

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series
Jean Ousley Interview
Conducted by Adina Langer
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Transcribed by Adina Langer

Born in 1945, Jean Ousley met her father for the first time after he returned from service in World War II. Her mother worked at the Kellogg Plant in Battle Creek, Michigan, and then as a welder at a factory in California. As an adult, Ousley led the Georgia chapter of the American Rosie the Riveter Association because of her mother's contributions to the war effort.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: Today is January 29, 2018. My name is Adina Langer, and I'm the curator of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University, and I'm here at the Sturgis Library with Jean Ousley. First of all, do you agree to this interview?

Ousley: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Could you please state your full name?

Ousley: Interesting, because I told you I'm Jean, but remember, my story is that I'm Gloria Jean. I was named because my grandmother wanted my name to be Gloria, but then I think my mother was trying to exert her independence, and she never called me Gloria. So Jean is—Gloria Jean Spriggs Ousley.

Interviewer: OK. And what's your birthday?

Ousley: April 22, 1945.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

Ousley: I was born in Gainesville in the Hall County Hospital in Gainesville, Georgia.

Interviewer: So, before we talk about your childhood, I'd like to go back a bit further and talk about your parents. What were your parents' names?

Ousley: My father was Samuel Eldo Spriggs—the middle name kind of unusual—from basically Gwinnett County, Georgia, I guess. I haven't even thought about it. I guess he was born in Gainesville¹. My mother, Laura Belle Miliken Spriggs was born in Bogart, Georgia, which is in Oconee County.

Interviewer: And when was she born?

¹ Throughout the interview, Jean Ousley references Hall County, Gwinnett County, Doraville, and Gainesville, in ways that can sometime seem interchangeable or confusing. Doraville is in Dekalb County, but on the border of Gwinnett. Gainesville is in Hall County, but on the border of Gwinnett. Ousley also references Lawrenceville, which is in the center of Gwinnett. Today, Gwinnett and Dekalb are both considered to be a part of the Atlanta metro area.

Ousley: June 22, 1945—I mean 1922. When I said 22nd, I went back to my birthday there.

Interviewer: Sure. So 1922, and Oconee County. Do you know the name of the town?

Ousley: Well, actually, I discovered looking at her birth certificate again this morning, that it was Bogart. I thought that she was born in, and they lived, in High Shoals which is another *booming metropolis*, right? [Laughs] I think Bogart, these days, is a service station and a little community center. A block—a concrete block. And High Shoals is basically deserted—devoid of commercial activity. Just—so they're both tiny towns.

Interviewer: Do you know what they were like when she was growing up there?

Ousley: The High Shoals area we do because we'd been there so often. My grandparents – my great-grandparents are also buried there in High Shoals Baptist Church. High Shoals Methodist Church across the street from each other. And it was a big deal for my mother and her older sibling, Mary, to travel back to High Shoals to just drive around, so we could drive—it was a big pastime in the '60s. 50's and 60's – driving around. And so I do know a lot about the town itself. The mill was at the shoal, which is, of course, a high almost waterfall kind of effect—a textile mill, a cotton mill. Don't know when it burned because I haven't looked that up. But I do know that my grandfather worked there—her father—until it burned. Now, with all the dams, and the straightening out of the river, it's not really impressive. You'd think, “how could they have built a textile mill with this fairly small source of water,” but when I was a kid, we would go there and slide down the rocks. It was so cool. Just a really neat—you know big flat rocks where you would go down and land, and then go down another one. Very high, actually. So, I know exactly where they lived in High Shoals. A couple of places they lived in, and/or stayed, but I don't know exactly when they moved to Gwinnett, and that was where she met my father. So sometime in the later '30s, I guess.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that your grandfather worked at the mill. Is that what most folks did there? Were they a poor family?

Ousley: Absolutely. I think I also mentioned to you, they never owned a house until my father built them one, which was, you know, just a little house, in the maybe late '50s, early '60s. They always rented. And I guess you would call him an itinerant laborer. He worked on other people's houses sometime, farms sometime, but since they didn't own a house, they didn't have any land. They couldn't build—couldn't grow cotton or big crops of corn, or whatever. So I think it was mostly subsistence farming if anything. A little garden out back. That sort of stuff. There's a story in the family—and that to me is a sort of symbol of the—I don't want to say poverty—there are actually two of them—and they were very poor. There's one story that they did not have enough money to become vaccinated when they were kids. And that was of course when measles and mumps—and all those vaccines—and polio—of course, polio was a little later—but measles, and mumps, and those vaccines were coming in, and there was a lady in the town—we were talking about charity earlier—one of the wives of the social pillars in the community, who picked up poor children and took them to the local health department. They had no car. So, she picked them up and took them there to be vaccinated. Which I thought was cool. And then later on I learned this story. I mentioned the older sister Mary. My mother was apparently the sharpest of the group. She was a very, very intelligent

woman, and I could see how this would have happened. But they only had one or two good dresses between them, and they would send Mother to school more often than Aunt Mary—which is fairly sad. But, you know, they rotated clothes.

Interviewer: So, did they—they rotated clothes. So how big was their family?

Ousley: Yeah. They had five children. But the two boys were born quite a bit later. In fact, my uncle who is still alive was born in '30. So, he was by far younger than Aunt Mary whose been dead a while. So, five kids.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that they would rotate clothes and go to school. What was your mother's schooling like?

Ousley: I have not seen the schoolhouse she attended in High Shoals, because it—as we used to say in the country—it fell in. [Laughs] It's not there. But it's up behind the High Shoals Baptist cemetery. Way into the woods now, but I imagine they had a dirt road to get up there. And then later on they went to a little school called – oh darn, I've forgotten it—good something, Good Hope, maybe, Good Hope. Which is a little community, and there's still a store there. Just down the road from High Shoals. And it's one of those '40s, '50s, low elementary schools, you know the way all of our elementary and high schools in Georgia looked at that point. It's also not in very good shape. It hasn't been used as a school in years. She went there. Then when they moved to Gwinnett, she went to Suwannee Elementary, and graduated from the 11th grade. They did not have a senior year.

Interviewer: So, Suwannee High School² went up to the 11th grade?

Ousley: Mmh hmm. Mmh hmm. And later I attended it. In fact, I went there and graduated from the 8th grade, because by then they had established a high school, so Suwannee was only up to what would be middle school at this point, I guess. So yeah, I graduated from the same school my mom did, which is pretty good in these days. [Laughs]

Interviewer: And did your mother work at all while she was still in high school?

Ousley: Not that I'm aware of. I don't think there would have been many places to work. I mean they lived in Hog Mountain—you probably know where that is—but in those days it was a wide spot in the road. They lived in Braselton. Same thing.³ There was that Braselton Brothers General Store, but even where we lived in the country when I grew up, there were miles, and miles, and miles of dirt roads. (8:14). And no stores. So, unless you could get a job in Lawrenceville, or Buford, working in the five and dime, I guess, there weren't part-time jobs. I sense there weren't temporary—you know, people probably worked in the stores 30, 40 years. They didn't have room for teenagers, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. So, after she graduated, then, did she start doing some work?

² Today, what was Suwannee High School is part of North Gwinnett High School. <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/georgia/districts/gwinnett-county/north-gwinnett-high-school-5942>

³ Hog Mountain is the location of the Mall of Georgia, west along Highway 85 from Braselton, in Gwinnett County.

Ousley: She worked at a shoe plant in Lawrenceville, which I've since learned was called Genesco—General Shoe Company. It's gone now. Replaced, I think, by a lumber store. So, I know she worked there. And there were some rooming situations going on even before the war, so that people were taking in roomers, maybe because of the Depression. But instead of living out in the country, she moved into Lawrenceville, near General Shoe, and roomed with someone, (9:12) so that she wouldn't have to drive, because, again, there was no car. Right?

Interviewer: And, given how poor your family was, that everybody was, was there a sense that the Depression made a huge difference, or what?

Ousley: Well, of course, I was born in '45. So, I'd heard them talk about it. I can't tell you what big Democrats they were. And what big supporters of Mr. Roosevelt. They all thought he was God. So, I sense that pulling them out of the Depression, whether they were poor or not, was a big deal. (9:52). Right. And, of course, you know the South was totally Democratic for so many years. But yes, they absolutely thought he was incredible. So I had the feeling that it was worse in other places, because we lived on the farm. We could go get a pig—which we did—and kill it. [Laughs] Or grow the corn. We had corn and cotton fields when I was a kid. So, I think it probably didn't impact them, except to the extent say that my grandfather was working in these mills, and they probably weren't hiring as many people in the Depression. I know he did—I didn't mention this—at one point he had to walk from High Shoals to Watkinsville to work, and it's ten miles⁴. You know, twice a day. So, probably because they High Shoals Mill was gone and, as I said, there weren't that many places to work. So—. (10:50)

Interviewer: So, he had to get up at 3:00 a.m or something.

Ousley: I know! Impossible. But, you know, they did it. And I know it's the old story of going to school uphill both ways, right? Maybe it was—over the years it might have been embellished. But we do know that he did have to walk to the mill, so—.

Interviewer: So, when did your mother meet your father? (11:13)

Ousley: Again, I'm kind of guessing about this. You should ask more questions, right? But I believe that sometime in the late 30s, they both ended up either in Jackson County or Gwinnett County. And I say Jackson because, in fact, this is odd, both sets of my great-grandparents are buried in the same cemetery. And you don't find that very often. So that's my father's relatives—my father's father's family, and my father's mother's family. So, I know they lived in Jackson County. And I've heard stories that Mother lived in a town, I think it was called Bickerton, which is also Jackson, but I also know that Barrow and Gwinnett were switching places⁵. They were re-drawing lines in those days. So there's a part of Barrow that might have been at one point in Jackson. All I know is they were in the same vicinity. Mother went to a school called Thompson Mill, which I know is in Jackson County, because Thompson Mill⁶ is still there. Not the school. Again, it

⁴ Along contemporary New High Shoal Road, it is about seven miles from North High Shoals to Watkinsville.

