression didn't make a huge difference.

1-00:15:26

Nelson: No, it might have been harder because we were a little older, but it probably has made it harder on my older sisters, too, because they were in the work force and everything then, or tried to get in. My sister couldn't find work for a long time. But she loved to sew, so she was at the machine, the pedal machine, the Singer, and the cat in her lap, making my clothes, which was great. But they both finally got a job in Fargo, even [though] it was cleaning homes for the people that worked. But I think it would have been the same whether it crashed or not, I really do.

Li: Were your parent very political? Did they discuss politics?

1-00:16:10

Nelson: No, but I love it. I love it now. No, when we finally got a radio, Mother really didn't enjoy it because she wanted it quiet. She was so used to no telephone, nothing, no noises at all in the house. She could cook and iron and do all her work, and she loved it that way. So Daddy and I had to turn it really low and get our ears up to hear President Roosevelt's fireside chats. That was exciting; that's about the only politics I knew was Roosevelt; and everybody, of course, thought he was "it."

Li: Yeah. Would your father talk to you about what had been on the radio, or would you just listen together?

1-00:17:02

Nelson: We listened together. We also listened to the boxing matches, way back. I think Jack Dempsey was already through, but we heard Max Baer and Joe Lewis, and all that stuff, and we were just big fans. So that's the time when Daddy and I kind of had a chance to be together; on some days we did that. I was trying to figure out if I really had a chance to vote for Roosevelt because his third term—I think that the election was, of course, November 4 as always. But I didn't turn twenty-one until December, so I might have just missed that one.

Li: Oh, right.

1-00:17:51

Nelson: I always wished I would have—

Li: Yeah, had a chance to vote for Roosevelt. Did a lot of your friends do stenography programs or other type of things when you went to high school? Was that pretty common?

1-00:18:10

Nelson: Um hm.

Li: Most girls your age figured they would work?

1-00:18:19

Nelson: Yes, I think so. I was the first to marry.

Li: How did you meet your husband?

1-00:18:24

Nelson: Well, he worked at a little mom and pop store. Of course, we were pretty young, and I was in high school. I think after I graduated in January of '39 I began to see him more at work. Then he got to know me, and he realized my dad was gone all week and came home only maybe Tuesdays and Thursdays and then had to be gone again until Sunday. In the middle of the winter when it [was a] blizzard we couldn't get out of the house, he knew we needed food. So he'd bring over food to us. We did have a phone then, so we could then order some food, and he'd bring it over. He always brought it to the back door, and we didn't use that door, so he'd have to almost shovel his way. He came in and set it all on the table and visited a while. Then the phone would ring, and it'd be his boss saying, "Hey, what are you doing?"

Li: He knew where he was?

1-00:19:32

Nelson: Yeah, he was drinking coffee and having cookies with me and Mom.

Li: And your dad was away doing deliveries.

1-00:19:40

Nelson: Well, yes, by then they had semi trucks, and they'd gone through the strike, which was very important back when I was, I guess, twelve or thirteen.

Li: What do you remember about that?

1-00:19:51

Nelson: Oh, it was exciting. Oh, conditions were terrible. When Daddy'd come home he hadn't shaved or hadn't had a place to bathe, just drove all the hours he could. He'd tell us that sometimes when he got home he'd just would have seen animals, trees or something bending over along the road. They just had no hours to tend to them, had to get the stuff where it was going. So by then he was driving for the Midnight Express, and he had three trips to cities and back—that's Minneapolis and St. Paul—each week. So he was sleeping there and then coming back and forth three times. That's pretty much on the road for good, even through winter and all.

Li: Wow. Typically now drivers own their own trucks, but did he own—he drove a truck owned by the company?

1-00:20:51

Nelson: No, it was always other companies. What was I going to say now?

Li: So the strike.

1-00:20:55

Nelson: Oh, the strike, yes. Conditions were so bad they began to gather downtown at a meeting and talk about what they were going to do about it. I remember one time it was Sunday afternoon and we were playing—we played cards a lot because the winter was long. And I think it was the minister that came and told us the police had gone in with billy clubs and taken over the meeting and taken a lot of the men to jail. I remember those card tables just got all folded up and put away so fast that— because we didn't know what to do. Our dad in jail?

Li: What year was this?

1-00:21:47

Nelson: I'd say maybe '34 or '35, maybe a little earlier than that. I don't think I remember the year.

Li: Was he part of a union or trying to form a union?

1-00:22:00

Nelson: Yes, it was the Teamsters Union forming it right there, yes. So they ended up in jail, and one of my girlfriends' father was in jail also, and a whole group of men. The thing was that all their names were printed in the *Fargo Forum* when it happened, and then when we went to school the next day we didn't know what to think. Everybody knew Daddy and her dad was in jail. But our minister was just so great. I loved that man. He went and bailed them out, brought them home.

Li: Were you Lutheran? Did he go to Lutheran Church?

1-00:22:51

Nelson: Yeah.

Li: So did your father end up joining the union?

1-00:22:57

Nelson: Oh, yes, he was the one that got it together, one of the beginning of it. When he retired he drew Check No. 1 from the union, Teamsters Union. Yeah, Dad worked so hard for that pension and decent hours so they could have their life.

Li: Was it scary when your father was doing that work—?

1-00:23:23

Nelson: Yes, and then they all had to go to court. Well, my dad and my sister Helen went to court all the time. Some of it they had to laugh about and some of it

wasn't funny. But they came out—and the town was all upset because of one of the workers, who was really poor and desperate and working to get these things changed, committed suicide. And the church was just filled. It filled to where it cracked.

Li: So was there a lot of community support, then, for the organizing of the union?

