

COBB COUNTY ORAL HISTORY SERIES

NO. 22

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ASBELL IVEY

CONDUCTED BY KATHRYN A. KELLEY

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Cobb County Oral History Series, No. 22
Interview with Ruth Asbell Ivey
Conducted by Kathryn A. (Kitty) Kelley
Date: April 21, 1992
Location: Ivey residence, Acworth, Georgia

Mrs. Ivey worked as a secretary at the Bell Aircraft plant in Marietta during World War II. The interview focuses primarily on her experiences during that time.

KK = Kitty Kelley RI = Ruth Ivey

KK Ms. Ivey, if you could tell me your full name and your date of birth:

RI My maiden name was Marian Ruth Asbell, A-s-b-e-l-l. And my married name is Mrs. Ashley Ivey. My date of birth is August the 1st, 1924.

KK And that makes you how old today?

RI I will be 68 on August the 1st of this year.

KK So you're 67 now?

RI Yes.

KK Were you born in Cobb County?

RI No, I was not. I was born in Athens. In fact, I was born just outside of Athens in Jackson County. However, I attended school in Clarke County in Athens and did not come to this area until after I had finished high school and, in fact, had finished a year and went to business school after I was out of high school. And then I came to work at the Bell. The war had already started when I came here. I graduated in 1941; and so it would have been sometime in 1942, probably late '42. I cannot remember the exact date.

KK Had your parents lived in Clarke County or around Athens --

RI Yes.

KK -- all their lives?

RI All my life, yes. I always lived there. I never lived anywhere else. Well, what happened -- as I said, I was born in Jackson County, but my father moved into Clarke County because of the fact that there were better schools primarily than there were in Jackson County. As I said,

I went to school in Clarke County.

KK How many children were there in your family?

RI It was a case of mine, yours, and ours, because my mother was a very young widow and had one daughter. My father was a widower with four children. They got married; and they had three children, but by the time I was born the older ones were grown up -- I was the last one. The older ones were grown up; and I have a half-sister, who has children who are very close to my age. In fact, a half-brother, my father's oldest child, died of influenza in France during World War I. And, of course, that was many years before I was born. So, as I said, we were a very spread out family.

KK Where did you come in the order of birth?

RI I was the last.

KK You were the baby?

RI I was the youngest, yes, I was the youngest. The older ones -- well, one had died, but the older ones were long -- I don't even ever remember them being at home. They were married or away, you know. And so I don't ever remember them living at home -- only my sister who is my whole sister is closest to my age. However, my nieces and nephews who are close in my age, [children of] my half-sisters -- we grew up together like brothers and sisters. So, we were very close to them; and we still are.

KK Now you said that your father moved just to get a better education. He must have thought that was very important?

RI Well, yes, and primarily because of the school situation.

KK What was your father's education?

RI Well, my father was probably, you would say a self-educated man. He had only been like to seventh or eighth grade, but he was a very well-read man. One of the things that my sister and brother (my brother is closest to me -- died in 1984), but we always, even when times were real hard, we had newspapers and books. We always had newspapers and books no matter, and certainly things were very hard. My father was a farmer. So, as I said, I think he was probably more of a self-educated man.

KK What about your mother's education?

- RI Well, mother was better. Mother had graduated from high school. And, of course, I guess that's why we were all readers. We all still are, the ones of us who are left, because I guess that was certainly one advantage that we had was the fact that both Daddy and Mother were.
- KK Was that unusual at the time, that you recall?
- RI Well, you know, I don't know. It didn't seem unusual. It didn't seem unusual, but it may have been in that particular time and among where we lived and among the neighbors -- that may have been a little unusual, may have been.
- KK I wondered how old you might be when you had your first date?
- RI Oh, my goodness.
- KK Would you call it a date back then?
- RI Oh, yeah -- sure. Well, I can remember, like going on a bicycle ride with somebody. But now for a car date, I remember going to school parties. Well, actually the first boy I guess that I had a date with, really, was not old enough to drive and his father drove us. And strangely enough, we liked each other a lot, but we fought a lot, too. And it was his father said that he drove us to a party and that we were probably not speaking to each other, you know. And it was funny, because I had my -- last May, just a year ago -- fiftieth high school reunion. Well, it was so much fun. You would not believe how much fun it was. And this boy -- man -- who lives in North Carolina now and I hadn't seen him in years and years and years. And he was giving me a hard time about that I was fickle, which I probably was.
- KK Oh, that's fun.
- RI But it was so much fun. I had no idea it would be as much fun as it was.
- KK So do you think you might have been around fifteen?
- RI Oh, probably. Because, like I said, he was not driving. Really for dates, I mean, what we did mostly were like a party at somebody's house or a school party.
- KK Were they usually chaperoned?
- RI Oh, yes. They were -- absolutely, always. But we didn't

RI Well, mother was better. Mother had graduated from high school. And, of course, I guess that's why we were all readers. We all still are, the ones of us who are left, because I guess that was certainly one advantage that we had was the fact that both Daddy and Mother were.

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KK Were they usually chaperoned?

RI Oh, yes. They were -- absolutely, always. But we didn't

have big classes like they have now.

KK How many students were in your class?

RI There were about 40 in my class.

KK In your grade?

RI In my graduating class. And some of us had gone to school together almost from the time we started to school. Well, now actually I started to school in Jackson County; but I only went through the first and second grade there. And that was a country school, so when we moved to Clarke County the school that I went to was a laboratory. The schools that I went to, the elementary and the high school, they no longer exist. They were laboratory schools for the University of Georgia. It was called University Elementary School and University High School. And they were very good. We got experimented on with a lot, with testing and that sort of thing.