⁵ Barrow County is currently between Gwinnett and Jackson Counties. I've been unable to find a town called Bickerton on the map.

⁶ There is a Thompson Mill Road in Buford, GA, just north of the Mall of Georgia.

burned. They all burned, right? But I know that she did go to high school, or later elementary school—I'm sorry—in that area.

Interviewer: So, they would have met, then, before high school.

Ousley: I think. Or perhaps during. I don't—I never got the sense they were long-term sweethearts. As in it was all of high school. I think they met, they went to some movies, they liked each other, you know. What am I saying? Some movies—they probably went to one movie every six months! [laughs] A movie. And, you know, they would go to church events, I'm sure.

Interviewer: They went to the Baptist church?

Ousley: Methodist, I think. All along. I had ancestors in Dawsonville, that I've known for years. There's a strong Baptist element in my family, but my parents were Methodist. And I've never figured out where that started.

Interviewer: So, did your mother share any early memories of their courtship, or their relationship with each other?

Ousley: Not much. And here's a really sad thing. I had actually some memories from her—and you know how even those things can fade—that I decided to write up in a little story. And I think I write OK, so I was writing this whole thing about—I was going to call it “Between the Two Wars,” or something every exciting, right? (13:45) I wrote up what she told me about their courtship and the early years, and it has been lost. It was thrown away when we moved at some point, so there are some details of that I didn't really get, but I can think that they didn't have a vehicle. So, their courtship would have been probably based around walking to church, and going on picnics. And I have to say that my courtship of my teenage boyfriends was almost that, except we had a car. I mean, times didn't change much in those 20 years in Gwinnett County.

Interviewer: So, then, what was your father's family like? (14:30)

Ousley: Very strict upbringing. Baptist. They actually founded a school in—you know where Vogel State Park⁷ is? There's actually a road between Vogel and Sir—Sir Walter Scott [rolls eyes]—what is that called? It's the something Scott State—there are two state parks there. This is between Scott and Vogel. And they founded a school called Spriggs Chapel which was on land donated by the local Baptist minister. And I'm talking—when you go there now you are on Forest Service Road 35. The bottom of the car is coming out. That sort of thing. It was not a real civilized area at that point. But that family I think—well obviously I think—was wealthier for one thing. They came from South Carolina and did gold mining. Gold and copper mining in the area where the Cherokees had been. Unfortunately. And we're talking 1845. So, they were probably there during the Trail of Tears. Probably—I know they got land in the lottery. That's where it came from. So, their family would have had more money—at least in the background. But the Civil War had come along, and nobody had any money. So they became, I would say, probably about as poor and hard scrabble as my mother's family were. But again very—

⁷ Vogel State Park is in northeastern Georgia, in Blairsville, Union County.

very straight-laced. I'd have to say. That's—my grandmother didn't want me to wear shorts, for example. I was ten years old [laughs], and I wasn't supposed to wear shorts because it was a sin.

Interviewer: So when did your parents decide to get married? (16:23)

Ousley: Well, they married in '40, so she would have been 18, which was maybe even a little old for that time period. But December 25. And they were married by—as I said, there was a strong Baptist connection in the family—so they were married by my uncle, who was a Baptist minister at Mulberry Church, which is where the great-grandparents are buried. In his house. And my feeling is they probably rented a little place between then and the time my father went to the war. So maybe lived with my grandparents. That I'm not sure about. But I think they probably rented something, because I don't know of a house—and my father built houses all over the land there—but I don't know of a house that they occupied at that time. They all seemed to be later, after he came back from the war.

Interviewer: Did they have a sense that there might be a war around the corner in 1940?

Ousley: I don't know that for sure. (17:28) I have some information about my uncle, for example, not being equipped for the war because he had flat feet. So they—he got a deferment. I had an uncle who had polio from a very early age, so he didn't go. And so in that immediate side of the family, my father was the only one who actually went to the war. That's really about all I know about their background. He had a sister who had, I would say, three or four sons. In some families, there were three or four people who were killed in families. It didn't happen often, but it could. So three or four sons. In fact, one of her sons was in the original Merrill's Marauders Group⁸, my son has discovered in his research. So no, I don't know about—and as I said, I was born when he was overseas. So I didn't really experience it. So all I remember is Mother just being very self-sufficient with everything around the house. She fed the chickens, and I'm talking, at one point we had 12,000. These were not yard chickens. These were in big houses. She did that when he went to work, when I was older. So I don't think it would have affected her. Obviously it affected her knowing where he was, but I'm sure she just got on with things, you know?

Interviewer: Do you have a sense for what their hopes and dreams were for the future, you know, when they first got married? (19:03)

Ousley: Well, my father was quite a—you know, again, coming from that Baptist and kind of stern background—quite a pragmatist. He was a very, very hard worker. But I have the feeling that having a child meant a lot to him. And, of course, I was the oldest child. Just, from the way he treated me my entire life, I know they wanted things to be better for us, better for all the siblings. And I just had the feeling that he was extremely proud of us, always. I know they wanted a house, and they got a little house. You know, they didn't want to live with the grandparents forever, sort of thing. But, you know, a lot of—I've always said this—a lot of hard-working ethic in our family. It's carried on. My sons would say unfortunately I passed it down to them. Which is probably true. Because they

⁸ Merrill's Marauders or Unit Galahad, officially named the 5307th Composite Unit, was a United States Army long range penetration special operations jungle warfare unit, which fought in the South-East Asian theatre of World War II

work all the time. They're still really good family people, but they're really hard workers. And I just get the sense that they were just going to try. My father had hogs. He had 12,000 chickens. He had an orchard. I remember him going to the county exchange agent to learn how to do his farm better. (20:22) To learn how to be a better farmer. And this was from a guy who I didn't mention—he only had a seventh-grade education. If that. We always sort of thought it might not even have been seventh grade, because he left to help my grandfather who was elderly at that point. Not necessarily on the farm. But my grandfather had been a blacksmith and ran moonshine. So he helped him run moonshine. This will go no further, I'm sure. [Laughs] They had a sawmill, which was powered by a Model T Ford. And he did this, I think, after he had the blacksmith shop. So the Model T Ford engine powered the sawmill. They would go up into North Georgia and get trees, cut them, and bring back the planks. You know, the two-by-fours, or the one-by-eights, or whatever they were. And maybe they weren't even finished at that point. And in the load of wood would be bottles of moonshine. (21:25) So he actually was sort of the Robert Mitchum⁹ type, running moonshine down the hills of North Georgia.

Interviewer: I happen to have the city version of that, with the bathtub gin.

Ousley: Exactly, right. Whatever they could do.

Interviewer: So how did they get news at that time? Did they have a radio?

Ousley: Yeah, and that was a really important part of life. It would be a little—what did they call those?—Bakelite. Before plastic. A kind of plastic radio. I think they were beige, usually. But my parents, I was thinking about it that very morning, had a taller radio that had a built in record player. Did we think we were up-town! Because we could play 78s in those days. Only 78s. Yeah, the news came. And entertainment. I remember loving country music, because my grandmother liked it so much. You know, Johnny Cash, Chet Atkins, that vintage. Ernest Tubb¹⁰— All those folks. There was a little newspaper—I wouldn't have thought about it till you mentioned it—called *Grit*¹¹ that came into rural areas. I don't know if they were published in a central place and then distributed everywhere, or if there was a publisher in Lawrenceville. I have no idea. It was not local news, though. It was sort of human-interest stories, and of course it was what was going on in the war and the world, and that kind of thing. It may have been a weekly. There was a Lawrenceville paper, like there was in every small town. But I don't remember seeing it in their houses. It was probably the *Gwinnett Daily News* or something like that. I don't remember seeing it there. I can remember getting—which I thought was so cool—sale papers—they called them. When Belk, or somebody, was having a sale, they would come out with, I guess you would call it a broad sheet, which was then folded. And one side was plain, and that side had the lettering on it, and that was how my Granny Spriggs taught me to write, because I would trace the letters on the back of this sale paper, and it's a wonder I didn't make my letters backward. You go, wait a minute! They were backward. Yeah, but, you know, she would somehow instruct me that they were supposed to be the other way, and in fact, because of her, and the fact that she read

⁹ Robert Mitchum was an actor popular in film in the 1940s and 1950s, most famous for playing antiheroes.

¹⁰ Known as the "Texas Troubadour" Ernest Tubb was active in country music from 1936 to 1982.

¹¹ *Grit* remains popular today as a magazine but used to be weekly newspaper which was first issued in 1882.

the comics—we did get the papers— because I can remember her reading “Nancy and Sluggo¹²” to me. “Brenda Starr.”¹³ “Rex Morgan” whatever his name was, M.D.¹⁴— So we did get those. But I was able to start school when I was five, and I could read, I mean fluently. I would walk beside the other kids and tell them the words. Somebody did something. It was either the sale papers or the comics! Somebody taught me to read! [Laughs] (24:34)

Interviewer: Can you share any memories of how they learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Ousley: Absolutely not. In fact, you’ll see in the old TV shows and documentaries, and whatever, people sitting around—huddled around the radio, listening to news of, you know, Pearl Harbor, or whether the war was going to be over soon. I think I’m just—I was too young for that. And also, maybe because mother was trying to hide the fact from—from everybody—that my father was there. I just can’t remember the family really talking about it. (25:15)

Interviewer: What did they decide to do after the war began?

Ousley: Well, as I had thought later, I really would have thought that my father would have volunteered, because he was doing—he had a seventh grade education—he was doing so many menial things. I learned later that he even worked on paving roads, which was a need in Gwinnett County at that point. The road we lived on wasn’t paved until probably ‘59 or ‘60. Somewhere in there. Which is now, of course, a thoroughfare at the Mall of Georgia¹⁵. But he had very menial jobs. He even went to Detroit once with some of the cousins I mentioned earlier who later went into the service. Some of those guys—to get work at the General Motors plant, or Ford, or whatever was there, but didn’t stay. And I don’t know why. So I have often wondered why he would not have volunteered, because—dangerous? Yes. Extremely dangerous in World War II. But probably paid pretty well. And it was a steady job. So as far as I know, he just decided to do it. Again, his two brothers could not go, so there was no one else in the family who could. He had a brother who died when he was a year old. So they were the only boys. And I would think, knowing my father, he probably just did it for the country.

