RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARJORIE PEASE

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Marjorie N. Pease on May 12, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler. I guess I'd like to begin by asking you a little about your parents and growing up in Manitoba.

Marjorie Pease: All right.

KP: Can you tell us a little bit about how your parents met?

MP: Well, actually, they met in the small town where my mother lived. My father had come back from overseas from World War I. He then took a job buying grain for one of the elevator companies. They sent him to the prairies in order to do this, and he operated an elevator there. That's where he met my mother. They were married there in that small town where I was born, my sister as well, thereafter. We were there about six years.

KP: After that small town, where did you go?

MP: That was in Manitoba. We led a very nomadic existence because of my dad's job. The more experienced elevator operators would get moved to the more productive areas and the trainees would be sent to the less busy ones. You could never predict where those areas were going to be. We just never lived anywhere more than about two years, so it was Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and then finally back to Ontario, because of a drought, plus the Depression.

KP: Did your father manage to stay employed through the Depression?

MP: Not always, no. There were gaps, but, mostly, he was able to get some kind of a job.

KP: It sounds like you spent most of your life growing up in very small towns.

MP: … [A population of] five thousand was a metropolitan area.

KP: Did mother ever work outside of the house?

MP: No, she never did. Both my mother and dad, though, were very interested in music. Neither had had many lessons at all. In fact, my father had none, but he played the violin. She played the piano, and whatever little town we got stuck in, if they didn't have an orchestra, or something like that, they would start one. … My mother was always the church organist and choir leader, everywhere we went. That meant, guess who got stuck in the choir?

KP: Your parents were Methodist.

MP: Well, yes. It was United Church, really, but that's Methodist-Presbyterian combined.

KP: From what you just said, it sounds like your mother was fairly active ...

MP: She was.

KP: … in the church.

MP: Yes, she was very active in the church. My dad never went.

KP: In growing up in all these different small towns, it sounds like you made and lost a lot of friends at that time.

MP: It was very difficult to keep friends, because you're just moving around so much, until we got to Espanola, where I went to high school. There we stayed, while I went to high school, and that is where I still have a few friends. I am currently in touch with one gal that I went to high school with.

KP: How big was the town of Espanola?

MP: Five thousand.

KP: So that was a big town for you.

MP: That was the biggest town we ever lived in. That's where the paper mill was fixed up for the prisoner of war camp in early 1940.

KP: I'd imagine that growing up in small communities, particularly before all the new technology, that you were fairly isolated.

MP: Yes.

KP: And you didn't really have a lot of money to travel.

MP: No, we didn't. … I can remember when we lived in northern Saskatchewan, (the capital of the providence was Regina) thinking that Regina was like next to China. When I went out there five years ago, I discovered it was only seventy miles from the town where we lived. … We had a car, but you just did not travel around like that. No, it was a very provincial type of life, to the point where, as I got older, it just drove me nuts. It really did.

KP: So, growing up, it sounds like you wanted to get to the big cities.

MP: Yes, I did. I just felt claustrophobic where I was.

KP: Especially in the smaller towns.

MP: Yes, right.

KP: What did you do for fun?

MP: Well, we played softball. When we were in Saskatchewan, we were far enough north so you could, in the summertime, play softball outside 'till ten-thirty at night. And we just played. You make your own fun. We hiked, we had picnic lunches and would take off into the fields and that sort of thing.

KP: Did you ever join the Girl Scouts?

MP: Oh, they didn't have any.

KP: No? Were your towns too small for them?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did your mother vote?

MP: No, she never did.

KP: Really?

MP: … I have become a real political activist, you know, as my dad was.

KP: Was he a liberal?

MP: Yes. The rest of my family is conservative, very. I've heard scuttlebutt that my three siblings got together once to try to figure out what happened to me.

KP: So you're the liberal ...

MP: Yes. I was asked to run for the New Jersey Assembly once, but I was unable to because of time and money constraints. I was actually going to Rutgers in Newark at the time.

KP: Oh, okay.

MP: I didn't go [until] I was in my forties, you know. Prior to that, I worked while my ex-husband got his Ph.D.

KP: Oh.

MP: One of those things. Party officials had put my name in the hopper to replace a gal who had withdrawn. But I couldn't do it, I had to turn it down.

KP: You say you're the liberal side of the family, like your father. Are your brothers and sisters in the United States?

MP: Yes, they all are.

KP: Oh, okay.

MP: … My sister and brother-in-law even listen to Rush Limbaugh. That, I really had a hard time with.

KP: Did your parents have any thought or any hope that you and your brothers and sisters would go to college?

MP: No, they were never in a position to do that. My dad had hoped to send me to teacher's college in Canada, which is one year, but I knew they could never ever afford to. It was up to me to do whatever I accomplished beyond high school. My sister never did finish high school. But my two brothers both came and lived with me, and my sister helped out financially. They got jobs (part-time) and are now college graduates as well.

KP: Did they graduate from Wayne State?

MP: Wayne State. Yes. Kerry, the older one of two boys, just retired from his position as a psychologist in the Michigan prison system.

KP: I only know a little bit about Canadian history, but …

MP: We won the War of 1812. Don't let them tell you anything else.

KP: I know a little bit about Mackenzie King.

MP: Okay, Mackenzie King was the one that, well, I didn't mention it in my summary.

KP: There's a story, I guess.

MP: Yes. In World War II, we had conscription, as they did in World War I. That meant the men from eighteen to forty-five had to enlist, and the only way they could be deferred was for medical reasons. Basically, that was it. Once you got in, however, you had a choice. This was sort of an olive branch to the French Canadians. Mackenzie King was the prime minister, and he ran this bill through called the "NRMA" (National Reserve Militia Act). This set up a policy that once you got in, you could choose whether you wanted to go on general service, that meant overseas, or stay in Canada. Those who stayed were commonly referred to as zombies, which was not very nice, but that's what we did. That was the only choice they had, really. He became very unpopular because of that.

KP: So it sounds like you didn't like this decision to allow people to stay in Canada.

MP: Correct. We really didn't. A lot of them just didn't want to put their neck on the line, you know. Others, though, had legitimate reasons. They were either pacifists or deferred on religious grounds, or whatever, and I can certainly understand.

KP: Your father served in World War I.

MP: Correct.

KP: Did he see combat in World War I?

MP: Yes. He was willing to fight. In fact, when I was little, I remember every now and then he'd have to go into the hospital to have more shrapnel removed from his legs.

KP: Oh, really?

MP: Yes.

KP: Do you know what battles he saw?

MP: He was in Ypres and some others. I've forgotten now, I think Passiondale and Vimy Ridge were two. He went there in '15, served from 1915 to 1918.

KP: So he saw a lot of combat.

MP: Yes, he did.

KP: Did he ever talk freely about the war?

MP: No, not a word.

KP: Really?

MP: If something came up, he would mention the names of the battles. But, no, you didn't discuss the war. But in Canada, as with World War II, when the war was over, that was it. You got on with your life. When I started this for you, all of these memories just flooded back and I thought, "Oh, my God, I've forgotten all of this stuff."

KP: Well, everyone was involved in the war, so there was no need to talk about it, because everyone knew about it.

MP: Yes, in Canada, especially. I mean, we were really in it.

KP: How did you feel in the 1930s, when we approached war?

MP: My dad, I think, was probably the one that brought that reality home. He was absolutely livid one day. He was reading the newspaper and began pacing up and down, (this would've been in the mid-‘30s) saying, “There's going to be another war.” And I won't tell you the things that he called Hitler.

KP: So he was really very much opposed to what was going on in Europe.

MP: Another war. But, of course, once we got in it, he supported it fully. He was angry because somebody didn't clamp down on Hitler right away.

KP: What did he think of Neville Chamberlain?

MP: He thought he was "an old woman with an umbrella."

KP: Really? Even before the Poland invasion?

MP: Yes, absolutely. That was his quote. I mean, I think that's a very chauvinistic statement to make, but ...

KP: But even though he didn't want another war, he was also not willing to let things stay the way they were.

MP: No, he did not. He felt that we should be in there and putting a clamp on things, long before we did, so there would not be another world war. He enlisted again in World War II. But, of course, he was too old to go overseas, so he served guard duty, some of it in Espanola.

KP: So he served in both World Wars.

MP: Yes, he did.

KP: It sounds like your father saw the need for Canada to get involved in World War II.

MP: Oh, yes, absolutely. I think everybody did. I mean, you just couldn't let this Hitler character continue. We didn't want to wind up speaking German.

