

Transcription of Legacy Series Interview for Kennesaw State University Archives

By Adina Langer

Interviewer: Adina Langer

Interviewee: Earline Gaither

Transcriber: Adina Langer

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AJL: Good morning. Today is Thursday June 8, 2017. We are at the Sturgis Library at Kennesaw State University, and my name is Adina Langer. First of all, Mrs. Gaither, do you agree to this interview?

EG: Oh sure!

AJL: Oh good.

EG: Whatever you can get out of me.

AJL: Could you please start by stating your full name?

EG: Earline Wood Gaither.

AJL: And, what's your birthday?

EG: October 5, 1925.

AJL: And where were you born?

EG: In Fulton, Mississippi.

AJL: OK. And what were your parents' names?

EG: My mother's name was Alice Gurley Wood, and my father's name was Lester Colin Wood.

AJL: And did you have a big family?

EG: No, I had two brothers, one older and one younger.

AJL: And can you tell me a little about your childhood? (1:00) What was it like growing up in Fulton, Mississippi?

EG: We lived on a farm, and it was just a nice, happy home!

AJL: What kind of a farm? What did you grow?

EG: We grew cotton and corn. My father did do logging work too.

AJL: So, let's see. If you were born in 1925, then the Great Depression began...

EG: (1:30) Oh, I remember it quite well.

AJL: So, what are your memories of how that affected your life?

EG: OK. We did not have electricity. We did not have a refrigerator, so to speak, so when we had meat, it had to be cured meat, or they had to kill like a beef calf and share it with all of the neighbors, because we couldn't take care of the meat. Unless my mother canned a little. So...

AJL: And that was true of everybody?

EG: Right, right. Yeah. We were poor but we didn't know it. (2:09) Everybody else was too.

AJL: And was there some sense-- you mentioned sharing meat-- of people helping each other out?

EG: Oh yes. Oh yes. We didn't have close neighbors like we do now (2:25), but close enough everybody knew everybody. You know, it was a small, small place.

AJL: And where did you attend high school? (2:37)

EG: Fulton, Itawamba County High School.

AJL: Was it a big high school?

EG: Oh yes, for there was one other high school in the county.

AJL: And did your brothers go there too?

EG: My older brother did. My younger brother-- my folks moved to Arkansas when, I think I was thirteen, and my older brother and me were in high school at the time, so we stayed with grandparents.

AJL: And you were in high school when World War II started, right? (3:10)

EG: Oh, yes.

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

EG: Oh, they attacked December 6¹, and it was Sunday. Sunday. And after we came home from church, I had a friend, and we sat outside, and it was Sunday afternoon in December, but a nice day like today, and we sat there, and we only had a battery radio that we could hear, and my grandfather let us take it outside. And we sat outside in the afternoon on December 6 to hear all that was happening in Hawaii. Yeah, I remember it very well.

AJL: Were you surprised?

1 The attack actually took place on December 7, 1941.

EG: Oh yeah, everybody was. Even at church, you know, it had just happened in the night, during the night in every other country. In Hawaii it was during the morning hours, I think. But yeah, everybody was so surprised! So upset! And on Monday morning, you know, I got up and went to high school, and we had to gather in the study hall for President Roosevelt to declare war. (4:29) And I very well remember – I don't remember all he said, but I do remember his voice saying “and this day will go down in infamy²” (laughs). Yeah.

AJL: Yeah. ([Technician adjusts location of chair.] Oh-- was I in the shot? Was I in the shot for what she just said? OK. I'm sorry. The hair).

EG: That's OK with me!

AJL: So, you were describing listening to President Roosevelt's speech. Did you gather around a radio? How did you hear it? (5:11) What way...

EG: His speech? He was on the front of the study hall. They had him elevated so we could see. I don't know how they made his picture then, because we certainly didn't have television. But yeah, we heard it I know. And when we would see things about the war, we had to go to the movies on the weekend and see the-- they always had news reels. Now they have other things, but we had to see news reels. That was our way of keeping up. That and Life magazine. Once in a while there would be something in the paper-- newspaper-- but we had very little except that battery radio. (Laughs) And we would hear Walter Winchell.³ I remember him every night going off saying “Good night Miss Calabash⁴ and all the ships at sea!” (More laughter) Yeah.

AJL: And among your family and your friends, was there a sense that everybody needed to chip in and do something for the war effort? (6:30)

EG: Yes, and we were rationed with everything. Just about everything. Food, gas, tires. Everything was rationed.

AJL: And did that feel-- did that affect you differently than it had, you know, living through the Depression before?

EG: Not a lot, because we were not used to a lot. And my parents had their own-- my mother even made our cheese, so we were not restricted with food.

