

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series

Edna Hicks Interview

Conducted by James Newberry

April 28, 2016

Transcribed by Géraldine N’kodia

Born in 1930, Edna Hicks grew up in Harrow, a suburb of London that sustained considerable bombing from German planes during World War II. After the war Hicks got a job at a post exchange on a military base and met an American pilot. They married in 1956 and lived on six bases in the United States before retiring to Warner Robins, Georgia. Hicks recorded her oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in April 2016.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: Well this is James Newberry and I’m here with Edna Hicks at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw University on Thursday, April 28, 2016. And Ms. Hicks, do you agree to this interview?

Hicks: Oh yes, I do.

Interviewer: Thank you. So, could you please state your full name at birth?

Hicks: Olive Edna Wales

Interviewer: And where and when were you born?

Hicks: When I was born—July 25th, 1930. And I was actually born in Letchworth Hertfordshire¹ which is about thirty miles Northeast of London.

Interviewer: Tell me about your childhood, your family.

Hicks: When we were at Letchworth?

Interviewer: Yes.

Hicks: Ok. I was the third one of four children. We lived in this really beautiful town of Letchworth that was what they called the “Garden City” and it had nice parks and things. I remember, walking in—I love to pick wildflowers and there were always lots of them. Hmm—I went to school, I started school there, Westburry School when I was five years old. And I don’t remember a whole lot. I remember picking daffodils in our neighbors’ garden and getting into trouble for it. But I don’t remember a whole that much.

¹ Letchworth is a town located in Hertfordshire, England.

I remember going to school. I didn't like it so I turned the tap, the cold water tap on in the little girls' restroom. And I put the plug in it. And I thought of that one, flood the school and I won't need to go back. But the coming morning, I was very disappointed to find that somebody had you know let the water out [laughing]. And I had to continue going to school. But when I was five and then at the —five —I guess when I was in 1936, hmm—I—my father had to move closer to London, close into London for work. The Depression was just as bad or if not worse than in anywhere else. And so, he moved us to Harrow² and we lived in a temporary house in Sudbury, Sudbury Court road. And during that time, the job didn't work out for him. He was hospitalized with an ulcer. And, my mother really had a hard time there. But she couldn't find a house to rent so they, they said well why don't you buy one? And she said, "are you joking, aren't you?" And so, he said, "no." He said the payment for a house is less or not any more than renting. So, she bought a house. And it was so nice for us because it was brand new and everything. And we moved in and that was 1936. We moved in December of thirty-six. And then —thirty-seven — I had pneumonia. I was in hospital for a long time. I had to go school and I hated it still. And—but time went on and then we got to say to 1939. And there was so much talk of war. And I didn't know what that meant. And I asked my older sister, Joyce. And she said I don't really know either. But she said, "I think it is when the air is full of arrows" [laughing]. So now I thought about that a bit and that didn't make sense to me so. But when the time went on, in 1939, we were issued with gas masks. We, we had an air-raid shelter built in our back garden. Everybody did in the London area, what they called it, an Anderson shelter. It was partially under the ground and then corrugated, metal put over it, and then covered with soil. And we've spent many nights there, oh when the war actually started. But —gas masks, air raid shelter, and then they took sort of like a census. And every household, every family had to disclose how many people were in the family, and you couldn't hide that. And part of that they were able to, any young man who was approaching eighteen years old they were ready to draft him you know as soon as possible. And with that, they issued everybody an identification card which you had to carry with you. They issued everybody a ration book which you—the head of the home would keep; the mother would keep. And you had to be registered for your food at different shops, like a shop that sold dairy products. And then the butcher shop was assigned a separate one. And he, the butcher, would take your coupons when you bought. And you could only buy a certain amount. And I have a copy of a ration book here. [shows ration book] It's not a real one, this is just made up. But it has all of the, all of the like coupons that they

² Harrow is a town located in the London borough of Harrow, Northwest London, England.

would mark off or cut out. I think some things that were more of, short, they would cut them out so that you couldn't go back again to get more. But some of them, they just crossed out, sorry [coughing].

Interviewer: So, tell me what were your parents' names?

Hicks: My mother was Olive Nsondet. No, I'm sorry that's wrong. That was her mother's name. Olive Day, Olive Day not Nsondet.

Interviewer: And your father?

Hicks: Harold Edward Frederick Wales.

Interviewer: Wow. So, what did he do for a living?

Hicks: Well, when he was a young man, they lived in Newcastle on Tyne³. He, when he left school, he worked with a railway for a while. And then he— when—he they left school early in England at that time. When he was sixteen years old, he put his age on and joined the Royal Flying Corps. And the people he worked for at the railway, told him, they promised him that they would have a job for him when the war ended. And they didn't. So, he was in the Royal Flying Corps. And that, I think it was in 1920 about 1922 I believe, it became the Royal Air Force. And he was stationed in South England and that's where he met my mother. She lived in, near where I was born, a town called Stevenage. That's where she was born and grew up. And that's how they met. And then they were married. And a year later my mother was pregnant. And she, my dad moved her up to Newcastle, his old home. He couldn't get a job up there, not for any reason. And so, he said we better move back to the South. So, they moved back and he was able to get work. And then they had a house there. But then after I've told you that he had to move into to London to get more work because that one, that one just dissolved. So, he was fortunate he was able to get work—near London, Abington. Abington, it's just sort of not far from Harrow as you are going into downtown London.

Interviewer: Could you describe Harrow for me?

Hicks: Harrow? Yes. It's—the real name is Harrow on the Hill. And the hill is kind of nice when you can see it from you know around. There's a church right on the top and you see the steeple. On the side, there are the Harrow colleges. And Winston Churchill attended there at some point. It's a very high-level college. And people can go on from Eaton and places like that from there. And South

³ Newcastle on Tyne is a city located in the North East of England.

Harrow, where the old Harrow was surrounding the hill, on the hill surrounding it. And then South Harrow was not too far out from the main Harrow. And there was a North Harrow as well but and then there was [indecipherable] around there and places like that.

Interviewer: And how far was it from London?

Hicks: Hmm—It took—It was ten miles. Ten miles from downtown, downtown London.

Interviewer: Very close in.

Hicks: Yes. And you know today we drive ten miles just—well look we drove ninety miles here this morning and you—Yes, it's not that far. But we thought it was a long way into downtown London. But it was justly ten miles.

Interviewer: Can you describe your house there in Harrow?

Hicks: In Harrow? It was not a big house. It had three bedrooms upstairs, one bath, and a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen, and a hallway. That was it.

Interviewer: So, you said—you mentioned your sister's comment about war. What did you know about politics in Germany when you were a child? Did you have a sense of what was going there?

Hicks: As it got closer to the end of 1939, we picked up bits and pieces. But still didn't register there. However, it did with my brother. And on one particular Sunday, my parents went to church, and us children stayed home. And built-on the radio, and we listened to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. And he spoke, and at the end he said, "we are now at war with Germany." And as he said that, the air-raid sirens sounded. And we were terrified so my brother made us put on our gas masks. And we went to the house next door. And our neighbors said "you take those gas masks off. He said you don't need to worry. You are not—There's nothing happening. You'll be alright." So, he calmed us down. And then went on from there. Well—that was—that was the fourth of September 1939 I believe. But then, nothing really happened as—from what I can remember, until 1940. And then in 1940 there was the Battle of Britain. And every time an airplane came over the South coast, the air-raid sirens would sound. Well that meant that was very disruptive. So, they changed it to the air-raid sirens would sound when the aircrafts were overhead. So, you could hear them. You could hear the sirens like in the towns that were close to you. But you could hear them coming and then it would get very loud of

course when it was over you. So you better be in—You better take shower. Shower! I mean [laughing], shelter when you heard that. And as I said early, we had to carry those gas masks all the time, yeah.