KP: You mentioned that your town would eventually house German POWs, but how did the war affect Canada?

MP: Initially, it didn't really hit. The war plants were built. That was before I went there to work. The first troops that enlisted were immediately sent to England for basic training. They would be inducted and two days later notified to depart, and it didn't matter when. I can remember one gal, in fact, it was the young woman whose husband was killed in Italy that I referred to in the summary.

KP: Oh, yes.

MP: He had to leave on Christmas Eve. It was just incredible. They spent two whole days just talking, she said, never tried to sleep. They just wanted to cram their whole life into those forty-

eight hours, because that's all he had. And that's all he had. He was killed in Italy. … They hadn't started rationing yet.

KP: When did rationing really start?

MP: I can't remember, exactly. It had to be in full swing by late 1940.

KP: Did it start the first year of the war?

MP: No, it took several months to really do this kind of thing. We had to save our toothpaste, tire tubes, and all that stuff.

KP: How did rationing start out in Canada?

MP: Well, you know, I'm not exactly [sure]. I know that we couldn't get sugar. Let's see, from August 1942, I was in Toronto working. I couldn't work in the war plant 'till I was seventeen, so after I got out of high school, I had to wait for my seventeenth birthday. You couldn't get rubber items. Silk stockings were hard to come by. In fact, the advent of nylons started then, as a result of developing the fabric for parachutes.

KP: What about gas? How scarce was that?

MP: I don't remember. We had a car then, but, again, I was away. There was not a lot. Anything that needed to be used for the war effort, we didn't have a lot of. That's a very general statement, but, basically, that was it.

KP: How about people's wages? Did they keep up with people you knew?

MP: Not really. They were very low paying wages.

KP: You mentioned that you made thirty-three cents.

MP: An hour. I did.

KP: How far did that go?

MP: Well, actually, you worked such long hours that my paycheck was somewhere in the neighborhood of eighteen to twenty dollars a week, which was not bad. I only was paying six dollars a week for board. I boarded with friends and shared a room with their niece. My dinner was included in that.

KP: Did your mother do anything during the first few years of the war?

MP: First two years, yes.

KP: What kinds of activities existed to support the war in your school and your community? Did you do any loan drives or anything like that?

MP: Well, no. The women of the church did get together and made up bandages and things like that. My mother was involved in that, but that was about it. The only thing I remember in school was that we were very interested in every aspect of the war, and I also remember our high school principal telling us that after the war, we'd have this thing called "television."

KP: What did he say about television?

MP: He said these pictures were going to be transmitted by airwaves. We were absolutely blown away. We couldn't imagine this. In Canada, they had five grades in high school, [including] grade thirteen. But grade thirteen was terminated in my high school because of the shortage in teachers. All the men were gone.

KP: So they terminated the thirteenth grade.

MP: … Teaching grade thirteen, and that's why, really, I got out at sixteen.

KP: When your father was in the military, was he sent away from home?

MP: Oh, yes. He was in Gravenhurst, guarding POWs there for awhile. Eventually, he came back to Espanola, but, by that time, I was already in Toronto working in the war plant.

KP: What about your brothers? Did they serve in the war?

MP: No, no. They're much younger than I.

KP: Okay. Were they ever involved in the war effort?

MP: No, they were like seven and four years.

KP: Oh, okay.

MP: I'm the oldest and my one brother is ten years younger than I, and the last one is fourteen years younger than I.

KP: So they were very young boys when the war ...

MP: Right.

KP: … occurred. Was there any fear of saboteurs in Canada?

MP: There was certainly some tenseness, I think, around some of the German people. There weren't that many Germans, but, you know, I'm looking at it from a perspective from these little provincial towns, now. I cannot tell you what was going on in Toronto at that time.

KP: Yes.

MP: I believe there was a *bund*, also.

KP: So it sounds like you had a fairly homogeneous, English-speaking, Canadian town.

MP: Yes, it was. People were mostly of Scottish origin and French Canadian. Out west, the farmers were German and Ukrainian people.

KP: You mentioned earlier about Mackenzie King's decision regarding the draft. How did the English canon view Quebec and the dissent that existed there?

MP: Well, there's always been dissension.

KP: Yes, but particularly in wartime.

[tape paused]

MP: They did not want to fight a war for England. They have never forgiven Wolfe for coming up on the Plains of Abraham and annihilating Montcalm. They were very unhappy about that, even though it was a hundred years before.

KP: Yes.

MP: They just didn't want to fight England's war.

KP: I know bilingualism is stressed in Canada today.

MP: Yes. Canada is a bilingual country.

KP: In your era, did you learn French in school?

MP: Yes, it was mandatory. Two years was mandatory and I took four. But, again, because of the war, they didn't have any other language choices, so one just took French. But, no, it's always been a part of our society, really. The older people, in particular, and even younger people now, of course, with this upsurge of the nationalism among Quebecers. But, you know, I have relatives that when they go into a supermarket and see the French side of the cans out, they'll turn them all around to the English side. So it's very evident.

KP: You mentioned that you moved around a lot, but it sounds like you really moved from one small town to another.

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you go on vacation at all?

MP: No, no. Well, occasionally we'd go to a lake, except that lakes were few and far between in the Midwest, so we didn't. But we'd always pile into the car and take a lunch and go to a lake for just the day. But we really never took vacations.

KP: You mentioned being very close to Regina. You're only seventy miles away.

MP: Yes.

KP: Only seventy miles.

MP: I know.

KP: But it sounds like going to a big city was rare.

MP: We never went to a big city. I never went to Regina until I went out there in 1990.

KP: You mentioned that you lived in Ontario.

MP: Right. I was there from age eleven on.

KP: It was a fairly big town by the standard.

MP: Right.

KP: But I'm not exactly sure where the town was, in western Ontario?

MP: Yes. It was in northern Ontario. Espanola was north of Lake Huron and was between Sudbury and Sault Sainte Marie.

KP: The climate in Canada is pretty harsh.

MP: Yes.

KP: How did that affect your growing up?

MP: Well, you don't pay that much attention to it, it's just there. But it was cold. I would be very happy if I never saw another snowflake, let's put it that way. I mean, when we were in Saskatchewan, I walked to school. There was no such thing as a "snow day." The school was open every day and we had to walk about three-quarters of a mile, which was not long because it

was a farming community. But I frequently would freeze my toe, as it was forty-five below on occasion. It nearly always in the thirties.

KP: So the arrival of the German POWs in your town really brought the war to your homes.

MP: It did.

KP: It was now really obvious that there was a war on.

MP: Yes, right.

KP: I guess, I remember our first conversation, when you called to set up the interview, how you really had a very clear image of what the Germans were like. Did that come from your father?

MP: Yes, and history books.

KP: Could you elaborate on what you thought of the Nazis and what you knew about the Nazis and the Germans, in general?

MP: Well, we didn't really know that much. This was really just a reaction on my part to my father's opinions, and I don't think he ever really discussed their appearances so much, but just the types, his images of what the German soldier was like. And then, we ourselves, my high school friends and I, looked up in the history books and saw these old Prussians with the handlebar moustaches and all.

KP: And the pointed helmets.

MP: Yes, basically that. And then, as I say, people who took the time, who had German friends, and you knew them on a one-to-one basis, there was no problem. But it was just, in general, a certain community. For instance, one town had a large German [population], and some would be somewhat skeptical of that town, not the town itself but just wonder if they might be doing something that was felt unappropriate for a wartime scenario.

KP: And you would get these German POWs that would come to your town and they didn't fit the image you expected of them.

MP: Oh, they were gorgeous, most of them anyway. This was the cream of the Aryan society, the U-boat people and the German airmen. They were really good-looking and very healthy specimens, I might add. We were not allowed, of course, to communicate in any way.

KP: It sounds like there was a lot of giggling among the girls.

MP: Oh, there was. In fact, two gals from high school actually got in a lot of trouble, because two of the boys, when they were out working on the roads, started waiting and doing things as

the girls would walk by, and they started leaving notes under stones to these guys. … Of course, it was found out and they got into quite a bit of trouble.

KP: From the school?

MP: From the school, from the parents, I mean, from the adjutant of the POWs.

KP: Was having a relationship with the POWs really frowned upon?

MP: Oh, there was none. I mean, it was considered treason.

KP: What about men in the community? Did they have any contact with the German POWs?

MP: No, no. Other than the service industry who had to go in. The POWs were pretty self-contained. I recall about eight of them [who wanted] asylum. … They had to (this was before the European [invasion], before D-Day, before Africa, so that this was pretty radical at that point) be removed and housed separately, as there was concern for their safety.