AJL: Now at this time, you had already met your husband, right?

EG: Oh, yes. (7:13)

AJL: Can you tell me about how you met him, and what was he like?

EG: He's six years older. And he was already out of high school, of course, and I was dating his younger brother. And he came home one weekend from work-- my husband had a car then, but he did

² Sic

³ Walter Winchell (1897-1972) was an American newspaper and radio gossip commentator, famous for attempting to destroy the careers of people both private and public whom he disliked.

⁴ This is likely an amalgamation of Jimmy Durante's popular sign-off “Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are,” and Walter Winchell's “Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. America, and all the ships at sea. Let's go to press.”

not have it off with him, so the younger brother used it-- and my husband came home one weekend, and I had a date with the brother. And instead of going with the brother, I went to the movie with both of them. (Laughs) And after that I started dating Ralph, the older brother. And that's how we got on.

AJL: So, what's his full name?

EG: Ralph Norman Gaither.

AJL: And how did the younger brother feel about that?'

EG: Well, we put him out one night-- oh they played not poker, but some shooting game they were playing-- and we put him out there, and he took my hand, and kissed it and said, "Good night," and I never dated him again. That was the end of that.

AJL: Can you tell me about your wedding to your husband? (8:40)

EG: Oh, that was a long story. We had planned to be married a couple of weeks before we got married because I had an uncle in Texas, and he died, and then there was no planes to transport people. It was only through a train that they could get his body from Texas back to Mississippi. So we had to wait because the soldiers were taking up the train space then. And my mother and father had to wait in Arkansas until they got his body back to Mississippi, so they could come over for the funeral, and while they were there, that's when we married. It was during the Christmas holidays. (Laughs)

AJL: And did you have just all your family there?

EG: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it had some fun, and some not so fun. (9:39) (Laughs)

AJL: And when did you graduate from high school?

EG: I did not graduate in class because then you could either go to work in the war effort, because they were looking for people to work, and most of the boys were-- when Roosevelt declared war, a lot of the boys in my high school volunteered right then. I mean, they couldn't wait to go! So you could take a test and pass it, or you could stay there and graduate in the spring (10:17) with the rest of them.

AJL: So, to graduate, you took the test?

EG: Took a test.

AJL: And then got married right after that?

EG: In December, yes. (10:28)

AJL: And, did your husband go into the military?

EG: No, he was turned down three times because he had a heart murmur, and high blood pressure, and they refused him three times. He did have a twin brother that went. He had to go.

AJL: And had they ever been separated before?

EG: Never been separated, not even a night before, no.

AJL: What about your brother-- your husband's brother. His younger brother?

EG: His younger brother, I guess he must have been about 21 or 22 when he finally-- they finally took him in. And he was a Marine. And they wanted him to go to officers' training school, and he did not want to leave his outfit. He wanted to stay with his buddies and did. And he came home one weekend when we were in Michigan, and Ralph and I took him to Memphis-- he and his buddy-- to catch the train to go back to Cali-- they were in California, ready to ship out. And when he said "Goodbye" to me, he gave me a hug and a kiss about like my husband would have! And he said, "Bye Earline. Someday I'll see you again." And I think he knew. I think he knew all the time that he would not be back. He went through the battle of Guam, but he did not die from a shot. He got an infected hand during the battle, and he had a buddy that came when his mother had his body returned, and the buddy told us that he died from an infected hand. They had nothing then to-- no penicillin, no antibiotics-- so he died from the infected hand. And my brother was-- you know he was about the same age. (12:40) But he, I think he was in the battle of Okinawa. And he was later coming home after the war than a lot of the boys were. Why, I don't know. He was in the Signal Corps, and they did wiring, and putting up poles and things, so maybe he had to stay and work more. I don't know. (13:04) But he was later coming home.

AJL: What was Ralph's younger brother's name?

EG: My younger brother?

AJL: I'm interested in everybody's names, actually, but the one who passed away, who was killed--

EG: His name was Stanley Earl Gaither.

AJL: And what about Ralph's twin brother? What did he do during the war?

EG: He was in an engineering group, and he was in-- he was in New Guinea and Australia. And he was gone-- when they took him, he was gone three years, three months, and eight days, and he did not get a furlough or anything! Yeah. (13:54) And he had malaria real bad when he came home, because they had mosquitoes so bad in New Guinea. And they sent him direct to a hospital in North Carolina-- whatever the hospital is there-- and he was there for quite a while. And when he died, he still was having trouble with malaria, and he was 92 when he died. (Clears throat) (14:23)

AJL: So what did your husband and you do in Mississippi right after the war started?

EG: After it started, we left. Within two weeks we were gone.

AJL: And how did you end up in Michigan?

