

Wisconsin Public Television
World War II Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
BETTY J. (NELSON) URSIN
Yeoman, Navy, World War II.

2002

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Ursin, Betty J., née Nelson. Oral History Interview, 2002.

Video Recording : 2 videorecordings (ca. 60 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript : 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract

Betty J. Ursin, née Nelson, a Duluth, Minnesota native, discusses her service as a Navy WAVE during World War II. While in college, Ursin talks about running a “Jeep Jamboree” war bonds campaign and helping St. Scholastica win the honor of being the first Minnesota college to fly the war flag. She details deciding to enlist in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service and taking the train to New York. She recalls other classmates of hers who enlisted. Ursin talks about her first day of training in New York and living in dorms with young women from all over the country. She describes marching in platoons and, during one hot summer parade, stepping over a WAVE who had fainted. She addresses the uniforms she wore and talks about airplane identification classes. Assigned to yeoman’s school in Cedar Falls (Iowa), she states she received a good rating and picked assignment to Madison (Wisconsin) so she could be near her father. Ursin talks about living conditions in a medical fraternity house on Summit Avenue in Madison and working at the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI). She states she liked her job answering letters and sending out correspondence courses until a new officer was assigned to her department who treated her like his personal secretary, which Ursin resented. After V-J Day, she speaks of typing up discharge papers at Wold-Chamberlain Field (Minnesota). Ursin describes keeping a scrapbook about the war. She speaks about dating a serviceman and celebrating V-E Day with him. After being discharged, she talks about using the GI Bill to pursue a master’s degree at the University of Minnesota, meeting her husband at a dance, being put on bed rest due to pregnancy, and leaving college to raise a family. She discusses housing conditions and eventually moving into veteran housing. Ursin reflects on leaving school to raise a family and touches on her employment at the University of Wisconsin and at Head Start.

Biographical Sketch

Ursin, née Nelson, served in the Navy from 1944 to 1946. She enlisted while attending a social work graduate program at the College of St. Scholastica (Minnesota). In 1947, she married Victor Ursin, an Army Air Corps veteran, and they raised five children. She settled in Superior (Wisconsin) and donated her war service materials to the Bong Veterans Historical Center (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin World War II Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCWW2-115 and WCWW2-116.

Related Materials Note:

Related Materials Note: Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin World War II Stories records (WVM Mss 1390).

Interviewed by Mik Derks, October 23, 2002.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcription edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: What made you decide to join the military?

Betty: Well I had a cousin that had already joined the WAVE. She left after two years of junior college, and went in, and I would hear that she was sending letters back home and what she was doing, but the main thing was that I came from a very patriotic family. We're--from 1939 on we were at the Minnesota State Fair when they were calling "extra" under our window because the Germans had just sank an English passenger--

Mik: Lusitania?

Betty: Yeah, and then two days later, September fourth, England declared war--I think that was it. So I started a scrapbook right then. And I--in fact I thought there was going to be so much I got the articles going in one on top of the other. And so I kept a scrapbook that went all the way up until the end of the war when the--when it was V-J Day. And every night we would eat supper with the radio on listening to the foreign war correspondents--like Edward R. Morrow and they'd be coming from London and Berlin and then my mother was an RN and one time she made the comment when they were doing--you know trying to get people to enlist, they had an ad on the radio, she says, "I don't know why they have trouble, if I were young I sure would go." And so I'm downtown and I'm going to transfer on a bus and there's a big sign saying, Enlist now, and I've just turned twenty-one just a couple of weeks before and I go in, and next thing you know I'm signed up. So when I get home it's a big shock to my parents to find out that I've gone and done that, because this was December and I was going to be called, and I was recruited so they put my picture in the paper, and I read that there was an article saying that I was asked to go speak at the Washington High School along with some group and--but I wasn't going to be graduating until June, and they had insured me that it made no difference with my college education. I would continue and graduate and then I would go in the summer.

Mik: What year?

Betty: That was 1944.

Mik: Keeping very close track of the war?

Betty: Uh huh.

Mik: From '39?

Betty: Right.

Mik: Pearl Harbor?