Interviewer: So then he was drafted in 1944?

Ousley: Drafted as far as I know. Well, I know he was, because my son has researched that. In— what did I tell you? ‘42 or ‘43?

Interviewer: I think you said 1944.

Ousley: OK. That was absolutely right. Because I have that paper. And it was from ‘44—early ‘44 until late ‘44 that he was being trained. (27:14)

Interviewer: So, what happened to your parents then, after he was drafted?

¹² *Nancy* comic strip was first syndicated in 1938.

¹³ *Brenda Starr, Reporter* was a comic strip launched in 1940.

¹⁴ *Rex Morgan, M.D.* was a soap opera style comic strip first launched in 1948.

¹⁵ The Mall of Georgia opened in 1999 as the largest mall in the southeast.

Ousley: I'm assuming that for a while mother continued working and probably doing this rooming—she had a room in Clarkston in a house, which was pretty far from Lawrenceville in those days. I imagine that's where she found a job. But I'm thinking that eventually she moved in with my grandmother. They did not have the best of relationships, because, as I said, my grandmother was very, very strict—very. I hardly ever saw her smile. So serious. They thought of themselves as “just working.” That's what you were supposed to do—and take care of that family. So, I think that probably it wasn't a totally congenial thing. That's why she let her name me Gloria but didn't call me Gloria. I've often wondered. But I do know that when I was born, she moved in with them. So, she would either—again, they did not have their own house, they did not rent, specifically, just before he left, so they probably lived with them. Now, their house was tiny, and again, was built by my uncle and father. It had two bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen, and a little ramshackle sort of screened porch thing out back. So not really the world's greatest house, but at least it was theirs, because my father had built it.

Interviewer: So, did your father train, probably at Fort Benning?

Ousley: Actually, I think he was mustered in—whatever they call it—at Fort McPherson, because that was a big base at that point, near Atlanta. And then was sent to Fort Custer, Michigan, because he was in a military police unit. So, my assumption is that's where they taught those—whatever—technical skills. In that—it was a battalion—I've actually forgotten the name of it—but a military police battalion, and they trained at Fort Custer, Michigan. (29:21).

Interviewer: I think I have the 785th military police battalion.

Ousley: That's right.

Interviewer: And what did your mother decide to do when your father went to Michigan?

Ousley: I think it must have been fairly quickly that she made the decision that she was going to go there with him. I don't know that she always wanted to go to Michigan and be cold? Did she miss my father that much? Or did she maybe just see an opportunity to leave home, one wonders. So, she hopped on a train, which is, of course, the only way they could get anywhere in those days. I suppose you could take a bus, but it probably would have been as expensive. And maybe not even—it certainly wouldn't have been as fast. So, she took the train up, and once she got there, she moved, again, into a boarding house. And the folks she lived with there almost became a part of our family as I was growing up, because they talked all the time about “Ma, and Pa Ostrander in Battle Creek, Michigan.” They just loved these folks. And apparently, they loved them too. Now you can picture, in those days there was nobody in the south who didn't have the world's worst southern accent—I'm going to say, or best southern accent. And my parents were from the country. So probably, they were a novelty [Laughs] in Battle Creek, and they're going, “Oh, how cute!” You know, “what a cute little couple this is,” sort of thing. So, she worked there in the Kellogg Plant, which had been converted to making K-rations. (30:54) They may have still made Corn Flakes for the general public, you know somewhere, but of course, those were all rationed. So, I don't know how much of that actually was still going on. But I do know that the particular plant she

worked at made K-rations for the Army¹⁶. (31:10) On a conveyor belt—really high level work. Right? Let's put some cornflakes in a box. Well, it wouldn't have been cornflakes. It would have been beef jerky or something.

Interviewer: Did your mother tell you anything about her first impressions of Michigan?

Ousley: No, not really, that's odd. I think, because it was cold and snowy, of course, that was the main thing—the weather. But I think later on, she was so impressed with California—I'm getting ahead of myself there. She talked more about California than she did about Michigan. So—.

Interviewer: So, working at the Kellogg Plant in Battle Creek, did she have to join a union to do that work?

Ousley: She did. I think it was called the American Federation of Grain Processors¹⁷. She had to be a member of the union, and I have since learned from doing my work with Rosie the Riveter, that it was actually required, in many cases, of women. And many times it was withheld, especially in the early part of the war. They were not allowed to join the union, but they had to do the work. And I'm sure as more men went to the front, and were killed, and they needed the shifts, they needed the K-rations—they loosened the rules, probably, of being a union member, maybe even the cost. Because I think that was a big part of it. (32:40)

Interviewer: Did she share any memories of working at the Kellogg Plant, what that was like?

Ousley: Not really. Again, I just can't remember anything other than the people they stayed with. Which is cool. You know, at least she thought of the good side of things, right? I'm sure the work was not all that thrilling. Now, that is where she met her best friend of later years. And that is because the men trained over here at Fort Custer, and the women lived in these rooming houses—the ones who came up. So there was Bea Whittington from Warner Robbins, Georgia. Montezuma, in fact, a metropolis outside Warner Robbins¹⁸. Bea, who again had the broadest southern accent I have ever heard in my life, and she and Mother became lifelong friends. So, I know that's where they met. They had great times. And then Bea came back to Georgia when Mother went out to California. So, I've seen some of their letters that are really cute. And of course, you know, we remained friends. We would go to Warner Robbins and see them when I was a kid. I said, "Wow! We're going to Warner Robbins." It was like a vacation. [Laughs]

Interviewer: What was their social life like with these friends?

Ousley: I think mostly movies from what I have heard. Because I know there is a story about—because that was a big deal in those days—going to a movie. You know, it wasn't like

¹⁶ During World War II, Kellogg employees produced more than 43 million packages of K-rations for US armed forces deployed overseas. These were individually wrapped daily combat rations.

¹⁷ Rooted in the American Federation of Grain Millers in the 19th Century, the National Council of Grain Processors was established in 1936 and then renamed the American Federation of Grain Processors in 1941. In 1948 it was granted an international charter under the AFL. In 1999, the American Federation of Grain Processors merged with the Bakery, Confectionary, and Tobacco Workers International Union forming the BCTGM.

¹⁸ Montezuma is a small town southwest of Warner Robins which is south of the city of Macon, Georgia.

everybody could even afford it. And of course, these guys were getting Army pay, so they could afford it. But there's a story about my father and Mother in California. So, I think that was the main thing. They got together with the people at the rooming houses and probably played cards. You know, Parcheesi, dominoes, that sort of thing. But I don't really think they were mobile. I just don't think they would have – maybe the Ostranders would have taken them somewhere, but I don't think they would have had access to a car.

Interviewer: Do you know much about what they would have eaten, or anything like that? Did they have rations?

Ousley: Well, I remember Mother talking about the fact that the food was so different. Because they, of course, grew up on what we now call "soul food." I ate more beans when I was a kid than I ever want to think about. Greens. Turnip greens. Of course, every kind of vegetable that could be grown, and cornbread. Biscuits in the morning, and usually cornbread in the evening. And I'm sure that's not what they were eating in Battle Creek. So, it probably didn't grow much. I've in fact tried—I did this just the other day—I tried to find the street that Mother lived on, because I had a letter with the street address. 55 Everett Street. So, I go in on Google, and the only thing that comes up is 55 Everett Avenue. And I suppose they could have changed it from street to avenue in those days. But you picture Philadelphia row houses, and I'm sure this is what that was like, except Battle Creek was smaller, and the house was not connected to another house. So, I'm thinking once again, these were not—they were masons. I remember the picture of him in his masonic robes. So, if it was a town, they may have been pillars of the community, but I'm sure they weren't wealthy sort of thing. So probably just traditional Michigan food, whatever that is.

Interviewer: It's not as good.

Ousley: It's not as good! Mother probably made them a few cakes of cornbread, as she would call it, in her iron skillet.

Interviewer: So, when did your mother and father go to California?

Ousley: The unit—the battalion, as my son said it was—he's retired military. He said, "Mom, you call everything a unit." He's tried to teach me platoon, company, battalion, division, and I promptly forget it, but the battalion was transferred to Wilmington, California, because they were going to embark to the Pacific. It's interesting. It makes you wonder how organized the Army was in those days in comparison with now. Because they went out there to train. They were very near the coast. My mother worked at Wilmington Shipyards¹⁹, which was on Wilmington Island, just off L.A., off the coast of L.A. We know they're at the water. They're not Navy. They're military police. And they're going to end up in Europe! But here they are training on the ocean. So that was maybe six months or something. But apparently, they needed further training. So, they took them

¹⁹ I've not been able to find a reference for Wilmington Shipyards, but the California Shipbuilding Corporation (Calship) built 467 Liberty and Victory ships during World War II at the Calship shipyard at Terminal Island in Los Angeles, California. According to Google Maps, Wilmington is the Los Angeles neighborhood just north of Terminal Island where the Calship shipyard was located.

inland to place called Camp Anza (A-N-Z-A)²⁰ which I view as being probably in the high desert, but not really, not really the Death Valley kind of thing. It was probably a little bit lower—further down in California. They would come back to Wilmington every once and a while, so Mother did get to see him. That's where the story about the movie comes in. Because not every guy would get leave at the same time. So, Mother told me that my father was always so charming that the girls wanted him to escort them to the movie, so he would take a gaggle of girls to the movie. And my father was good looking, but looking back I'm thinking, "charming?" "Girls?" "My father?" He was not extremely outgoing, I have to say, but, you know, he was younger then.