KK Were your teachers students?

RI No, the teachers were qualified teachers, but we had a lot of student-teachers; like I said, we had a lot of testing through the education department at the university.

KK What year did you graduate high school?

RI I graduated in 1941.

KK Now you said you went to a year of business school?

RI Yes.

KK Where did you go there?

RI Well, I went for a little while in that area, in Athens. I don't even remember what it was now. I mean, it was just for typing and stuff. And then I went to an NYA school -- now that's the National Youth Administration -- and it was in Monroe. I can't even remember -- what was the name of that? It had been like an A & M school of some kind, and that was where I really learned shorthand and typing and so forth and so on.

KK Was it common for a girl your age to go to a business school after high school?

RI Probably, if you were -- well, I don't know, I don't

know.

KK I wondered if you were unusual to go on?

RI Well, now some of the people went right to work; and a few went to college, which I should have done. I don't know why I didn't. Well, we didn't have the money; but it could have been done -- I don't know why I didn't. But I don't know, people just did different things. I really don't know. I don't think it was anything that was all that unusual.

KK Do you remember a difference between what was expected of boys after graduation and what was expected of girls?

RI Well, I guess there may have been. I don't recall anything specific in my family. The ones of [us] who were at home [were] my sister, who was several years older than me, and then Henry, my brother. Of course, he was just ahead of me in high school, because he was only a couple of years older than me. So he had worked for a while. I don't remember even what he did. He was working at some dry cleaner's or something. Then, of course, he went in the service the minute things got so bad.

KK Which war was that now?

RI It was World War II.

KK World War II?

RI Yes, because he went in the Navy in 1941. So I just don't know. Yes, I expect things were a little different. I expect that there were probably different expectations for boys and girls. They just kind of let me do what I wanted to, I think. But I don't recall -- now I was very young, you know. I was 17 when I graduated; so I was pretty young, when I came up here.

KK Now did you come to Atlanta right after your business school experience?

RI Yes.

KK How did you happen to do that?

RI Well, I had a friend there, a girl that I had been in school with. She said, "Let's go to Atlanta." Now Mother and Daddy were not very happy about this. "Let's go to Atlanta and get a job with Bell Aircraft." And I said, "Doing what?" "Well, you know, whatever." So we

got on the bus, and we came to Atlanta. I wouldn't have wanted my little girl to do it, but anyway -- we came to Atlanta. It was in Atlanta somewhere when we knew where to go for interviews and tests and whatever and did whatever was necessary. Then we went back to Athens, and then we were notified. She didn't stay very long. We came back and went back to work. But the thing about it was, you have to have a place to live. So somewhere along the line, and I couldn't tell you to save my life how I heard about this -- right on the corner of Peachtree and Fourteenth Street -- it's not there anymore. There is a Gorin's Ice Cream or something there [now]; but there was a great, great, big, big, big house, which was a boarding house. Just the typical boarding house, I guess. And somewhere -- and it may have been from information when we took the tests and did the stuff, I don't know -- but somehow or other that was a place that was recommended. So we got a room there. As I said, she wasn't very happy, and she didn't stay very long. But anyway, I stayed for about two and a half years.

KK Now how much money did you have in your pocket when you arrived in Atlanta?

RI Well, very little. I don't know, but it couldn't have been very much, because we didn't have very much money. I'm sure that Mother and Dad wouldn't have let me come off without having enough to be sure I could get here and get back and have something to eat and whatever. I was talking to my sister-in-law this morning. I said, I was trying to think how much money we made. I didn't live very long there in town. Well, I lived there maybe six months; I don't know. And it was really kind of a nice place to live, because it wasn't very far down to Tenth Street. There was the movie, and there was the -- I mean, it wasn't like it is now. It was entirely different.

KK Was it well chaperoned? Was it proper for a young girl to live in a place --

RI Yes, it was quite proper. Everything was very proper. I mean, the people who ran the thing -- boy, you behaved or you probably would have gotten thrown out.

KK Who ran the place?

RI You know, I don't remember. I couldn't tell you to save my life. But, as I said, everybody -- they were all working girls.

KK All the girls lived there -- no men?

RI All girls. I don't think there were any -- I cannot recall if there were any men there at all. I think there were all girls. And, like I said, everybody behaved very well. I don't recall there ever being any problem of any kind.

KK Do you remember how much it cost to stay there?

RI No, I don't. I'm sorry, but I don't.

KK Did it feel expensive to you or was it reasonable to you?

RI No, it must not have, because I managed. Of course, I had to have transportation. See, I was working out at Marietta; so I had to have transportation, I had to have food, and I had to have -- you know, to pay. So I got along okay. I never got in any real trouble with money. When at first, I came out on the streetcar -- you know, there was a streetcar?

KK Yes.

RI I mean, it was pretty good transportation. And then after I had been working awhile and got acquainted with some people, then I rode with somebody who drove.

KK In a private car?

RI Yes, right.

KK Did other girls that were living in that boarding home work at Bell Bomber also?

RI Yes. Some of them did, and some of them worked at other places in Atlanta. One that I remember -- I can't remember her name -- but one of them worked on one of the newspapers in Atlanta. And some of them were going to school, taking some kind of courses and living in Atlanta -- just various and sundry things.

KK Were you more excited about coming to Atlanta or to Bell Aircraft?

RI Oh, well, probably about coming to Atlanta. I mean, it was a big city; and I had only been to Atlanta a couple of times in my whole life.