1-00:23:58
Nelson:

Yeah, there was.

Li: Would your father talk about this work at home, union organizing, or you just knew it was happening because—

1-00:24:15
Nelson:

No, I just knew he went to the meetings, but we didn't talk about it at all at home, except I remember them talking about their going to court—I was in school, of course and didn't get in on that.

Li: Did your husband you date; did you have time to date?

1-00:24:35
Nelson:

We did. We couldn't go very much, but we went to movies and got back soon so Mom wouldn't be home alone. One time he came over to, just came over to visit me I guess, and we were both sick. We were both in bed, and he just felt terrible. So before we knew it he went in the back room and pulled out a cot, and he stayed there overnight and took care of us. I thought that was really sweet of him. He kind of liked my family a lot, and they liked him, so we just went together.

Li: How old were you when you got engaged?

1-00:25:23
Nelson:

Let's see. I was, I guess, seventeen.

Li: Was that pretty young among your group of friends?

1-00:25:31
Nelson:

Yeah, it was.

Li: Were your parents supportive of that?

1-00:25:36
Nelson:

Yeah. His too. It was all really nice.

Li: And did you get married in Fargo?

1-00:25:43
Nelson:

Um-hmm, right at the same church there. We all got baptized there and confirmed there and married there. Yes we did.

Li: You mentioned in one of your books that your husband warned you that it was going to be a life of travel to be with him. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

1-00:26:04

Nelson: Yes. Keep your ditty bag packed.

Li: Now, what's a ditty bag?

1-00:26:07

Nelson: It's just a little bag, smaller than a duffle bag, but just their bag that they take with them with their shaving stuff and everything in it.

Li: Because he was in the Reserves or something?

1-00:26:19

Nelson: Well, he was in the Reserves, but he was on active duty. We were married in September, and the 164th Infantry was called to active federal duty in February. But in between there was Pearl Harbor.

Li: Right.

1-00:26:51

Nelson: So that made all the difference in the world. We knew he would go back. I remember listening to that announcement and the President speaking on the radio; we were all huddled around the radio to listen to that.

Li: Is that where you first heard of Pearl Harbor? On the radio?

1-00:27:10

Nelson: Um-hmm. So all of the men in Fargo that were in the National Guard had to get down to the Armory then, in February, when they were called up. I had to go see Quentin down there, and then we told them goodbye when they went. So all of 164th Infantry left for Camp Claiborne, Louisiana.

Li: Were you planning on staying at Fargo then at that time?

1-00:27:51

Nelson: Um-hmm, and I did stay there with my parents. They were just wonderful to us always through the war. Otherwise, I don't know what I'd have done then for a place to stay.

Li: What year was your first child born?

1-00:28:04

Nelson: In '42.

Li: In '42.

1-00:28:09

Nelson:

So he went to Camp Claiborne and trained with them. They were already bonded then as a group, and there they got to be a real close knit Army battalion. So I went in March; I got on the train with another army wife, a Captain's wife. My husband was a Corporal then. She was having a baby, so the Captain asked Quentin if I would go with them down there because she was expecting a baby.

Li:

This is March 1942?

1-00:28:52

Nelson:

This was in '41.

Li:

Forty-one, okay. Were you pregnant at that time?

1-00:28:59

Nelson:

No.

Li:

So then you went down to Camp Claiborne?

1-00:29:04

Nelson:

Um-hmm.

Li:

Was that the first time you've been out of North Dakota?

1-00:29:10

Nelson:

Well, we had traveled maybe up to Minnesota and to Duluth, and around wherever there were places we could. We didn't always have a car, but we did do some traveling, but just around the Northwest there.

Li:

How did you feel about going to Louisiana?

1-00:29:26

Nelson:

I really didn't figure it out at all; I just knew I was going to go. I guess you just kind of go with the flow. [laughs] That's where he was; that's where I was supposed to be.

Li:

Where did you live when you got there?

1-00:29:44

Nelson:

Well, when we got there the man had three— [tape interrupted]

Li:

We were talking about your move to Camp Claiborne. I was asking where you were going to live.

1-00:29:55

Nelson:

Oh, yes. The men had looked for a house, and they rented a house that had two bedrooms. But, of course, there were three couples of us. But guess what? Of course, the Captain got one and the Lieutenant got one, and we slept on the couch.

Li: Was your husband living on the base, and you were in a house with the other wives?

1-00:30:18

Nelson: Yeah.

Li: Was that going to be a permanent situation for while you were there?

1-00:30:28

Nelson: Well, I think we knew nothing was permanent. You just knew that you're going to do that, and then you would be going on. I don't think from then on I ever knew what I was going to do. You just got orders, and you did it. But we got along fine. The Colonel's wife was a young—well, she was older than I was; everybody was older than I was because I was nineteen then. She needed someone to help her get settled in her house because she was expecting a baby. It was the Colonel's second wife. He had grown daughters. So they made arrangements for me to go over and help her, which I was happy to do because I needed some money. The Corporal's pay was \$54 a month, and the house was \$75 a month, so we were in desperate need all the time. So I went to help her, and it was so much fun. One day we were washing the Colonel's ties with some other clothes, and she had some bright red beautiful underclothes and washed it. She put them in the same tub to take them out to the line to get them dry—we didn't have dryers, of course, or anything—and after they'd been there for a little bit she went to hang them out and the Colonel's ties were all red polka dots on it.

Li: Oh, no.