Interviewer: Where did you carry it on you?

Hicks: I've got a picture here. I can show you.

Interviewer: Please hold it up.

Hicks: Ok. [holds up photograph] That was when I was nine years old. And we had to carry them.

Interviewer: So, tell me about being fitted for the gas masks?

Hicks: Oh, it was horrible. We were taken to some building. I think it was a school and lined up and dragged. Everybody had their gas masks put on. And I remember screaming because I thought I was gonna die. I thought they were shocking me. And the smell, that rubbery smell. And I only learned not too long ago they had asbestos in them. I am alive I mean. It didn't kill us, so I don't know. I don't know how much asbestos, but there was asbestos in them. So, but, but so we were all fitted. And babies now, little baby had to be put in sort of like a not a balloon, but something like it. And the mother would have to pump it continually. So, in an air-raid, if the mother was killed the baby would die. That's all—you know that's all they could do.

Interviewer: So, the mother strapped on her own gas mask and was pumping this bubble for the baby.

Hicks: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you said Neville Chamberlain said, "We're at war." Do you remember when Winston Churchill came to power as prime minister?

Hicks: No, you know I don't. But it must have been shortly after that. I don't remember, but I do remember him speaking. And he—you know my father, he listened to every speech and he was—I think Chamberlain gave everybody a lot of strength in that you know, we felt sure that we would win. And we were going not to let those Germans defeat us. It came close to it. And then at that time too, there was talk of invasion. And I don't know why it didn't succeed. I, thank God it they didn't. They talked—. Well there was talk of them being parachuted, dropped, you know soldiers dropped from near. And I remember saying to my mother "What would we do? What would happen? What would

happen if one came down in our back garden?” And she looked at me and she said, “Oh Edna” she said, “if one comes down in our back garden, he’ll be a young boy just as Billy”. And she said, “I’ll give him cup of tea.” [laughing] So, I thought ok, that’s the way it will be. And I was happy, you know. But to warn us of an attack like that, first of all, no churches across the nation were allowed to ring their bells during the war. Only if there was an attack by air, an invasion. Then, the bells would be allowed to warn us. So, we didn’t hear the church’s bells until the war ended.

Interviewer: So, the—were the church’s bells and air-raid sirens together?

Hicks: No. I think in the case of invasion it would have been just the bells. And everybody everywhere could hear the bells because lots of churches and they all had bells.

Interviewer: And who was supposed to ring them?

Hicks: Well I expect that would have been up to the vicar of each church. I don’t know. See I’m only telling you what I remember. I’m not going to read to look it up. But you can google it. [laughing]

Interviewer: So, I think at this time there’s the perception that for many in Britain, that they were sort of fighting alone, for a brief period of time. And can you speak at all about that? Did you talk about that? Do you remember your parents talking about that?

Hicks: Well I do remember a little bit because, the French were unable to help us. They couldn’t help themselves. The Belgians and everybody and so we were alone. I don’t really remember a whole lot except that all of our family, my uncles on my mother’s side and on my father’s side, they all went to war. And then in forty-two, my brother was—no forty-one, he was eighteen and in forty-two he was sent to India. He wasn’t—the training wasn’t very long. He came home and he said he got two weeks leave. So, my mother said, “Bill two weeks?” And he said “yeah”. He said that’s some vacation leave. So, after two weeks he left and we didn’t hear from him for a long time. And he ended up in India. And how he really almost didn’t get there because something happened to the ship he was supposed to be on. And the convoy had to leave, so they sailed by themselves. Just one ship going all the way around the East side of Africa. They stopped in Durban for a while and then they went on to India. But they were by themselves and there were German U-boats all the way along there. It was miracle that he got there. But he stayed there until 1946. So, when he came back he was a grown-up man.

Interviewer: What branch of service was he in?

Hicks: Royal Air Force.

Interviewer: But he was on a ship and going to England.

Hicks: Oh yes, they took him by ship, yes.

Interviewer: Did you have any sense of what he did in India?

Hicks: Yes, he was a mechanic. And he worked on mosquitoes⁴, the American mosquito. They were on the Southwest Bangalore, Southwest of India. I think it is West, yes. But South Bangalore.

Interviewer: So, tell me about your sister Joyce.

Hicks: Okay. Joyce was five years older than me. And when she was fifteen, she left school. And she had this job, learning to be a treasurer at the big department store in Harrow. And she had a bicycle. And one morning of the twelve of August 1940, I was up early that morning for some reason. And I went to the gate and she cycled off and I waved. And she turned around and she said, "Edna tell Momma I should be home for dinner." And that was it. She was killed in a traffic accident right then. So, I don't know. They came to school to take me home. And my mother worked. Nobody had a phone in those days. My mother learned by this policeman knocking on the door to tell her. Which must have been such a horrible thing, how she—. And so, she had the death of my sister, she had rationing, the war starting. And all at one time. And I just, you know—She wasn't the only one but I don't—how they did it. They got strength from above.

Interviewer: Did you notice a change in your mother?

Hicks: Oh yes [nodding]. Oh, very definitely. Yes hmm—She— she took it so badly that she had a friend and the friend was a Christian scientist. And my mother was Church of England. So, my mother went to the Christian Scientist's church with her. And she could confide in this lady. And this lady said to her you know, "you've got to pull yourself together. You've got two little girls at home. You've got to take care of them." So, I think that was a turning point for my mother. But she was very good. She took care of us. Oh, my goodness. With the rationing which was absolutely dreadful, and clothes were rationed. And you were issued clothing coupons. And they had to buy your clothes, your

⁴ Twin engine bomber.

shoes, bed linens. Anything that—made of cloth. So it was you know a gamble, really. What should you buy, what should you do? Fortunately, my mother was a dress maker, a good one. And so, she was able to alter clothes to fit me and Irene. And I remember when she made me a dress out of a man's suit. I guess it was one of my dad's old suits and things like that. And I'm getting off the subject a bit. But wool of course was very short. Wool to knit, with wool and yarn. So, she would get buy from thrift shops or somewhere all sweaters that had been knitted by hand. And would pull apart, wash the yarn and then knit. So, it's all recycling, as to it.

Interviewer: And what food in particular were very short?