KK So you were adventurous?

RI Yes, I was. Also, it was real exciting to have a job and

have some money.

KK After growing up in such a large family, how did it feel to be on your own?

RI I think I was always a little independent, probably. I mean, in spite of the fact I was the youngest, I think I was a little independent. And, of course, the older ones were gone; and there were just Mother and Dad and me -- and well, Henry until he went in the Navy. But I lived probably there at Fourteenth Street for about six months -- I can't remember exactly. But then a very, very good friend who worked in the same office that I did at Bell, she and her folks lived out on Peachtree Hills Avenue, just off of Peachtree Road at Peachtree Creek. We spent a lot of time together, and I spent a lot of time at her house. Eventually, I guess, her folks decided if I was going to spend time there, they just asked me to move in. They already had the house full. I don't know why [they invited me], because they had five children at home -- one who was married and their married son's wife was there part of the time. But anyway, I moved in with them and lived there in that family as a member of the family. Well, as it turned out, then eventually this girl married my brother. So she became my sister-in-law, still my dear sister-in-law. Like I said, she lives in Norcross and we don't see each other a lot.

KK How did you say you met her?

RI Well, we worked in the same office at Bell. And, of course, my brother was in the Navy. And, you know, in those days you wrote to servicemen. This was your patriotic duty. And, of course, my brother was a really handsome young man. And so Margo -- well, her name is Margaret, but I call her Margo -- she started writing to my brother in the Navy. He was on an ammunition ship in the Pacific, and they wrote to each other. Well, then he came home -- had some time at home -- and they went out together.

KK So that's when they first met?

RI That's right, that's right. They went out together, but then he had to go back again. When he came back home again, then they went together for a while and got married. So anyway --

KK That must have pleased you?

RI Oh, yes, it did. And I said I did real well -- I picked

out my own sister-in-law. But anyway, as I said, I was already very close to her family. They were marvelous to me. It was just like I was their own child. So I guess maybe I was lonesome for a family. But we did a lot of things for fun. We went bowling; and we went to movies; and we went to parties; and we -- there was one of the men in the office. He and his wife had parties for servicemen, and we often attended. We worked in the industrial engineering office at Bell.

KK What was your occupation there?

RI Oh, I was a -- I started off as a stenographer. Well, there again, we were talking about that this morning. Eventually, I was given the responsibility of the typing pool, of assigning people to the typing pool and the stenographic pool, which was a promotion. Then Margo became private secretary to one of the engineers, and that's when we were talking about how much money. And I said, "Margo, I can't even remember how much money we made". She said, well, the highest that she made was \$55.00 a week. That was a real, real good salary. I was thinking probably \$45.00, \$50.00 dollars a week or in that neighborhood.

KK At the time, do you remember yourself making more money than other girls your age at Bell?

RI Well, now I would make more than the girls who worked in the pool, after I had the promotion and was in charge of the typing pool assigning, because all of the men didn't have secretaries. We just had the pool and whenever they needed anything. So it was somebody's responsibility to see it was done. And I did make more than some of them after that.

KK What about working at a place other than Bell Aircraft? Were those people making anywhere near what you were making?

RI Oh, no. You would've definitely made more in any of the defense industries -- were paying more. Now I left. I worked there I think about two and a half years. I know I worked over two years, because I have a two-year pin. I was sure I had it in there somewhere. It was in the jewelry box.

KK Oh, that's beautiful.

RI Toward the end of the war, when you knew things were slowing down, I got another job, because I thought all these people are going to be hunting jobs.

- KK So you saw the end coming?
- RI This thing is going to -- I mean, you know, there are going to be cuts. And so I went to work for the Sinclair Oil, Sinclair Refining Company, which was in town. Their offices were on West Peachtree at the time. So I think I did just about as well, because I became private secretary to one of the vice-presidents in charge of collection or something-or-other. I don't remember exactly what his title was.
- KK At which employer?
- RI In Sinclair.
- KK When you were at Bell, were all the bosses men and all the secretaries women?
- RI Yes, they were. They were all engineers. Like I said, we were in the industrial engineering department; and all of the engineers were men, every one of them. Margo said something this morning about this woman who had been in charge of the stenographic pool at one point and about one of the men who had asked particularly for her [Margo] to do his work. This woman said, "Well, you can't ask. You just have to take who it was." I said, "I don't know where she thought she was getting off, because those men were the boss." I mean, there was no two ways about it. It was a man's world; it was. Now there were women in some of the other departments with more responsibility, but certainly there were none of the engineers.
- KK So the professionals were men?
- RI They were men, that's right -- absolutely.
- KK And that's just the way it was?
- RI It was -- and it was a big department. I don't know how many of them there were -- it was a very big department. There were a lot of them. But there were no women engineers in that department -- at all. I think, as I said, in some other areas of the plant there were probably some areas where there were women with more responsibility, but not in that section.
- KK What about blacks and other minorities that worked at Bell?
- RI Now you know, there were none in our office.

KK No black secretaries?

RI None whatsoever.

KK Any black engineers?

RI None whatsoever. I don't know why. Occasionally we'd have some occasion rarely to go out into the plant. I guess that there were blacks who worked in the plant; but I declare to goodness, I have no memory of it whatsoever -- at all. The main thing that I remember is the noise. I don't guess I ever went out into the actual plant but a very few times.

KK Did you feel patriotic working there?

RI Oh, absolutely. Oh, yes, indeed.

KK Especially with your brother --

RI Oh, yes, indeed.