KP: Because the early POWs were very staunch Nazis.

MP: Oh, absolutely.

KP: There was often real tension in POW camps between the true Nazis and the wavering ones. It sounds like it came to your town, too.

MP: It did.

KP: How did you learn about these people seeking asylum?

MP: Because they had a separate house right on the sidewalk.

KP: Oh.

MP: We had to walk past it every day, going to school.

KP: Did you know that this was a special house?

MP: Yes. That's correct. It was common knowledge, and they were treated a lot more leniently, too, by the guards.

KP: Was your father one of the guards?

MP: Yes, correct. At the end. He was at a POW camp in Gravenhurst, which was in southern Ontario, while I was home, but then he moved up to Espanola after.

KP: Did you know any of the guards?

MP: Not really, because I was gone by then.

KP: Oh, okay.

MP: I was in Toronto then.

KP: So you encountered them for just a brief time.

MP: Yes.

KP: You mentioned that they did a lot of roadwork.

MP: Yes, they did. They had to give them something to do, so they built and repaired roads all in the general vicinity. They didn't take them that far away. [It was] an easy commute from their camp. They were transported in trucks to and from. They would sing in harmony, going and coming. They were good.

KP: It sounds like there was a fairly scrupulous obedience to the Geneva Convention, because these were really not military projects.

MP: No, they really weren't. Their pay, I believe, was three cents a day. They got some money, and every time you went into the store, (we had one general store in town) there would be one or two prisoners with a guard, doing their shopping. It's quite a contrast to the way our prisoners were treated in Germany.

KP: Yes. It sounds like you viewed this as normal practice, that they were treated this way.

MP: Yes, that's right. They were prisoners of war and the Geneva Convention decreed how they were to be treated.

KP: As a guard, did your father ever talk about his experiences or comment on the prisoners?

MP: No, not really. They're really not supposed to discuss this outside, you know.

KP: So it sounds like your father didn't say very much about military matters.

MP: No, most of the men who served in the military did not.

KP: Did you view the war as a chance to get out of this small town?

MP: Yes, well, it was. It presented an opportunity. There were few other opportunities.

KP: If the war hadn't come along, what do you think you would have done? It sounds like you wanted to get out of your small town.

MP: I did.

KP: But how did you think you'd get out?

MP: I don't know. I have no idea.

KP: You never made the decision to just leave?

MP: No. I probably would have gone to Toronto, at some point, and stayed with these same friends and got a job. But who knows what would have happened?

KP: I know that there was a real push in the United States for "Rosie the Riveters." What about for women in Canada? What kind of push or incentive existed?

MP: Oh, you were expected to do your part, and, of course, the men had no choice, but the women were definitely [involved], also. A lot of the women either joined up or went into the factories as soon as their men, their husbands and brothers and so forth, left. Every family had someone involved, and one in ten families had somebody in the military service, so it was a widespread effort.

KP: Were people very encouraging?

MP: Yes, everybody. It was just a general sort of feeling, just a general accepted way of, you know, helping in the war.

KP: You mentioned Toronto. How did you end up in Toronto?

MP: Yes. Well, some friends of my mother had moved there. The husband had gone to work in a war plant, Research Enterprises, where they did actually do research, as well as other work. There were about eight or ten buildings in this whole, big place. I cannot remember, to save my soul, what was going on in those other buildings. But that's really where the radar system was (from the English) developed. That's the part I was involved in. But I went there and stayed with these people who were friends. They were very good to me. They made me part of the family, really. I was there until I left to go into the army.

KP: What was it like to live in a big city?

MP: Oh, I loved it.

KP: What was your favorite thing about it?

MP: Well, of course, given the economic limitations, you know, the movies, 'cause we had some really good movies. They might have had theater, but I certainly couldn't afford to go there. But just the concerts, a lot of free concerts and places to dance. There was just a lot of activity.

KP: What about dating? Did you date when you were growing up?

MP: No, I did not.

KP: What about going to Toronto?

MP: My parents didn't want me to start dating until I was sixteen, and I was already, you know …

KP: That would preclude ...

MP: Preclude anything in Espanola. The only person I really went out with much, and I was heavily supervised, as we went out with a group, we didn't ever single date, was a fellow who went overseas, a French Canadian. The only French Canadian I ever dated. But, then, in Toronto, I did date. Of course, there again, in the war plant, there were only older men. Workers were all women, or men over forty-five, and an occasional, as you call it, "4-Fer" over here, someone who had been wounded in the early part of the war and had been rehabilitated and they would come there to work.

KP: So there were not very many eligible men around.

MP: No. We had a few there from the American Army, who came in to supervise the radar units that we were working on-they had the final say, since they were for use in the Pacific. … I did go out with one of them for awhile.

KP: Because you were working with radar, was there any sort of background check done on you, or any of the other war workers?

MP: No, not that I know of.

KP: You didn't have someone from the Canadian military check you out?

MP: I was not fingerprinted or anything.

KP: Really? Were you given any sort of warnings about discussing what you did?

MP: Yes, definitely. You did not discuss what you did. It was just accepted practice, just like the military.

KP: What did you do at the plant?

MP: Oh, well, most of the time, I was sitting at this big, long bench with my co-workers. We were all women except the supervisor, and it was just like building a radio, a stereo set almost, you know. In fact, I built our own stereo after I was married, because I learned to solder pretty well there. You just put in the wires and a lot of things that are no longer used because of computer chips now, such as bakelite resisters, etcetera.

KP: So it sounds like you did a lot of production.

MP: This was production line, except you didn't do one part and move it along. You completed the little set.

KP: Did you know how to build a set?

MP: Yes, absolutely.

KP: I mean, you mentioned putting together your own stereo.

MP: Yes, I built it from a kit. This was after I was married and my husband would check it out. I'll never forget the very last. I finished it and there was a great deal of ceremony. He put each tube in carefully. He wanted to make sure it was turned off. He was a very cautious type. … He put the tubes in very, very carefully before he turned the set on, in case something blew, except that I had put the on/off switch in backwards, so it lit up like a Christmas tree when he put in the last tube.

KP: Did you really have mechanical abilities when you were doing this?

MP: No, I still don't.

KP: Was it difficult to learn?

MP: Somewhat. If I really wanted to learn something, however, I've never had a lot of trouble learning it. It's only if I have a mental block, "I really don't want to do this kind of thing," that I have a problem. I don't like mechanics.

KP: So this was really for the duration.

MP: That's right. I mean, you just learned it, and I did a good job, really. In fact, I even got a commendation for being able to turn out the best unit.

KP: Was it mostly single women who worked there?

MP: Actually, a lot of them were married with husbands overseas.

KP: What about their children?

MP: No, I don't remember any of them having young children.

KP: Was there any sort of daycare center?

MP: No, oh, heavens. We're talking 1942 here, '43.

KP: So it was mostly single women or married women with no children.

MP: Yes, right. There were older women whose kids were gone, or childless and single. There were quite a few of us who were very young, sixteen to eighteen.

KP: You mentioned that you did a lot of overtime.

MP: Actually, I didn't do a lot of overtime. I just worked those long hours. I tried to do overtime twice. Overtime meant a fourteen hour day.

KP: What was a typical workday like?

MP: Your typical workday was ten hours. Six hours on Saturday. … Occasionally, they would want you to work overtime, and I tried it twice. … The second time, I passed out on the streetcar going home. I was almost as tall as I am now and I weighed 113 pounds. I was with one of the girls from the plant, who lived that way, too, so she told my boss. Actually, she was the one who helped me off the streetcar, and he refused to let me do it again.

KP: You mentioned that the men were supervisors. Were there any women supervisors?

MP: No, I don't remember a one.

KP: Do you know what happened to any of the other girls in the plant after the war was over?

MP: I don't know. I was not there. A couple of them, I knew of later. One of the girls, not the one I mentioned, whose husband was killed, had started to go out again with one fellow. She finally married him. She was reluctant to get married again. And another gal that worked right next to me, she and her husband finally had a child, you know, that kind of thing. But then, after three or four years, I never heard anything. I just didn't keep up.

KP: Yes, you could have stayed working at this factory for the duration of the war, at least.

MP: Yes.

KP: What made you decide that you wanted to enlist?

MP: Basically, it was the possibility of benefits. Somehow or other, I knew I had to get myself educated, and no one knew then, of course, how long the war was going to last. … I thought,

"Well, if I go into the service, at least then I'll get some benefits, depending on how long I'm in there, and, at least, I'll be able to get some education."