Betty: Oh, well I wasn't the first one to hear it--I had a college friend call on the phone and almost scream into the phone, "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor!" And I had had a physics partner in high school that was in the National Guard and he was one of the first to go, and I knew that he went to the Philippines, and he was somebody that was engaged so I kind of thought of him more like a brother so I was very concerned about him, but I didn't know him well enough to know the family or know what was happening to him, so when the Japs captured the Philippines and they had the Bataan death march I became real concerned about picturing whether or not he was one of those.

Mik: Was he?

Betty: I don't know.

Mik: Don't know?

Betty: No. I'm going to have to clear my voice.

Mik: Go ahead.

Betty: You're not going to get that on camera are you?

Mik: Yeah, but--won't be in show.

Betty: Okay.

Mik: If need to cough, no problem.

Betty: See, I get this drainage in my throat.

Mik: We'll put together a reel.

Betty: Okay, good, yeah--[laughing.]

Mik: You joined the WAVES? Did you take a bus--train?

Betty: A train.

Mik: Tell me about going out there?

Betty: Well, not having traveled on a train before, when we were going through the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania I was the only one that went out on

the viewing deck, and it was right when we were--oh I'm going to have to do it again.

Mik: Need a drink?

Betty: I guess so. I don't know if that will help or not, that's where the cough drops come in handy, if I took time out for those.

Mik: So you went out on the viewing deck?

Betty: Yeah, because--I don't know if they announced that we were going through the Pocono Mountains, and that there was a hairpin turn and so I was at--out on this viewing deck, and the train was just halfway around so that I was looking at the engine and this long train and there it was making a perfect hairpin, so that was exciting. And then when we got into New York we came into the Bronx and I know they took us into a restaurant to eat and I'm sure the people there had seen other WAVES come in before, you know, but they still kind of looked at us like oh, here they come again, you know, kind of a motley crew because you've been sleeping overnight on the train and all. I can remember lifting up the curtain of the berth and looking out when we were in Cleveland and I could see the port, the water and such.

Mik: Why did you choose the WAVES?

Betty: Well, that was what this cousin had gone into.

Mik: That's right.

Betty: Yeah.

Mik: Where were you living?

Betty: In Duluth, West Duluth, I had graduated from Denfeld and from St. Scholastica.

Mik: So you knew a little about water?

Betty: Oh, sure, yeah, well I had always liked swimming and canoeing, not that that has any association with it. In fact, we lived in a duplex, and I think the boy that lived upstairs went in the Navy and I think I've made a notation somewhere, oh I know, I kept a scrapbook from the time I graduated in high school, and I put in from then on--I put in everything that had to do with anyone that I was familiar with from high school that--where they either became engaged or they enlisted and then from then on I've got real good articles about, you know, war stories. There was--we

had Wally Smith that was a star football player and there's a big article about him and his experience in--I think it was in some--wherever it was they were having a battle, he was the only one that came out alive, and there was a couple, she was I think our queen, and she was engaged to a young man that was a year older that was in college and I've got their--the article of course where they got married down wherever it was he was stationed, and when she came to a class reunion, our 55th, I found out that--oh in fact, I guess I have a clipping in there--that he was killed. That was only like a year about after they were married.

Mik: So you get to New York.

Betty: Uh huh.

Mik: You had dinner?

Betty: Yeah, well you sit at--we sat at like the step counter, yeah.

Mik: Where to report?

Betty: Well, the main thing I remember is that you felt just like you were being herded all the time, you know suddenly you felt like you were like a bunch of cows, you know, you didn't have any special identity, and we were put in this--the Navy had bought up these apartment buildings and that was what we were housed in. And the one we went into I think I maybe was up on the fifth floor, you had to go up these stairs, and there would be two big rooms with a bathroom in between and then there were three bunk beds in each room. And of course we were very tired and I don't even know if we got--there wasn't a shower, there was a bath tub. I don't remember if we got a chance to wash up but you weren't feeling that great, and 5:30 in the morning they blow the bugle out in the hallway and it's called muster and you have to come out in your pajamas just the way you are, and then from there you march over to the mess hall. And I've always loved breakfast, but being tired and kind of nauseous, it was chipped beef on toast, that didn't appeal to me very much. [Laughing.] But what I've made a note of is that what I enjoyed as soon as I sat at the table is I just loved hearing all those accents, especially a girl from Georgia that had a very thick accent, and then the girls from like, New Jersey they had their different ones, where they put the Rs on the ends of their words--so I enjoyed it.

Mik: You were having a ball. You were with all these new people-- all these new friends.