KK -- in the military?

RI All of the men were gone. I say all the men were gone; but I mean the young men, the ones our age were mostly. There were a few who, for some reason or another, were not in the service; but most everybody you knew was. You did feel very patriotic, yes, because you were helping the war effort. I remember when they rolled out the first B-29, which is what they were making. It was a big occasion.

KK What happened?

RI It was kind of like a holiday. Everybody came out to see the roll out. Also, another thing that I remember was when Franklin Roosevelt died, when the news came; and the thing was that the way to show him honor or respect was to keep working, so that the war would end sooner. So there was no closing up.

KK Do you remember when that happened?

RI It was in April, 1945.

KK Now what did that bomber, that B-29, look like to you?

RI It was enormous, enormous. Of course, it's not now. I mean, it doesn't look big now. It wouldn't look big now. They had the heavy bombers -- they had the B-17. That's what my husband flew, or was a navigator on. They had

the B-24. They had the B-26, although I didn't hear much about the B-26. But this was the big one. And, of course, that ended up that that was used to drop the bombs on Hiroshima and a lot of other bombs on Japan. It was used in the Pacific; it was never used in Europe.

KK So that must have been very exciting?

RI It was, it was. It was a very special thing to do for the war effort. It's just hard for anybody now, I think, anybody your age or for people who were not living in that time to realize the effort that people put forth. It was like it really was the cohesiveness of the country.

KK So everyone fought the war?

RI You couldn't ever say everyone, but it was the thing to do. I mean, it was absolutely the thing to do, to be patriotic and to work and to serve and to whatever -- buy war bonds. You bought war bonds.

KK And Victory Gardens?

RI That's right. And there again, when I was talking to my sister-in-law this morning, I said, "You remember somebody or some movie star or somebody came." There was this big bond drive there at the plant. Neither one of us can remember who it was, but I had a bond -- money taken out of my paycheck for bonds which I still had, when I got married. I spent it then. But that's what people were doing, and it was a real interesting time. It's very hard to realize, when there is so much controversy about any of the military actions, any of it that there has been since, including Korea and Vietnam. My husband was in both places. Then even this Gulf thing -- people seemed to be a little bit more behind that. But, as I said, it's kind of hard for people who didn't live in that time to realize how much togetherness there was in that respect.

KK What did you wear to work?

RI I wore dresses or skirts -- no pants. Now the women who worked in the plant wore pants.

KK Was that new?

RI Yes, it was. It was very new. But they -- you know, for safety reasons.

KK Was it scandalous at all?

- RI No. Now actually we were wearing like shorts and slacks before for play.
- KK But not to work?
- RI But not to work. But, as I said, the women who worked in the plant for safety reasons and because they had to climb up on -- you know, for many reasons wore slacks. But not us at all. I always liked clothes; so I spent a good part of my salary on clothes and shopped at Rich's and, it was Davison's then. It was Davison-Packson, you know, it wasn't Macys. But I had charge accounts. I'm telling you, that was the first thing practically I got was a charge account at Rich's. I've had a charge account at Rich's ever since, as I said, almost since I can remember. But anyway, suits -- you dressed up.
- KK Professional?
- RI Yes. I always wore very high heels being short. And then, gosh, they were like this (indicating).
- KK Maybe about four inches high?
- RI Oh, very high heels. I couldn't walk in them now to save my life. But stockings -- as long as you could get stockings.
- KK Were they nylon then?
- RI Well, you couldn't get nylon. You had just started getting nylons at the war; and then you couldn't; and you couldn't get silk stockings. But rayon -- and they were just dreadful. So you could go bare legged, because you couldn't get stockings. At first, you used to wear stockings always; but then when it got to where you couldn't get stockings -- the rayon, they drooped, you know, and oh, they were just terrible. But you could go without stockings. Some people used leg makeup. It was dreadful, though; it wasn't very attractive.
- KK Did you wear makeup?
- RI Yes, not a lot. I never used very much makeup, but, yes, I'd use certain lipstick and rouge and powder, like -- I think it went back that far -- like the pancake makeup, like the Max Factor pancake or something like that. I think it went back that far. But I never used a lot of makeup when I was young or ever.
- KK What was your relationship with the engineers, the men? You said that they were very domineering?

RI Yes, well, they were the bosses. I mean, that's true. Actually, they were all very nice to us, to me and Margo and most of the girls. There was one in particular who -- he was a dear man and his wife had come from Pennsylvania -- I'll always remember, Johnstown, Pennsylvania. She worked with the Red Cross in Atlanta. They would invite soldiers to their house and then invite some of us to a party or have one or two and lend you their car to go to take them sightseeing around Atlanta or something like that. His name was Stohr, S-t-o-h-r, and his nickname was Skip -- I don't remember what his first name was. They were really very nice people. And actually, all of them were -- they were all nice to me. I never had any real problems with any of them.

KK Did you enjoy entertaining visiting troops?

RI Yes, I had a fine time. You know, I was not engaged. I was young, and I really did, I had a good time.

KK Did most of the girls?

RI Some of them. Now some of them were engaged and had somebody away in service. Some of the girls in our office were married to people who were -- one of the girl's husband was in the Coast Guard -- I remember that. And, of course, some of the women in the office were older. Most of them were young. Most of the stenographers and typists were young.

KK When you say young, how old do you mean?

RI Well, I meant 19, 20, 21, you know. But, no, I had a really good time. I always tell my husband, I say, "I enjoyed the war -- I was footloose and fancy free."