Interviewer: What kind of work did your mother do?

Ousley: Well, at the shipyards she became a welder. Of course, that has to be an intensive training course. I was married to a welding engineer, and I know it is a complicated, complicated process. It's not something that you do in, you know, five minutes. But of course they were putting women through the very quick, intensive training in those days, because they needed them to be welders, like they needed them to be riveters on airplanes. On ships they needed welders, so she took the course and did it. And I don't know how long this lasted, but she told me not long before she died, I guess, the story of one of the supervisors coming in to her and telling her that she looked as if she had good organizational skills, and I'm thinking "how do you look as if you do" but he hired her to come over into the office and do office work, and filing, and that kind of thing, which she would have never done before in her life. But she also told me that this same guy who was there when she would walk into the office would sing, "Here she comes, Miss America," which of course was a big deal in those days. Bert Parks and the theme song. So, I'm wondering, was she moved into the office because she was a good organizer, or because she was pretty. We don't know.

Interviewer: And she was pretty.

Ousley: Very. Very pretty. Although I look, as I said I'm involved with the Rosie the Riveter Association, and I look at pictures of those women, those gorgeous hairdos. There was so much going on with hair in those days. They actually did a lot more makeup than, to me, any generation afterward, they paid a lot more attention to their makeup. But there were so many pretty women. You know, we'll have pictures at the Rosie convention—"here's my mother when she was in the war, age 20." Just beautiful faces! And of course they stayed pretty later too. But yes, she was quite attractive. Very slim, which helped. Always very slim.

Interviewer: So, when was your father sent overseas?

Ousley: That would have been in early '45, or I'm going to say December '44, early '45, and, of course, I was born in April. So Mother was obviously already pregnant at the time that he left, and they knew there would be a baby he wouldn't see, or at least he thought he wouldn't. So, when they were shipped out, they came back to – I'm going to have to remember this—I think they shipped out from Boston. So, they trained two places—they're here—but apparently, they don't need them in the Pacific yet. So, that comes

²⁰ Camp Anza was located in Riverside, California, and was operational as an Army staging camp from 1942 – 1946.

later. So, they send them to France. But he left from Boston. That was in early '45. My son told me yesterday that he was in the Rhine campaign²¹. He was with the Third—attached to the Third Army under General Patton, and I didn't know until yesterday, my son told me, I was in the nail salon, holding my phone waiting to go in, and my son is talking to me about World War II. So, I said to the other ladies, you know, I'm sorry I'm having to do this, but I have to listen to him. He's on his way back to Washington, because he teaches and was preparing lessons, and I'm listening to this. A story I had never heard is that my father was so proud that he saw Patton. And you can imagine, you know, there were thousands and thousands of people working for this guy, and he's a legend, and absolute—then! You know, not just now, but an absolute total legend. And he was so thrilled. He had to tell Mark about this. So, they went into France. They were there as the war was ending, actually, which was interesting after all this training. So, they were in the clean up campaign, for, what I think was called the Central Europe and the Rhineland Campaign. Both of those were with the Third Army. They came in through England, went down into France, and then into Germany, so when the war was ending he was in Germany. My son also told me yesterday that he remembered passing a concentration camp on their way somewhere, and it was a terrible thing. Of course, you do Holocaust education, and you've heard it all, but my father said he remembered the smell. That's going to make me cry, but that's what struck him about it. And they were just passing. They were not liberating it. They didn't have that sort of thing going on. There were a lot of, obviously, surrenders. My father brought back a—it's a family relic—a shotgun and rifle combination that is apparently extremely unusual. It's a German weapon. So, they were able to get one of those. They got the munitions from the soldiers. And also – I keep saying “my son told me yesterday”—he was in this military police battalion that was involved in going to—and I would have to look it up again—I believe it is Merkers²². (M-E-R-K-E-R-S). In Germany. Which is salt mines. And you know what the Nazis did with the gold and the art. We've been to Austria a few times, and the salt mines in northern Austria, they took them up there. They threw gold bars into deep mountain lakes, so they could abscond with them after they ruled the world. Right? So, the military police battalion goes up to Merkers, and was able to help escort some of the things back. So, I said to Mark, “Oh, it's like *Monuments Men*²³.” Mark, my son, he said, “Mom, that movie was not authentic.” So, it was not exactly like that. He's big into authentic military movies. I have to say.

Interviewer: That's not on the list then—.

Ousley: Yes, absolutely. I think he liked *The Big Red One*²⁴ ok. That's about all I remember.

Interviewer: So, how did your mother and father stay in touch during this time? Did your mother return to Georgia while your father went abroad?

Ousley: Right, she did, and I think lived with Granny Spriggs. Letters. Lots of letters. But over the years they were lost or destroyed by mistake. We had a relative that threw away a lot

²¹ The Rhineland Offensive was a series of allied operations from February 8, 1945 – March 25, 1945, aimed at occupying the Rhineland and securing a passage over the Rhine River for General Eisenhower's “broad front” strategy.

²² For more on the Merkers Mine Treasure, see *Prologue Magazine*, Spring 1999 vol. 31, no. 1.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1999/spring/nazi-gold-merkers-mine-treasure.html>

²³ *Monuments Men* is a 2014 war film directed by George Clooney and produced by George Clooney and Grant Heslov.

²⁴ *The Big Red One* is a 1980 war film written and directed by Samuel Fuller.

of things that Mother had kept. And after Mother died, looking at what was in her attic, I can tell you she probably had every letter he wrote. Because she had every letter I wrote her from California when I lived there, so what a shame that they're gone. But we do have two V-mails. And my son has them, because, again, he's the military historian, and obviously for our family as well. And we have a small diary. It's about that big [hold hands together] that we later learned was given to him by my grandparents when he left, but, you know, again a seventh grade education, he wrote pretty well. He read a lot in his later years. But there are hardly any entries in it, which is interesting. Mostly when he was in the Pacific, in fact, and I guess in Europe they were too busy with the war. But then again you know people who wrote diaries in great detail. So, I'm not sure why he didn't. I do know he wrote her fairly voluminous letters. I've just heard her talk about it. A lot of detail in those. I just wish we had them, right?

Interviewer: Did your father stay in Europe the whole time? (46:47)

Ousley: No, when that part of the war was over—of course I've forgotten when V.E. Day was, May something or other of '45²⁵, we thought we were going to invade Japan, apparently. It was, "Let's go send over a million people and invade a country with four million people." Whatever it was—bright idea! As my grandson would say, "Good idea, Dad and Mom," to go over there. But they sent thousands and thousands of people to the Pacific. So, here's this guy from Georgia, walking around behind a mule for part of his life, and he's now gone across the ocean to Europe, and he now comes back across the country and goes across the ocean to the Pacific. So, it had to be quite a big event in these guys' lives. Even being on a ship. He's probably never been on a boat at that point. I know he was later. So, they send them to this island, I believe it is, called Maug Maug²⁶. He later went to—I've forgotten the name, I believe, of the—there's another island. Obviously, they're all small Pacific islands. But he ended up in Okinawa. That was the place he stayed the longest after they were sent there. One interesting thing I have to mention, because I want this to be part of the family thing, it was for us. He was a sergeant, and he had another sergeant friend, I'm thinking. I don't believe this guy worked for him, but his name was Sergeant Nut. We heard about him all of our childhood. We even had a picture of his little girl. A 5" x 7" of his little girl. I don't know why we had it. So, they had mobilized into Okinawa, and I guess had maybe built some buildings, because there wouldn't have been anything to take over there, they way there was in Europe. So, they built some buildings. Sergeant Nut went into a building to do something. They were repairing jeeps. Repairing the military police jeeps. I didn't mention he had gone into the motor pool later on, after he was strictly a military policeman. He went into the motor pool side of it. So, he went into this building, came out—backwards. My father went into the building, came out, and he may have been going in to get gasoline, or to fill up a can, or something. Sergeant Nut goes into the building after him, and it blows up. So, his best friend has died. And Mark reminded me yesterday that one of the entries in the diary said he wasn't able to go to the funeral. And that's all it says. "Sergeant Nut died yesterday. I wasn't able to go to the funeral." So, we don't know why. I mean, I know from Mark being in Afghanistan that military funerals are generally—or at least memorial services—are attended by the whole

²⁵ V.E. Day was May 8, 1945, when Germany officially surrendered to the Allies.

²⁶ The Maug islands are part of the Northern Mariana island chain. Originally held by Japan during World War II, they were taken by the Allies and served as a U.S. base of operations in the last months of the war.

company. You know, and they put the rifle up, and the helmet, and the boots here. So I don't know why he wouldn't have been able to go. But through the—and we had the long picture of the battalion in the wall in the den, and the smaller picture of the company—200 people—underneath it on the wall—and we'd say, "There's Sergeant Nut!" You know, I think he was in both pictures. So, it was like just part of the family lore that my father had lost his best friend. Other than that, there were not any—and again this is my son telling me—there were not other instances. Of course, they weren't at the front. They were military police. They were not out there in the infantry area. But there was a time when he was shot at in Germany when he was over there trying to retrieve an axle to repair a Jeep. He was trying to retrieve it from a bunch of mangled vehicles over here. He was shot at, and he never knew if it was a German partisan who was still fighting the war, or a civilian who didn't like Americans, but he looked up and the bullet had grazed the car over his head. Then, the story of when he got the shotgun/rifle combination, apparently his company commander at that point was a not really revered guy. Mark describes him as "old Army." Very tough. Guys didn't like him much. So, he and my father were both out there getting these German weapons. And what did they call him? I guess he was a captain—the captain if he's in charge of the company. He shot himself in the foot with the gun that he retrieved, and he had to go home. So, my father was here. There were two rifles and shotguns. It could have been him who shot himself in his foot! So, he escaped being injured three times. And of course, you'd think being in the military police he may have never even been shot at. But you don't know. You don't know what's going to happen. So—.

Interviewer: So, did you mother share any stories about how she learned about the end of the war? She wasn't huddled around the radio—.