KP: What about the benefits that were so alluring?

MP: Well, it wasn't really alluring, it was just better than nothing. But I was in twenty months, and for that, I was eligible for six months worth of some kind of training. You had to be in for eons to go to college. One gal, who was my roommate in basic training, went to college. College was three years then. She paid the last year herself.

KP: Did the Canadian government pay for the first two years?

MP: Yes.

KP: Was there the promise of some sort of training?

MP: Yes, you knew you'd have a certain amount of money, and how you applied it was up to you, but it was supposed to be for education.

KP: You mentioned that there was some family resistance to you joining.

MP: Yes.

KP: Could you elaborate?

MP: My father did not want me to join the service, really, but he could have accepted the air force or the navy. They did not have the reputation that the first women going into the army had. I'm not talking professionals now, like nurses.

KP: Yes.

MP: I mean, anybody going in at an entry level, and you can't really generalize, but it only takes a few to spoil everything.

KP: What was the image he had?

MP: The image was that they slept around, frankly. They were hard-drinking, hard-living and slept around.

KP: And your father was in the army again.

MP: Yes, I'm sure he knew.

KP: So it's not something he heard rumors of.

MP: No, no.

KP: How much convincing or arguing did you have with the family?

MP: I didn't tell them until I had joined up. I was in it for three weeks when I wrote them from basic training camp with the news.

KP: Did they write you back?

MP: Yes, my dad said that he was disappointed to hear it, but if I felt that that was the right thing to do, why, do it, because, by then, things were changing a lot. They were getting some really nice people. There were people joining, because their husbands and brothers were overseas and it was getting desperate.

KP: Did you know of the army's reputation when you enlisted?

MP: Yes, so you're very careful. Of course, the social mores were totally different then.

KP: Yes, it was very different.

MP: Yes, you just didn't do certain things. I never, even in the camp, with all the men there, I never ever spoke to anyone unless I'd been properly introduced and I didn't go out of my way to have that happen. I felt it was up to them, if they were interested, to use a little ingenuity and work it out. … Also, the staff was very protective of the women, at least at where I was.

KP: It sounds like the military was aware of this reputation.

MP: They had been in the beginning. We were kept separate from the regular barracks. We had our own female training officers, our own barracks training camps. Having worked in a man's profession since then, the resentment on the part of the men, they can make your life miserable.

KP: Yes.

MP: There was over three thousand people at that camp, one percent of which were women, so we had to have our own facilities.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

MP: Our barracks area was patrolled twenty-four hours a day.

KP: Was it in order to keep that separation?

MP: Yes, not just us, but the officers, the brig, were in that little area as well. … Then, in the working arena, the fellows that I worked with (there were only two women in our whole office) and the entire office staff, including a hundred counselors, were very careful. Naturally, I dated

quite a bit. In fact, I thought that I was being socially deprived if I didn't go dancing at least three times a week. The office would check out anybody that I was interested in, or saw, or that showed an interest in me. They would get the scuttlebutt. … I worked for the intelligence testing department and we had their documents there, so we could check them out as well. They couldn't put much over on us. We'd check out their documents and then the guys would do the preliminary investigative work and say, "Yes, he's okay," or, "This one, stay away from."

KP: Would married men ask you out?

MP: Yes. As a matter-of-fact, there were a couple that were very nice gentlemen, a couple of counselors, who were upfront about their marriage and everything, but loved to dance, so they would ask me out to go dancing.

KP: They just wanted to have a good time.

MP: Exactly. (I found this out actually after) but the officer second in command also spoke on my behalf. Evidently, a couple of guys must have said something and he said, "Hands off, she's a nice kid and her boyfriend is overseas," which he was, so he stepped in whenever ...

KP: When necessary.

MP: Yes.

KP: Where did you go to enlist?

MP: In Toronto.

KP: Did you report to an army recruiting facility?

MP: Oh, I had tried to get in the air force, but, again, I was so thin. They said I was underweight.

KP: So you couldn't get into the air force.

MP: One whole winter, I ate myself sick and was told I was borderline when I went back. I had put in my application previously. They said they had to reevaluate my application, and I got fed up with it. The war was really heating up. We knew there was going to be an invasion. And one day, I was shopping and they had this booth in front of City Hall in Toronto, so I just went in to get some information about the army. I came out signed, sealed, and delivered.

KP: Was there a real push to get women?

MP: Yes.

KP: What did you hope to do in the air force?

MP: Radio operator. They had tested me for that, which turned out very well. He said, "Are you sure you haven't taken this before?" but I have a good ear for music and that helped.

KP: So you would be a ground based radio operator.

MP: Yes.

KP: Could women fly planes in the Canadian Air Force?

MP: No.

KP: Because Americans had the WASPs for women.

MP: No, we did not have anything like that. There were no women, to my knowledge, flying planes anywhere, even inland.

KP: Was there any chance that you could be a pilot?

MP: No.

KP: What did you think you would do in the Canadian Women's Army Corps?

MP: Oh, I had envisioned that I would be driving an ambulance or a truck. I knew I couldn't go overseas 'till I was twenty-one. But, again ...

KP: Was that because there was the restriction?

MP: Yes, you had to be twenty-one.

KP: Could you go overseas if you had your parents' permission?

MP: No.

KP: No?

MP: No, you had to be twenty-one. Women, I should say, women had to be twenty-one.

KP: But you didn't need your parents' permission to join the army.

MP: Well, you would have if I had been under eighteen.

KP: So there were different age requirements.

MP: Yes.

KP: You could join the army but not get sent overseas.

MP: Right.

KP: When did you actually report?

MP: It was about three weeks after enlisting.

KP: Where did you report to initially?

MP: I had to report to the downtown Toronto station. … Of course, they immediately give you your shots, uniforms, etcetera, and then you're shipped off, immediately, to basic training.

KP: How was your induction different from what the men went through?

MP: Oh, well, I don't know that it really was that different. You had to strip, you had to get your shots.

KP: Really?

MP: Yes, absolutely. It was really traumatizing. We went to lectures and things like that and got fitted for our uniforms, etcetera. We were only there a few days.

KP: So it sounds like your experience was pretty similar.

MP: Yes, it was. Of course, not having gone through the men's myself, I wouldn't know, but to my knowledge, there was no appreciable difference.

KP: Where did you report for your basic training?

MP: Kitchener. They took us all by bus to Kitchener. We were billeted in barracks. I have pictures. I could have them copied.

KP: We would love copies.

MP: Okay, I'll make some copies and have them sent.

KP: Did you stay with the same group throughout basic training?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you get to know any of the women while going to basic training?

MP: Well, we didn't really talk much on the bus. I made friends with this one gal who had been a secretary before the war, and she and I stayed friends up until twenty-five years ago, I mean, in communication. But the rest, I don't remember even talking to until we got there. We really didn't know each other and you didn't talk to people you didn't know back then.

KP: Did you grow up in a reserved environment?

MP: Yes, I did. We weren't nearly as friendly and open as Americans are. The British ethic is very strong.

KP: Yes, in American culture, there's a real openness. Did you get to know other people's backgrounds?

MP: Yes, they were from all over, gals from the farms in the Midwest and a few from offices throughout. In the four of us, my roommates, the one gal was only nineteen. She was married and her husband had gone overseas, so she wanted to join to keep abreast of what he was experiencing. One of them had actually worked at Research Enterprises in an office, the one who later went on to college. And then, Flo, my friend, the gal who had been the secretary, and myself. But there were no college graduates, because they would automatically have been made officers.

KP: Were you all high school graduates?

MP: Yes. Maybe with some kind of business training, also.

KP: Were there any people from the Maritime Provinces?

MP: No, not where we are. We had one American girl, though.

KP: Really?

MP: She was from Brooklyn. But the poor kid, I mean, we just sort of like shunned her. It was awful. She was a real loner.

KP: Do you know why she enlisted in the Women's Army Corps?

MP: I have no idea. We never hardly talked to her. But we used to wonder why she did. She was a Jewish girl from Brooklyn.

KP: Who enlisted in the Canadian Army.

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you have any people from Quebec?

MP: No, none.

KP: Was it mostly people from Ontario?

MP: Yes, with WASPish kinds of backgrounds.

KP: Boot camp can be somewhat traumatizing. Could you tell us about your experience in boot camp? You showed a picture of the sergeant.

MP: Yes.

KP: Could you start with your sergeant?