Betty: The thing was they tried us out for the platoons and you could--you had a choice, you could get into the singing platoon if you wanted to try out and

I had always liked music and dancing, I hadn't really at that time in my life--hadn't done much dancing, and I wanted to be in that one but one of the girls that had come all the way from Duluth and she was kind of shy, she says, "No, let's not go in that." And I was very unhappy at first because I got in one with a girl that was probably from the hills down south, you know, maybe would have been called a hillbilly [laughing] she just couldn't seem to march right, I mean, she always was out of step. I thought, "Why did I have to get in here?" In reading back, now that I've had to look back, I found a letter that I'd written to a college friend, and evidently it must have not gotten mailed, and in there I say that we--our platoon ended up getting the E for efficiency and that when we were going to have a review and march in parade for Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, the one that the airport there is named after, that we were going to be out in front. I couldn't believe it. I thought, here I've always talked about what a bad platoon I was in [laughing] so maybe she dropped out, because I really don't think she would ever have gotten it [laughs.] We'd hear every now and then that so and so has dropped out, but who knows? Maybe they made a woman out of her [laughs.] As they say, they make a man out of a man.

Mik: Woman out of a woman?

Betty: Yeah [laughs.]

Mik: Did they tell you that?

Betty: Did they tell me? No [laughs.]

Mik: What did they tell you about being a WAVE?

Betty: They had none of that stuff like, you know, you can be the best that you can be--I don't remember hearing anything like that, no.

Mik: Do you remember marching in the first platoon in the parade?

Betty: If that's what we ended up doing, I can't really believe it but what I do remember is that it was the hottest summer in New York since 1840. And that was another thing about--I had an upper bunk, and in this letter that I write I say that the girls complained about that. Their mattresses and their sheets would get soaking wet, but I would wake up, I guess I don't like--sounds like--I didn't sleep. I said, "I have a system," I says, "Every half hour, I move to the opposite end of the bed, it gives it a chance to dry out and then I move back." And the other thing I said is that if they catch you out of bed at night they come in with a flashlight and do bed checks and you get demerits and you'd end up peeling potatoes.

- Mik: So it was a very hot summer?
- Betty: Yeah, so that one night I slithered down and went into the bathroom and lay on the tile floor and I managed to feel more comfortable there.
- Mik: But then they came in and found you not in bed?
- Betty: I hid behind the door, and of course they would have seen that I wasn't in my bed so I think I did get demerits, but the thing was that the day that we marched in review--they told us ahead of time there are some girls that are possibly going to faint, and that if someone falls in front of you, just step over them and keep marching, and after your platoon has gone by the medics will come out and pull them off the field. And the girl in front of me fell, and I stepped over her [laughing.]
- Mik: Did a lot of people faint that day?
- Betty: I don't know.
- Mik: I mean, you were in the front.
- Betty: Well, if that's where I was, I can hardly believe it, but--you'll notice if you've got a picture back there of our marching, that as we go in front of the reviewing stand then it would be eyes right and we'd all have to turn and face and salute the reviewing stand.
- Mik: Tell me about your uniforms?
- Betty: Well we had a summer seersucker that--and then we had the--they had the navy blue and it was a nice looking one. You wore a white shirt with a little black tie and then you had the skirt and the jacket, and then there was--hats, there was a white hat with a brim saying US Navy on the front and then there was the overseas hat that was--had nothing on it, was just plain. And we maybe had a white, a white dress uniform, I just don't remember. I didn't keep any of them. I was so frugal that when I got home I changed the design of the jacket of my uniform and managed to keep wearing it.
- Mik: How long in basic?
- Betty: I couldn't tell you. I just know that I went in in July and that we were in--at our assignments in the fall when I was at Cedar Falls, Iowa. We've taken a picture when we were out marching, and we were given a free moment, and that we went into a cornfield and the corn was as high as an elephant's eye, like they say, which was--I found, I had never seen that kind of corn here, I don't think.

Mik: What was your assignment?

Betty: Oh, yeoman's school. I had a degree in social work. They never mentioned anything like that when they were interviewing me, they'd say things like, "Oh you can be a control tower operator," and you know, they made it sound real exciting. Another thing that they didn't tell me was that with a college degree I could down to Minneapolis and enlist as an officer, so I didn't know that until afterwards when one of the girls at the college told me, but I was an only child and it was a good experience for me. I feel like I didn't miss anything. I needed to kind of [cough] get the hard knocks, so--

Mik: Did you get the hard knocks in basic?