Ousley: No, I really don't know. And my father came home when I was eight months old. So that would have been January '46. And of course, eight months—I didn't know him. They said I crawled over to see him, and in the process—I crawled to the door where they were having excitement, I guess—and in the process I creased my head on a rocking chair. So, I had that scar forever. And they've told me that I was afraid of him for a long time, because I had never seen him. But I just can imagine that there was general excitement, and she's probably knowing that she's going to be able to move—she's a little bit under my grandmother's thumb. And I have to say this laughingly, because Granny Spriggs was my favorite person growing up. So stern as she was, never smiled, I spent so many days with that woman, listened to so much country music, so it wasn't that she was mean or hard to get along with. It's just, you know, a mother-in-law thing.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that you were born shortly before the end of the war.

Ousley: Mmh hmm.

Interviewer: What kind of support did your mother have when you were born? She was living with your grandparents—.

Ousley: Right, and at that point my grandfather was still alive. I don't know how healthy he was. I've never really known what he died from. But he died early. Because my brother was born in '47, and Mother was pregnant with him when he died. He was a lot older than

my grandmother when they were married. He may have been in poor health. I just know my Granny Spriggs was the hardest working person you've ever seen—in the house, and in the fields, and whatever. They had a garden the size of four or five subdivision house tracts. Just a huge garden which is now across the street from my house. But I can imagine that Mother helped with the food, but Granny always made maybe a 1:00 meal that the table was full [gestures with hands] vegetables and fried chicken, biscuits always. And I don't really think my grandfather would have been a whole lot of help, because I'm sure he was fairly sick at that point. I know he was very thin from the pictures I've seen. But somehow, I remember him. They always said that I was kind of his favorite, and I was not the oldest grandchild, by far. Because my father was the baby in the family. So, I was not anywhere near the oldest grandchild. But they just said he really had taken a liking to me, and I can almost remember sitting on his knee. Now I would have been two years old. So, do I really remember? Yeah, I'm thinking that Mother would have continued working in probably a sewing plant, or maybe the shoe plant? Although, you know, in those days women stayed home when they had babies. And maybe it was frowned upon. I hadn't really thought about whether she went back right away or not. (55:31)

Interviewer: What were some of your earliest memories of your parents?

Ousley: Starting, I guess, when we lived in Gwinnett. As I mentioned to you earlier, they bought this little house. They were building them for G.I.s all over the country. Little cracker-box houses [makes box shape with hands]. On a tiny lot, you know maybe that much bigger than the house. In Gainesville. So that's where I actually was born. This is interesting. I was born in Hall County. Thinking back, that doesn't seem right. I guess they took me to Hall County. Maybe there was no nearer hospital. At any rate, they bought this house after the war and lived there, so that would have been '46 to something. And I can kind of remember living there then. Not too well, but I remember living on a farm in the country. Again, my father had built probably two more houses by then. There's the house on the hill and the house at the bottom of the hill. Rented to relatives, or sometimes relatives just occupied them without paying us. He was always building houses. So, my earliest memories then would not be at Gainesville. But off, you know, rutted country roads, mud, red clay, 12,000 chickens, a couple of cows, a couple of hogs—two or three I guess—playing outside all the time, riding bicycles all over. And then, when I was – this is interesting—when I was in fourth grade, I suppose they had been renting the house in Gainesville in my early years. They decided to move back when I was in fourth grade. And we're all going, "We don't like this milk," for example. Because the milk man would come and bring us homogenized milk, and we had been drinking milk from a cow all those years. And then Mother would churn buttermilk. And we thought buttermilk from the milk man was an abomination. I mean there was nothing worse tasting than buttermilk from a carton when we've had the real thing over here. I got roller skates. I was able to skate on the sidewalk. It was little subdivision houses. We had friends in the house next door, and the house next door. Whereas our farm was 25-30 acres without any neighbors. The neighbors were all very far away. So that was one year. I went to walk to an elementary school, a little low elementary school called Miller Park²⁷—same architecture as all the other schools in Georgia. And it was just weird. My

²⁷ Miller Park Elementary School was located on Dorsey Street in Gainesville, Georgia and operated from 1948 – 1979. https://dlg.usg.edu/record/hall_hchp_0505

brother had a bicycle he rode on the sidewalks. Someone stole it and threw it into a gutter, a culvert sort of thing. So, we lived the city life for maybe a year, year and a half, and I guess maybe they just missed the farm. So maybe the second house had not been built yet, so he built another house. That's what happened.

Interviewer: So how did your folks live in sort of a farm complex?

Ousley: My goodness. It's probably a mile and a half between us and Highway 20, you know, which goes by the Mall of Georgia. Probably a mile and a half. There were three very big farms which were ours and the two other best friends of ours, the Chesters and the Bollous, and then there were little houses where, for some reason, they didn't have the land. I think the only reason we got the land is that it probably cost 25 cents an acre. And my grandfather might have had some money from the blacksmithing and moonshining days, so they were able to buy a lot of land like, for what it was worth, it really was not all that fertile in those days, because cotton had farmed it out kind of thing. I can remember red clay for miles. Not even much vegetation. So, the three neighbors, they were our best buddies. We were baseball playing fiends. When I grew up, we played baseball every day out on our little field thing. And other than that, I would say maybe four other houses. There was a crazy guy who walked up and down the road. There was Mrs. Johnson, the nice old lady up on the hill in a kind of old white house. And then someone who had built a newer house, apparently again just on a small tract of land. And then there was our church, which was between there and the road. We didn't know many people, because there were not that many people to know. And then my uncle had land maybe another half a mile from us, and we went there through the woods to his house. I think I had mentioned to you, and maybe you had seen the article I sent you about my family reunion—the Spriggs reunion—that had been held at his farm for 72 years. It began in '45 on his land. So that was over there, and of course we'd visit them, kind of thing. But yeah, there weren't many people.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that your parents had kids every two years or so, so can you tell me about your siblings—their names—.

Ousley: My brother is named Samuel after my father, but again, he goes by Charles. That seems to be an affliction in our family. So, his name is S. Charles Spriggs. And we've never called him Chaz. When he went to work for Dupont, people started calling him Chaz. And I said, "There's something wrong with that. He's Charles." Then I have a sister named Virginia Elaine who is two years younger than he is, and Rita Faye—you had to have a Faye in the family if you're in the South. So, Rita Faye, two years later. We were like two separate camps because of that age difference. My brother and I were very—you know we rode the bicycles. I was a tomboy from word go. We did baseball all day. Jenny—that was her nickname—and Rita. They were not old enough to play baseball. So, we had the older siblings, the younger siblings. If they ever played with us, for example, we would do "Tarzan."²⁸ And my youngest sister Rita is still mortified by the fact that she got to be "Cheetah." She was not in the group enough to be a person. So, we had the friends who were named the Bullous and the Chester kids in that family, and they would come out and join us in all our games and bicycle riding. You may

²⁸ Tarzan is a fictional character—a boy raised in the African jungle by Mangani great apes—who encounters civilization and then later rejects it. Originally created by Edgar Rice Burroughs.

remember “Rin Tin Tin.” Do you remember that? So, we did “Rin Tin Tin” And I always say this with a little bit of pride. I was elected the Lieutenant. So “women’s lib” in 1952. Dennis Bullou, who was a little older than I was, was the sergeant, and my brother was Private Whatever-he-was. And we had a dog who was Rin Tin Tin. So those were the kind of things that my brother and I did, but my younger sisters got kind of left out a little bit. They didn’t get to be Tomboys as much as I did, because in ‘59 we moved to a subdivision in Doraville. So, at that point Rita was only eight. Jane was only ten. You know, they had not really been able to get out with us and do the kind of rough-and-tumble things, and I kind of regret that for them, you know. They were not country children as much as we were. And I think that was a good lifestyle. A little dangerous sometimes. We stepped on nails. I cut my foot on a piece of ball jar about that big. [motions about twice the size of her hand] I fell and cut my knee (scar) playing baseball on a rock. I cut it all the way to the bone. You know, dangerous. There were snakes. There were copperheads at the creek where we picked blackberries—a good many of them—but you know, so free. There were just—there were no boundaries sort of thing.

Interviewer: Was there someone in the family that knew first aid, or did you ever go to the doctor for these things?

Ousley: [Laughs] There’s a doctor in Lawrenceville. And the story—I have to tell you about the knee, because my sister, the older of the younger two, always said that she remembers going in the car, because I guess they piled us all in the car to go to Lawrenceville and have my knee sewn up. And she says she remembered my father pouring alcohol in it. Now this was a cut. I could see the bone there. But the alcohol—because he thought that was what he was supposed to do. You know, you were cured in those days by having iodine put on things. And of course, that would kill you. Or Mercurochrome²⁹, the other iodine. So that’s what they’d use for first aid in general. But we did go to get stitches for that. I don’t know if I remember any other stitches, but my brother fell on a rock when he was a young kid under our old oak tree. I remember him hurting his mouth doing that, so, you know, there were some hazards. But when you—if you stepped on a nail, you just pulled it out. What were you even going to do?

Interviewer: They didn’t have the tetanus shot back then?

Ousley: I’m not sure when they started, even. I’m not sure. You know, we did have smallpox vaccines vaccinations, so there were some shots going on. There might have been a DPT³⁰ shot when Jenny and Rita were little, but I don’t think when I was.

Interviewer: And then there was one more sibling, right?

Ousley: Right. She was born when I was a freshman in college. And so this is like the family anomaly, weirdness, or whatever. I imagine some of my college—I went to college early, in fact, that’s why I was only 18, since I’d started school when I was five because I could read, so I graduated when I was 17, and went to college when I was like 17 years

²⁹ Mercurochrome is a trade name for merbromin, a topical antiseptic used to treat minor cuts and scrapes. It is no longer sold in the United States due to its mercury content.