MP: She was very tough-and a big gal. You didn't socialize with them at all, you know, 'cause they ...

KP: Did they maintain a very strict separation?

MP: Yes, absolutely. We were just a bunch of silly kids at times. But you had a busy day. Reveille was at six a.m.

KP: What was a typical day?

MP: Reveille was around six. You had to have breakfast and have your bed and your room tidy by seven. … Then there was, I don't remember the order of this, but at some point during the day, you had a lecture, you had to drill, and, on occasion, you'd have KP duty. They'd throw a lot of other little goodies in. But we had a full day. We had one break for about an hour. We were finished about four and then dinner was at five. I don't remember all the details.

KP: But you remember having a lot to do.

MP: Very full, heavy day. You were exhausted by the end of the day. And one thing, the drill, was no easy thing, because not only was there drilling, but it was in the summer (June). It was very hot that June. You'd have to learn that if somebody fainted or collapsed or something, you had to step over them. That was the thing that really got me. That was the job for the medics. You kept formation; you kept on going. … One day, they were dropping like flies, and I felt a little woozy myself, but you just had to keep right on going. That, to me, was very traumatic. I think that's hard for a woman, maybe some men, too, but particularly for woman, just to step right over your buddy.

KP: Just to step right over someone who's going to ...

MP: Yes, and not stop.

KP: What about the medics? They would come out and ...

MP: Yes, they'd rush out. They were all there already with stretchers.

KP: Were they ready for people to faint?

MP: Yes.

KP: You mentioned that you had gotten tear gas training.

MP: Yes. They had a chamber there. This was sort of the final thing. We had to learn to use our gas masks. And again, I've got a great picture of the gas masks. We had to take off the gas masks and run through the tear gas chamber.

KP: Would you put the gas masks on in the chamber?

MP: No, we had to run through. They wanted us to know what the real thing was like. So you had to run through this chamber with no gas mask, and it was a great incentive to be sure and wear a gas mask. Believe me, if it ever happened, you knew you'd get it on in a mighty quick hurry.

KP: Did you get any weapons training?

MP: No, we got no weapons training.

KP: You never learned how to shoot a rifle?

MP: No, nothing like that. Basically, all we knew was that we were going to be used somewhere. Some did get assigned to be truck drivers. At the end, a few of us got sent on other training, like secretarial work and army administration.

KP: Did you get any self-defense training?

MP: No, none of that, either.

KP: A lot of basic training is learning about army protocol and the culture of the army. What did they impress upon you concerning your relationship with officers? Especially in terms of dating, I'm sure there must have been rules.

MP: Yes, there was. They were not supposed to date us, but they did. I've only known of one, a personal instance, where that was even alluded to. But, no, we all did. There were so few of us (CWACs) and all these men around.

KP: Yes.

MP: And the poor soldiers, the privates, the noncoms, had no money. I mean, absolutely none, so that if you wanted to [go out], it was maybe movie once a month. If you really wanted to go out and go dancing or to dinner, you were really pretty much restricted to the officers, and so we all did. My one girlfriend and I, we made a pact that we would not date anyone else but an officer, because we liked to go dancing. We'd double date quite a bit. Only once did fraternization ever come up, and this was a fellow that I had really started to go out with, just not dancing. … I dated him quite a bit. He never mentioned it. He worked in the horse palace, as I did, and we used to meet for coffee. … I remember our CWAC captain came in and watched us. She totally ignored me, like I wasn't even sitting there, and she walked over to Charlie and she said, "Again?" and he said, "You mean, 'still.'" Really put her in her place. She never did that again. But, then, he told me that she had talked to him about dating me. But she liked him, herself. She had, in fact, even invited him out. But that's the only time I ever saw that, because even though it wasn't advocated, it was just accepted.

KP: In the American Army, I know there was a lot of resentment between the noncoms and the privates. The enlisted men felt that the officers got all the women.

MP: Yes, I'm sure it existed.

KP: Oh.

MP: I'm sure it existed. In fact, I'm positive, but I really didn't get involved in that.

KP: Did you ever feel that resentment?

MP: Occasionally, on a streetcar, you would hear someone behind you making comments, but you just ignored it.

KP: How was army food?

MP: The food wasn't bad on basic training. It wasn't great, but it wasn't bad. Other than just the regular nonsensical stuff that went on, we'd go into Kitchener, because every now and then, we'd get what they called "a supper and midnight pass." You could go on leave at three-thirty, but you had to be back in by midnight. We'd go to a movie or something like that. But I never dated there, because we were all women and [I] just had my own friends that I went out with.

KP: Would anyone ever invite you into their homes?

MP: Yes. They did do that … There was a fellow from Research Enterprises, where I had worked, who had an aunt and uncle there, and he came and took me to his aunt and uncle's, and they just sort of adopted me. They used to have me there every Sunday for dinner.

KP: So it sounds like you had a good time.

MP: Yes, we did.

KP: It must have been really nice to have someplace to go on Sundays.

MP: Yes, it was. We were so happy to get out of the ... camp, you know.

KP: How was KP duty?

MP: Oh, God, it was awful. The steam, and everything. It's all troughs- places where they'd wash the dishes and the scrubbing of the pots, peeling potatoes. Oh, I mean, whatever you see in the movie, it happened. It was just awful. Oh, I hated that with a passion.

KP: A lot of soldiers harped about inspections.

MP: Yes, they did.

KP: Did you have this inspection?

MP: Our colonel wore white gloves, and she would come in with those white gloves. There was a little ridge right below the upper bunk, and her finger would go right along that thing, checking for dust. She was a pistol.

KP: Do you remember anything about your officers?

MP: No, because, again, you just didn't associate with them. It was very segregated. They were nice to us, they spoke to us, you got lectures from them, and so forth, but there was no personal contact. The only thing we knew about our colonel was that she was married and her husband was overseas.

KP: Did anyone not make it through training?

MP: Basic? Oh, God, no. I mean, they must have had them working twenty-four hours a day. You passed.

KP: So no one quit.

MP: You didn't quit. No, you made it through basic. Believe me, you made it through basic.

KP: Were there any problems then? Did some people have problems with certain parts of it?

MP: Yes. But I don't know of anybody who really flunked, as you would say, "flunked out." No. This one little gal, Joan Miller, our roommate, who was only nineteen, was a little-bitty thing. Actually, her father was a colonel in the army and they had been very much against her joining, but she did. She'd sit up in her bunk and write poetry. She's a very fragile person, and the future had a rather tragic ending. In Canada, (her husband was in the air force) they had what they called a "tour of ops," (tour of operations) which meant thirty bombing raids over Germany

and back, or over Europe. … He was killed on his return trip of the thirtieth one. … I didn't see her, but I heard that she totally cracked up. They had to give her a discharge. She was actually hospitalized for awhile.

KP: You mentioned in your written statement that a lot of women lost their …

MP: Yes.

KP: … husbands …

MP: Yes.

KP: … and boyfriends.

MP: Yes.

KP: You mentioned that something like this happened in the plant.

MP: Yes. We were all working one day, (I don't even remember her name now) but she was the one whose husband had been sent overseas for basic on Christmas Eve. She was sitting there, and, suddenly, she started to tremble violently. … She laid down her soldering iron and she was as pale as a ghost and she said, "Ron's been hit." Just like that. … We thought, of course, that she was cracking up. She was taken home. A few hours later, the telegram came. He had been killed right about that time. That was a very traumatic experience for all of us. My very first experience at witnessing ESP. To be in Italy, where her husband was serving, and she in Toronto and yet to get this tremendous response was really something.

KP: She just knew her husband had been injured without really hearing about it.

MP: Yes. It seemed that he had just been hit at that moment.

KP: And then she later got the telegram.

MP: Yes, saying that's when he was killed.

KP: Oh, that is sort of eerie.

MP: But it happened. I witnessed the whole thing. There were others, as well. Every now and then, somebody wouldn't come into work because they got a telegram. But that's the most vivid one in my mind about our own group.

KP: How long did your basic training last?

MP: Six weeks.

KP: And did you have a graduation ceremony?

MP: We may have. I don't remember it.

KP: It's been fifty years, so you might not remember it.

MP: Yes, a lot of this I had completely forgotten 'till I started trying to compose it in this little summary I gave you.

KP: Yes. After basic, where did you go to next?

MP: Oh, that's when a few of us went to Saskatoon in Saskatchewan (a little north of Regina). We got there in late August, and one of the things we had to do was jog every morning. … I mean, there was ice hanging on the trees and we were out there jogging in white shorts and a sweater.