KK Were the soldiers respectful of girls then when they came to visit?

RI They were to me.

KK So they were just interested in having a good time?

RI I think they were -- I really and truly think that in those times -- I don't know if it's the same now or not -- I think in those times, they just kind of knew whether you were a respectful girl or not.

KK And they treated you accordingly?

RI I think so; I really think for the most part. Oh, I don't mean somebody didn't get fresh once in awhile; but

I never had any real problem with any of them. Well, I mean, I didn't pick them up off the street; but when the Stohrs would have servicemen and have a party and I would go out with them or some USO things, I did.

KK Was there a USO in Marietta?

RI I never went to one in Marietta. I went to one in Atlanta, to dance and some things. See, I lived in Atlanta; so really and truly I came out here and worked and then went back. I never lived in Cobb County at all at that point.

KK What happened at the USOs?

RI Mostly, it was just dances. There were refreshments and dances and everything. Nothing world shaking, but just mostly there was music.

KK There's been a lot of controversy now about sexual harassment charges in the work place.

RI Yes.

KK I wondered if that was an idea that seemed foreign to you then?

RI I was never sexually harassed. Maybe I didn't know I was. I mean, they always seemed so much older and everything; and I've had them pat me on the shoulder or call me honey or something. But nobody ever gave me a hard time. So, as I said, maybe I just didn't even know I was being sexually harassed. I really do not think that that was -- like I said, it was kind of like it was, they were almost more fatherly to those of us who were in my situation, my age, than anything else. But I am sure that there were things that went on that was much more than that. I never had any problem with it.

KK Once you came to Atlanta to work and had left your family, I was wondering how your relationships with your family changed, since you were now a working girl and living away from home?

RI Well, there were not a lot of changes. I went home for a weekend when I could, you know, fairly often.

KK How did you get home?

RI By bus, and it was not pleasant -- believe me. I did not have a car and wouldn't have been able to get gas, probably, if I had. But the buses were always crowded

and always, as I said, not pleasant at all. But I went home for weekends when I could. By then, my sister -- the one nearest me in age, the one who's my whole sister -- was married and living in South Dakota and had a baby. Now she came home. The baby was born in 1943; and it was a little girl; and she was named Eleanor Ruth. She was named after my older half-sister and me. I guess Eleanor was about six months old; and my brother-in-law went overseas, went to the Pacific, and my sister came home.

KK So she came home to live with your parents?

RI Yes, in fact, we visited her this weekend; and we were talking about that; and she was talking about coming home on the train with the baby. And if going to Athens on the bus was hard, believe me, coming from South Dakota on the train was hard and travel was awful in those days -- it was terrible.

KK Well, I guess that's what you did when you were a young girl if your husband went to war -- you went home?

RI Oh, that's right, that's right. She had been a couple of different places where he was stationed; and then they, as I said, were in South Dakota when he got orders to go to the Pacific; and so, of course, there was no reason for her to stay there.

KK When you say that transportation was terrible, in what way was the transportation uncomfortable?

RI It was crowded, it was extremely -- everything was always crowded. It was always late. I mean, there were so many people travelling. You had the service people who were travelling back and forth, and you had people like me who were working away from home who were going home and then back to work and everything. Now people who had cars -- you know, there were the gas rations. Of course, the people that I rode to work with every day had special ration coupons, because of needing them for the transportation to the defense industry and because other people were riding with them. So they got extra. But for just travelling pleasure --

KK Or for working in not the defense industry.

RI -- you didn't have very much. So, of course, Mother and Daddy had a car; but they had -- like I don't remember what they called the coupons, maybe an A coupon or something because it was non -- it was just for going to get groceries and going just -- it wouldn't take you very far. Then, of course, there were also the ration coupons

for other things which, there again, I don't have any. I wish I had saved a lot of those things. But we had ration coupons for meat. And we never had any great problem. I remember we ate an awful lot of chicken, because you didn't have to have rations to eat chicken. Beef, you did. Of course, living with my sister-in-law's family like I did and with as many of us as in the family, Margo's mother was able to do very well with us as far as food was concerned, because she had enough ration coupons to work with.

KK Did she have a garden?

RI Yes, I think they had a small garden. it was a city lot; it was in the city; so they didn't have a real big garden; but they had a small garden. Almost everybody had a garden of some kind, a little garden.

KK To supplement what you could get with your coupons?

RI Yeah, that's right.

KK So you're saying then that because of the gas rationing even for those people who did own cars, they could not get as much gasoline as they would need to get around; so there was a tremendous burden placed on public transportation?

RI That's right.

KK Of all kinds?

RI That's right -- all kinds.

KK Was there heat and -- there was no air conditioning, of course -- but was there heat in the vehicles?

RI There must have been. I cannot ever remember being cold. Of course, there was no air conditioning.

KK It must have been terrible on a bus in the summertime full crowd?

RI Yes, it was. Any kind of public transportation was bad. Now in town, in the city, transportation was pretty good -- we had the trollies. You could go anywhere in Atlanta on a trolley.

KK Was it fairly inexpensive?

RI Yes, I can't remember how much, but it certainly was not expensive. You get transfers, you know. You transfer

from one line to another one; and, actually, it was good transportation.

KK That's how you got to Bell Aircraft when you went to work?

RI No, no.

KK When you lived at the boarding house?

RI No, no. When I first started to work the trollies didn't come out here; it was the streetcars that ran on the railroad, the train line, the railroad.

KK That was special just for Bomber Aircraft, wasn't it?