Hicks: Everything. Okay, England imported all food. I, I—just as a guess, I would say seventy-five percent. And most of it came from Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Canada, United States. Of course, all those avenues were cut off. And so everything was rationed very, very, very you know—sharply. Cheese was like a little square like that for once a week [making gestures]. And of course, with—in the beginning there six people in the family. Of course, when Joyce was killed, five people. So, my mother could get rations, put it all together so it didn't look so bad. But when Bill went to India, that was another one cut off. So, yes it was bad. And in the beginning, when they told us they would be rationing, my mother who had such a sweet tooth went down to buy sugar. And she bought pounds and pounds of sugar. And I remember her standing by the pantry looking in and there was all the sugar. And she said “there, that will last us for the duration.” Not knowing that the duration would be five years. So, yes. It—you know rationing was bad. And the—still things still came in from the United States and Canada. But there were U-boats throughout the Atlantic. And they, well they sunk all of our ships, all the maritime ships, but it was one of those ships that captured a German U-boat. And on it, was an enigma machine. And they captured that. And they were able to decode it. And that was one of the good things that happened during the war. That was very important. But lots of bad things too because this was early in the war. And they found the Germans who were going to bomb Coventry. And Churchill said, we can't let them know that we know that. So, they had to let that raid go. Otherwise they would have found out that we had the code. Horrible decision for him to make.

Interviewer: Tough.

Hicks: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about your father's work during the war.

Hicks: Okay. Well, it's sketchy. In the beginning, he was put on night work because he was not fit for service. And the first work he did was at Mill Hill⁵, a place there. And His Master's Records⁶, I think you might have heard of His Master's Records company. There's a little dog by a gramophone. That was his logo, but they didn't make records at that time. They made munitions. And actually, what it was at that point, I don't know what he did. But then he was moved to a place in Acton⁷ where they were working on radars. And again, it was night work. And one night he told me that they were so sick and tired from running to the air-raid shelter that him and his friends, his colleagues, they decided to just sit in a room and play cards. And that night the air-raid shelter took a direct hit. Everybody was killed. So, you know [shrugs shoulders] that one of those things and so he came home. And then another night that when he was coming home a bomb had dropped close to us and it came down between two houses. And it was a land mine that comes down with a parachute. And they don't go off immediately. There's a delay, it fuses. And I was reading in one of those papers this morning that this one had come down in Saint Paul's Cathedral. And they managed to get it away but it was eight feet tall, big around. And if one of those bombs exploded, it would take out just about everything around it. We, I wouldn't be here if it had exploded. But they were able to defuse that one. So, and they defused the one for Saint Paul's too. But they were a lot of those that came down. And some of them—. The men who took them away and defused them, they were the bravest people I think in the whole world. But anyway, you were asking me about my dad's work and that's all I know about it.

Interviewer: So, he worked at night?

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: So that sorts of brings me to the next question. Why weren't you evacuated?

Hicks: Well, see evacuation begun in 1939 before even anything had started. And I can remember my parents talking about it. And then in 1940, when the bombings started they talked about it again. And my mother with my—well my brother was there then. But a little bit later on, my brother had gone, my older sister had gone, my dad was on a night work that left just my mother and the two small children. And she didn't want to be alone at night with a heavy

⁵ Mill Hill is a London suburb.

⁶ His Master's Voice (HMV) was the common name of a British record company created by the Gramophone company.

⁷ Town located in West London, England.

bombing. So that's why we weren't sent away and it worked out for us. We, you know, we weren't killed. We weren't injured. A lot of the children who were evacuated had not such good stories to tell. Some of them were very happy, but some were not treated well.

Interviewer: Did you have friends who evacuated?

Hicks: Yes, yeah, I did. One girl went to Canada. Another girl went to Wales, which is you know on the East, West side of England. Hmm—and then there were other girls that I knew who went. They weren't close friends but I, a lot of them went. But the school that I went to was very crowded because so many people in the East End of London were bombed out of. I mean there were homeless people. So, they were all sent to the rim around in, of London. And they went to our school. And they were given homes. If— Like there was one lady who lived in this house alone. And she had to let a family live with her. And there was quite a few like that. But, and one family, the older sister my brother married her. [smiling and laughing] Yes so, they wouldn't have met otherwise.

Interviewer: Okay. So, still here with Edna Hicks. We were talking about why you weren't evacuated. And I wanted to ask one more question about that. Did anyone in your extended family, or friends, other people in the neighborhood, did they express any concern that your mother have chosen not to evacuate you and your sister?

Hicks: No, because a lot of the children in the— that lived around us did not go either. I think it was mostly from the downtown part of London. See we were in what do you call the outer borough of the city? So, we didn't—I'm guessing at this. They probably didn't think we would be bombed so much, as much as we were. But it was a gamble that you took. Because even being evacuated wasn't a hundred percent safe. So, but the reason, the reason I think was if my father hadn't been on night work, I do believe we may have been sent into the countryside. But my mother didn't want to be the only person in the house with bombs dropping around. I don't blame her. We gave her company. We didn't give, we couldn't have given her much help I guess, but—.

Interviewer: So, let's talk about when the bombings started in earnest.

Hicks: Well, it started in 1940, 9th September of 1940. There was—I think there was bomb damages earlier than that. But it just, it was gradual. The Battle of Britain we would see— another thing. When Poland fell, the Polish Air Force pilots, and maybe others escaped to England. And they joined the Royal Air

Force. And they flew in the Battle of Britain. They helped along Canadians, Americans, Australians and New Zealanders did as well, a sprinkling of them. We, the house that my mother bought was about as the crow flies, not very far from an airport. And before the war, it was a very small airport like just like what do you call these small airplanes? —a little, what would you call a small airplane? [Husband says “auxiliary field”] Yes, just small. But it was taken over by the Royal Air Force to be used for the spitfires. And so, they would come up. We would see them occasionally come up and fly off in a squadron over our house. And they would, well the Battle of Britain was mostly around the South coast because they got the Germans as they came in on the South coast. So, we would see them go out and then we would see them, some of them come back with holes in their wings and stuff like that. And there is a memorial there in RAF Northolt for the Polish pilots because they did so much. But, so it began gradually. And the air battle was daytime. But then the Germans started bombing at nighttime. And now this is when we got the big, the big ones, Henschel Hs and Messerschmitt. Well Messerschmitt were fighters. I cannot remember the other name of the other airplane right now. But anyway, the big ones. And we had the air-raid sirens and we would go to the air-raid shelter. My dad was home on weekends so then he would join us. And I remember one night, I was in my bed, and my dad awoken me, shaking me violently. And he said, “Come on Edna! Didn’t you hear the air-raid siren?” And I hadn’t. And they gone down with Irene and they forgot about me for while. [laughing] Anyway, I managed to get down. But, yes it—so they bombed at nighttime and it got worst and worst and worst. And they were looking for Northolt airport, but it had been camouflaged. And what I read some time ago was that, it was the camouflage was so good, that even Allied pilots had a difficult time finding it. Which wouldn’t have been very good for them. But the Germans, I don’t, I don’t know I may be wrong, but I don’t think they ever bombed it. However, they did bomb us because we had a big green park atop of our avenue. A green big park like the size of a big golf course. And they bombed it thinking perhaps that it was the airport. And so in the winter time, I know we used to go out when we, whenever there was no air-raids on. We would go out and just play in craters. [laughing] And in the winter when there was a bit of rain and a little bit of freezing, we would slide on the ice and—.

Interviewer: How big were the craters?

Hicks: About big, you know [shows with arms out wide]. Not terribly deep. I don’t recall. But big shallows about as big as around us, this end of the room.

Interviewer: So, I want to sort of break down an air-raid. From start to finish you talked a little bit about this. But what was the sound like of bells and sirens going off? And how long would it usually last?

Hicks: A siren? An air-raid siren, how long would it last?

Interviewer: Yes, well and how long would the whole raid last? Would the amount vary?