1-00:32:08

Nelson: Oh, they were newly married, and she really had a fit. What was the Colonel going to say when he came home from work? So we thought it over, and she said, "Have you any idea what would work?" And I said, "All I know is bleach. Mother used to use bleach." She said, "Well, we have to do something." So she got her bleach out, and we made tin of bleached water and put the ties in there and just stood for a while. But they began to take the red out, and pretty soon they were just fine. So we rinsed them out, and she dried them and got the ironing board up after we'd lined her cupboards and put all that stuff away, and I was up there on a chair doing that when the Colonel came home. He thought I was just something. He said, "I don't know if my daughters could do that." And it's the first time I'd ever done it, but didn't let him know it. We had a good time that day, I just loved her, and I did a few things for her. But anyway she was ironing them when he came home and laying a few over the ironing board. It did look good. He said, "Man, you girls did a good job on my ties. Thank you." [laughs]

Li: How long were you in Louisiana for?

1-00:33:40

Nelson: Well, we were there about from February until the end—they went on maneuvers, I think, in September or something like that. So it was through the whole summer.

Li: And maneuvers, what does that mean?

1-00:33:55

Nelson: They mean they go on out and practice war.

Li: And where were they going to go to do that?

1-00:34:01

Nelson: They had huge areas, just like right here at Ft. Lewis; they have a huge firing range, or they practiced right out there in a wooded area.

Li: Did your husband have any idea where he would be going?

1-00:34:22

Nelson: No.

Li: After Louisiana where did you go from there?

1-00:34:26

Nelson: Well, we went up to Fargo; well, actually we went up home on leave and spent a little time with the parents. Then we went back down to Camp Claiborne, and there were his discharge papers. Right then it just happened to be a little short time before they actually got mobilized that they let married soldiers out. So we were in shock. We got down there, and we got on a bus and came right back home because he was discharged. So he spent—he had a broken time—he had some time at Fargo then and we had our children then after that.

Li: So he was home when—?

1-00:35:17

Nelson: So he was home until '43 I think or so; I have to think about those days. And then it's that time that we took the babies and went down to Nebraska. And that's when I worked in the war plant.

Li: What prompted you to go down to Nebraska?

1-00:35:36

Nelson: Well, I'll tell you, his outfit then went without him to the Pacific, and our Fargo Forum was filled with some men [weeps].

Li: So you were saying that while your husband was inactive the rest of his comrades were sent to the Pacific.

1-00:36:14

Nelson:

Yes, and that hurt him so bad; he just wasn't himself. He wanted to go with them. When the *Fargo Forum* came out they listed all the men from the 164th that were killed, and among them were everyone he knew. And they were my school chums. And the one boy, Bernard Starkenberg, had married a young girl that I'd met down in Louisiana, and she was eighteen and pregnant. She and I and the lady who owned a car got together, and I was the only driver then. So I drove this neat little coupe up, and the other two—we three went home together. So I'd gotten to know her then, too, because I knew her husband from school. He was one of the first ones killed when they landed in Guadalcanal. Then all the others we knew, too, because they were National Guard, and we'd spent time with them down there. So it was really bad. And it went on and on and on and on. They were taken prisoners over there, what was left, and kept for four or five years by the Japanese. So later on when my husband went we girls were close, of course.

Li:

In this time when your husband was not in the military, what did he do for work?

1-00:38:02

Nelson:

He worked at a company that made cookies and things, a bakery, really a huge bakery. But he couldn't concentrate, so he signed up to go down to the war plant, the munitions plant in Nebraska. He went, and we stayed there at Mother's, the two babies and I, at Mom and Dad upstairs. It was a little apartment, and we could stay there anytime. So that's where we were. He went down, got the job, found a place to live, and came back up and got us.

Li:

Was he really motivated because he wanted to just be a part of—?

1-00:38:46

Nelson:

I think he couldn't control it; he just had to go, so we went with him. It was in the middle of winter; I think it was in December we went down, yes, because it was almost Christmas time. We got all packed up in the car and told the folks goodbye and left. When we got down almost to our destination in Hastings, it was just misting and the highway froze. There was about twenty cars went off the road, including us. Our car slid across the road; thank goodness it didn't hit anybody. It hit a little tree and landed on the side. I bumped my head pretty bad and had kind of a concussion for a few hours. But people stopped by and got us all out of our cars and took us into this little town, and they put us up for the night. They found a home for each family. They took the children, and Quentin had climbed out where the door opened on the top then. It landed this way, and so he got up there, and I lifted Connie up to him. She was fine.

Li:

How old was she?

1-00:40:20

Nelson: She was about—Roger was three months, and she was just thirteen months older. They were both small.

Li: Two little babies.

1-00:40:30

Nelson: Yeah. The baby was in a bunting, and we had a neat little place to put him right behind us, and then I could get him when I needed to and all. I heard him cry, or I wouldn't have known where he was. But his bunting had hooked on the steering wheel, and he was crying and wanted out of there, so—

[tape interrupted]

Li: You were saying that Roger was just hanging from the steering wheel and—?

1-00:40:59

Nelson: Yes, and so I got him out and saw he was fine and lifted him up to his dad. That's when people were already coming to help us. But that's how people are. They just helped each other back in those days. So next day we were there in Hastings Nebraska—the place he'd found to rent was the caretaker of the cemetery. They had a big house, and their family was all gone already. There were all kinds of people coming down to work in the war plant. A lot of people rented out, but we had room and board there, so we ate with them, and we slept in the big bedroom upstairs.

Li: How did you come to work at the factory?