EG: I asked my husband that the other night, and he said, "I think we saw advertisements in the paper where they were begging for help—asking for help—and he and another friend, they went ahead of me, and I left about two weeks later. I rode the bus all the way to Michigan. (Laughs)

AJL: And where were you headed?

EG: Where?...

AJL: What specifically—which company, or which place were you supposed to...

EG: Ford Motor Company had turned their big automobile factory into Willow Run, and they were hiring anybody that would come along. So when I went, I had a friend, and she had worked as a mail carrier in Mississippi, and she wanted to work at the post office, so she had me go with her to the post office, and when we got there, they asked me to put in an application, and when it was over they wanted me to work—not her. And I did not want to work in the post office. I wanted to work with Ralph in the plant and did. (15:56)

AJL: What was that trip like to get out there?

EG: Oh, terrible! (Laughs) Because soldiers are everywhere, you know. You had to really push to get a seat, even on the bus at that time. And a trip on the train was a story too.

AJL: We've got time. Do you want to tell that story?

EG: Yeah, I don't know what I was doing. We would work maybe four to six months and then we'd take a little trip home. But gas was rationed, you know, and my father was a farmer in Arkansas at that time, and he would give us his extra gas stamps, because he got extra for having farm equipment, and he would give us the extra gas stamp, and Ralph would buy a little used car. You couldn't buy a new car then. So Ralph would buy a little used car in Michigan, and we would drive it home. And then he would catch the bus and go back, and later, I would go back. So this one time I had to go over to Red Bay, Alabama, and catch the train. When I caught the train it had been converted from a coal car. I had to sit in a converted coal car to ride the train. So when I got to Chicago I was black as coal! I did not know if they'd let me ride it on to Michigan, but they did. (Laughter) (17:34)

AJL: That's a great story. So where did you live when you were working at Willow Run?

EG: OK. When we first got there, it was hard to find a place. Extra hard. And we had to live with this older man and woman, and they had converted one room. It might have been ten feet across, maybe. And maybe twenty down. So, at the end of that room we had a bed and a little chest of drawers for our clothes. At the other end, they had converted a little stove for us, and a little table. We had no bathroom. We had to use their bathroom or go outside. They had an outside bath. And when it was cold, we did use their bathroom. And that went on for about—well into the first year we were there. And then the government started bringing in these little buildings they would make, and it was almost like the one room we had, except just a little bit larger. (18:54) But all—the bathroom was boxed off in one corner. Yeah. It was bad.

AJL: Did you have a lot of close neighbors when you were there?

EG: There we only had room between each place for a car—two cars to park. We could park our car, and they could park theirs next door to us, and so on. And we were in rows up and down the street. And the rows were marked off by alphabetical order. We lived on “X” street. (Laughter) (19:31)

AJL: Did that designate how far you had to walk to work?

EG: No, they had buses, and the buses would stop at the end of these streets. And I suppose there might have been ten of those things down each street. And you could walk up to the end and catch a bus, and

we did it a lot to save on gas.

AJL: What did these buildings look like? (19:56)

EG: What these buildings—they would fold. They would fold up, and there would just be a place in the middle like this. (Holds hands close together) And then either side would fold out. And that would be—that's where it was.

AJL: And were they made out of metal?

EG: No. I don't know what they were made—no. They were not metal.

AJL: So, at Willow Run, what kind of work did your husband do?

EG: He was on the assembly line too. He did—he told me last night what he did, but I don't—He installed something. But he worked where they had four assembly lines. And I worked where they had converted it down to one. (20:41) When they got to where I was, there was only one. And we shot a plane out every hour. Every hour!

AJL: And did you need to work for the money, or did you choose to work for other reasons?

EG: Well, Ralph was older, and he had worked a few years before—maybe three. Two or three. And we were not desperate for money, so I was in no big hurry. And that was not our main—not the main reason.

AJL: Can you tell me what it was like to apply for your job at Willow Run? (21:16)

EG: Oh, you just go to the office and tell them you'd like to make an application, and they were ready! (Laughs)

AJL: And did you go through training? (21:28)

EG: Very little. We had about three days, but I do remember the day we got the message about Stanley being dead, I was in a meeting. And I remember sitting there crying through the whole meeting, and I didn't know what the meeting was about when it was over. I remember that day. (21:50)

AJL: And you mentioned advertisements telling people there were jobs. Do you remember seeing any images of Rosie the Riveter?

EG: Oh yes. Every place. And you know Hitler. I think he said we wouldn't win the war for all the women working, but we did. (22:17)

AJL: Did you feel a connection to that idea of women being needed in the war effort.

EG: Oh yes, yes. Every place needed help then. Every place. Yeah.