RI I don't believe that it was started for that. It was used, but I think that was how people in Marietta and Smyrna used to go into Atlanta to go shopping on. I think they used to go into [Atlanta] on the streetcar.

KK So you don't remember any special transportation accommodations since you came?

RI No, I don't. No, I don't.

KK How long had Bell Aircraft been open when you came to Atlanta?

RI Well, it must have been open; it must have already been opened.

KK They opened March of 1943.

RI Forty-three?

KK Yes.

RI Opened in '43?

KK Yes.

RI I thought it was earlier than that. Well, it couldn't have been open very long when I came then.

KK Did you make a lot of friends with the girls there at Bell?

RI Yes, yes. I haven't kept up with any of them over the years and can't remember some of their names. As I said, my sister-in-law and I were trying to remember some of the names; but yes, we were friends and did things

together and went to movies together and, like I said, bowled. I think at one point we had a little bowling team. I never was very good. One of the things that I remember about going to work was that you had a badge. But they had this tunnel that you had to go through, a long tunnel because the parking was way out here. And it was the longest thing that you walked through this tunnel to get into the building and up to work. I don't know why they had those long tunnels. I have not been to Lockheed. I don't know whether they still have that or not. I guess they do. But it always would seem like you were just never going to get through that long tunnel.

KK Was it safe?

RI Oh, yes, because there were always a lot of people. I mean, everybody -- that shift -- everybody. I came to work at 8:00 and got off at 5:00 or 5:30, or something, whatever. I was strictly working in the day time. I never worked at night.

KK Did you work Monday through Friday?

RI Yes. I cannot remember that we were ever required to work overtime, like they did sometime in the plant. Of course, they had the different shifts in the plant.

KK But the clerical staff and professional staff worked --

RI That's right, worked day time hours only. But as I said, I had just forgotten that long, long tunnel. I think there was probably a guard, when you came into it to check and then probably when you got through there and to your building -- I can't remember. I know you had to go through several different checkpoints for security.

KK Do you ever remember any trouble or any scandal there at the plant while you were there with security or anything like that?

RI I don't remember ever, ever anything of the kind.

KK So it was a good place to work?

RI Yes, it was a very good place to work. I really do not recall ever there being any [trouble]. What did they call those awards they gave? E Award of Excellence or whatever -- [that] was what they were doing then.

KK So that was a motivational award?

RI That's right, to the people in the plant. I never had any real problems at all. When I left and took another

job, it was because the war was coming to an end and the handwriting was on the wall. In fact, some of the men in the office were saying, "This is a good time to find another job."

KK Now when was that, do you remember?

RI Well, it was sometime between VE Day and VJ Day. Sometime in that period, because once VJ Day, see, everything began to close down.

KK I remember reading about how employees at Bell were at some point reassured that their jobs would not end --

RI Yes.

KK -- and that there was a lot of controversy about that, because people seemed to say that they knew otherwise or they suspected otherwise. Could you comment on that?

RI Well, as I said, the main thing that I remember was that in talking, like to some of the engineers and everything about what was going on, some of them were beginning to hunt other jobs.

KK After VE Day?

RI Yes, in that time frame there, when things were beginning to kind of wind down. And it seemed that rather than waiting until there was a possibility everything would close down and everybody was hunting a job, that it was a good time to do it and there was a little more choice. And, in fact, this man that I was talking about, Mr. Stohr, was one of the engineers; and his wife I had said worked with the Red Cross. I interviewed for a job at the Red Cross, and I liked her a lot -- she was a really nice lady. I could have had the job, but it didn't pay enough. It didn't begin to pay enough, and that was when I went to work for Sinclair.

KK Had you saved a lot of money?

RI No.

KK You spent it all at Rich's?

RI Well, I had some bonds. I had bought some bonds, and I had some bonds. I don't even remember now how much; but I had bought bonds; and that was really the only savings I had, because I liked clothes, and I was young, and I did spend a lot on clothes.

KK And you spent a lot just playing around bowling --

RI Sure, absolutely.

KK -- and having fun with your girlfriends and so forth?

RI Yes, but I did have my bonds. But that was the only thing I had saved. I wasn't very thrifty.

KK When you went to work at Sinclair, how did your salary compare with Bell?

RI That was one reason that I took that job, because there was not a lot of change. I don't think I made quite as much, but it was very close. And most of the civilian jobs at that point, or jobs outside the defense industry, were not paying as much. But I had a good job there; and I enjoyed working there; and I worked there until I was married. Then I never worked a regular, full-time job after that.

KK When did you meet your husband?

RI I had known him a long time, but we weren't engaged. His plane was shot down in occupied Holland where they crash-landed. He was behind the lines for about four and a half months.

KK Did you know him then?

RI Yes, I knew him. I knew that this had happened; but, as I said, we were not engaged or were not seriously involved. But anyway, after he came back and got out of the service, after he was discharged --

KK Did he have a medical discharge?

RI No. He just got out because the war was coming to an end, had come to an end, so to speak. He started school over at the University of Georgia. I would see him, when I went over there. Then he started coming over, and then we decided we would get married. Well, I guess he went to school for about a year at [UGA] -- we got married in 1946.

KK So you had been working at Sinclair during that time?

RI That's right. I was still working in Atlanta. Then he decided he wanted to go back in the service. So he had been in the Army Air Corps, which wasn't the Air Force then. It was the Army Air Corps. However, he was a navigator; and when he decided to come back in the

service -- his original commission was in the infantry. He had transferred from that to the Air Corps. So when he came back in, they sort of said, "We're not taking navigators" -- they didn't need any navigators. So he came back in into service as an infantry, first lieutenant in the infantry. And so then I started moving around with him. I've had a few odds and ends of jobs and part-time things here and there and volunteer and whatever, but I've never worked at a full-time job since then.