Betty: Not in basic, I did later, at my assignment in Madison.

Mik: So what was your--where was it--Des Moines--or Iowa?

Betty: Cedar Falls, Iowa State Teachers College.

Mik: What did you do there?

Betty: Well that was yeoman's school, we went to classes, and took, you know, shorthand and typing and--see I had already taken shorthand in high school even though took college prep, just so that it would be something that would help me to either work on the side or take notes, so I already did have that little bit of background. Anyway, I did up with an A rating, which gave me the ability to be able to pick my assignment which was considered to be one of the better ones. And I wouldn't have picked Madison because I would have picked something that I would have thought more exciting, but I did because I knew how lonely, especially my dad was, and that way maybe I could get home more often. What was nice about was we had such wonderful living quarters that I, you know, am almost embarrassed to say that we who had volunteered to go in and do this what was supposed to be real hard, you know, our duty, which was going to be kind of taxing. We ended up in what had been a medical Fraternity house on Summit Avenue in Madison; it was up on top of a hill and it had a grand piano in the living room. There was a big dorm room downstairs but I got into a porch that was just off of the living room. So we got to use the living room a lot. We had two bunk beds in there, so us just four girls there, became real good friends.

Mik: Did you call them your bunkies?

- BU: No [laughs.] One of them was--I really kept in touch with even though I never saw her in all that time, I went through her whole life with her, you know, she married a soldier and ended up living down in Tucson, and went through having her children, and her children growing and getting married, and then she having grandchildren, and now last Christmas I got a letter from her husband saying she had died of cancer.
- Mik: What were you doing in Madison? What was your job?
- Betty: We went to the--what was called, in brief, USAFI, United States Armed Forces Institute, where they sent out correspondence courses to servicemen both here and overseas. And so they--at first I just got--was in a department where they just did typing but one of the officers their looked up our records and asked to have me transferred to his department because he felt with my educational background that was something that was more fitting and that's how I got the job of reading letters, answering mail, and sending out the courses. So, when I came home on a leave and went to visit the college they thought it was interesting enough to have me interviewed and they put my picture in the paper with an article and that's how I can remember a few of the details from going back and reading that article. Like I said, I could remember some of the letters at that time and like one of them was that, he was asking for another book because he said, "We had a little dunking" and so that was how he lost it. And another one that was in battle said that, "He was behind and hadn't gotten his lesson in because they had been a little busy."
- Mik: So a little dunking means the ship went down?
- Betty: It went down, yeah. But that was where I had my--a big hard knock, was that I loved my job and I really liked the lieutenant that was in charge of that department, Lt. Pross, and he wrote a book of procedures, so that because he wanted to get back on active duty, he'd been on active duty before and he wanted to get back out, so he printed up this really nice professional book of procedures so that the person who took his place--the other officers there were men that were--they had the departments and they also had civil service people working there, and when he did get called out and shipped out, and officer came in, and I told Eric that I didn't think I would repeat this, and Eric--an officer took his place that just was a goof off and he took me away from my job and I don't--if I was to be considered his private secretary or what, I was called over just to sit and take dictation, and he leaned back in his desk--leaned back in his chair and put his feet up on his desk and started slowly reading the letters that I had been processing and getting a hundred out a day. And he reads it and then he slowly starts dictating his answer and then he's got to figure out now, what course is it I need to send, so he pulls out a drawer to look up and find the information, and I was just so angry that I would put the words in

his mouth for him. And so, I got transferred out of there downstairs to typing addresses on envelopes. But luckily I wasn't there too long because that was the end of the war and it was V-J Day. So since I was considered a troublemaker, I was one of the first ones shipped out to a discharge center [laughing.] But I went to a nice place it was a naval air—Word-Chamberlain—a Naval air base in Minneapolis where they set up a discharge center and that now was all Navy, so there were men there mainly the ones that were the heads of departments or ones that had been out on active duty and had come back.

Mik: What did you do there?

Betty: It was, you know, typing up discharge papers, but it was a nice place to be. I can recall vaguely that while we there, that some navy fighter planes flew in and somebody saying, "These are the newest." And they were an F--something, I don't remember what the number was.

Mik: Were they the F-4U corsairs?