AJL: Can you describe what the building was like at Willow Run where you worked?

EG: It was just a big, big building. Just a long-- it was a long building. I could tell you a funny story about that, too, but it doesn't pertain to my work.

AJL: What was the Ford Motor Company producing there? (23:01) What were you making?

EG: Before?

AJL: No. For the war effort.

EG: Then, oh! B-29 bombers. B-29 bombers. Yeah.

AJL: And, as you said, it was a big building. What were your duties specifically?

EG: Oh yeah. I had to oil the guns. (23:24) And I had to put up the-- the plane had a pocket up in the front of it, and I installed the instructions-- flying instructions. And then they had little curtains you could snap on the windows, and I had to snap each curtain on and make sure it fit the windows. (Laughs) I did have a lady that was my inspector. She made sure I did it right.

AJL: And did she inspect a lot of different people?

EG: Oh yes, oh yes. I do not remember but two people that I worked with other than the inspector. I remember her name was Grace, but I don't remember any other women working with me.

AJL: So did she supervise men too, then? (24:20)

EG: Oh, yes! Oh yeah. She was an inspector for what some of the men did. And we had a time study on everything. I had like five minutes on this gun, and ten minutes on this one, and I had to climb up into the turret, you know, to get up there. So we had a time study on everything we did. And that's when the union man came by one day and asked me if I was being taken care of, and if I was being harrassed about my job, and I said, "No." And he said, "Do they ever ask you to do something you're not supposed to be doing, to help somebody else, out?" And I said, "No." He said, "If they ever do, don't refuse to do it. Just don't do it." So I said, "OK." (25:12) (Laughs)

AJL: What did you wear?

EG: Good question. I was told when I was hired in there that you don't wear clothes that are real noticeable, (25:25) like loud clothes. You wear a little shirt-- button-down little work shirt. And we did not have tight jeans then, so we just had regular jeans. Regular pants to wear, but you could not wear loud colors. No.

AJL: And jewelry?

EG: No jewelry. No jewelry.

AJL: What about your shoes?

EG: We just had little-- then-- they were canvas shoes. Yeah. Could not wear boots. No boots. Don't care how high the snow was, you couldn't wear boots.

AJL: I imagine snow was unfamiliar, having grown up in Mississippi.

EG: It was, and I wouldn't care now if I never see snow again! (Shakes head and laughs). We'd get up some mornings, and the snow would be up to the bumper in the car. You know! (Shakes head). No snow.

AJL: What did you think about your work? (26:27) Did you enjoy it?

EG: I did. I did. It was not-- it was nothing hard. Nothing-- I was never pushed at my job, no. And I only remember two men that I worked with. I guess I worked with others-- I'm sure I did, but I can only remember two. What were they like?

AJL: What were they like?

EG: Ok, one of them was a young guy, (26:55) and he had been in the war. He had served. And he had a steel plate in his head. He was injured, and he had a steel plate in his head. And he was about 80-90 percent normal, but a little bit funny. And we would, if it was nice weather, like the summertime-- we did have two summers there-- we would sit outside to have our thirty minute lunch, but we had to have our drink in-- it had to be milk. We didn't have sodas back then. So we had a little bitty bottle of milk we could get off the lunch wagon, and it was glass-- a little glass jar. And we had to put up a dime deposit every day to get that glass bottle, and when we'd turn our bottle back in, we'd get our dime back. So this guy-- he loved to eat with me. He'd sit with me and eat, and he wanted to match me for my bottle each day, and would get the biggest kick out of getting my dime. (Laughs). So I can't forget him, and his name was Stan. So I remember Stan. And the other guy was an older guy, but he had served in the war too and had gotten out maybe for age, or length of time, or service. He was an older guy, but very nice. He was kind of my protector, you know. Kind of looked after me. And his name was Sid Lee. And he would tell me that when the war was over, he was going back to Clearwater, Florida, buy him a motel, and we could come down and visit his motel anytime for free. But if I were his wife, he would knock me in the head and sit me on his mantel to be his doll! (Laughs a lot) I might have weighed 90 pounds then.

AJL: How did your husband feel about you hanging out with these guys?

EG: OK. The only time I ever knew my husband to be jealous was and to show it was when I told him about Stan getting such a charge out of getting my milk deposit bottle every day-- getting that dime every day. It was always a big joke where we were sitting about him wanting to get my dime, and I told Ralph about it one day, and the next day he had walked the length of that plant to have lunch with me. (29:43) And I knew why. He wanted to meet Stan. But that's the only time that I ever knew him to be jealous.