Hicks: Oh, it varied greatly. They didn't sound an all clear until they absolutely knew that there were no planes left in the facility. So, it could be half an hour. It could be two or three hours. It could be all night, and it was during the night bombing. It was all night. And I remember once. I think by then I was probably eleven or twelve, maybe twelve or thirteen. I got up, went to school. And I thought, that's funny there's nobody around. I went upstairs to my classroom, and this warden came towards me. And he said, "What are you doing here? What are you doing here? Don't you know there's a raid on?" And we hadn't heard the all clear, so my mother just assumed because it was quiet. But there were still planes around. So, I managed, well I dodged that one - ha ha. But, things like that happened. As seniors in the school, we didn't have an air-raid shelter. But we had to seat in a cloak room which was as big as this perhaps [pointing at the room]. And I don't know why they thought it was safe. But, the infants and juniors they had built air-raid shelters in the playing fields. And that's where I went to first. And they were horrible places like just like a mold tunnel, you know like a round hole going through dark, damp. And my mother, we of course had our gas masks, and my mother would put a little snack in there and then she said, "if you're in there for a long time." Well as soon as we sat down, I got it out. But I was—you know a direct hit would have wiped them out. Nothing could stop a direct hit. I mean that was just the way it was.

Interviewer: So, it was mostly just for shrapnel.

Hicks: [nodding]

Interviewer: Can you describe the shelter in your garden?

Hicks: Yes, it was—. They dug a hole maybe, maybe four feet down, six feet long and maybe, I don't know, five feet wide. And they built them depending on the number of the people in the family. So, we had a relatively big one because there was six people in the family at that time. And it was thick concrete. Well about as thick as this [showing the cover of a book] because there was a shelf when—and then they covered it with corrugated metal. [motions above with

hand] And then they put a flat end to it and a flat front to it with an opening so that you could get in. And covered it with soil. And it would have stopped—if the house had been bombed and the bricks came down, we would have been okay. Direct hit? No. The shrapnel was okay because the shrapnel and there was a lot of shrapnel There were lots of anti-aircraft guns all around London, all the way around. And we would hear them going “boom boom boom boom boom” like that. And then there was search lights too. And if a plane got caught in a search lights, they got in. Yes.

Interviewer: Did you have blackout curtains?

Hicks: Oh yes! Oh yes, absolutely. And they were wardens on each street. And they would walk up and down. And if there was a chink of light, they would knock on your door “Put that light out! Put that light out!” Coming up, I read one of those newspapers that I gave you. And at the bottom, there was “times for blackout” and “tonight blackout would be at 7:40” until maybe 6:00 something in the morning, or you know whatever it was. But during those times, you couldn’t let light get out. And people were not allowed to smoke outside because an aircraft could see that red end when you were smocking. And you couldn’t have a flashlight when you were outside for the same reason. So, when on a night where there was no moon, it was very dangerous. And then we often had fogs. So with the blackout and the fog the buses had a hard time cause you know trying to get through anywhere. And I was reading not too long about—well no, I wasn’t reading. It was a tape my brother gave me about the great fog in London in 1954. But the same sort of applied during the war. This bus was following a car. You know there is like this much in front of you up here —cause fogs in England, when they say you could only see your hand in front of you, they weren’t joking. It was total so—. [laughing] And you lost your sort of equilibrium. You didn’t know which way was up. So, anyway. This bus was following a car and the car. And the car made a turn, and the bus made a turn. But the bus has gone into this person’s driveway. [laughing] It must have been a long one. But there were funny things like that. And in those days, the buses had a driver and a man, a conductor, who took your money and gave you a ticket. So, they would walk ahead of the bus, sorts of holding on to the bus and walking along. It’s— it’s terrible. And then, when it was foggy and you go into a movie, to see a movie, the fog would be in there too. And you couldn’t see the scree very well. [laughing]

Interviewer: So, how frequent were these air-raids?

Hicks: Every night. In the beginning, there were nine months of nighttime air-raids. Fifty-seven consecutive nights in the beginning, in the very beginning. Fifty-seven consecutive nights of nighttime bombing. And that was not only in London. But it was like Coventry, up in the North, in the South. Just different places. They of course, they bombed the steel industry which Coventry was, that area. And they just went—and if they, I don't think they were allowed to go home with their bombs so they dropped them indiscriminately. Buckingham Palace was bombed three times. And the King and the Queen they wanted them to leave but they said, "No, we are going to stay there with our people." And they would go out visiting people who had been bombed. And that endeared them to everybody.

Interviewer: And you were the same age as Princess Margaret?

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: So did you, did you ever—how did you feel about the girls, princesses?

Hicks: Oh well, we loved them. I mean we never did see them in the flesh. But we loved them because well, they were our princesses. And my older sister Joyce was the same age as the Queen, and yes—I just wondered be the different world if she had still lived? But yes, we thought and we would see them quite a lot on special occasions wearing their royal gowns. And that was always so much, so important to us, yes.

Interviewer: So, when you were in the bomb shelter during one of the raids, what would you do to pass the time?

Hicks: Well, we looked at comic books. I don't know that we did much of anything cause it was night time mostly. So, we tried to go to sleep. I told you the concrete or cement was that thick so there was a shelf. So, at the end when you got it, at the end there was a bunk across that rested on each side. My sister would go up first, and I would be beside her. And one night I remember, I could feel myself falling and falling and falling. And I fell right, right down onto my parents. It wasn't far but, yeah—No, I don't think we did anything. In the daytime, in the beginning before we got really the war started, my Irene and I would go in and we would put our dolls in there, and flowers, and things. We thought it was fun. But, but then getting on—when after the Germans' night time bombing, there was a lull cause they—by that time, the Americans, thank God, they had gone into England. And they were bombing Germany and taking the focus off of them bombing us, really. But Hitler had another program for us and that was the one, the flying bomb. So, when that started,

we had to get down into the shelter again. And my mother who was sick and tired of the air-raids shelter she said, "We would just sleep under the dinner room table." It was a thick and odd top which I don't know it would have saved us. It may have. But one night, well one day, our neighbor came over. And she said, "Mrs. Wales I saw two airplanes flying over your house last night. Very low and they were both on fire." So, fortunately they flew over and gone somewhere. Well, we learned later that they were two flying bombs. And that with the flames coming out at the end that was okay. But as soon as the engine stopped, the engine stopped and they just fell. So, if you heard one, you better take shelter immediately because they were that bad. And at school, we came up with this rhyme that we could them doodle bugs. And the rhyme was, "if a doodle dallys, don't dawdle, dive!"

Interviewer: So, do you remember hearing them?

Hicks: Oh yes. Oh, they made a horrible noise, yes. And once in school, we heard it coming our way, one of them coming our way. And we were, everybody was just so quiet because we know that if that stopped, it would fall right into the school. But thanks goodness, it went on a bit further and landed in a field. And then after we got used to those, there were the V-2 rockets. And they were true, true rockets. And they, we couldn't hear them coming. You would just hear an explosion. They didn't sound the air-raid sirens because they didn't, nobody knew when they were coming. They killed a lot of people. They just, just landed. And if you heard the explosion, you thought "Thank God!" You know, "I'm over here and not over there."

Interviewer: Did you know anyone who was injured or killed?

Hicks: In the war?

Interviewer: In the bombings.