Betty: I don't know.

Mik: Did you have any contact with the people that you were talking about, their discharge--or did you only know them by their discharge papers?

Betty: We really--where I sat we really didn't see them but I did have--I was sent to deliver something and where they were lined up and I met one, a sailor that I had met just briefly before. In fact, my dad worked in the park department in Duluth, and he was a lifeguard someplace so that he had to come into the park department to get his check, and he lived in Thief River Falls and we were going to be traveling to Winnipeg so we brought him along and he and I sat in the back seat of the car while we were traveling and we kept singing, "I've got spurs that jingle jangle jingle" [laughing.] So anyway, we did keep track of one another from then on and we did date when I came back but it wasn't, but you know, the special spark wasn't there.

Mik: Got to change tape. **[End of Tape 1]** I assume you were keeping up with the war, because you had so much interest in it. Do you remember V-E Day, and all those big events, the battles?

Betty: Well I, you know, being that I had kept that scrapbook all the time I was home, I wasn't able to do that after getting in the service but I did buy papers that had the big headlines on those major days and I just stuck them between the pages. So I've got the newspapers from those days, yeah.

Mik: And a lot of the naval activity was in the Pacific?

- Betty: Yeah.
- Mik: Some of them were having a hard time, with the Kamikaze planes and--
- Betty: Sure, yeah. Oh, I know that I was--maybe I just didn't keep all those papers, I didn't have a scrapbook naturally, but I certainly was aware of all the different islands where the battles were going on and whether we were winning or losing.
- Mik: Did you feel like you were part of it, did you feel like you were playing a part, as a WAVE?
- Betty: Yeah, I did.
- Mik: Was there anything you didn't like about it, besides your commanding officers?
- Betty: Well, that was just one, I mean, I really admired Lt. Pross. I did--Truax Army base was in Madison and I did--I met a flyer when I was going on the train from Duluth back to Madison and he was just visiting an uncle in Duluth and we did date and so we were going together when it was V-J Day so he came over and he had an old jalopy that would blow smoke out the back and it would make so much smoke that I think the cars around probably weren't able to see for a while, but he picked me up to go out and celebrate. I wasn't a drinker, but we did go from bar to bar in Madison while I drank ginger ale, that I remember.
- Mik: Everybody was feeling good about V-J Day?
- Betty: Wait, no that was, no!
- Mik: That was V-E Day?
- Betty: Yeah, that was V-E Day, sure. The other one, I got sent out of there so fast, I can't remember that one that well. And then when he came and visited me at Wold-Chamberlain Field and--a couple times and then when--when it was, oh yeah. And then he called and said that he was going over to Germany, and so we said goodbye, and that was it.
- Mik: There was a lot of that during war.
- Betty: Yeah, well my husband was at Truax field too and at other fields and when the end of the war came he said they were given a choice of whether or not to ship over, I don't know what they called it in the Army, and he said that they were all saying no rather than go to the occupation forces.

But he said that--he says the flyers were the ones that went, so that would be why Johnny would have gone.

Mik: Do you have a lot of contact with the civilian public?

Betty: Yeah.

Mik: How did they treat you, in your uniform?

Betty: Well, they just kind of kept their distance--we really didn't get to know them.

Mik: They didn't pat ya on the back, and say thank you for doing your job?

Betty: Well, you know. I mean, if we had been nurses over there on the battlefield I'm sure they deserved that, but I don't think they had necessarily a reason to think that we were doing that much. That's why, I thought, "Why am I being interviewed, just what have I got to talk about that's going to be inspirational." And I don't think I really, personally, have, you know--did anything that was inspiring.

Mik: But, you know, not that many people did the things that were inspiring. There were a lot more people who did the jobs, did the typing, did the supplying. And I think they are all important jobs, don't you?

Betty: Well, when you said, "What did they stress in boot camp?" It was the fact that we were relieving men that were here that would--we were freeing them to be able to go into active duty. I--or--yeah, into combat, action.

Mik: Say that again?

Betty: That we were freeing a sailor or a navy man to be able to go into more the active duty. Well, they are in active duty I guess the word is go into combat.

Mik: To see action. I think a lot of people were disappointed if they didn't.

Betty: Yeah--I rather doubt that this one that put his feet up on his desk, I don't think he was anxious to go [laughing.]