AJL: How many hours a day did you work at the plant? (29:58)

EG: I think we worked nine hours a day then. We had a shift break, and you won't believe this, but we had a shift break every thirty minutes. There was a lot of people worked in that plant. And we put out a plane every hour, so there had to be a lot of people doing it. And we had a shift break in every thirty minutes, and if my shift broke before his, he would wait outside for the bus, and we'd catch the bus back together. Because every shift did not break at the same time.

AJL: Wow, that's very coordinated.

EG: Yeah.

AJL: So other than these guys you mentioned working with, what other sort of people did you see at the factory? Were they men, women, different people of color? (30:58)

EG: I must tell you that the first race riot I ever heard of happened while we were working there, and I think it lasted for four to six days-- I would say my memory of it-- during that time they told us that some of the colored people did not get to leave that plant for two days! But I'd never heard of that before, and it was not real bad. I don't even remember why-- why we had it-- but it was nothing really bad, but I guess people got scared-- got afraid, yeah.

AJL: Did people--

EG: But they-- we never had any problems. Never had any problems. No, we never had any problems.

AJL: Did people of different races work together? (31:47) Or work separately?

EG: Uh huh-- they kind of had their own jobs. We all had separate jobs. (Clears throat) My husband was-- he had to work with a guy-- they were together doing their job, and one day their time study guy came by. He was going to time study-- he was going to time them while they did their job-- and it upset them-- made them mad. And they really got busy and did it in half the time. (32:18) (Laughs) Just to be ugly. But usually you just had your own job. Most people just had their own job, and that was the way it was.

AJL: And the work you did-- you said you didn't really work with other women-- so there were men doing the job?

EG: I do not remember working directly with anybody around me-- any women around me. It was mostly men. Most of them were older men that were too old to go into service, (32:51) or people that had been refused for some reason.

AJL: And do you remember what kind of a woman the inspector was? (33:05) The supervisor that you worked with? What was she like?

EG: She was a nice lady. She was very nice. I never had any problems. Never had any problems, but one day I was working, and I was told that Charles Lindbergh was flying in. So I don't know if it was the manager of the plant-- I don't know who he was-- but he came by and asked me if I'd like to go out and meet him! So we walked out that door, and there was Charles Lindbergh. He flew in, and he flew out. Got in another plane and flew out.

AJL: Did you shake his hand or anything?

EG: Nope. He didn't do that. He just said, "Hi," and "Bye." (Laughs)

AJL: And you mentioned the union representative. Did you have to pay union dues?

EG: No, we didn't. Mmh mmh. (33:58) No. In fact, I was surprised that we even had one come around to check, but I guess they were just-- Ford Motor Company, they tell me, was very strict on their work people, on the people who worked for them, and took care of them, so I guess he was just maybe -- I don't know if he was hired by the company or as part of the government work. I don't know.

AJL: How much did you get paid? (34:34)

EG: Good question. You know, I do not remember. We did not get paid very well. It was not much money, and we had to go for two weeks. We'd work two weeks days, two weeks nights. Rotating.

AJL: Did everybody do that, or was that something--

EG: No, everybody. Everybody did it. Yeah. (35:00) That was just they way they ran this place then.

AJL: Did you have leisure time? Did you do anything for fun other than working?

EG: Very little. I did like the summers up there. Not the winters but the summers. As I said, we had to go to the movies on the weekend. We had to go to the theater to see all of our pictures of the war. If we wanted to see anything that was going on, we had to go there to see it, because it was the news reel. And we would do that, because everybody was interested in what they were seeing. There was so little. I can't imagine now. I can't imagine a war now. (35:56)

AJL: Did you and your husband become friends with any of the other young couples?

EG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. We met one couple that we were really devout friends with. And I have always wondered what happened to them. We stayed friends for several years, but then kind of lost out, you know. Seventy-five years you can't-- can't communicate too much. I'm sure they're gone too. Most everybody our age is gone.

AJL: So, about how long did you work at Willow Run? You mentioned that you kind of had to take a break.

EG: I had a break. I was not (36:42) working there when the plant closed, when the war was over. So, sometime during that time, when we had, let's see, about two other couples from our home town that had followed us up there, and, of course, we were all friends and did things together-- played cards and all that-- so that was mostly our recreation.

AJL: Do you have memories of when President Roosevelt died? (37:16)

EG: I certainly do. We had moved at that time into a house-- another home-- and we were upstairs. We had the upstairs apartment. And the day he died, they wer having a party downstairs, just laughing and laughing, and I couldn't figure out what was going on. So when I turned my radio on, I found out what was going on, and they were so excited that he had died! And I was so upset, because he was my favorite and always will be. Yeah, but that was just the way it was. Yes, I remember that day.