1-00:41:56

Nelson: Well, I of course was at home. I wanted to be with the babies; I just loved that. Then the lady there began to love them, too. She had, I think, a couple of grandchildren, but they were not getting along. She didn't see them, and I think she was just so happy to have those kids. Quentin went right back to work and got out there when we arrived again, I didn't start for a while. Then she said, "I know you guys need—." It's hard; we were making pretty good money but not a lot, and of course we had to pay our room and board. So she said, "If you'd like to work, that's fine. I'll have the babies." Because I worked the midnight shift then, and—actually she didn't have them that much.

Li: Right.

1-00:42:58

Nelson: Because I was at home during the day and Quentin came home, and then I left. Or I left just a little before that. So that worked out quite well. It was heavy work, though, and I was—

Li: When did you sleep?

1-00:43:14

Nelson:

Well, I slept during the day I guess, or whatever. I just slept when I got home and slept in. I suppose she helped in the morning. I can't remember all the details any more. But it was looking fine.

Li:

What was an average day like for you at that time?

1-00:43:30

Nelson:

Well, I went to work at 4:00 in the afternoon or something like that on a bus, and it was a few miles outside of town, of course. They took us right up to the building where we worked. We had to go through the gate and show ID and all. So the first place I worked was a great big warehouse where they brought in empty cases of bombs and rockets and warheads and all sorts. And they have to all be cleaned because they'd come in grease, and they had threads. We had to—some of the smaller—I'm not sure what they called those smaller ones, about like this and about this round. We had to use solvent. The whole thing went in the solvent and then we cleaned all the threads. There were five of us at a table, and they ran into maybe, oh I don't know, a lot, every night. Then they were boxed up sometimes and sent out to have something else done to them somewhere else. And some rockets, I think, were already boosted when they went out. Do you remember after the war they had those vacuum cleaners that were round, and then they got a little smaller here, and they put on the hose here? That was shells that were really originally rockets.

Li:

Oh, they were repurposed to vacuum cleaners?

1-00:45:10

Nelson:

Yeah. But at the time—(this was in another place that I worked, too) still at night shift—we brought in cases that were rockets, but they were painted—it was awful—it was a pretty lavender color. They'd be kind of chipped up and messed up. So when I came there there was two sisters that would go out to the paint shop—it was a little ways out, of course—and try to mix paint to match them. Of course, that was right down my alley, and I said, "Well, you need more of this or that." So that became my job. I mixed the paint to fix up all the bomb cases that came in.

Then, of course, every night about close to 11:00 o'clock or so we had to walk all the way down the track—this was a small car track—to work in the cooling bay because that's where you got your hazard pay. You each had to take your turn going down there and working this dangerous spot.

Li:

What would happen in the cooling bay, what was—?

1-00:46:35

Nelson:

Well, in the cooling bay—well, when they left case prep, where we prepared them, they went on a car on the track, and they went to where they there was a filling, fill house, and up above was a great big vat of a mixture of dynamite and all sorts of other things to make it even more explosive, Torpax. Then it

came down the funnel and filled whatever there was, whatever kind of munition they wanted to do, whatever kind of rocket or type it was, it was filled with that.

Li: With that same compound?

1-00:47:16

Nelson: Um-hmm. Well I guess. And, of course, the dynamite was stored all the way out, and some people had to work out there, too, in the dynamite, and they turned yellow. They had to stop after a few weeks from the dynamite.

Li: Oh, my gosh.

1-00:47:34

Nelson: And get away from it for a while, and then they can go back and work in it. But I never did that. That's all I saw; it was when it was going down. Then we went on down further to the cooling bay because that stuff's hot when it's put in there. It's just like a big soup. So down there we couldn't wear pins or anything metal on us, of course; we couldn't—you didn't want any sparks. Then they were all laid in rows and piled up sometimes, sometimes not, because the big Navy mines were, oh, as long as the couch, black, and quite big around. And they were warm, so you had to clean everything all out just there, too, and markings; everywhere we went we had to get out the—what do you call that when you have all the markings on this and you paint it on?

Li: Oh, stencil?

1-00:48:37

Nelson: Stencil, or whatever, and get them all numbered; everything's got to be just perfect for every one before it goes out. Then we had—actually most of them, I think they went to the British Air Force where they dropped them, kind of big green ones. Once they were ready to get on the boxcar we rolled them over to the boxcar, and then they had a board where we could roll them right onto the car, the boxcar. That's where they loaded them up for them to ship out to get radios or whatever else needed to be done with them. They'd do that some other place. But we loaded them on the—I helped spot them in there a couple times. But I have claustrophobia, and I just really couldn't continue to do that.

Li: Getting into the boxcar?

1-00:49:35

Nelson: Yeah. But men and women both. There was a big forklift in there that my husband used during the daytime to load them and hook on to them and take them in the boxcar and get them lined up in there to be shipped out.

Li: So were you nervous during this last hour of the day doing this kind of—?

1-00:49:59
Nelson: Well, I guess I didn't think about it enough, and I knew we had to be careful. It was wintertime, and so what we had to do, when we did get done with it, we laid down on those big Navy mines that were cooling and stayed warm. And we tried to sleep a little.

Li: You'd take a nap on the big ones because they were warm, and it was cold.

1-00:50:30
Nelson: Yeah.

Li: Wow.

1-00:50:33
Nelson: Then we'd walk back down to case prep and shower. We had to all shower before we left.

Li: Because of the chemicals you were dealing with?

1-00:50:43
Nelson: Um hm. Then we got on the bus and came home. I remember I was so tired, sometimes I thought, "I wonder where our home is," [laughs] because I had those little kids and I don't think I was really recuperated enough.

Li: Did you have a uniform that you wore at work?

1-00:51:04
Nelson: We had regular—

Li: Jumpsuits?

1-00:51:04
Nelson: Yeah, jumpsuits on, and had to have the right shoes and everything. We couldn't wear any shoes with any metals—

Li: Did you wear face masks?