Hicks: In the bombings? No, you know I really didn't. I heard of people, but they weren't close to us. I knew this—I had this friend who, she was my age. And during that time, she lived in the East End of London, the dock part. And this one night, there was an air-raid, and they didn't have for some reason, or they didn't have anywhere to go, or maybe they couldn't get out quickly enough. But the mother who was holding a newborn baby, and Eunice and her little sister they stood in the doorway, in the arch of a doorway. And the house came down, and they were saved. However, the mother was in daze, a daze. She was holding the baby and there was glass shards in all around. And she didn't know whether they were on the baby or not. In the turmoil, and that's all you can call

it, the wardens managed to get her out, sent her to hospital straight away with the baby. And the baby was fine. But the two little girls, they just took them and put them on a train and sent them up to Scotland. The mother didn't know where the girls had gone. The girls didn't know where the mother was. The father was in the Army so—But miraculously, they all got together when the war ended. And you know, when you think about things like that—and I'm so thankful that my family, although my sister was killed, our family didn't experience any of that type of thing. Yes, we were afraid because we could hear the bombs coming down. But they didn't hit us, yes. There were lots of incendiary bombs.

Interviewer: What's an incendiary bomb?

Hicks: It's a small bomb that when it breaks open, it fuses out fire. And when hits your house, and you didn't get to it, it would burn your house down. That's what they were. And they dropped lots, lots of them, lots.

Interviewer: Was your house hit by anything? Shrapnel?

Hicks: Shrapnel [nodding]. And then, one time, an anti-aircraft shell that hadn't exploded, it came down and went under our back garden. And the people came to dig it out, but they couldn't find it. So, it must have traveled quite a distance and, you know, who knows? We moved away from that. So, I don't know if anyone ever found it or—But they are still finding unexploded bombs in London. When they excavate to build something new they often come across them, yes.

Interviewer: So—How did you— Okay, so if you're going through this night after night after night. Do you develop a certain attitude or routine in this situation?

Hicks: Oh yes. You, I heard people say, "Oh here we go again. Let's get into the shelter." And "make sure you got your gas make, make sure you got some tea and a thermos." And we had air-raid shelters that were born, built in the street as well. So, if a person was you know visiting someone, they could go in there. They were bunks in there, you could sleep in there. Some people did. And in down—you know right in the center of London, where the underground tubes are. People would sleep in those stations which were very safe. However, one night, some of the people, so many people pushing to get in there. Somebody slipped and they all fell down and a lot of people died. That was a tragic thing. But anyway, as I was saying, we all had our gas masks, we all had identification cards that we had to carry with us. And our identification cards

were, the father, it was BICJ. And my father was number one BICJ, BICJ one. I, my mother was two, my brother three, Joyce four. I was five and Irene six. I would never ever forget that number, BICJ 225.

Interviewer: What did BICJ stand for?

Hicks: No idea. It was just codes that I guess people in this area would be this and so on. But I don't, I don't know.

Interviewer: Who did you have to show it to?

Hicks: Anybody who asked you for it. If you were, if you were killed in a, one of the bombings, they could find out who you were by that card. I mean that's like us having our driving license or something. It didn't have a photograph on but—and I guess if you were out bombed or out there wondering around, there's no proof that it was you. I, I don't know how they, I don't know how they did that but you had to carry it.

Interviewer: So, when the planes came in, were they others planes or flown by the RAF to fight them. Did you ever see you know any sort of fighting in the sky? I mean—.

Hicks: Yes, well cause the bombers came over at nighttime. But during the day, when the raiders would come in, the small planes, yes. My brother before he, before he was called up, he would go out and watch them to my mother's horror. And I would go with him. But he, when he was in school, he joined the Royal Air Corps. So, when he was called up with the knowledge that he gained there, they put him in the Air Force, which he loved. And he, he would, before he was called up, he would have these cards with a black picture of, the shape of an aircraft. And he would say, "Ok Edna, hold them up. I got it." You know, he had to know which airplane was what. So, then he started testing me. So, I learned to identify quite a few airplanes too which we had fun doing that. But anyway—.

Interviewer: Tell me about holidays and family traditions in those years when the bombing was the heaviest. Did you carry as normal?

Hicks: No, there weren't any holidays. There weren't. I mean you know, we didn't—the only thing we did was occasionally go to visit my grandfather who lived in Stevenage, thirty miles North of London and, we didn't stay long. But for those, my mother had to take the ration book, all ration books with her. And you would have to tell the store where you were registered to mark them so

that you could take them somewhere else. Food I would say was so scarce that we had to do that.

Interviewer: Did you travel by car?

Hicks: Oh no, we went by bus [nodding]. We didn't have a car. Not many people did.

Interviewer: Did you follow news of the war?

Hicks: Oh yes.

Interviewer: And how did you follow it?

Hicks: Well, newspapers primarily and the radio. We didn't have Fox News or anything like that, with the glamour girls. [laughing]

Interviewer: What are your memories of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

Hicks: I don't really remember. I honestly don't remember.

Interviewer: So, do you have a memory of getting the knowledge or realizing that the U. S. was entering the war?

Hicks: Oh yes. And it was because "Oh the Americans are coming over. They'll have chewing gum." [laughing]

Interviewer: Did it mean anything to you beyond that?

Hicks: I guess not really. I mean, I think I was probably too young to understand the full implication. But we knew that the Americans were flying bombers over Germany. And that was good news. But I don't recall a whole lot about that. And as far as chewing gum, we didn't get any because the Americans didn't come to where we were, on our part of the island. Although, once during the lull in the bombing, there was a theater in London that never closed. And so, my dad took us all. It was a — there was a movie made about that too, *It Never Closed*. — we went and it was really downtown London. And we, coming home, we were going down the escalator. And these two Americans passed by us, these young men in their beautiful uniforms. And one of them turned around to my sister and he said, "Hello honey! What's your name?" And she said, "Oh Irene." So, then he went on his way. So, my dad looked at my mother and he said, "You know, that's the second American that has spoken to Irene." And my mother said, "I bet she will marry one." And then I thought to myself, "No,

she won't. But I will." [laughing] I, I don't know why I was so sure about that but I had no idea how'd I ever meet one, you know, but I did.

Interviewer: And what were your perception of the United States when you were that age?

Hicks: Okay. Well, occasionally we were able to go to see a movie of Betty Grable and that beautiful technicolor, beautiful clothes, beautiful people, beautiful places. And every time I got out of the, and the reality just depressed me terribly because all we had was darkness and grunge and bombed out buildings and no much food to eat. So, America seemed like almost a paradise to us. And it, it persisted. America that's why everybody, "America, oh, let's— we are going to America." It was a paradise. But—and when I did come over here in 1956, I wasn't disappointed because we lived in Massachusetts. And the, I come over in September, and the autumn leaves, the blue sky, and then the snow. I really thought I was in technicolor, you know I thought I was beautiful.

Interviewer: So, what are your memories of the D-Day invasion?

Hicks: I do not remember that at all. I only remember what I've read and how, what a horrible, horrible disaster it was. Although it was alleviated by everybody who owned a boat, went across to pick those soldiers up, and bring them back. And that's all I know. It was just something that—.

Interviewer: You are talking about Dunkirk?

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, but the D-Day?

Hicks: Oh, I am sorry.

Interviewer: No, you are fine.