KP: Would you jog as a company?

MP: Yes. We'd sing songs, some of them not so nice, just like the men.

KP: So there was a real emphasis on physical fitness.

MP: Yes, there was, you're right, because the rest of it was sitting at a desk, so there had to be a good balance. … Maybe, in a way, maybe that's why the impression among people was that some of the women in the service were not the elite, as it were, because as we ran we'd sing these raunchy songs.

KP: Which was something that women of the time didn't do.

MP: That's right.

KP: Now, my female students will use almost every obscenity in the book and not think twice about it.

MP: Right.

KP: But in your era ...

MP: It was not done. Also, there was no public show of affection if you went out with your date. None. Holding hands, maybe, on the street, but nothing beyond that. It's a whole different scene than now.

KP: Were you doing this when you were jogging?

MP: Yes. So I guess I can understand, for the first time why they had this impression.

KP: And you were at this training base for how long?

MP: In Saskatoon, we were there six months.

KP: Six months. And it was a basic training, it was a Commonwealth ...

MP: Yes, I wanted to bring that out, because, again, I'm sure it's in the history books, but during the war, England had a training program for just airmen, I mean, just the pilots, and they called it the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. All of the pilots from all the British commonwealths were trained in Canada at these various flight schools, and one was in Saskatoon. We had Australians, New Zealanders, etcetera, as well as Canadians. But those ones I remember because I did go out, occasionally, with a few.

KP: Were all the commonwealths represented at this place?

MP: I'm not sure.

KP: You didn't know them personally.

MP: No.

KP: Were all your instructors English?

MP: Only on basic. We had civilian instructors in Saskatoon. It was a business school, which we attended, but we had our barracks there. We went to school and returned to our barracks.

KP: So you were being trained for office work …

MP: Yes, all of us.

KP: … while this military training was going on?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you have anything to do with the air training?

MP: No, we had nothing to do with it.

KP: People have described the Australians and New Zealanders as a pretty rowdy bunch. Did you see any of that while you were at the base?

MP: I don't know anything about that, because they were on their best behavior with us.

KP: So when you saw them, they were pretty behaved.

MP: I mean, they would just ask us out. My only problem was I couldn't understand the Australians. So I never did pursue a friendship. One date would be about it. But, no, they were gentlemenly.

KP: Flying had a very glamorous reputation.

MP: Flying, yes. As a matter-of-fact, my very first boyfriend, Bob, the one that I alluded to as being overseas, was a flying instructor at that school, and we were able to go out to the base on Sundays and they would take us up. They allowed two to a plane. These were the old Cessnas with four seats. We had to put on big flying suits and the air pressure was tremendous in those things. Some of the pilots would cavort around, which they weren't supposed to do.

KP: Were they supposed to be doing this?

MP: No. They could have gotten court-martialed for this. You know, they'd whoosh down and scare some horses in a field. One guy really was brought up on charges. But a lot of these pilots had been overseas,wounded and returned home.

KP: Well, I mean, it's not the first story, because a lot of airmen have described doing the same thing.

MP: Yes.

KP: It must have been a big thrill to be able to fly.

MP: Yes, it was. I enjoyed it very much.

KP: Were you sad to leave this base?

MP: No. I was anxious to get on with my life.

KP: And then you were reassigned to ...

MP: Toronto.

KP: Toronto.

MP: Yes.

KP: And you knew Toronto from having worked there.

MP: Yes, I did, and having lived there. They tried to send you back to your home.

KP: And you were assigned to Army Depot number two in Toronto.

MP: Yes, right. That was a troop processing center, really.

KP: You were in the exhibition grounds.

MP: Yes.

KP: The fair grounds.

MP: Yes.

KP: And you were part of a troop processing center. You processed in some celebrities.

MP: Yes.

KP: Could you describe the role of women on the base and the general purpose of the base?

MP: Yes. We processed recruits that were about to go overseas. All were either sent to Toronto, or Montreal, and from there on boats for overseas. Our department administered the M-test (the intelligence test). I don't know if Americans call it "M-test" or not.

KP: No, they have another test.

MP: We administered those tests. … Then the conselors would interview these new recruits to help place them in the area where they would be best suited, the philosophy being, if they were happier, they would fight and work a lot better and improve morale in general. This worked for the first troops. This wasn't started until about 1941. So the early guys, the first division people who went overseas in '39 and '40 (they were the ones that fought in Italy) basically didn't get that opportunity, but the others did. The head of our department, who had been a practicing psychiatrist before the war, started this. He had talked to the army about instituting this whole program. They agreed. By the time I got there, after D-Day, it didn't matter what they wanted. They still conducted the interview, but everybody went into CIC rifles, which was the infantry.

KP: Whereas before, there was a real effort to place people where they were best suited.

MP: Yes, there was.

KP: Some people would be better as a quartermaster, or something else.

MP: Yes. Some of them had special skills, and they wanted to utilize these skills, and the infantry really just got those who really didn't have any basic skills. But, of course, that all changed after D-Day.

KP: Were you there to see that transition?

MP: Yes, I was. And, of course, the medical exam got much more lenient after that, too. In fact, our own little joke there was, the recruits just came in and the medical people felt them, and if they were warm, over they went. We were desperate there. … Then, I think I mentioned that some of the people on our staff had been transferred from the air force. Anybody who had served less than eighteen months in the air force (there were a lot of air force recruits and the army had virtually none) it was decided by the powers that be that anybody with less than eighteen months would be transferred to the army to fill in the gaps. So our office staff there was largely, except for two of us CWACs and the regular administration staff, was made up of all these RCAF airmen. They were not happy about that move.

KP: Were these men trained as pilots?

MP: No, no, they were just strictly service personnel. They weren't officers.

KP: They weren't officers?

MP: No, they were just working troops, you know, servicing airplanes and whatever else.

KP: Were they sent from the air force to the army?

MP: Yes.

KP: And they were ...

MP: They were not happy …

KP: How were the soldiers placed in their different units?

MP: You were just told where to go.

KP: Oh.

MP: You had no choice about where you went, basically, beyond the initial interview. The women did not have that interview process, by the way, strictly the men. But, no, they were just sent to whatever regiment had vacancies. A lot of the young Jewish men from the Toronto area got put in the Irish regiment, and it caused them a lot of grief.

KP: Were there other ethnic units? I know that the Royal Twenty-second is the French-speaking unit.

MP: Yes.

KP: Were there other ethnic units?

MP: Yes. The initial setup were mostly the Scottish regiments, but there was a homogenous group in it, because it got to the point where you really just had to fill in the vacancies of a regiment. … So they just took whoever came and plopped them in there.

KP: Do you have any humorous stories about your experiences there?

MP: Yes. As I mentioned previously, they had taken these old cavernous buildings with the high ceilings and just slapped up eight-foot partitions to make offices. These could be readily taken down and disassembled after the war and returned to its original purpose. The medical inspection room was right next door to us. A lot of the boring things went on occasionally, but the one bright experience, every now and then, would be that some poor recruit would open the wrong door and stroll in our office stark naked.

KP: That must have been very embarrassing.

MP: It was. Walk in, and, of course, never expecting to see women, either. Of course, there [were] only two of us, so it wasn't immediately apparent that there were women in there.

KP: You must have been very startled.

MP: We were startled, but hysterical. There was not that much to laugh about.

KP: What was the typical day like for you at that processing center?

MP: It was just like an office job, really. We had to get up at seven, go to the mess hall for breakfast, and then you were to be at the office at eight-thirty. At twelve, you broke for lunch, and later, when I got my two stripes, I could go to the special mess hall for corporals. This was closer than the women's mess hall.

KP: The British Army is legendary for being very conscious of rank.

MP: Yes, they are.

KP: It sounds like there was an element of that that was perpetuated in the Canadian Army.

MP: Yes.

KP: They had the separate mess hall for corporals, not just for NCOs.

MP: No, that's right. It was a big base, so they had to have separate mess halls for different ranks. I would go with some of the guys from my office. I had company.

KP: How formal was your department?

MP: Well, it was really just a regular army military base.

KP: Did you salute?

MP: Oh, yes, you had to salute, not within the office, because you were in a working environment, but out on the street, yes, you had to.

KP: So when you were walking on base and you ran into an officer, did you salute them?

MP: You had to salute, yes. You were not allowed to pass an officer without a saluting.

KP: Did you ever get in trouble because you missed an officer and didn't salute?

MP: No. I'd cross the street.

KP: Where did you live on the base?