AJL: And what about the end of the war? What do you remember from--

EG: All I remember from the end of the war was seeing – and I'm sure it was at a news reel-- seeing the boys that came home in New York. They had this ticker tape parade in New York, you know, and it was just crowds and crowds, seeing all these – And when we would go by the bus station or the train up there, we would see guys coming in, you know, and it was fun to watch them come in and meet their families, yeah. (38:39) It was.

AJL: Was your husband laid off from the factory at the end of the war?

EG: No, he wasn't laid off. He just went to work one night and came and said, "We're out of a job. The factory closed." And that's when we left and went back to Mississippi, and he went to Memphis and got on with McDonnell Aircraft⁵ and they were doing there-- they were not building planes, but they must have been working on them so way. And he was there for six to eight months. Then, he went to work one night and come home and said they had closed. And after that it kind of got to the place that you couldn't-- if you had not been in service, you couldn't find a job, because they were giving all the work to people who had been in service, you know, which was only fair. (39:35)

AJL: So you mentioned that you had lived in Arkansas, then, for a little while.

EG: Yeah, we lived there for two years. Judy was born in Arkansas, yeah, in a little hospital that Mrs. Roosevelt, during Roosevelt's administration, she got involved-- she was a very good worker. I mean, she worked for him. And she got this project started there. It was open country, and they gave like forty acres-- I don't know if they gave it to them, or if they might have paid a little, or I don't know how they got the land, but to some families, they would get this forty acres of land, and it was a little community place. And she had a little hospital built there. And it's not-- they did not have private rooms. It was just-- when she was born, she was in a-- it was just a long room, and she and one other little girl, and one little boy were in there. (Laughs) It was strange. Otherwise we would have had to go all the way to Memphis to have had her, so we had her in that little hospital. I think it cost \$50.00. (Laughs)

AJL: Was your husband in Memphis then? (41:06)

EG: No, no. He was in Arkansas. We lived on the farm with my father and two brothers.

AJL: What were you farming there?

EG: Cotton. Cotton. We had our first garden there, and we planted our first garden on Georgia Washington's birthday, February 22, I guess. And my dad laughed at us for doing it. It was pretty weather, like springtime, so we planted our garden—first garden. My dad laughed at us, and that night it came snow! (Laughter)

AJL: So, can you tell me your daughter's name and what year it was when she was born?

EG: Her name is Judy Gail (41:57) and she was born in '47.

AJL: What was it like to be a new mother?

EG: Wonderful! We had been married almost five years, and it was just wonderful for both of us. And he—at that time you didn't know if it was going to be a boy or a girl, and he had threatened to leave me if it wasn't a little boy, but he was so excited over her too! (Laughter) It didn't make any difference. She could have been anything. (Laughter) (42:32)

AJL: So the next place you went was Memphis?

⁵ *Memphis International Airport: Environmental Impact Statement, 1993.*

EG: No, that was after Memphis. This was after Memphis, yeah.

AJL: So, then, did you move to Georgia next?

EG: No. I think we left there and went to Wichita, Kansas. We did not live in Wichita too long. You couldn't find a-- He worked for Boeing Aircraft and loved to work for Boeing, but you couldn't find a place to live there either. And the one summer that we were there it rained, and it rained, and the next day it would be a sandstorm blowing. We did not like Wichita. We could not stand it. So when Lockheed opened again out here, we came and, he put in his application, and they hired him. So he come back to Wichita, and told them he was leaving in two weeks. He gave them two week's notice. And the said, "No! You can't leave." They offered him a big salary job—I mean big pay. And he said, "No, I've already hired. I'm leaving. I'm going to Georgia." And they wrote on his papers, "Subject to rehire any time." He said, "But I'm not coming back." So we've never been back to Wichita. (44:02)

AJL: What did Ralph do at Boeing?

EG: What did he do at Boeing? He was a—he worked on the assembly line just building airplanes. That's what they do out there—just build a plane. So he was just on the assembly line.

AJL: And how did he find out about the Lockheed job?

EG: Probably had come to Mississippi, and somebody was working over here. Probably. We came on November 14, about 1950, '51. And it was a beautiful day. Oh a beautiful day, and we've never wanted to leave. (Laughter) (44:46)

AJL: And did Ralph work for Lockheed on their assembly line too?

EG: No, he worked in—he was in mock-up. They did the first—when they would have something changed on the plane, a change of some kind, they had to do the first change to make it work. They called it mock-up. I don't know why.

AJL: And do you remember the trip from Wichita to Marietta?

EG: I think I—Judy and I came on the bus. (45:30) We rode the bus, and I think that might have been my last trip. I don't remember the car—a car trip back. But we came on the bus, and I remember riding through the mountains of Arkansas and loved it! It was so pretty. (Laughter) Yeah.