Hicks: That was Dunkirk, yes.

Interviewer: So, we are moving later on now.

Hicks: Yes, D-Day, D-Day. Oh, D-Day. We just heard little bits cause it was all pretty secret. But we just heard little bits that there was something going on, that's—.

Interviewer: Do you remember a point in which the war seemed to be on the road for the Allies to win? That's badly phrased, but did you have a sense that the war was turning?

Hicks: I think we did, we did. You know it was, it was like—well this will be over soon. It was that attitude. And I think at that point we stopped carrying our gas masks with us. It was like you know, “we are not going to need these.” And we might have left the gas masks a bit earlier than but you know—we just felt that Germany wasn’t able, capable of doing much more than send those rockets over. And, and with people like Crawford over there, doing what he did, I mean that broke it.

Interviewer: But how long did the bombings last?

Hicks: Well I told you the nine months of bombing. But after that, it was spattered you know, irregular. The Germans were still intended on coming over and a lot of them continued to get through. And they would, just one plane would come over circling around and dropping a bomb here and there. But after a while, they did stop. But that’s when they sent the V-1 rockets, the bus bomb and then the V-2.

Interviewer: So, there was a pause and then they sent these new—.

Hicks: Yes, yes. It lightened up quite a bit. And the rationing was just as bad. But the, the bombing that eased up a bit. And we felt that we could go out, not worry too much. In fact, in 1943, I think it was, we were able to go on a school tour to a museum in London, downtown London. So, you know they judged that it would be safe for us to do that. And another time, they took us to a theater, a ballet, Swan Lake, in the afternoon. [nodding]

Interviewer: Did school shut down for any period of time?

Hicks: Yes, it did right in the beginning. And I’ve been trying to think. It seems to me that it was a year. But I, I must google that some time and find out. Because at first, the schools were closed. And they were closed for a while. And my parents were getting concerned because, you know, we weren’t being educated. Well then the schools opened every other day. Not every other day. But half the school went this day, and then half the next so that if there was a bomb, it wouldn’t have killed as many. So, it went on for a while, but I don’t know exactly how long. It seemed like a year. And I know my parents were trying to find somebody in the neighborhood who would homeschool us, but we didn’t have to do that. So, you know—.

Interviewer: What are your memories of the end of the war and the Victory Day?

Hicks: Oh, well cause VE⁸ Day came first. And the—we had the neighbors all got together and built a bonfire in— there were crossroads and our house was on a corner. So, this was right in front of our house, huge bonfire. And we sang, and we danced, and we drank. The adults drunk, we didn't. But we had a lot of fun. And it was about midnight when the fire had gone down, but had reached its height of heat, you know. The whole road blew up. And we said, "wow, we did what Germany couldn't do." [laughs] So, but then as it got dark that night, airplanes flew over the house, low. Our own airplanes, with their lights on. I never knew an airplane had lights to put on. And we were able to turn our lights on with no blackout. And then, I'll never forget my mother saying, "Oh Edna! All this time, we could have been sleeping in our own bed." [laughing] Yes, we could have. We hadn't needed to go in to the air-raids shelters because nothing touched us. But we were fortunate, we were.

Interviewer: Did you remember the songs that you were saying?

Hicks: Yes, "there will be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover." Vera Lynn, she was wonderful. She, the songs that she sung was so uplifting and so good. She was a wonderful lady. And then, the victory in Japan we were more prepared for that one because we knew it was coming. So, we had a stage and I remember we dressed up in costumes. And I made like a cowgirl costume. And I was saying the only song I knew about America was "chocolate soldier from the U. S. A." [laughing]

Interviewer: How does that go?

Hicks: Well it was like, "they used to call him lazy bones in Harlem, lazy good for nothing or the day, but now then mighty proud of him in Harlem, chocolate soldier from the U. S. A." [laughing] I don't think they would like to, you know, I don't—I think they would be sort of banned now, wouldn't it, or would it?

Interviewer: It's an out of date song, right?

Hicks: It's out of the date. But you know, calling a Black man a chocolate soldier. Yes, they wouldn't like it. And I wouldn't like it either. But at that time—.

Interviewer: So, tell me about leaving school. When did that take place?

Hicks: July of 1940. No, wait a minute. July of 1945!

⁸ VE Day stands for Victory in Europe. It was first celebrated on May 8, 1945

Interviewer: So, the war in Europe is over.

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: And why did you leave school?

Hicks: That was the time they made us leave.

Interviewer: So, you were a senior sort of speak?

Hicks: No, it wasn't forty-five, it was forty-four. I was fourteen, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And why were you made to leave school?

Hicks: Well, everybody my age did. We were given—this is what was so bad about England and the schooling, we were tested at age eleven, English and Math. And, and if you didn't get A or B+, you failed. And that meant you couldn't go on to grammar school. I didn't excel in either one of those. So, I was an art. I like arts and history, geography. That's what I was really interested in. It didn't count, it didn't count. So, when I was fourteen, I, we left school. And there wasn't much work at the time around with the end of the war, you know, on nearly in the end of the war. So, my father said he didn't want me to work in a factory or a restaurant. So, the only option for me was an office or a shop. And I didn't really, looking back I wish I had, but at that time, I didn't fancy working in an, in an office. So, my mother got me a job in a department store in the millinery department. And they were going to train me, teach me millinery which was one, another thing I really loved. So, after three weeks there, I was informed by the manager that I was leaving. And I say, "I am?" And she said, "your mother came in and said that you would be leaving." And my father that was taking us up to Newcastle, to get away from the V-1 bombs. And I thought, "well I didn't know I was leaving, I was getting to like it there." So, when, we didn't stay in Newcastle very long but we came back. And my mother was able to get me another position, in a ladies' shop closer to home. And they had a milliner, and I was going to learn millinery. Well another one that didn't—they—I don't know why they just, they just didn't—All I had to do was just pick up pins and dust things and—and then they put into the ladies' department selling dresses which I didn't want to do that. So, I—my mother again helped me get this my job in Harrow, in a toy shop. And I rather like that because the lady who owned it she was very nice. And she let me dress up the windows. We called it windows-dressing. I don't know if you do now. But with all those pretty dolls and things. And I really enjoyed that. But then after a while, I heard that Americans had come back to the London area. Oh, this is

after, oh yes. This after, around forty-seven forty-eight. With the Berlin Airlift, the Americans had come to London and they had opened a station. It wasn't a base, it was a station not very far from where I lived. So, I am getting a bit mixed up here. But I was, I got this job. I got an interview with a place in London. I wanted to sketch dresses for the fashion envelopes and fashion books. And I could sketch pretty well. So, I had my portfolio and we were on the station waiting to go into London. And this American came onto the station, he looked like something out of those technicolor movies too. My mother, she embarrassed me to death. She went over, I was seventeen at the time, seventeen or eighteen. And she said, "Are they hiring young women on the base?" [laughing] He said, "Oh no Mam," he said, "if your daughter is interested you know working on the base, she will have to see a personnel officer." So, that was that. And I dismissed it. Well, we went into London, went to this place and they looked into my work. And they fought everything was okay except I wasn't tall enough. Now I can't understand why that would make any difference just sketching. But that was it at the time. So, then I had another interview, a short time after that at a photographer's. And it was not to take photography, it wasn't to model. It was just to you know do whatever works need to be done. But he said, "I'm sorry you're not tall enough." Another one. So, when I got home I thought, the heck! What can I do? I'll go this—the base personnel office. And I got a job in their— well we called it a nefy. They called it the post exchange, where they sold all kinds of thing and they put me in a department that sold English dishes, oil paintings, ornaments. And I loved it. I mean that was really, that was really, you know, very interesting.