Mik: So, tell me the story about the southern woman and the B-29. In fact, do you remember at all doing the airplane identification, and why you were learning that?

Betty: No, the main thing I remember is--not that I remember any of it but we had to learn what were all the different classes, the specialists and the

insignia that we could see on their sleeve that would tell us what they were and then of course the officers how they ranked and how they compared with the Army in rank. And it was stressed that when we go on leave that we were to salute an officer and the Marines had such fancy uniforms that we were saluting what looked to us like braid and then one of them--and they'd just smile. And, well then, one of them was nice enough to stop and tell us that they weren't officers. [laughs] We did go up to the--when we were on leave, we went up the Empire State Building. Oh, but you were asking about what happened when we were taking these classes. One of them was Airplane Identification and the instructor mentioned that we presently had a B something plane but that we were going to be soon having a much better one, you know, a bomber, and we were going to have a B-29, and she wanted to know if anyone in the class was familiar with the B-29. And there was this girl with a Southern accent who stood up very slowly and said, "I worked in a factory where they made the--built the B-29s and I had a cousin who had an uncle who stood on the wingtip of one and said, 'It sure was far to the other side.'" [laughs.]

Mik: Ya know what you are going to have to tell that again.

Betty: Tell that again?

Mik: Cause of the elevator.

Betty: Oh boy, it'll probably come out different.

Mik: That's okay.

Betty: You know, I wish I could take time to read that. I got it here so I know what that name of that first plane was.

Mik: I can't walk over there cause of the elevator.

Betty: Okay. Well, in boot camp when we were having these classes when had one in Airplane Identification. And the instructor mentioned that at the present time our biggest bomber was a B-25, but that there was a new one coming out that would be much bigger and better, and it was a B-29. She wanted to know if anyone in the class had any experience with that--had seen it or such. And there was this tall lanky girl from the South who stood up and she had this faraway look, I said, in her eyes, and she says that, "I have an uncle that has a cousin that has a brother that stood on the wingtip and said, 'It sure was far to the other side.'" I think she said he worked in the plant.

- Mik: You had been in college, you had been thru college and so you obviously had a lot of friends in college. How was being in the WAVE similar or different to being in college?
- Betty: Oh, very different. Because you, you know, you have your chance to make—be identified as to what your special interests are and to be honored for those special ones, which I had that opportunity from being on the Student Council. I got elected to have to chairmanship of the bond campaign for the college, so I--I don't know where I got the idea, maybe from seeing a picture in a magazine of--saying that you could buy a Jeep by buying more bonds and so I started what was called the Jeep Jamboree campaign--so they, we--this was an all-girls college so we weren't aware of knowing when the, you know, the boys were leaving because they were enlisting. But we had a raccoon, and we had a fairly--I suppose a one-hour lunch hour, and I got the idea that instead of the girls just coming in there freely, that they'd have to buy a stamp or a--where they'd fill a book and get a war bond in order to come so that was called the Jeep Jamboree. So that was entertaining. There would be the girls that would play the piano and we'd stand around and sing and we'd play the record player and dance. I since have become a fairly good dancer but at that time I can remember a girl from high school that had been a cheerleader and I can remember she took the lead and danced with me and she says, "Come on now, loosen up." [Laughing.] But--well anyway, we ended up where we--I got a letter from a Mrs. Hutchinson that represented the War Department telling us that we had won the honor of being the first school in Minnesota to fly the, what was it, the war flag? I showed you that article earlier. So that too got some publicity in the newspaper, I wouldn't remember those details either.
- Mik: And that was different from the relationship you had with the girls in the--
- Betty: Yes, I mean, you know, when you do all that marching and you're just one of the crowd. So it was kind of unusual to have that one lieutenant there at USAFI look up our records and to notice that with my education that I could do something a little different than what I had been doing.
- Mik: And when were you discharged?
- Betty: It was something like July 2, 1944.
- Mik: Before? Oh really? So that was before V-J day?
- Betty: Oh, '46! Oh, I'm glad you straightened me out.
- Mik: Okay.

Betty: I would have been discharged before I had gone into active duty.

Mik: Say again.