1-00:51:12
Nelson: No.

Li: Was it typical that people would have a shift that would be split between the regular work and the hazard work?

1-00:51:22
Nelson: Yes.

Li: So everybody would do some of the hazard work.

1-00:51:25
Nelson: Yes.

Li: And men and women it, didn't matter—

1-00:51:27

Nelson: No, it was all the same. It was mostly men driving the forklifts, but I did see one lady who did it for a while. But everybody did the same work.

Li: Was it pretty evenly divided between men and women who worked at the factory?

1-00:51:44

Nelson: Um-hmm.

Li: Were most of the men, like your husband, married men who were decommissioned for the time—

1-00:51:51

Nelson: Pardon?

Li: Were most of the men who were there, like your husband—?

1-00:51:54

Nelson: Waiting to be called back? In fact, there was one man worked there who had been to war and was already back and gone to work in the plant. There might have been more of them, too, but otherwise they were just people they recruited all around the Midwest.

Li: Did you talk about what you were making, what it was meant for and—?

1-00:52:16

Nelson: Well, we knew what they were meant for and all, but we really didn't talk about it, no. We were busy working, just when we had breaks. No, we really didn't. We did the work, then we didn't think about it anymore, I guess, once we had a little free time. But then I'd ride the bus home, and, of course, I had to walk along the cemetery in the night and get to my door, and get upstairs and get in the bed.

Li: Was the cemetery, was it eerie, particularly because of what you had been doing during your work shift?

1-00:52:55

Nelson: Was it eerie?

Li: Yeah.

1-00:52:56

Nelson: Well, I got used to it, of course, but the first few times I didn't like being out there in the dark, nobody around at midnight, 2:00 in the morning. But our landlady had a little dog, and mostly I feared getting in the door, evading that little dog. But I got used to her, too.

Li: So work very social, did people—?

1-00:53:22

Nelson: Yeah, we got to be quite friendly. Well, then as we worked there, I went on the day shift finally. The landlady suggested I go on the day shift; she could see I was worn out, and both of us were worn out. They tried to do everything to help get all that done in that community. So I went to work with him, and that was very nice. We just worked in different various spots wherever they needed us, the same for both of us. Only he drove the forklift, so he was usually in the cooling bay. We went home, and that night in the middle of the night the house just shook; it just shook until we knew—of course, we knew. All the lights went on in the town, it seemed like, and the phone was ringing. So we didn't know—we were told; I don't know how we got told that we couldn't get in the area until about two days maybe. They wouldn't let us go out there. So then when we heard we could go back to work, we went out on the bus and got in through the gate. They drove us by our workplace, a great big crater in the ground. We saw parts of the forklift; and we saw the devastation. It was awful. It destroyed that whole building completely and took out the windows of all the—because there was a line that went that way and a line that went that way. So it was the one we worked in that was gone. We didn't know then how many people were killed. The one that escaped was the one that had come back from war, and he knew how to get to the bomb shelter. He did that, he got in the shelter and he saved himself.

Li: Wow. What happened? Did they know what happened?

1-00:55:42

Nelson: No.

Li: How terrible.

1-00:55:46

Nelson: Could have been just a spark. So we went to work. They had another line all set up just like the one we worked in, and all the windows were gone out of it, too. Everything was broken. So we went to work sweeping glass and tried to get that one going. I remember while we were doing that in that new line, they were setting off all the duds—they didn't even realize it—so when we went by it and got out and looked, we were told later not to go over there at all anymore because they were getting the duds out and taking them a ways away and firing them so that they could get rid of them. So we heard that going on. That's about the only time I was jumpy, I think.

Li: Oh, my God.

1-00:56:47

Nelson: But you have to do it. It had to be done.

Li: You know, a lot of the Rosie's I've talked to have said that they signed up for work at the factories for money; the pay was good, and—

1-00:57:00

Nelson: Yeah, it was better than what we had.

Li: Then some others said they were motivated because they just wanted to be a part of the war effort.

1-00:57:06

Nelson: Right, absolutely, number one.

Li: Were both of those things that at play for you?

1-00:57:09

Nelson: Yes. And I lost a dear friend I'd made there. And what bothered me so much was her two sons were in Europe in the war, and that really bothered me.

Li: You lost her in the explosion.

1-00:57:29

Nelson: Yeah. There were about eleven that died there that night. But I don't think anybody ever knew about it. Every time I speak about it, they listen, but I don't know if they just thought it was—I don't know, they couldn't connect with it here. They were victims of war every bit as much.

Begin Audiofile 2

Li: This is Robin Li speaking with Marion Nelson, January 13, 2012 in Tacoma, Washington, part of the Rosie the Riveter 2010-2012 Project. This is Interview 1, Tape 2. We were just talking about the explosion that happened at the plant you were working at. Do you know, do you remember the name of the plant that you were—?

2-00:00:28

Nelson: Well, all I know is that it was a munitions plant in Hastings, Nebraska, but that's about it. I don't know if it had a name; I think it did.

Li: Were your paychecks coming from a private business, then, that was contracting with the US Government, or—?

2-00:00:46

Nelson: I think so. I didn't pay attention to some of that stuff. I was just so busy, I guess.

Li: Because you were saying that a lot of people don't know about the—

2-00:00:56

Nelson:

Well, they must have all—I know that the government took a lot of land to put this together, and the people did resent that I think, losing their land. Because when I went back much later with—I lived with a neat fellow much later after I had been widowed quite a long time—we went traveling together. They seemed a little bitter when I went back so many years later. They still kind of felt bad about losing their property.