Interviewer: This was part of the post-exchange that was set up by the Americans?

Hicks: Yes, yes. It was all American.

Interviewer: Why did they have this place selling those sorts of things?

Hicks: Well I suppose it was because so many Americans were stationed there. And they would buy gifts to send back home and items for their homes in England, things like that. Well after, after a while, I left there because I wanted to see if I could get a better job. And I got a job in a drugstore, a chemist in England. And I worked in the surgical department. And that was a very good job, and I liked it. And when I asked the manager what chances were there for me to be promoted, to have an increase in pay, he said, "Oh in about five years." So, I thought I am not getting anywhere. So, a friend of mine still worked on the base and I called her. And I said, "Irene see if you can find me a job on the

base.” Because I said, “I just—I need to get a better paying job.” So, after a while, she called me and she said, “Okay I’ve got you a job,” she said. “It’s as a cashier in the officers’ club.” And I said, “Irene, I failed math. I didn’t even get a D in math. How can I be a cashier or a treasurer?” But then I thought, “Okay, well I am gonna do it.” So, I’ve got the job, I’ve got the job. And there was there that I met my first husband, Jerry. He was a captain. He was a general’s pilot. And so, that’s how it all began.

Interviewer: What did he do during the war?

Hicks: He flew in a China-India over the hump. He flew a C-46, taking the gas over the hump to the free Chinese. That was what he did.

Interviewer: What’s the hump?

Hicks: The Himalayans. [laughing] They flew the lowest passage through which was what? Twenty—. [Husband says “twenty thousand, The Himalayans are 30,000, but there’s a low spot 20,000] And they went through that gap. And it was very dangerous because if they went down, nobody could rescue them. So, it was death if you went down, if you survived the crash. But that’s what he did. And he was there until all the way through the war. He made twenty-three missions. And then, when the war ended he had to stayed out there to transport the free Chinese from I think it was in the Kunming area to Shanghai. So, they could get with Chiang Kai-Shek⁹ to go to Taiwan. So, that was—then he got back. And as soon as he got back to the States, they sent him to Germany to take part in the Berlin airlift. And in that he flew coal into Berlin. So, that’s quite a job.

Interviewer: And how did he end up in England?

Hicks: Berlin Airlift. Well, okay—So, when he got through with the Berlin Airlift, he was sent back to the States. And then, they sent him to this base in England, the one in London, doing aerial photography as sorts of spy work. And, but somebody said to him, “Davis, you’re not getting anywhere in a job like that. So, you’ve got to—.” Well, he was very fortunate. Out of all the pilots in England at that base who had more, he had more hours than anybody else in multi-engines planes. And he so, with that he was selected to be General Celsus designated pilot. And, oh, he had a very good job there.

Interviewer: And why did you like him Why were you attracted to him?

⁹ Chinese political and military figure.

Hicks: Oh well, he was very good looking. He was a very handsome man. And , but he was very busy so we had—we had a few dates and it didn't seem to be going anywhere. And then in 1954 by that time I've quit the job at the officers' club and I've gone back to work in the post exchange. And then I was working on the jewelry department. But so, he came in to say what I thought was goodbye. So, after a while he, we were talking and talking. And he wasn't saying anything, and it wasn't going anywhere. So, I thought, if he doesn't go soon I'm just gonna cry. So, I put my hand down and I said, "Well goodbye Jerry." And he walked, turned away, walked away. But then we began corresponding and in 1956, I flew to the States to marry him.

Interviewer: And what did it mean to you to leave England?

Hicks: Well [pause] I was so enthralled with getting married, I don't really think, I really didn't think I was leaving England. It's a strange thought. It was because America didn't seem to be that far away. So, I knew I would be able to go back. Earlier, I had wanted to go out to New Zealand, to immigrate to New Zealand. And when I thought, and I had all my papers, and my dad signed them. But when I thought that I would never see England again in the spring time, probably never see England again cause it's such a long way, I thought, no I can't go there and I tossed those papers out. But so, my destiny was here.

Interviewer: How did your mother feel about you leaving?

Hicks: She was very happy. She was overjoyed. She said, she thought it was just you know "wonderful". Something she would have liked to have done. But, yes.

Interviewer: Did she make any trips over?

Hicks: No, I could never get them to come over. It was always, always something, always something. And after my dad died I said, "Mom I am coming to England and "but I want to bring you back with me but you'll have to get a passport. And well she didn't do that. So, when I get to England it takes quite a long time get a passport there." So, I said, "Well you know I would have taken you back with me and I would have brought you back to England" cause she said she didn't like she traveled alone. And she wouldn't, she wouldn't. And then my sister had three girls. And each one of them as they turned sixteen I said, "Okay when you're sixteen I am going to pay your fares for you to come to America, stay with us a while." They had excuses. One girl didn't want to leave her boyfriend. The other girl didn't want to—and so, the three them said no. So, my sister and in my brother-in-law, they weren't interested. So, I finally got my brother to come over and that was when he was seventy-five.

And he had the most wonderful time. And we saw too that he did. We took him to Disney World and all places you know we thought he liked. And he didn't want to go home. And thanks goodness he came over when he did cause he died the following year.

Interviewer: Oh wow.

Hicks: Yes.

Interviewer: And I want to talk about your husband's military career, your first husband's military career. How many bases did you lived on in the United States?

Hicks: Okay. Massachusetts, Westover Air Force Base for three years. Then he went to the Command and Staff College in in Maxwell, Alabama. We were there for about a part of the year. And then went to MacDill, Tampa We were there three years. Excuse-me [coughing]. And then we went to Japan, Tokyo for three years. And then came back to Hamilton Air Force Base just north of, of San Francisco. And that would have been a four-year assignment but we were there two and a half years. And he gave up flying at that point. And so, he couldn't stay there because it was a flying job. So, they sent him out here to Robins. And that's how I came to Georgia.

Interviewer: And where is Robins Air Force Base located?

Hicks: Warner Robins, Georgia, South of Macon.

Interviewer: And when did you come there? Do you know the year?

Hicks: Yes, it was 1968. And he retired as soon as he could in 1969. And then we left Georgia, went up to Massachusetts where I thought we would live. And I don't know, after being away, after being in the South we decided it wasn't for us. And then he said, "Where shall we go?" cause we didn't have children. And he wasn't close to his family. So, we went to Missouri where he was born. Lived there a while, didn't like it. So, we moved to Florida. And we stayed for eighteen months and went back to Missouri for a while. And went back to Florida for a while, finally bought a house. We, eighteen months we were there at that time. Went back to Missouri and then we went back to Florida and bought a house. We were there for eight years. And then we moved to Williamsburg, Virginia. We were there two years. And I liked it but he didn't. And so, he said he wanted to go back to Florida. And I said, "No." We left there for many reasons. And the reasons still apply. So, we made a

compromise and settle on Georgia for a little bit, in between the two.
[laughing]

Interviewer: So, tell me about meeting your second husband.