KK Well, what did he think of having a girlfriend who was living in Atlanta and had a job?

RI Oh, he would have probably been happy for me to keep it. However, when he had gone back to the service, he had been assigned to Fort McClellan, Alabama; and that's where he was assigned. We were married the Labor Day weekend -- we married on the 31st of August. He had no leave accrued, you know, having just come back in the service a short time before. And so we had the weekend on that honeymoon -- our honeymoon was that weekend. We spent two nights at the Biltmore Hotel. Do you know where the Biltmore is?

KK Yes.

RI Well, it's really funny, because over the years, I have given him a hard time. I said, "You always told me you were going to take me back to the Biltmore Hotel sometime, and you never did." Then it closed. Well, we read this past year, they are going to reopen. Well, would you believe that he still had the bill from the two nights that we spent there when we were married? We married in Athens on Saturday; and we came over to Atlanta and spent Saturday night and Sunday night; and then Monday we went back to Alabama, because he had to report to duty on Tuesday after Labor Day. Well, he had that bill; and it was like seven dollars a night or something ridiculous. He said, "When they get that thing near done, I'm going to send them a copy of this and tell them we want to come back and spend two nights at the same rates." Would you believe that now he's put it away so carefully he can't find it? After all those years he has kept that -- can you believe that? Isn't that funny?

KK Well, you must have been somewhat relieved then to not have a husband overseas in the war?

RI Yes.

KK That must have been terribly difficult for women.

- RI Well, it was terrible. And I was very lucky that I was not, because so many of the people now -- my sister's husband was overseas in the Pacific during some very, very bad times. And there were girls in the office, and there were people -- well, one of the boys in my high school class that I used to date was killed during -- he was in the Navy. So, as I said, really I worried, because [of] my brother. But I didn't have a husband or a fiance or anybody. But then I married him; and then he went off to Korea during the war; and he went off to Vietnam during the war; so I'm just glad that we were not married during World War II.
- KK It seems that throughout history, the job of women has been to work and wait for their man to go off to war. Which do you think is harder -- staying or going?
- RI You know, I don't know. Now we talked just while we were in Savannah the other day. We went, this group that we were with --
- KK This was your reunion from World War II?
- RI The military reunion. And we went out to Fort Stewart, which is near Savannah; and they were very kind to us; and we had lunch at the Officer's Club. There were a lot of the young officers around as kind of hosts for this group. And I was talking to a young woman, a lieutenant who served in Desert Storm. And she talks to these people who, like my husband, were in World War II and Korea and Vietnam. She said, "I can't imagine another one, because war is dreadful. It doesn't make any difference where it is or what it is." But I asked her; I said, "Would you rather have been there or have been stationed [here]?" She would rather have been there, but she's in the service. That's her job.
- KK What about a young woman in the '40s? I would imagine it would be terribly difficult to send your husband off to war?
- RI Yes.
- KK I can't imagine.
- RI I think it would, too. I know it was terrible for me when Ashley -- my children were just babies when he went to Korea. Well, Jack was nearly five and Janet was three. She had her third birthday just before he went to Korea. Jack started kindergarten while he was gone. It was terrible. He was gone nineteen months. But, see, many of them were gone during World War II so much longer

than that. And that was just like an eternity -- it was a terrible time.

KK Plus the communication wasn't as good as it is now; and so people didn't have letters; and it must have been dreadful?

RI No, it had to have been -- it was dreadful. But I wouldn't want to go through the time that he was in Korea or Vietnam again either. By the time he went to Vietnam, my son was in college; and my daughter was just ready to go -- well, she was just finishing high school. But he was only gone a year that time, but it was a mighty long year to have your husband gone.

KK When you look back on the Bell Aircraft days, how would you summarize the impact that Bell Aircraft had on women at that time?

RI Oh, I think it was very good for women. I would certainly think that it was very good for women, because it did provide jobs that were well-paying jobs. But I think the fact that women were given, that there was the opportunity for a lot of different types of jobs. Not only the kind that I had, but the ones for women who worked in the plant; and these were jobs that women had never had before.

KK Physical labor jobs.

RI Physical labor jobs. Probably, people never thought women could do that sort of thing.

KK And they could.

RI And they could.

KK What did you think about that at the time?

RI I thought it was great. I didn't think it was for me, because I'm not very adept with -- I had a feeling that if I put rivets in, they'd probably all fall out. But I think it was great, and I admired the women who worked in the plant -- I really did.

KK Do you think that their work changed life for women after?

RI Oh, I think it did -- oh, I think it did. Well, I mean, we certainly know that the war years changed all of our lives. It changed a lot of things. But certainly that was one aspect of the change.