Betty: I went into active duty July thirteenth, 1944 and it was the same month but in the first week, in 1946. And then I went to, under the GI Bill, I went to the University of Minnesota to get my Master's Degree in psychiatric social work which would take two years and I went to get acquainted for new students and I didn't want to meet any freshmen because I'd had a bad experience. I had signed up to go on a hay ride where one of the young men that came over to meet me that was going to be going on the hay ride with me. Now I figured we told what class we were in and that I thought there would be some correlation there but there were some--I was living in what was called the co-op housing and we lived in houses and there were some younger girls there that knew what--knew that I was older and they knew that this fellow that had come to pick me up was--they knew him and he happened to be quite--very good looking and someone they knew. And so they told him that, you know, evidently something like I mean, you're going out with a real old lady there, and so when he had come over to get acquainted with me I mean, we'd gotten along real well. But when we went on the hay ride they didn't pay any attention to their dates, they fussed over him and he paid no attention to me and I just sat there like a lump on a log. There's--I've got a picture from the hayride and of course this always reminds me of that sad occasion. [Laughing.] But so when I went with a girl that had been a nurse overseas and she talked me into going and I said, "I don't want to go, I don't want to be there meeting any freshmen." And so we got, you know, a tour of, they don't call it, they didn't call it, we called it the Union, there, the main building. And then we got, you know, treated to, you know, pop and snacks and now the music was starting to play for a dance and I says I'm not going in there. She says, "Well, let's just peek in, we'll just, we'll just stand on the outskirts." So we went, and we did that. We were just kind of standing on the edge of the room. And someone from across the room was like, from that song "Some Enchanted Evening," came straight across making a beeline for me. And so I said okay that I would dance with him because she had accepted with someone else. And I thought, I'm going to straighten him out right away. So as soon as we started talking I said, "I'm a graduate student, I've been in the service." And he says, "Oh, where were you stationed?" And then I said, "Well, Madison." He says, "When?" He says, "I was stationed at Truax field." He said, "Did you ever go to the Masonic Service Center?" And I said, "I went a couple times." He says, "Well, I use to play pool there with a WAVE." When he described her, I knew that was Margaret Herbel, knew her. And so, that's the man I ended up marrying. And--but I never got my degree because it was a two year course and we were engaged in March of 1946, could that be it? Yeah, wait no, 1947. And we got married in September just before classes

started and I got pregnant right away and by the time I got halfway through my--that second year, the doctor told me I had to have bed rest or I could lose the baby and then I ended up having a family of five children after that.

Mik: So it's a good thing you went to that mixer. Was he on the GI bill as well?

Betty: Yes.

Mik: It sounds like the GI bill really changed the country.

Betty: Yeah, it was great. But the funny thing is, she got walked home and so did I, and when he was walking me home he said, "You and I should get married." He says, "We both have the GI Bill." He says, "I already have an engagement ring, and I've got a roommate that plays the guitar so we've got the music." [Laughing.] And of course that was all joking. When it came time when we did become engaged he had sold the other ring and he took me in to pick my own although my mother said, "Tiny, isn't it?" because you don't have much money when you're there.

Mik: But ya didn't tell me why he had the engagement ring?

Betty: He had been engaged while he was down in Texas, and when he came home just to see the girl she had started teaching and she was staying in a home of a family that had a son and they had decided that they were meant for each other. He did--the first date I went out on with him--we went into Bridgman's on campus and he by mistake called me Goldie, that was her name [laughing.]

Mik: You never let him forget it?

Betty: Oh, it didn't bother me, I'd had my boyfriends. I hadn't been engaged to anybody but I hadn't wanted to be.

Mik: So what was it like starting a family in those days of everybody coming back from the service and starting their lives?

Betty: Oh, we lived in an attic. There were three floors and it was a family where the--he had been a superintendent of schools, the man who owned the house, and he decided he wanted to be a dentist. And they lived downstairs on the first floor and had twins and another child all under school age. And I had babysat for them. And so that's how I knew that they had--were going to have an apartment available up in the attic and that's what we went into. And on the second floor they had probably--all they had was a living room, and they used the dining room as a bedroom and then the kitchen that was what they lived in. On the second floor was

maybe as many as about seven bedrooms and that was all, you know, students in there, and there were a couple of married couples. And then up in the attic was a married couple that was from Bogotá, Colombia, South America. And we just had one big room and they had one big room and we had a kitchen without a window and a bathroom and when my parents came to visit they said, "You have to get out of here, you can't be in a place that has a kitchen without a window." And then we did end up going into veteran housing where we lived in a trailer, near the farm campus, but you want to know—well you asked what was it like.