Li:

You just mentioned that a lot of people you speak with are surprised at the sacrifices that people made on the home front as far as the war effort.

2-00:01:42

Nelson:

Oh, absolutely.

Li:

And not just giving up the land, but also the dangerous work that you were doing in the factory, and that these were casualties of the war.

2-00:01:53

Nelson:

Um-hmm, absolutely.

Li:

After that explosion happened, did it give you a different—did you feel differently about your work in term of—

2-00:02:05

Nelson:

No. I know that when we went back the bus was only half full, and they didn't all go back; I think they took off. I don't think it ever came across our minds to do that until he was recalled. We were there when he was called back to active duty, and that's why we left.

Li:

But some people left after the explosion, too.

2-00:02:30

Nelson:

They did, and I don't blame them. If they can't go back, they can't.

Li:

So how long were you working there?

2-00:02:41

Nelson:

Well, Quentin drove down first in October and came for us in Fargo in December. We arrived before Christmas at Hastings. He went back to work right away and I began the night shift in, maybe February. We left for home in July, I believe. So I worked four months—before the explosion and two months after. I remember him coming home waving a letter. "I got it. I got it." Of course my heart sank because I knew he would go straight to war.

Li:

What month was that?

2-00:03:16

Nelson:

I think it maybe September or so he went back into service

Li:

Okay, 19—

2-00:03:25

Nelson: Forty—I got mixed up on my years. I can look it up.

Li:

1944. So at that point he got papers calling him back up—

2-00:03:36

Nelson: Um-hmm.

Li:

Were you guys going back to Louisiana?

2-00:03:41

Nelson: No, we went back to Fargo because that's where the children and I would be living while he was gone. So then in December in fact, right on my birthday again, he left for Europe. He had spent time at Fort Hood, Texas to take refresher courses and came back to Fargo to say good-bye. The children and I came down with chicken pox the next day. Christmas was not very good. He served with the Pennsylvania Keystone Division through the worst winter offensive of the war, the Belgian Bulge. It lasted all winter and the Germans were driven back to Germany. The war ended in May of 1945 and he was still in Germany when that happened.

Li:

He was in the Army?

2-00:04:53

Nelson: Um-hmm. He was in the Infantry.

Li:

How much communication did you have with him during this time when he was in Belgium? Could you write letters and—?

2-00:05:04

Nelson: We did write a few letters, but everything was all cut out, and so when you got it you were glad to know he was alive anyway, but it was just short, and he was talking about—I don't think he meant to tell any secrets—but anything the censors didn't want, they cut it out. So we really didn't get much.

Li:

Did you know where he was at the time?

2-00:05:28

Nelson: Not always. No, I didn't.

Li:

You just knew somewhere in Germany or Belgium that area?

2-00:05:37

Nelson: Um-hmm.

Li:

So would you listen to the radio a lot during this time and follow the—

2-00:05:41

Nelson: I don't remember listening to the radio a lot. I don't know if we got a lot of news or not, but we did see it in the newsreels. We tried to go to some of the

movies to see—go to a movie where we’d see the newsreel, and that’s where I remember seeing most of the action was on the news.

Li: You were living with your parents?

2-00:06:04

Nelson: Um hmm. I went right back to D’Lendrecie’s where I worked and told the boss that I was needing a job really bad because I didn’t get any allotment checks for four months, and mom and dad never asked for money, anyway. But I had to have money. So I went back and told him I needed a job. He said, “Listen, someone’s in the baby department already,” but then we were talking about other things I can do, and he said, “Oh, never mind, come Monday and we’ll put you to work.” So then they figured out where to use me.

Li: Did you feel like there was a lot of support for you as a military wife?

2-00:06:50

Nelson: Well, in my job, yes. And my family. But, well, I think there was a lot of support for me from my folks mainly, and my sisters were my main support. But in the Korean War, nobody knew where Korea was even, so I noticed it there. When I went home again later during the Korean War I found people didn’t know a thing about it.

Li: Wow, that’s amazing.

2-00:07:26

Nelson: It is amazing.

Li: Ten years later that it’s completely different.

2-00:07:32

Nelson: Um-hmm. That’d be about five years later.

Li: So did you have contact with other military wives?

2-00:07:42

Nelson: Not then because—well, I knew the wives in Fargo. And I did, I saw those wives whose men were in the Pacific, but I didn’t know anybody in the Pennsylvania outfit.

Li: I wanted to go back and ask, was the plant that you worked at in Nebraska, was it ethnically diverse, or were they pretty much local people from that area of Nebraska?

2-00:08:20

Nelson: Yeah, I think it was more—I didn’t see anybody, meet anybody from North Dakota, but a lot of them from the surrounding area.

Li: So were they mostly German—

- 2-00:08:33
Nelson: Oh, they all were just plain American; I don't notice that anyway.
- Li: So were there any racial issues at the factory that you know of?
- 2-00:08:43
Nelson: No. No, we were all one back then.
- Li: Were there any African Americans who worked at the factory?
- 2-00:08:44
Nelson: No.
- Li: During this time I know it wasn't much of a factor where you were living, but did you hear about the internment camps and the Japanese Americans on the coast?
- 2-00:09:06
Nelson: Yes, in fact there were German prisoners right across the river in Minnesota that were there from Germany, German prisoners of war.
- Li: Did you ever see them?
- 2-00:09:19
Nelson: No, I never did. But a lot of people did go out there and try to see them and be friendly to them, I think.
- Li: Interesting.
- 2-00:09:27
Nelson: But I never did. I was busy, I guess, with the children—
- Li: So people felt friendly towards the prisoners?
- 2-00:09:36
Nelson: Well, there were some of the girls I think who did. I don't know about anybody else, but you'd be surprised how tolerant people are really. And we don't treat prisoners badly anyway. We shouldn't ever. I've just been worried about the way—you know, Abu Ghraib; I can't understand it.
- Li: Right.
- 2-00:09:59
Nelson: Why justice isn't done.
- Li: Did you read about the internment of Japanese Americans in the newspaper or on the radio?
- 2-00:10:11
Nelson: Yeah. Both.