- KK So when you said that you thought a lot of people didn't realize women could do that kind of thing, then perhaps after the Bell Aircraft experience, men who hired people for physical labor jobs might consider women for those jobs?
- RI Yes. They didn't -- it didn't come very easy or fast even after that. I think after the war women were kind of expected to just go back [to] their place in the home. A lot of them didn't, and a lot of them didn't want to. And a lot of them did not. So it had a great effect on American life and on women. You know, it's like the changes that have come and are still coming. It's interesting that you asked awhile ago about the black people, but I simply have no memory of black people in that plant. They surely must have been there.
- KK They were there.
- RI But, as I said, not in the office; and certainly there were none of the engineers or none of the secretaries in the office or any of the --
- KK What about in your school or in your community?
- RI No.
- KK Were things so segregated that --
- RI Terribly, totally, absolutely segregated. Absolutely.
- KK So interacting with blacks, then, was not a part of your system?
- RI No, the only thing was that we had -- living in the country, we had neighbors that were black. They would do things for you or you would do things for them, but not socially at all -- not at all.
- KK When you look back on your experience at Bell Aircraft, do you have any lasting memories or important events that you want to share?
- RI Well, actually the thing that probably is the most impressive as far as I was concerned was the roll out of the B-29, because that was such a big moment. I do definitely remember when Franklin Roosevelt died. It was kind of a scary time, you know. Because I think in spite of the fact that many people did not like Roosevelt, he had been our president always. I could hardly remember before.

- KK Well, he also died in Warm Springs, Georgia, and you were in Georgia. So that must have impacted you?
- RI That's right. And of course, the funeral train came through. I do remember that the announcement about it and that the best thing for all of us to do was just to keep working which was what we all did. It was a very good experience -- to work in there was a very good experience for me. I had a good job; and I was around people that were good to me; and I lived well. As far as I was concerned, except for the fact that you wanted the war to be over, because I did have people I cared for there, the war years were not hard years for me. They weren't really. And I was young enough to enjoy what I did -- and I did.
- KK I think I've covered everything that I came to talk with you about unless there's something we've left out that you would like to add?
- RI Well, I can't think of anything. I'm sorry that my memory is not better and that I can't tell you all kinds of things with dates. But, you know, it was just like it was a day-to-day thing. It's like you go to school, and you do what you do every day. The war news was very important, you know, keeping up with what was going on in the war.
- KK Was that through newspapers and radio?
- RI Through newspapers and radio. And one of the things was that when you went to the movie, you always saw the newsreels. They were great. And I just think that it's a shame -- I mean, of course, you don't need them any more, because of all of the television and all, but they were marvelous.
- KK Did it keep you informed --
- RI Yes.
- KK -- and keep you feeling like you were a part of it?
- RI Yes, absolutely. And, as I said, it was very important what was going on and keeping up with what was going on. Now I remember we used to, when we rode to work -- there were several people who had cars and they car pooled and several of us who didn't have cars, we just paid to ride with them. We used to sing songs. I remember singing the songs from Oklahoma, you know, going to work. We probably didn't sing them coming home. We were probably too tired.

- KK So they were exciting times for you as a young woman?
- RI Yes, they were. It was much more, probably much more exciting than whatever I would have done had I stayed in Athens. I don't know what I would have done.
- KK But you always expected to work --
- RI Yes.
- KK -- since you went to business college?
- RI Yes. I expected to work at something somewhere.
- KK Until you got married, or did you think of that in terms of your life?
- RI I don't know -- I probably thought that I would. I guess I thought I would sooner or later, but I wasn't in any great hurry at that point. But I don't know what I would have done had it not been for that. The war really changed all of our lives; it did. Men and women, too.
- KK Well, I thank you for all this information. It's really rich, and your memories and your impressions and your feelings really add a lot that's not accounted for with dates and things.
- RI Ashley and I were in a Cracker Barrel the other day, and you know how they have the framed advertisements and things on the wall. They had one that was advertising Lucky Strike cigarettes. Well, strangely enough now -- this surprised me -- it said, how to stay thin, smoke Lucky Strikes. And I said, I do not -- but it showed a green package, you know, the Lucky Strike green that's gone to War -- but I never remember an advertisement advertising cigarettes that said that if you smoked that you would stay thin. I don't ever remember that.
- KK Did you smoke cigarettes back then?
- RI I did -- I started smoking; and, thank goodness, I have stopped. I stopped about 15 years ago.
- KK Good for you. Was that part of your independent persona?
- RI That was part of independence. My mother and father were very disapproving. But cigarettes got really hard to get during the war. They were sending the cigarettes to the service people. Well, that was all right. But I smoked some weird things -- I don't mean drugs, I don't mean drugs -- but I mean some horrible, whatever -- some of

these terrible brands that they had. But some of the music really takes you back, when you hear that. As bad as my memory is for other things, many, many of the songs that were popular at that time, I can remember every word of them.

KK Did you love the Andrews Sisters or who did you love back then?

RI Oh, yes. Well, you know, Glenn Miller, the big bands, and Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, and the Andrews Sisters. That was great music; I still think it is. It's funny, because sometimes things will take you back, music you hear.

KK But it sounds like it takes you back to good memories, pleasant memories?

RI It does, for the most part. We were lucky, because my brother came home [and] my brother-in-law came home. There were a lot of people lost their lives. Ashley lost a brother. But, fortunately, he came back; but his other brother -- he had another brother who was in the Pacific, but he came back. And so a lot of people did lose loved ones. We were just lucky in our family, very lucky. However, my daddy had a stroke during the war years and Mother always thought it was because he was so worried about my brother -- well, I don't know. He was an old man by then. I'm sure that it didn't help any.

KK What were your parents' names?

RI My father's name was Steven Henry Asbell, and my mother's name was Sarah Asbell. And then my brother was Henry. He was a junior, but we call him Henry. And I have a sister who's Sarah; so all the names have been used a lot.

KK Well, is there anything else that you can think of?

RI No, I can't think of a thing in the world -- no.

KK Well, I thank you so much for letting me come here today. This has been a delightful time.

RI Well, you're welcome.

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