MP: We had our own barracks hall and mess hall in a separate compound, which was patrolled. It was like a little compound within a compound, and it was on a square. There was the brig and the entrance gate, then our mess hall, our barracks. … Then, across the green, on the other side, were the officers' quarters. It was constantly patrolled. We felt quite safe there. To my knowledge, there were never any instances at all.

KP: Did you ever hear of any women being attacked?

MP: No. Once, they caught a peeping tom.

KP: You mentioned eating in the corporals' mess. Would you go with men who were also corporals?

MP: Yes.

KP: But at night and the morning, you ate at the women's mess hall.

MP: Yes, I did. Dinner at night was at the women's mess hall.

KP: Were there officers' or enlisted men's clubs?

MP: Yes. Within the officers' quarters, there was a club, but, of course, we weren't allowed in there.

KP: Because it was really for officers.

MP: Yes. We were not allowed in the officers' quarters.

KP: Which is interesting, because, on the American bases, the women often could get into them, if they were dating someone.

MP: No. This was strictly a military-run operation. No women.

KP: Did you enjoy your job?

MP: Yes, I did like it, at first. But a lot of the restrictions eventually got to me. What made the whole thing livable was the people there, the guys and gals there. They were really very nice, and because it was somewhat boring, there were always two or three characters, cutups, that would do things that make life a little interesting.

KP: Could you talk about your other female co-worker?

MP: Yes. Well, she had been a secretary before the war. She was about ten years older than I, but we got along very well and used to go out together. We didn't double date so much, but we stayed in touch often. In fact, she was with me at the 1980 reunion. She was the one that got me to go. But then, about ten years ago, I didn't hear anymore and don't know what happened. But, no, we just typed these interview reports that the officers would dictate for the files. Later, I became the secretary to the department head over in the horse palace, and, there, it was strictly just taking his dictation and typing.

KP: Did you ever interview anybody or anything like that?

MP: No, we were strictly office (peon) personnel.

KP: It sounds like it was pretty routine.

MP: It was. The officers who were the counselors were receiving special training by this time. They were all back from overseas. Now they had to help the veterans coming back.

KP: So the men were all coming back from the war.

MP: Yes, the last year (1946), they had been in the war and were now home. … The one place that I worked was a special office to help a lot of the fellows who came back and did not have enough points to get discharged. In fact, it was the only first division that had enough points (those who went overseas in 1939, 1940). So if they had a compelling reason of some kind, they could apply for a discharge on compassionate grounds. Our office was located on the second floor of the horse palace. On the first floor, as I indicated, they billeted some of the transient troops. The army had built bunks in the old horse stalls. … Then they had the sinks and so forth, running down the center of the room. Our office on the second floor (it had previously been used for storage) meant we had to walk through that part to get to our office. … I mean, the troops would be dressed, because we would be coming in much later than reveille.

KP: Yes.

MP: But they'd be shaving and so forth. The first day I had to go to this office, I was just traumatized, totally, when I got to the second floor. My boss heard all the ruckus.

KP: So you're basically walking into the men's room.

MP: Well, yes. It was terrible. You have no idea. That din is still in my ears- the catcalls and whistles.

KP: So this was an unusual incident.

MP: It was. This was not the norm, believe me.

KP: Yes.

MP: … So then he assigned, immediately, a sergeant to meet me at the front entrance.

KP: So you'd have a sergeant escort you through this place.

MP: Well, for the first three or four days, he did, but he was unhappy with that assignment. This was not his favorite thing. So he decided to add a little drama to the thing by slinging a rifle over his shoulder and marching along very stiffly beside me all the way up. After about the third day, the officer in charge of that whole area had heard, and so he met me for coffee and everything was quiet after that. He's the one that I started to date and the one that the CWAC officer told to leave me alone.

KP: I picture there was some competition there, too.

MP: Yes. The two married men that I went out with just to dance were laughing, because they told me that she had approached them, also, invited them out, and then approached them about not taking me out. But, of course, they weren't interested in me as a real date anyway, so they just laughed.

KP: So first you worked in the steno pool that processed people who were getting inducted. Then you were transferred to this horse palace.

MP: Yes.

KP: Where were you on V-E Day and on V-J Day?

MP: V-J Day, I was home. That didn't have the impact for me. I mean, we were totally enmeshed in the European war. But V-E Day, we just all poured out of the offices and went to downtown Toronto. The stores, the bars (they brought out barrels of beer into the street) were wide open. Everybody was dancing, smooching and everything. It was a wonderful day, it was truly, truly wonderful.

KP: Were you on base when you got the news?

MP: Yes.

KP: So they really loosened up a little then.

MP: Yes, they just opened the doors, absolutely opened the doors. No such thing as a pass, or anything like that, you just went.

KP: You just left work?

MP: Yes.

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

KP: This continues an interview with Marjorie N. Pease on May 12, 1997, at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler. Before we go back to the army, you mentioned that you were very aware of Hitler's call for Germans to return to the Fatherland in the mid-30s. He said that he would offer free passage back to Germany. Could you elaborate on that?

MP: Okay, I just know of one specific instance and it was a young man who had come through riding the trains, looking for work. The elevators were right beside the tracks. My father had brought him home for dinner and then found him a job at a farm right near there, and so he used to come to our house for dinner every now and then. He was in for dinner one night and said that he had heard (his family had told him) about this offer that Hitler was making to all of the [Germans]. It was common knowledge in Germany that it was an offer, a free passage home, and a bonus, of course, if they went into the military, and they had to serve in the military for a certain length of time in order to collect the bonus. So I don't know how many lived to collect the bonus, or how long they had to be there, but that was the rule. … So this one young man said he decided to go home. We never heard from him. And we didn't communicate after the war.

KP: How about during the war?

MP: I mean, during the war. I don't know what happened to him.

KP: Did you know a lot of German farmers?

MP: There were a lot of [them]. In most of that area, they were either German or Ukrainian farmers.

KP: Going back …

MP: Right. To V-E Day.

KP: … To V-E Day. You said that the war with Japan was an afterthought to many Canadians.

MP: It was. I mean, the whistles in town blew and things like that, but there wasn't the jubilance of V-E Day. We had made a commitment to the Americans, of course, for help in the Pacific, but we really hadn't got that off the ground.

KP: So that was in the future.

MP: Yes, right.

KP: In terms of, particularly after V-E Day, when it's clear that the Canadian war effort was going to wind down, what was the mood like at the processing center?

MP: Boredom easily set in after, I mean, everybody was coming home and they wanted to get out. But things were much better because the war was over. We knew there was an end to all this. I did volunteer work a few times helping the Red Cross with the new arrivals. They would bring the troops off the trains and into the exhibition grounds and into this one building. Then in a typical Canadian military style, they were not allowed to meet their families until roll call was over. The families were in the baseball stadium (where the Blue Jays now play) on the exhibition grounds. They had to go in there and wait, and then the troops marched in, in formation, from the building into the stadium area. One day, I was walking along. It was right at lunchtime, and these guys weren't precision marchers at this point, they were just holding their duffel bags and walking along, but they were in formation. But the front end of the line had just gotten into the stadium. This tremendous roar went up from the people there. … As the column was passing me (I was trying to cross the street and had to stop) this young man looked over at me as he was going by and he said, "There must be one hell of a ball game going on in there." … I thought, for somebody who had been overseas for five years, that was pretty remarkable. Then, I volunteered to help the Red Cross serve people in the canteen, but I didn't last long there. I was just a coward. I could not handle seeing the families come back with kids, with this man who's now "Daddy," after the initial welcoming and then standing there, not knowing what to say to one another. You know, a six year old kid standing there, that this man is "Daddy, but he's not, I don't know him from Adam." It was heartbreaking.

KP: This wasn't an isolated incident.

MP: No, it was not. … Then, the thing that really did me in, and I keep thinking I must have dreamed it, but I didn't, it's so horrible, and this is one of the things that I feel was inhumane. There must have been a better way to handle this. But this one young man, who was quadriplegic, was in a reinforced basket, a round, big basket with handles on it. He had been in the tank corps, and he had his jaunty little tam on and everything. And I thought, "My God, what a terrible way. Couldn't they have gotten a wheelchair or something?" It just seems so inhumane. I'm embarrassed; I am really ashamed that that's how they were treated. I never used the term "basket case" ever again.

KP: Because he literally was in a basket.

MP: He was literally in a basket.

KP: Did he come to the Red Cross center to meet his family?