AJL: And where did you live when you first came to Georgia? (45:50)

EG: In Dunwoody. In an apartment. We could not find a place in Marietta.

AJL: And did you intend to go back into the workforce yourself at that time?

EG: No. No.

AJL: And what about your son. When was he born?

EG: In 1954. (46:16) And then I had planned to go – I had put my application in at Lockheed and taken one test. (Laughs) And found out I was expecting again, so I didn't—I never pursued that.

EG: Ralph Allen

AJL: How did you come to get the house that you live in now? (46:44)

EG: OK. We lived in a little house. Some guy had built this little project of houses, and we never bought that house. But when they started building the little brick houses around, we put our name in, and they were selling faster than they were building. So we finally got one, and we still live in that little house. We never moved. (Laughter) Regretfully—but we figured when we came here, we would probably be here maybe five years, because every place we lived it would be no more than five years, then we'd be moving on, so we figured that—and we just never pursued going into a bigger house. And the children loved it. They were close to school. Now they don't like it because it is too close to the school. (Laughs)

AJL: And what was your neighborhood like? (47:53)

EG: We had a wonderful neighborhood at first. A wonderful neighborhood. Yeah. All the people at Lockheed were trying to get a house, so we had lovely neighbors. Lovely neighbors. I only have—I don't have a one that was there when we moved in, I don't believe, but a couple that moved not too long after are still our neighbors. (Laughter)

AJL: And you mentioned it was little brick houses.

EG: Mm hmm. Yeah. I have a little house. And I always thought that I'd like to have one of those big houses they were building, and everybody moved. Just about all of our neighbors moved. They'd buy a bigger house and move, and Ralph would say, "Oh if I go to work some night and come home and say the plant's closed, what are we going to do with a big house?" So we stayed in that little house, and now I don't want a big house. (Laughter) I'm happy with my little house.

AJL: Do you have a yard?

EG: Small yard. Judy cuts the grass. (Laughter)

AJL: So when your son was born, you stayed with him for a little bit? (49:01)

EG: He was about-- he might have been eighteen months or two years old when Sears built a new store out on Roswell Street, and everybody was going to work for Sears. So I put my application in for a part-time job, and I worked part-time for maybe-- I don't think a year-- but then they shoved me on full-time, and I worked there for 28 and a half years.

AJL: And what was your job like there?

EG: At first I was a sales lady and worked for – I liked my manager very much. She was really a nice person, and she taught me a lot about the work. And when she got promoted to Atlanta, they gave me her job. And it was a stressful job because we did not have computers – no way of keeping up with the merchandise except counting it. I had books this thick that I would have to go through the merchandise - what we had sold, how much we had sold, how much we had left, what sold better. You know, it was a stressful job, and finally, after about – I don't know how many years, I was division-manager, and I

had a heart problem, and my doctor told me I had to have heart surgery, and I did. (50:37) And they wanted to put me on a medical leave, and I said, “No, I don't have one foot in the grave. I want a job.” So I went to the drapery department and worked maybe ten years. I don't know. And then they sent me back to the children. I was in the children's department – baby department we called it – which was next to the appliances in Sear's store. It was the biggest department in the store-- did more money for them. So I went back to the children's department and finished up my-- and they moved up to Towne Center, and I worked there for six months, and going home at – I had to work there two nights a week till ten o'clock-- and going home, and those big trucks would be on either side of me, and I said, “No, I'm not going to do this.” So I just retired. I was about 62 then. (Laughs) But I've enjoyed my retirement. I've enjoyed my life. I'll say it that way.

AJL: You mentioned that you were one of the first women to have open heart surgery in Georgia?

EG: Yeah, Judy maybe can tell you. Judy, was I not one of the first women in Georgia to have open-heart?

Judy Gaither: I think you were the only woman in your room that day that had open-heart surgery.

EG: I know when they told me I had to have it, Judy went bananas because she had worked at Grady when they started doing open-heart, and they doctors would lose their patients and get upset, and she got tired of seeing that, so it upset her when she told me that I had to have open-heart, but I had to have it, and my doctors – I did very well. I'd get up and race up and down the halls, and my doctors were so amazed they'd have me talk to other people who would come in needing open heart but didn't want to have it. They were so frightened. And they'd have me go talk to them. (Laughter) (52:48) And tell them you can do it.

AJL: So did you go to Grady, then, to have the surgery?

EG: No, I had it at the old, old St. Joseph. I was one of the last before they moved into the new St. Joseph Hospital. Yeah. Quite an experience. I was in the hospital with two guys. Did both of those guys have open-heart, too, maybe? Behind me?

JG: Yeah.

EG: But they had us all in the ICU together.