³⁰ Probably referencing DTAP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis) vaccine which was first developed in the 1930s but combined in the acellular fashion we are now familiar with in 1991.

and two or three months, which is pretty early— so I’m sure a lot of my friends thought, in those days, “Is this Jean’s baby, or is it her mother’s?” Because that did happen, you know. There were girls who went other places, and had their babies, but there were some who kept them. But such an attraction! I can’t tell you how many times I thought, “Gee, I’m glad I have a baby sister!” Because then all the boys would come into the dorm seating area. I went to Reinhardt, which is a small mountain school, so there’s not much there—but that seating area—and then the boys would come over and talk to the baby, and she got to be cuter when she walked and all this. Today she is— what is she doing today? She’s teaching at Georgia Highlands College. Teaching computer science.

Interviewer: What’s her name?

Ousley: Melanie. Melanie Lynn. Named by me. I keep thinking of all these things I would have thought. Of course for *Gone With the Wind*. For Melanie from *Gone With the Wind*. And people would say, “Why didn’t you name her Scarlet?” So, she’d be tougher, and maybe more outgoing or whatever. But somehow I just thought of her as a Melanie when she was born. And she’s really been that way. She is a tough, really brilliant. She majored in math at Tech. You know, she’s smarter than the rest of us. And yet still quiet and unassuming. So she’s a Melanie³¹.

Interviewer: So, where did you attend high school, in Doraville?

Ousley: I went to West Gwinnett High School which later became Norcross, so in Doraville. Those were the years when they were consolidating the schools, when Gwinnett is growing, you know. We had the big water tower for a long time that said “Growing Gwinnett.” (1:08:03) So they started consolidating Suwanee, Duluth, Buford—all the schools—into Central Gwinnett, South Gwinnett, West Gwinnett. And it didn’t take well in some cases because people really wanted to be in their own cities. So eventually Duluth left West Gwinnett and went back to their own school system. Of course Buford still has their own, even these days. They didn’t willingly go into North Gwinnett. So after two years, the name of the school was changed from West Gwinnett to Norcross. And I was there for the last graduating class in that school that doesn’t exist anymore, which is very strange.

Interviewer: And this would have all been before desegregation, right?

Ousley: Right. Yeah. There would not have been a black person in my school that I can recall. And, in fact, when I went to Reinhardt³², and of course it was a private, Methodist school, it was a little more expensive—it was a little more expensive then, in those days at any rate—not a single black student. My sisters would have been at Norcross—the two younger, not the youngest, the younger ones—when desegregation came about, and they talk about it really as being kind of a non-event at Norcross. I’m not sure if that was true for everybody. But I can remember growing up—I didn’t mention this—we lived in

³¹ Melanie Hamilton Wilkes is a fictional character who first appeared in the Margaret Mitchell novel, *Gone With the Wind*. Melanie’s total goodness and naivety is meant to serve as a contrast to Scarlett O’Hara’s spunky ruthlessness.

³² Reinhardt University is a private school in Waleska, Georgia. The school is still affiliated with the United Methodist Church.

the country. Going to Lawrenceville on Saturday was a big deal. So we'd go to the drug store and buy a comic book and an ice cream cone, we'd go to see Dr. Simms if somebody had to go see the doctor,—you didn't have an appointment; you just dropped in to see Dr. Simms—Mother bought groceries, because the grocery store was in Lawrenceville, not anywhere near where we lived, and I remember seeing black people walking down the street. And I didn't think, “these are black people, these are—” it was just not even in our thought process. We, I suppose, knew that there were black schools. They weren't attending ours. I went to this school called Sunny Hill³³, which burned—they all burned—I've often said it was because they oiled the floors so much. The floors were wooden, and truly they must have been oiled a thousand times a year to keep them, I guess, pliable. It was not hard wood. It was some kind of old pine, I guess. So if it started burning, it was going to go up in flames, right? So Sunny Hill—absolutely no black children. I didn't know where the black children lived. I would have had no conception of that there's a part of town where the black children live. But growing up, we did not talk about race. We did not use the words that some people did. I don't know how my mother and father managed to escape all of that without apparently any sort of feelings of discrimination. But of course when my father went to work at the B.O.P. plant, the General Motors plant in Doraville, surely it must have been desegregated, or whatever—whatever one would call it in those days. But he had been in the Army. And of course, today I was looking at your Tuskegee Airmen exhibit, and I realize it was not desegregated either. But he had been there with people from other places, and I'm sure he was with some, or around some of the black units. Did that do it? I don't know. But they just did not ever instill in us any sort of prejudice against anybody. It was not—and because we were poor, we didn't look down on poor people, because we knew what it was. But I have to say, by the time we moved to Doraville, my father had sold a whole lot of the land in Gwinnett county, and he built this house without, I believe, without a mortgage, I believe I'm right about that. Although maybe he did have to get a construction loan. But at any rate, and it had been paid for for years by the time he died. But it wasn't as if in those days we were poverty-stricken. I mean we went down on Buford Highway and bought our groceries kind of thing. We had nice clothes. Mother still made a lot of them, as she had back on the farm. But, you know, he had been working at General Motors³⁴ a long time. And she worked some during those years. So it wasn't as if we were really poor by the time I was thirteen or fourteen. We had pretty much a little suburban lifestyle. It wasn't as if my father was a professional man, but still enough money kind of thing.

Interviewer: Did he get to make any use of the G.I. Bill?

Ousley: With the house, I'm sure. The one in Gainesville. He did not take any courses. I mean, he hadn't even finished high school, so he certainly didn't think—and I don't think in those days that they would have thought about college. it's just—This is an interested statistic if you think about how “young” I am. [scare quotes] I was the first person in our family to go to college. And those older brothers and sisters—Claude, Suzy, Benny, Ruby—cousins much older than I am, many of whom have died. So, it was just a culture

³³ According to Gwinnett County, the school was torn down in 1958. It existed on Highway 24. http://www.old-new-orleans.com/GA_Gwinnett_Forsyth.html

³⁴ General Motors operated an assembly plant in Doraville at the intersection of I-285 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard from 1947 until 2008.

thing. They just didn't do it. I was supposed to go to secretarial school. That's what I was destined for when I graduated, but circumstances were better than that. But I just don't think he would have thought about it. I think that maybe he would have thought that his lot in life was maybe just to be a hard-working farmer, and he didn't really—but then I again I said he went to work at General Motors where he worked on the assembly line. One of his jobs for years was putting on door handles. On the Chevrolets that came by. I think that there's something in that group of people—maybe it's the mountain people. Maybe it's just Southern people in general that sort of said, "If this is your place, this is your place." And I don't want to say it was a quashing of the spirit, or anything like that, but it was sort of like, "Bloom where you're planted." I've always liked that saying. And it was not "you've got to go do something 'better' than what you are" in order to make a living, sort of thing. Mother had a little bit more of that. I think I mentioned to you that I came across this this morning again—she took the Civil Service courses to become a government employee. And for some reason she never—I know she never worked for the government. For some reason she never did, but she was more ambitious than he was in that sense, and of course had a high school education, so she could have started off at a higher level. My father did not speak exceptionally well, couldn't spell very well—probably a good thing that he could even write after seventh grade in a country school. But I just don't think—I'm sure the house was on the G.I. Bill—the Gainesville house—because it was in an area where you would expect the newer houses to be built. That's why they were building them, sort of thing. But I can't remember any other—I know he got some sort of V.A. benefit, but I think everybody did. And he wasn't wounded. But I think he did get some sort of V.A. type thing.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me more about your graduation and how you went from being destined for secretarial school to going to college?

Ousley: Right. Let me take a sip. We don't have to stop. So, secretarial school because I was a woman, and again I think my parents had not really thought above their station, right? This is our station. We live in Doraville, and we have a subdivision house, and, by the way, there was a lake across the street. We were in high cotton, as we could go swimming in the lake. In later years, I actually insured the dams in Gwinnett. I was a broker for Gwinnett county for a long time, and we insured the dams. The dam in that lake had been deemed unsafe by the insurance company, so it did not maintain its character as a lake for a long time, but we swam in it when we were teenagers. So that's where we were, and I was going to go off to secretarial school. (1:17:20) I was pretty successful in high school. Very, I guess. Valedictorian. I won the Atlanta Journal Cup³⁵, which is really weird for somebody—I was the shyest person you'd ever want to see in your life. Don't know how I would have impressed anybody from mostly grades. But I'm sitting here, and somehow, the Atlanta Journal Cup has, you know the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* in those days, and somehow the Dean of Students from Reinhardt had seen my name. And they were recruiting students from Atlanta to diversify the mountain population of Reinhardt College. As it had been Adairsville, Canton, Elijay—all the mountain towns. Nothing wrong with them. Some of the greatest people in the world in college. But they wanted to diversify. So, he came to the place where I was working that summer. I got a summer job in a life insurance company. Because I was

³⁵ <https://www.ajc.com/news/schools/ajc-cup/> Launched in 1927 to recognize local students who work hard to attain a well-rounded education. Each high school in the Atlanta metro area is invited to nominate a student for the honor.

working 9-5, he had to come to the thing, and the manager of the company, I guess, let me go into a little room to interview with him. And he said, "If you'll come to Reinhardt, we'll give you a work study scholarship, and we'll give you a scholarship because of your grades, and we'll find some other money for you if your parents need it." And so, we said, "Fine." You know, secretarial school didn't have scholarships, right? [laughs] So, let me just go on up here. And I had the best experience, because my work in my work-study scholarship was as the student secretary to the president. So I knew everything that was going on in the college. And the neatest people who worked for him—this wonderful woman who was his executive secretary. And then the Dean of Students was in the same complex. His secretary was fantastic. It just helped me so much. Great experience at Reinhardt. Wonderful school. And they did have a lot of people from Atlanta that particular year. I have friends from East Atlanta in particular, for some reason. They were also recruiting further south. I remember a girl from Vienna³⁶, Georgia. Have you ever heard of Vi-enna? You want to talk southern accent again! So just a very diverse population. And then when I graduated from there, the interesting thing is that I went to Emory³⁷. And some years before that—not too many years before that from the lore I heard—Emory had started recruiting in the Northeast. So here I am going to two schools that are trying to diversify and not be so Southern, or not to be so North Georgia Southern anymore. So, there were just tons of people from New York and New Jersey at Emory at that point. So, I guess I lucked out really in that kind of diversification because, if I'd gone to, let's say, a girls' school in the South, probably very insular, I would have thought.