Li: Did you hear it discussed; did people generally think it was a good idea, or—?

2-00:10:16

Nelson: Well, we just took it. We just thought that, I guess, if the President said that, he'd know what was best. And we didn't know if there was a lot of—we didn't really know if there was reason to distrust them. I guess we just didn't know.

Li: You were very far away.

2-00:10:37

Nelson: I think it's not what we would want done. But in the war everybody did just whatever they had to do. When some of the people in Washington decide that they couldn't trust everybody, I guess that's just it.

Li: How aware were you of what was going on in the Pacific or in Europe in terms of—?

2-00:11:04

Nelson: Well, of course, we watched the Pacific really the most in Fargo because that's where all our young men were. So that was our main thrust.

Li: Were you aware at all of the Nazi Holocaust and the camps—?

2-00:11:24

Nelson: Really not at that time. I can't think that—I think that we heard more and more about it as the war was over. Yeah, I don't really recall knowing that much about it until later.

Li: Yeah. Can you tell me about hearing about the bombing of Hiroshima, where you were and—?

2-00:11:45

Nelson: Well, let me think about that. Well, I'm sure I was at home. I really think others over on the West Coast might have been more concerned about that. I knew it was happening, but I don't think I ever made any decisions of how I felt about it. The war just was going on for me for so long, it seemed like, for all of us, that we were glad to see something bring it to an end. Of course, it was terrible. I don't ever want to have that done again.

Li: Yeah, so did you know—what did it mean for you to hear that the war was over?

2-00:12:32

Nelson: Oh, my gosh. Well, Quentin was still in Europe when the war ended. He ran a displaced persons camp in the Saar until he returned in August of '45. He was back on leave in Fargo where he re-uped and was waiting for a new assignment to the Pacific when Japan surrendered. It was a very happy day in Fargo. The streets were filled with people cheering and dancing.

Li: Really?

2-00:12:50

Nelson: It was all over finally! The crowd frightened me so I went in a taxi home where Mom was watching the children and alone. Quentin had run into some old buddies and they were celebrating all night at the VFW. I didn't blame them. I was so relieved that he didn't need to go to the other war.

Li: How did the war affect your husband? Did he seem different when he came home?

2-00:13:36

Nelson: Um-hmm. Yeah. They're all different. Back then they thought the men were so happy to get home, and then life was just a bowl of cherries or something. It just doesn't happen. I'm glad that Michelle Obama is working on that very thing, and the President, because these people need to come through a whole process when they get back, the same as they do to send them. And make them think about war; that's all they think about when they get back, subconsciously. But you need to help them when they get off the train to come back to this life. They don't know this life anymore.

Li: Was there any support for your husband?

2-00:14:29

Nelson: No.

Li: Did he talk about—?

2-00:14:30

Nelson: Me.

Li: You. Did he talk to you about his experiences there?

2-00:14:33

Nelson: Not really. He did some, and when we went to Germany in '55, when he went back—he went back to almost the same place where he was when he ended up the war. He was a Sergeant then. In fact, some time during the Bulge they had offered him a battlefield commission because he was a really bright Sergeant that had control of the company when the first lieutenants would lose their lives and it was his duty to step up and do their work. It happened so much to him he just didn't want to be a lieutenant I guess, so he didn't take it. But he was really an infantry man clear through, and I think that when they're so dedicated—and most of them are—it's hard to be then dedicated to your family and your everyday life.

Li: Did he stay in touch with his friends—?

2-00:15:46

Nelson: Um-hmm. Not maybe from World War II, but from Korea he did, and all the way through.

Li: So what made him decide to stay in the military after the war?

2-00:15:58

Nelson: That was his life.

Li: So but even before the war was that the career he intended for himself or—?

2-00:16:04

Nelson: I don't know how much he thought of it before. His mother had to sign for him to go into the National Guard to begin with, and so he must have wanted to do that for some reason, because he was a farm boy. He was just dedicated.

Li: So right after World War II ended did you stay in Fargo, the four of you?

2-00:16:34

Nelson: Well, for a short time. He had orders, and he had to get a new assignment. But he had a little time with us in Fargo, and we were living upstairs at Mother's again, of course. Then he had to go to Ft. Lewis to see where he was going to be assigned for good. So in the middle of the winter he got stuck in a blizzard and all sorts of things getting out here, but he got out there. Then they sent him all the way over to Camp Lee, Virginia, because they didn't have any places available. So he went all the way over there, and he still didn't have an assignment. I was just so—I'd been there waiting and waiting with the children, and so I just wrote him that I was going to come and join him in Virginia.

So I did. I got on a train with those two kids—I think they were about two and three then? And there wasn't a place to sit down. The war was just over; everybody was traveling, and there were servicemen, and there was no place to sit down. So they all, each one took the kids and squished over and let me sit with them. That's how we started our trip to Virginia.

Li: Oh, wow. So then you guys were in Virginia for how long?

2-00:18:19

Nelson: One day, two days? He had orders when I got there for New Orleans. So we got in a car and drove to New Orleans. When we got there, the Army and civilians, too, that worked for the Army, took the housing that was the Higgins Shipyards, where they made all the ships down on the harbor, and all that housing was turned over to the Army. So we lived there and he was signed up to Camp Leroy Johnson right on Lake Pontchartrain.