AJL: What year was this?

JG: She was 52 years old. I can't tell you what year.

AJL: So, why do you think it's important to share your story (53:40) for students, especially, to learn about--

EG: I don't know that anybody would want to hear my story. When I saw in the paper about this lady having the Rosie the Riveter story, and she was going to have this meeting, I thought that might be interesting to me. I never met anybody. Never met anybody that's had an experience like I had. Some of them will tell me, “Yeah, I worked out at the Bomber Plant,” but they can't tell me a story like mine. So I thought well I might like to hear this, so I got in touch with whatever-her-name-is-- I've forgotten-- but anyway, I went to the meeting, and you pursued me there!

AJL: Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, do you think there are lessons to take away from the national experience around World War II? You know, anything special about that time as compared to now?

EG: Do I think-- Very special. Very. I'm so sorry my children could not know more about what we really went through. We bought little books of stamps for our-- to help pay for the war. I can remember buying 25-cent stamps, and you had to buy enough to get a 25-dollar-- at that time they would sell 25-dollar savings bonds. And we would have to get these stamps until we got 25 dollars worth and we could-- So after I went to work for Sears, I did take out money for savings bonds then, just because I thought it was good to do, you know, and I'm so thankful I did. I've done a lot with that money that I wouldn't have had had I not done it. But as far as the war, I'm sorry-- I'm sorry the children-- I don't think they're getting the history they should have about that war.

AJL: What's missing? (56:06)

EG: Just the details of it, and the actual part-- there's so many stories there. I still hear them on television. I listen to them on television. I listen to everything I can, because I even want to know more myself. I really -- it was a different world. We were living in a different world then. And these people now-- I even work with people 80 years old-- play cards with them, or go to church with them, 80 years old, and they don't know that story. They must have been real small then, I guess, and nothing to remember about it, because we didn't have television, and no way of keeping up like we do now.

AJL: What anchors you in the Marietta community today? (57:09) What kind of participation do you have?

EG: I just go to church, and yeah, I have friends, and I keep up with Judy. She plays tennis, and she has a lot of friends, and I go with her. I don't want to get real old! (Laughter) But if you had done this twenty years ago I could have told you more. (Laughs) I have forgotten a lot in 75 years.

AJL: Tell me about your family today. (57:41)

EG: Which?

AJL: So, what are your son and daughter doing, and your grandchildren?

EG: Oh, my daughter worked at CDC for-- she started out with Grady Hospital and moved over to the-- where did you move to, Judy? Yeah, the VA, then over to CDC, and worked there for years and years. And she has good stories she can tell you too. My son did not choose to go to college, and he was a carpenter and had his own roofing business until he married this girl, and she became a doctor, and she told him if he didn't want to work anymore, he didn't have to. And he had worked a lot to put her through med school. So right now he's in ill health, and he doesn't do-- he's not occupied with anything. I have one-- I have two grandsons, and one is in the insurance business. He's a-- I don't know what he calls his job, but-- anyway, he's in insurance. The other one graduated from Kennesaw College here a couple years ago, and he's 36, is he?

JG: Yeah.

EG: Thirty-six, and he works for Dick's Sporting Goods now, but he graduated with honors, so he expects to have a better job someday. (Laughter)

AJL: And everybody lives in Georgia? (59:26)

EG: Yeah, we all live in Georgia. Both my brothers-- my kid brother died about two or three years ago, and my older brother then died when he was 57, I believe. He had a heart attack and died. And Ralph is-- my husband is the last in his family, and he will be 98 in December. But he's still-- his mind is, what, 80%, Judy?

JG: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, he still has-- his mind is still very good.(1:00:03) to be that age.

AJL: You mentioned that you have some property down in Okonee.

EG: Yes, his father-- Ralph's father was a banker, a businessman, and an educated man. For to be his age, he was one of the few college-educated people back then, way back, and he left property to his children. And Ralph took his-- the town of Fulton wanted to buy his property and build a new high school, and so he sold it, bought land down in Green County for the boys to have a place to hunt. (Laughter) Now I wouldn't have minded moving down in that area for a while, but we will never move down there. But my oldest grandson, he loves it. So, yeah.

AJL: So is there anything that I've--

EG: I've had some wonderful-- excuse me, but I've had some wonderful people in my life. (1:01:17) But a lot of them are gone. You know, just about all of them in fact. My friends now are mostly younger, OK.

AJL: Any stories that you want to talk about that I haven't asked you about (1:01:32) already?

EG: I don't know of any-- I've just let an interesting life.

AJL: You sure have. Thank you so much. We really appreciate you coming in today and telling your story.

EG: Well, thank you. I don't mind doing it, but I've never done this before. I'm not a story teller.