Interviewer: Did impressions of your mother's experience, or the work that she did, shape at all your decisions about going into insurance?

Ousley: I don't know so much that, because, later on she was not able to maintain that level—that skill level—because she had to work in a sewing factory when I was a kid. Because there wasn't anything else. What else? She couldn't work at Boeing, or Kellogg, or whatever. They weren't there. But I think there was just something about the experience. And I have to tell you this—I probably should have brought the whole story—when I was a kid they had – and they probably had it before I was born—a cedar chest. They used to call them hope chests. And it's not as if it came with anything, I don't think. Her dowry was not in there, because there was no dowry. But my father had bought it for her, I guess, sometime after they got married. Beautiful cedar chest. The Lane³⁸ kind of thing. So, we would open it, and it would be like a treasure trove of things from the past. So, I wrote this little story later on in my mother's memory book, because what I remember seeing in there were these dresses we used to wear. They had embroidery, and I don't mean the little—it was the layered kind of applique embroidery. She had one with almost a sequined look in there. And there were suits. She had a crepe suit that was lavender, oh my goodness! But she's going around wearing house dresses. You would never have worn a crepe suit to Rock Springs United Methodist Church, I can tell you that. She probably wore her house dress—no she didn't. She had a Sunday-go-to-meeting kind of thing, and people wore hats and all that. But I remember looking in the

³⁶ Vienna, Georgia, is the county seat of Dooly County, located in the southern part of Middle Georgia.

³⁷ Emory University is a private research university located in Atlanta, GA. It was founded in 1836 originally in Oxford, Georgia, by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

³⁸ The Lane Company of Altavista, Virginia was an active maker of fine cedar chests between 1912 and 2001.

cedar chest and thinking, “My mother must have been really elegant.” And what I said in the story is that I fantasized that she must have left that life to come and raise us. Because she had—there were shoes with spike heels, with the pointy toes! She didn’t wear those anymore. She wore sandals. They just weren’t worn out where we lived. Purses! I remember a couple purses. Gorgeous. So, I just thought she had a glamorous life before we were there. And I think that what—Mother—if I was inspired—I was just another person out there doing things—but if I was inspired at all, I think it would have been that Mother wanted me to try new things. Not to be afraid. And you could probably see that with the little country girl getting on a train to go to Michigan.

Interviewer: So, how did you learn about the American Rosie the Riveter Association?

Ousley: They started an Atlanta chapter, so I can’t claim any going around looking for it kind of thing. I knew that my mother—that is not right. I knew that my mother had been a welder. That is absolutely sure. And I actually took her—I had forgotten this sequence. I took her to Warm Springs when they were having their convention there. In the early days they always had their conventions in Warm Springs. And so I said, “Mother! You were a Rosie the Riveter!” So we see there that day a re-enactor, who’s a wonderful girl out of Lagrange, Georgia. Her name’s Carol Kane. She did our Atlanta convention for us. This reenactor doing stories, and I said, “Mother, that sounds like your story! You went to these places, and you did things that you never thought you would do, and you met people you never thought you’d meet—town people—and you weren’t accustomed to that sort of thing.” So, we were very interested in it, but then, in say three years or so, a couple of people had started an Atlanta chapter. And then, of course, I made her join. But you couldn’t get Mother to stand up and tell her story. And I’m the president now, and when I do the conventions, I have every Rosie in the room tell her story. Some of them are this long [holds fingers close together] because they’re really shy, and they don’t want to stand up to begin with, and some of them are fairly long. Mother would never have done that. She went to a couple of meetings of the Atlanta chapter with me, but she just—she didn’t go to many of them. She just wasn’t feeling as well, I guess, in those days. Certainly, it was something that, when I heard about that, I wanted to celebrate what she had done.

Interviewer: And when was this first one that you went to?

Ousley: It would have been about 2000. Somewhere around there.

Interviewer: And are you a mother yourself these days?

Ousley: Yes. Those boys. Three boys. And the 40- whatever he is, I can’t believe it—46-year-old. Gulp. Yes, he is 46. When he was young, he wanted to be in the Army. And it’s not because his father was. His father had—I’m divorced—his father had a defense deferment, because he was working on the S.S.T. during Vietnam. So, it wasn’t his father. I don’t know if it was his father and his grandfather who was in World War II that inspired him, but he wanted to be in the Army—well he wanted to be in the military from an early age. He did have a Marine uniform at one point when he was about five. And then the Revolution—well I’ve always said that the Revolutionary War was his first love. He drew a picture of George Washington when he was three. He won an art contest. And then he went on from there to the Civil War. And eventually got interested

in World War II. So that's how that progressed. He's still interested in the Civil War a little bit. But definitely, I don't know why, again, he's a patriot, for sure. He's hard working. He cares about the country. An awful lot about the Army. Very, very committed to the Army—to the structure and the discipline and all of that. You might say you'd hate to be his son, but that's not true. He actually has a very playful side as well, so he's not this strong disciplinarian person. In fact, he's probably one of the silliest children in the world when he was growing up. Middle son is—.

Interviewer: His name, I'm sorry—.

Ousley: Mark McDonald Turner. He's named for his great-grandmother. Her maiden name. And—great-grandmother? No, grandmother. It's her maiden name, so actually it's for his great-grandmother. And then there is Matthew Scott Turner. Mr. free spirit. Wouldn't have been in the Army if you had paid him an awful lot of money. Could not have even thought of that. Entrepreneur. Developed a patent for an iPod docking station. That was his living for a while, until they came out with the next version, and then he made backs for the iPhone 4 and the iPhone 5, and they did fairly well with that, but eventually they just could get enough ahead of the Apple folks to make it work. So, these days—he had his own company for a really long time—and these days he's doing things like prototypes for other companies. he's kind of an idea man. He does a lot of computer work and electronics work for companies on a contract basis. So very much sort of an individualist. And then there's Steven who is 12 years younger than he is. Steven Joseph. Eight years younger than the oldest and 12 years younger than Matthew³⁹. And Steven's a salesman. He wouldn't want me to say that. This is being videotaped. He actually manages a group called a consortium, but he's a salesman. From the word go. He used to sell us on everything when he was a kid, and he can still do it now. So very different children.

Interviewer: And where did you raise your kids?

Ousley: Well, we moved around a lot for the first 12 years we were married, so Mark was born in California. Matt was born in South Carolina. But then we moved to New Orleans when they were—I don't know what ages—but they lived in New Orleans for three and a half years, but then very fortunately—you know things happen for the best—we got a divorce—that's not the fortunate part—but we did, and I came back to Georgia. So, they were only nine and six at that point. Mark was in fourth grade and Matt was starting first grade, so from then until they graduated, they were in Dekalb County schools. In the same house, even, because we lived in that house for 12 years. So, after all that moving before they were old enough to know what was going on, they were able to live in one place.

Interviewer: So, you got married again?

Ousley: Mmh hmm. And Steven is mine and Tom's, and he's more like his father than the other two are like their father. So—actually their father is an engineer. And I suppose that's one reason they are somewhat technically-oriented. You have to be technical to be in the Army—to be an officer in the Army these days. You can't just go out and do things with

³⁹ Since this math doesn't work, it's likely the other way around.

your hands, you know, or shoot a rifle. Very, very heavy administrative work. And of course the middle one has all the skills for taking things apart and putting them back together—making them, designing them—all of that.

Interviewer: So, what do you think students and future generations should take away from your family's World War II experience—World War II in general—.

Ousley: Oh, my goodness. I'm totally unqualified to answer that. I don't know that there are experiences like that anymore, because World War II was so—First of all, the Depression. Kind of the crucible of the Depression that made people afraid, but made people decide they had to work harder, made them probably want to hold onto what they had. I think that's part of, you know, when I said that about my parents. Part of the thing of kind of not reaching above your station. You know, some people did still, but a bit more of holding onto what you had, and then the war comes, and think of how many people died. How many men did not return. So, we've lost all of that. And I think that the country, the cohesiveness part of it, had to carry down to families. It had to be a model for the way that people were. We hadn't started moving in those days. We hadn't started—you know, the reason I moved every three and a half years is that my husband had a new job. So, we were transferred here, transferred there—we'd pick up our stuff and move it, and we went, right? That had not happened very much in those days. Except I will have to say that some of the Rosies did that, which is pretty cool. You know, my mother, Jane Tucker who went to Savannah with her parents, but that was over in a while, and then they came back and got back into the family unit. [clasps hands together] And, you know, stayed cohesive. So, I think that that could not be replicated, really, but what we ought to learn from them is that you can come together when there's a necessity, and you should. You probably should also as a family unit be together all the time. These days there's too much division, we know, in the country at any rate. People say in families. I take exception to the whole thing, and I know you see these posted on Facebook: children aren't what they used to be. I mean, come on! Let's stop generalizing about children not being respectful, about not being hardworking, talking back to their parents more than they used to. That's not true. It may be true of a few people who maybe are different from their parents, but I really don't think that you can generalize to any extent about that. It's what you are in the family, and what the family teaches. So that part of it, I think, couldn't be replicated. Cause let's hope we don't have another World War. Look what happened in Vietnam. I mean division all over the place! We didn't come together and support the guys over there. We just didn't do that the right way. I don't know why, but we didn't. So, will that happen again? I don't know. And in terms of the way I grew up on the farm, and, you know, the freedom, and the desire to go out and do crazy things every day, there are people in Kansas living like that right now. And, you know, I wish we were. Right? I've always laughed and said that Gwinnett was like a Third World country when I grew up, because one thing I didn't mention—and the younger people in the audience will love this one—we didn't have an inside bathroom until I moved to Doraville. So when I lived on the farm, we had to—for some reason, the Chesters' pasture backed up to part of our land where the outhouse was, so my father had to build concrete steps over a barbed wire fence, and that's how we got to the outhouse. But we had hollyhocks blooming along the fence line, so it was pretty and decorative. Kind of a Southern thing too, I've since learned. But it was such a different time. Again, I don't know if it could be replicated down here, but I'm sure there are people in Vienna, Georgia, in Baxley, in Valdosta, whose kids maybe kind of

still live that way.