Li: Is that where you stayed until he went back to war?

- 2-00:19:08
Nelson: We stayed there for almost two, from beginning of '46, I think, until '48.
- Li: What happened in '48?
- 2-00:19:25
Nelson: We were transferred to El Paso, Texas.
- Li: And how long were you there?
- 2-00:19:33
Nelson: We were there until he went to Korea in 1950.
- Li: The outbreak of World War II is so huge in American history. The American involvement in the Korean War is much less well known. Can you tell me about what you remember of that war starting and—?
- 2-00:20:00
Nelson: Well, yes. We knew it was going on since about '49, I think. He was in the Engineers then, he'd switched from infantry to the Engineers, and so he went over I think with the 159th Engineers or something like that. And he'd made all good friends and buddies there. So my mother and dad took the train, down there to get us, me and the children. We had bought a trailer because there was no housing, and we bought a brand new 30-foot trailer. Dad was, of course, the truck driver; it was right down his alley. And we had a Fraser car, and so he pulled that trailer up home to their place in their back yard while he was in Korea. But we enjoyed living at Ft. Bliss. It' a nice place to live. We lived on the post in our RV, in our trailer, with a lot of other Army people, and the kids found nice friends there and everything, some they had for years.
- Li: How long were you at Ft. Bliss?
- 2-00:21:27
Nelson: We were at Ft. Bliss two years.
- Li: From '48 to '50?
- 2-00:21:28
Nelson: Well, we were there twice so sometimes I get them mixed up, but we must have—I can't figure out that time frame now. But I guess he left from there the first time quite soon because left in '50.
- Li: What was it like to live on base?
- 2-00:22:06
Nelson: I liked it. I liked it.
- Li: Did you have much interaction with non-military families or—?

2-00:22:14

Nelson: We did.

Li: Did your children attend school on base?

2-00:22:27

Nelson: Yes, they did attend kindergarten and first grade on the base our first assignment there, but the second tour at Fort Bliss they attended public schools in El Paso. Later, during our two tours in Germany they attended American School in our American town. Our son graduated high school there and attended the University of North Dakota. Our daughter studied dance in Tring, just outside of London and is a member of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing in London. They also attended schools in North Carolina and North Dakota.

Li: But they went to the Army school in El Paso?

2-00:22:44

Nelson: I'm not sure. I think they were off the post to go to school there, too. I can't remember. No, I think they did go to the post school, yes.

Li: So having experienced World War II as a military wife and then the Korean War as a military wife, how were those experiences different?

2-00:23:03

Nelson: They were different. I don't think I felt the push as much that the war was going on. I remember we lived in the trailer behind Mom's house, and we had an oil stove, but it wasn't hooked up like if we were permanent. And we had a barrel out there to fill and everything So I called for oil to be brought out, and they brought it out and filled it, but I had no way of knowing how much I had. So I called them late one day because it was cold—get down to 20 below without any problem, but when it was really cold we went and slept at Mother's; we did that a lot. But I liked the kids to be there where their home was and to just stay so it wouldn't be such a change. And so I called him up, and he said he'd come out, and then he said, "I don't know why you don't have your husband fix this up so that you won't have this trouble." And I said, "Well, I'm sure he'd love to if he could be here; he happens to be in Korea right now." And it was just like I hit him—he just—it's just like I hit him in the head. He was so shocked.

Li: Really?

2-00:24:31 a

Nelson: Yeah, and he felt so terrible.

Li: So it sounds like in World War II everyone expected your husband to be at war, but then during the Korean War—

2-00:24:37

Nelson: Yeah.

Li: People weren't thinking about it?

2-00:24:39

Nelson: No, and I didn't mean to hurt him like that, but he said, "My gosh, you call me any time of the night." It just came to me then that they just didn't know what was going on.

Li: So it wasn't in the newsreels the way—?

2-00:24:56

Nelson: Not really.

Li: So for you I'm thinking about did it sort of seem like one long war?

2-00:25:06

Nelson: No, they're very separate.

Li: They're very separate, okay.

2-00:25:11

Nelson: Very separate. I heard from him a lot; the mail came through a lot better, it seems like. I sent him packages, but in the other war he got in on one of the worst battles of the war, it's just you had to sit and wait.

Li: Looking back now, how important to you was your participation in the war effort, was your work at the munitions factory?

2-00:25:50

Nelson: What?

Li: How important was that experience to you?

2-00:25:53

Nelson: Oh, I think it was very important. I really do. I kind of think we really would have just stayed there until it was over if he hadn't been recalled.

Li: Did you continue to work later, after the war? Did you get a job?

2-00:26:22

Nelson: Well, actually, all the time we were going—I got a job in New Orleans, and it was a good job, too, but I never could plan to have a career.

Li: Why, because you were always moving?

2-00:26:29

Nelson: I was always moving. But they were very good, and they hired me, and they knew I'd be leaving. But I loved the work, and I always did my best, and they

always kept me on as long as I could be there, and I hated to leave some of them, but I had to go. I worked at the PX in New Orleans, too, at the post. So I could always find a job; I just couldn't keep going at it.

Li: Are there any more experiences from World War II from that time period that you'd like to share that I didn't ask about?

2-00:27:14

Nelson: Well you hit all the high spots, I think. Of course, there's so much to tell; it's hard to think of all of it, you know?. But those are the parts that you probably were interested in for this particular project.

Li: Well, thank you so much for talking to me today.

2-00:27:33

Nelson: I loved it. Thank you.

[End of Interview]