Hicks: You mean Old Crawfy¹⁰ over there? [He says, “the person over here.”]

Interviewer: That guy.

Hicks: Well after Jerry died, it was 2000. So, widows friends of mine said, “Why don’t you come with us to have dinner at the Officers’ Club on a Saturday night?” So, I did. And then on a Wednesday night, they would go and have something to eat and then go to the movies. Well, on this one particular Wednesday night, it was a buffet on a Wednesday night. I got up and there was a man standing beside me. And he said to me, “Do you know if that is chicken or shrimp? the deep-fried chicken or shrimp?” That’s how I got to know Robert. What a line! [All laugh]

Interviewer: And when did you marry?

Hicks: Well that, I met him in ’03, January or February of ’03 and we were married in October. And when he asked to marry him I said, “No I don’t want to get married.” I was not intending to get married and he said, “Oh think about it.” And I said, “Okay. I’ll think about it.” But, we were married in October. [husband talks in the background. “Tell about restaurant—, unclear] Well, there is a restaurant, there is a restaurant in a Warner Robins, a very nice sandwich restaurant. We had sandwiches and we were leaving. And I was driving my car. So, I was in the car and he—you didn’t get down on bended knee [addressing her husband in the room]. You were in the car. You said, “Would you marry me?” And I said, “No. Let me think about it for a while. Give me six months.” Well that was three months. I think it was about four months later we got married. So, then this was what was interesting. He said, “Where will we get married?” and I said, “well, I don’t know.” We didn’t want to go out to Las Vegas to get married. I said, “Well I would like to get married in the church.” And he said, “Okay. He would too.” [husband talks in the background about church, unclear] So—church? Okay, So, I had no objection to my, in my church. So, then he said, “I need to have a bagpiper.” And I thought, “bagpiper, really? Where would I find a bagpiper?” And I did. So, then it went on and on and on. And in the end, it was quite a formal wedding. His three sons were there. And I called my cousin in England, and I

¹⁰ This is Mr. Crawford’s nickname.

jokingly said to him, “Dick you know, I am getting married.” I said, “How about you giving me away?” So, he said “okay.” So, they came. [laughing] And all in tuxedos. And he walked me down the aisle and my [husband says, “It was crammed full.”] Yes it was. Because they were all waiting to see what on earth I would marry. But we had the bagpiper to lead us in. I had a maid of honor and a little flower girl. And my wedding dress. I went to this Japanese dress maker. And that poor girl. I picked out a pattern that was quite difficult and of course the fabric was flimsy and you know, difficult to deal with. And what was so tragic, her only granddaughter, died. And I think she was here at the school, this college. She was twenty-two years old and she had meningitis. She died. And then so I said to her, “Mary.” I said, “please just forget it. I can, I’ll buy something.” She said, “no, oh no Ms. Edna. She said, “I’ll finish it.” She said, “it’s therapy for me.” Well a week or two went further along, and her husband had a heart attack. I said, “oh no.” I said, “this is it.” I said, “you cannot do anymore of this.” She said, “I’ll finish this for you.” She said, “please.” Her husband was getting all okay after that. But she said, “it’s therapy for me.” And she did an excellent job. But poor lady, I felt so sad for her. But then, so we had this nice wedding. It was very nice, yes. [Edna’s husband refers to Edna’s nickname, the wicked stepmother. Robert’s sons came up with that nickname].

Interviewer: And why is that?

Hicks: It’s only Rob, only Rob the eldest one.

Interviewer: Is there a reason for it?

Hicks: Well no. Cause he, he tries to trick me up with things you know. So, I tricked him up. And I was the one that said that I was his wicked stepmother. [Edna’s husband tells about the deep love that his sons have for Ms. Edna.] And we do have a good time [as a family].

Interviewer: So, you were married to two World War II pilots?

Hicks: Right, and you know it’s a funny thing. If, I don’t think I would have married Crawford, if we hadn’t got that connection. That connection, not just with the War, but with airplanes. Like you know, we talked about airplanes, we understand them.

Interviewer: And so, going off that, why do you think it is important to share your World War II story?

Hicks: Well, I hopefully others will learn from it. Hopefully, we will never have to go through that same kind of thing again [Mr. Crawford says, “hopefully they will know more about what happened and the present conditions of war.”] Yes, I hope it helps somebody. But see, and when the war ended it wasn’t like oh you closed that door and everything is normal again. It wasn’t. It wasn’t normal for another ten years. Rationing still went on. Things were very drab. All the nice things that England made were sent for export. We could only have, what? Like seconds or utility things that were not good, such good fabrics and stuffs like that. And it was very dreary. And that’s why a lot of people went to Australia, New Zealand where they could go. And the government would pay their passages out there. That’s why I wanted to go to New Zealand. The government paid your passage. You had to stay there for three years. If you came back earlier, you had to reimburse them for your fare. But so, it was dull, dull, dull.

Interviewer: And I wanted to go back to more things before we finish. You said you got out of school in 1944, at the age of fourteen. And your father didn’t want you to work at a factory. Was it necessary that you worked at that time?

Hicks: Well, probably not. I mean probably not but, I guess they just didn’t want me sitting around home. But—

Interviewer: But you worked during the war?

Hicks: That last year of the war I did, yes. Mm-hmm. Yeah. And when I worked in that toy shop, I remember the lady who owned it saying, because we had huge glass windows and we had to get in them you know to arrange things. And she said, “You are not afraid, are you?” and I said, “afraid of what?” And she said, “well the war is still on. We could have a bomb.” And I said, “No, no. That’s doesn’t bother me.” Because it was unlikely then that there would be anything. You know, it was pretty much over. It was just finishing off you know the bits and pieces. So, yes. I worked during the war. But no harm came. There were not bombs then. Except the flying bombs.

Interviewer: Is there anything you would like to add?

Hicks: Well, not really. But I have a poem.

Interviewer: Please.

Hicks: If I may. And this is a tribute to the Battle of Britain pilots. And it’s anonymous. And it’s called *The Few*,

“mischievous laughing boys who grew to quick men who’d, to be the few. Who flew above all human cause, through summer’s heat, through autumn’s fall. Infringe the sanctity of space in freedom’s name and died in grace. Falling like leaves upon the weald to rust his spot in English fields. There brief, gay, valiant seasons spent for us. Our task, their monument. Nature itself has taken over. And has decreed forever more the few shall be remembered by white shook marks in a summer sky.”

So now we, during the Battle of Britain, the sky was full of contrails you know. And that’s how we remember them.

Interviewer: Thank you so much, Ms. Hicks.

Hicks: Thank you.

Interviewer: And you were telling me a story about a moment in the bomb shelter.

Hicks: Well, we could hear the bombs coming down. And there was a lull. And I mimicked the bombs coming out like a—they whined as they came down, more than whistle. And I was whistling to copy it. And my dad and he looked and he said, “This is a close one.” And I guess he was waiting for the explosion. And I said, “Dad that was me. I whistled it.” And one another time, I had this piece of shrapnel, this big piece. And I don’t know whether it came from a bomb, or from the anti-aircraft bomb or shell, but I held it. And after a while, I threw it away cause I was afraid it was going to explode. But other than that, you know—I cannot whistle anymore. [Husband says she can whistle] fNo, I didn’t [Ms. Hicks tries to whistle]. I can’t do it anymore, sorry.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much!