Interviewer: What about the Rosies and the Rosebuds? What, in your words, is their legacy?

Ousley: I like the thought of the Rosies' spunk, I think. Because, as I've said, when we have—there are 20 or 30 of them now at our convention—they act like they might as well be 60. There was a woman who retired from—I think it was McDonnell Douglas in California, two or three years ago, who was the oldest living riveter. She was 88 or so when she retired. Still going out and doing Rosie appearances all over the country. We have a lady out in Philadelphia—she's emailing me back and forth—she's the moving spirit behind the Rosie the Riveter Day we have in Congress⁴⁰, and she travels all the—I think she was in New York, or was it Times Square—at the Veterans Day Parade in New York. I'm not sure what they call it. The New York Veterans Day Parade. She walked the whole thing! She's 88 or 90 years old! You know, so it's the spunk. And the tenaciousness. And some of them are so flip, and so funny when they are telling their stories. And there are some of them who have, you know, dementia. Like the one lady who stood up in Kansas City, and I said, OK, you know, tell us your stories, and I have the microphone, but I'm happy to give the microphone to people to go out into the audience, and the lady's first words were, "I was born, in 1922 in Kansas City." And I thought, "We are in for a long night here." Because everybody else was telling me about what they had done during the war. She said, "I was born in Kansas City in 1922." So, of course there are exceptions, but if you're going to come to a convention—I mean they live in Connecticut, in Oklahoma, in Texas, and they fly to Atlanta, to Kansas City, to wherever it is to go to these conventions and meet each other. So, it has really—I wouldn't say taught me a lot, because I think my mother was like that. I really do. I knew that generation was like that. And I don't even want to say that. Because we talked about the "greatest generation." I knew that those women were like that from that time period, just from knowing her. And, you know, there were people who weren't Rose the Riveters. There were women who didn't go to work and didn't try hard enough to do that sort of thing or who weren't maybe even—I don't know if they weren't patriotic enough. I think a whole lot of it was—you know, you had the husbands in some cases, but maybe women who just wouldn't even try. They didn't think they could get a job. So it was the spunkiest ones who would go out, stand in front of the union boss, and say, "I want to join your union." You know, they had to be pretty outgoing people. And so, I learned a whole lot more about Mother's generation from that, but it's a great group, and of course the lady who founded it was a riveter herself, and then became a college professor. So, Dr. Fran Carter⁴¹.

Interviewer: So, do we still have farther to go when it comes to women's parity in the world, or—

Ousley: Oh, I'd have to say so. I think women are still looked at as too much of the technical, detail-oriented folks. I do insurance, which is extremely technical. Boring, probably, to an awful lot of people. Quite boring. But in that field, there were more women in insurance when I started in '78. There were more women who were sort of up-and-

⁴⁰ H.Res. 237 was introduced on March 14, 2019 as a bill to support the designation of March 21, 2019 as "National Rosie the Riveter Day" during Women's History Month. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/237/text>

⁴¹ <https://rosietheriveter.net/> Dr. Frances Carter of Birmingham, Alabama, founded the American Rosie the Riveter Association on December 7, 1998. She worked as a riveter on B-29 planes during World War II.

coming, and I knew would have been promoted, and that kind of thing, but in '84, when I was promoted to Assistant Vice President, I was the first female officer in the southeast region of that company, and it was a humongous company. 75,000 employees. The southeastern region covered six states, and I was the first woman officer in 1984. So what does that tell you? I'm in a technical field, right? We are detail-oriented out the wazoo—people tell me all the time, "I've never seen anybody read a contract like you do, Jean." Well, it's probably my English background—I'm inventing it over here somewhere. But that's the way we're viewed, and yet women even in that company, in that field, did not advance. And that's—I have to speak from my personal experience, though. I'd say if you went into a profession—if you had the guts if you were my age to become a doctor or a lawyer in particular, you were probably viewed as really, really, really unusual, but you'd go out and start your own practice. So as long as people will come to you—I don't know if people came to the women lawyers as much as they flocked to the men. Maybe they didn't get the patients or the clients. I'm pretty sure the doctors didn't get the patients. They were not well-received. But, still there was a little bit more in that to me the independence of it, whereas if you went to work for a corporation, and I'm not sure about, say, the Arthur Anderson's of the world—I'm thinking of that kind of technical expertise. I think I am pretty sure that those women were not promoted as they should have been either. I'll tell you that I don't think I ever had the same salary as a man. If I had stayed where I was, I might have eventually in five years or so, but when I left that company, I was 59 years old. So, I should already have had the same salary. Right. Well, I'll tell you—this is kind of cute—especially my middle son always says, "Mom, you went out and worked so hard, and you came from being a little country girl" – he says this—"to being the Vice President." Because I became the Vice President eventually—"in a really big company. That is so great." And of course it is so great to have your son that proud of you, right? If he talks about you. But it was really unusual in those days, and I think, even now it probably is. I look around at my company, and yeah, women are more highly regarded, but there are very few highly paid producers in insurance broking. Maybe women don't want to be producers. I'm not sure, but I think there is still that stigma, a little bit, "Do you want to buy from a woman?" And yet I have to say the most highly paid, highly regarded female insurance broker in Atlanta is a woman. She has more business than any of the men. So, there are exceptions.

Interviewer: So, what company did you work for?

Ousley: It was called Marsh and McLennan, and eventually we bought the two other—our two other competitors who were not as large as we were, so now it's just called Marsh. It's just called Marsh.

Interviewer: I know they had offices in the World Trade Center.

Ousley: Oh, exactly. I went to World Trade several times to visit my armored car underwriter, and I was in Four World Trade—their office was not in One or Two, but we went up to the Four Seasons now and then sort of thing, but I was in Four a lot and stayed across the street, behind the American Express Building, across the street. So, we get the word one day that the—well, we didn't get the word. I walked into my building, and I was going on a business trip to California—I had my suitcase, and I was parked over here, and I had my briefcase, and there was a bank downstairs that had a TV monitor,

although it was really just a little outpatient bank—not full service. I looked up, and I saw a plane flying into a building. Weird. It’s very weird. I get upstairs and find out, of course, that the plane has flown into the building that Marsh is located in. So, people were not in a great mood that day. We canceled—of course we canceled it. The airports were closed. We didn’t go to California. But Marsh lost 400 people⁴², I think, in the towers. And one of them was a guy who was our local construction loss control guy. So somebody we knew. He’d been in my office two weeks before that. [waves hand back and forth] I’d say, “Hi Maynard, how are you doing?” And he’d say, “If I were any better, I’d have to be twins.” I mean he was the cutest guy in the world. Funny. Great, great loss control guy. Safety-conscious as can be. But he was the only person from Atlanta. They were having a meeting that day. But yeah, sad, sad day.

Interviewer: Well, is there anything that you can think of that I haven’t asked you about?

Ousley: Oh, my goodness. No. So many things you’d ask, and I’d think, “where did she come up with that?” Not really. I guess, just the whole thing of the war being sort of the center of what we were talking about. Maybe I did not give enough attention to my father, and to his bravery and what must have been the bravery of all of these people. In our Rosie group we had a Rivet. That’s an associate member who was married to one of our Rosies. He was a German prisoner-of-war and came to talk with us a few times, bringing along the drawings that he made along his prison cell. He was a parachutist, and, of course, wasn’t everybody? There were planes, and he had to parachute in. He parachuted into Germany, and it was the first time he had a parachute on, because they had to turn people—run people through so quickly. They didn’t have time to train him. They said you just pull the cord, and it will all work out ok, and of course he parachuted into a German field somewhere and they captured him, so I have to be grateful that my father had great training, and that’s one thing that I think about. But the fact that they were all so brave. Another thing I want to mention about that guy—he was one of four sons—I’m thinking it was four who went. You’ve probably seen the star, the star in the window. At least one of his brothers was killed, and I think maybe two of them. And he was a prisoner, so he came back. But just so much bravery, but then when they came back, did they talk about it? Probably almost never. And my son—I told you about him before—when he was 12, he started going around interviewing soldiers. I can remember sitting outside of people’s houses in the wee hours of the morning, going, “Mark?” There were no cell phones in those days. “Where are you?” He’s still in there, because he knew what to ask, and he was so interested. And he still does this today when he can find people to interview. So interested—they would sit there and talk with him for hours and hours about their service, and give him their medals, letters, their helmets—all of these things. And yet, in the family people didn’t talk about it. I guess it was just too close. Probably for a—for my father, for example, if he started talking about Sergeant Nut, he would cry. And he didn’t want the family to see him cry, right? But if you’re talking to somebody who’s interviewing you, as Mark was with these guys, they’d just go on all hours. And I really have to tell you—and I’m so thrilled about this—in the course of doing, of getting ready for this interview, I talked to Mark on the phone. He remembered that he interviewed my mother and recorded it. He did not remember this before. He has—I can’t even tell you how many thousands of hours of veterans talking

⁴² According to the Marsh & McLennan Companies, 295 colleagues and 63 consultants were killed on September 11, 2001. <http://memorial.mmc.com/>

to him. He just hadn't remembered that he had done that. Of course, now I'm going to have to go get it and reproduce it for the rest of the family. So, it would probably have never even come up.

Interviewer: Well, I'm so glad that we could help facilitate that.

Ousley: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time.

Ousley: Well, thank you for letting me talk so long.