Mik: Yeah, housing was in short supply.

Betty: Yes, and a lot--often when you got married you just--we--my husband had expected that we would live in the same room that he had been living in a house. It's so different nowadays. He had expected that we would just have this bedroom and have the privileges of going down and using the kitchen. And I--we would get a field placement, my first one was with Red Cross, and for the men that were, there were two men there that were going to go into administration and social services. And they lived where they just had one bedroom and would go wash their dishes in the wash basin in the bathroom with their wives, they were married. And you now, it's just so, you know, unimaginable the way things are now--or have been, we've been in this kind of, up until now sort of what seems like prosperity to us who lived in the time of the Depression that they have these big showers and they get all these things and they maybe even have a house before they go in.

Mik: And did you have a car?

Betty: No, we didn't, no.

MIC: Wasn't easy to get a car even if you did have the money.

Betty: Sure. In fact, when I had my first baby it was my husband's brother that drove us to the hospital and home again afterwards.

Mik: Well you went to a hospital at least?

Betty: Yeah.

Mik: Doctor didn't come to the house, did he?

Betty: No, but we didn't have, you know, health insurance, so I went into the hospital through student health service because of some problem I had and that when they told me, "We think you are pregnant." They told me where to go and they said, "I think you should have the rabbit test." And when I

had the rabbit test that was when they told me I was--and you know it was so different because we didn't plan to have--I'd gone to Planned Parenthood and we didn't plan to have a baby right away so it wasn't like you come out and you're, you know, you just can't wait to say, you know, how wonderful this is and I just quietly say, "I'm pregnant." But we have this wonderful daughter that was the only girl we got, the rest are four boys, and she knows that that happened, that we weren't thrilled when we first heard about it but that we've been very happy that we've got her.

Mik: So instead of being a psychiatric social worker you were a mother?

Betty: Yeah. It wasn't--I took like different--I did work--well never mind, the little things that I did beforehand. But 1982 was the first time I did something that--well no--I worked for the Youth Service Bureau at UW and they wanted somebody with social work background to be their secretary, and so I was the secretary for them and they did write proposals to get grants and they made--they had terrible handwriting, and I'd get these pages with scratches and arrows and pointing to this and you had to type up this proposal and so it was helpful that I was familiar with all their different jargon and lingo. But then they lost their grant and in 1982 I got a job as a family resource person with Head Start where it's--where I worked only with the parents. And it's kind of like planning what would be similar to like PTA type meetings, and you do home visits and work with the parents.

Mik: You mentioned jargon and lingo--did you have any jargon and lingo when you were in the WAVES? I mean ya had to learn a whole language. Ya know, like learning stripes and insignia.

Betty: Well, you know, because, I didn't make any notes on that I'm not going to be able to say. The only thing I know is what I could find in my memorabilia and so--

Mik: You don't think much about your time in WAVES? It never pops into your head? Something happens and it makes ya think of--

Betty: No, no, no.

Mik: That's cause you put it all into your scrapbooks.

Betty: Yeah.

Cameraman: You guys ready for those cadence calls--when ya used to march?

Betty: Oh sure, of course, the one I remember best is—

- Mik: Talk to me as if I asked the question.
- Betty: You want to ask it?
- Mik: No. Do you remember any of those calls? Do you remember em?
- Betty: Well, yeah, the main thing of course that I remember is one of the songs that we--we always sang. And the song I remember best is, the one, "Left, left, I had a good job and I left, first they hired me, then they fired me, that's the reason I left." And I felt sorry for the students that were going to study to be teachers and Cedar Falls, Iowa, because they were in class and we'd be marching around singing. But they also had had Air Force men there. And--but I--they weren't there when we were there, I'm sure I would remember if they were, having seen them.
- Mik: Do you have other cadence songs?
- Betty: That's the only one I remember. I supposed we sang "Anchors Away," you know.
- Mik: And what was your rank?
- Betty: Well, you're, first you're just a seaman, and then you're a yeoman, third class and second class, you work up to first class, I wasn't in that long.
- Mik: Were you glad to get out? Were you glad to get on with your life?
- Betty: I--because of the friendships I had made there and all it was just time of passage, you know I wasn't sentimental about it, I just--so--what was your question?
- Mik: Were ya happy to return to civilian life?

[End of Interview]