MP: Well, his family was standing all around him, and there again, the painful expressions. They were happy to see him, that he was alive, of course, but you could see the pain on the face of the older people there. Perhaps a couple of them were his parents. He was not old, probably in his twenties.

KP: You knew a lot of people in the factory who got married very quickly …

MP: Yes.

KP: … because of the war. Then they ended up having kids that the fathers didn't really know when they returned.

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you know if any of these people had marriage problems?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you know a lot of people who made it?

MP: Many. Some of the men that came back, walked in and found their wives living with somebody else and all kinds of things. I mean, war, this is going to sound like I'm pontificating here, but it goes so far beyond battle scars, because it can destroy the whole fabric of life. It had to be a very strong family, because when you're away for six years, or five years, it played havoc with a good many family structures. It was expected that you would come back and resume [your life], but in many cases, that just didn't work. … That's when some of these people got their compassionate discharges.

KP: Was it because of the dysfunction?

MP: Yes, the family. They wanted to take their kids back, anyway, at least, get their children and continue with their life or get a divorce, or whatever. That happened more than once, people walking in and finding their wives living with somebody else. Of course, when they were overseas, I'm sure they weren't angels either.

KP: Oh, yes. I understand.

MP: You know, even my last boss, who was a very straight arrow business type and did not have a funny bone in his body, lived with a woman in England partly because (there was no thought of not coming back to his wife and family) they could get groceries and things like that that the English couldn't get. Her husband was in the navy somewhere, so they lived together. This was common. I never made a commitment to anybody. As you pointed out, a lot of the men did want to get married before they went overseas, because they needed something to hang onto at home. But I just wasn't ready to make a commitment like that, because you don't know what your life is going to be when they come home. Also, they look a heck of a lot different when they're out of their uniforms.

KP: It sound like you thought about a lot of this.

MP: Yes, I did. I made it a rule that I would not make any commitment, even if I wanted to, while I was in the service. And I didn't, and I tried to be very careful about turning anyone down. Later on, two of them came back and wanted to pick up where we left off. Then it was difficult.

KP: Was there a lot of pressure on women to support men's morale?

MP: Yes. They really needed this support system in place before they went, and you can certainly understand it. My boyfriend was taking two girls out. I knew that. He'd tell me about them when he'd write, and then, when I started to go out with this Charlie things changed. One commitment we had made to each other was that we would write once a week. … Evidently, my letters got a little behind and I got a tinge of guilt, and so I wrote two letters close together (three or four days), thinking it would make him very happy. Well, the letter I got back said he got these two letters together and he guessed that "the man shortage must be coming to a crucial point in Canada." I had Charlie's platoon totally surround me, while I stood in the middle. I had the picture taken and I sent it to Bob with the comment, "It's possible, but I hadn't noticed." Things started to unravel between us after that.

KP: When did you leave the military?

MP: January of '46.

KP: So it was several months after V-J Day that you finally got out.

MP: Because we had all these returnees to process.

KP: And it sounds like you were also on a point system.

MP: Yes, we were. We had to take a sort of "wait our turn" philosophy. I applied for my discharge in September, using the excuse I wanted to further my education, but it didn't come through till January of '46. I was twenty and a half years old at that point.

KP: Even though you hadn't been overseas, you had seen a good part of the military.

MP: Yes.

KP: You had been through basic.

MP: Working at a war plant and then the service (twenty months). You compare that to a twenty-year-old now. Of course, I was not an isolated case by any means. It was the norm.

KP: What happened after you were discharged?

MP: I stayed right in Toronto. I enrolled for a business machines course at Burroughs. I mean, there were others. Business machines were just beginning to appear. And there were some others. I think what later became IBM was going full-tilt, but Burroughs was the one that had training schools. I went there and I took all their business machines. It was a six-months course.

KP: Was this paid for by the Canadian government?

MP: Yes, this was from my veteran's benefits. They also paid your living expenses.

KP: After finishing this training, where did you go?

MP: I went to work in a bank.

KP: In Toronto?

MP: Actually, a trust company, and I was there for about four and half years, until I came to the United States.

KP: How did you end up coming to the US?

MP: Well, my sister married an American, and she got rather lonely for some of her own family and friends, and so I came over. Actually, I had planned to go to Vancouver. Another gal and myself wanted to go to Vancouver to work. The trust company had an office out there, and we wanted to transfer. But then I came to Detroit to where my sister was living, with the intent of coming for two years. Then my whole life changed.

KP: Your two years turned into a ...

MP: Lifetime.

KP: Citizenship.

MP: Right, and a marriage, a divorce, kids.

KP: Did you meet your husband in Detroit?

MP: Yes, he was from Detroit. He was teaching at Wayne State University, as a matter-of-fact. He was a blind date. I had started at a non-accredited business college. It is now accredited, but then it wasn't. Because I wanted to take accounting courses and I didn't want to take the full curriculum. After two years at night school, I decided that this was a pretty stupid move, as in if I ever leave this area, I'm going to be dead-in-the-water, because it was not accredited. So I transferred to Wayne State University, where I started taking psychology courses (I have a minor in psych). I was employed during that time. Bob (Pease) was teaching in the chemical engineering department and working on his Ph. D. at the University of Michigan. We met on a blind date and that's how it went.

KP: And that led to marriage?

MP: Yes.

KP: How did you come to New Jersey?

MP: Bob got a job there. I was still married at the time, and I was not able to resume my education.

KP: Was this the 1960s?

MP: It was early 1960s. We left Ann Arbor in '63, so it would've been about 1960. … The only night courses they had at U of M were adult education courses. I took a couple of those, which were very interesting, including Russian literature.

KP: But you couldn't get an accounting degree?

MP: No. Geology was the only thing they offered for credit. Can you believe this? Anyway, I just worked until he was finished, and then he got a job with Allied Chemical (which is now Allied Signal) in New Jersey.

KP: Yes.

MP: He was in research there, on plastics.

KP: You came to the Morris county area.

MP: Yes. We lived in Denville for awhile. We finally built a house in Randolph. By this time, we had two children, but the marriage was getting rather rocky. … They had built a junior college just up the road from our house. When it opened, I started attending. They only had one building- administration offices were on the first floor and classrooms were on the second.

KP: Which community college did you attend?

MP: The Morris County Community College.

KP: Oh, when it was just built?

MP: Yes.

KP: Yes, because, I remember when that was being built.

MP: Really? Well, I was in that first class.

KP: The County College of Morris.

MP: Yes, County College of Morris, right. I took about forty credits there, and, by then, I realized that I needed a career, a profession, as we had split up. I realized I had to continue. It was mandatory. When I started, if I had thought of four years, at night, with a family and working full-time, forget it. But when you get forty credits behind you, it seems possible. Then I transferred to Rutgers- Newark campus.

KP: And you started in 1971.

MP: Yes, I didn't graduate 'till '77, but it was all night school.

KP: I taught night school up in Newark.

MP: Oh, did you?

KP: Actually, some of the best students I've ever had were in those night classes. I was really amazed, because some of those people also had full-time jobs and were still able to do well in school.

MP: Yes. Well, I didn't do so great the last three semesters, because I was carrying nine credits and going to school four nights a week. I'd fall asleep in that damn last class. I had kids at home during this [time], and I was a single parent. It just was too much. I should not have done that.

KP: Where did you work?

MP: I worked in Newark, at a CPA firm called Besser, Colner, Herbs, and Lustbader. They were on Broad Street.

KP: And you were very active in politics. You mentioned that your name was put in for a position in the Assembly.

MP: Yes, to cover a vacancy that had occurred. My name was put in the hopper to cover the vacancy, but I said that I really couldn't do it. I had to finish my education. This was when I was still going to night school in Newark and working full-time. I couldn't take two days a week to go to Trenton.

KP: Yes. Much less run the election.

MP: I was very active in all the political campaigns. I worked quite heavily in Bill Bradley's first campaign. He was still playing for the Knicks when I first met him. He lived in Morris.

KP: Yes.

MP: In fact, our county chair, Steve, went to Princeton with him and they were friends, so when Bill and his wife were looking for a place to live, Steve helped him find a house in Denville. Bill would make the circuit, you know, attend all our political affairs for two years there, while he was still playing basketball, before he decided to run for public office.

KP: The chairman that helped him, do you remember his last name?

MP: Yes, Steve Ritcher.

KP: Were you ever active in any women's organizations?

MP: Yes, I started, actually, with the gal who replaced me in the Assembly run, Rosemary Totaro. This was right after Watergate and she won.

KP: So Democrats had a chance in your locality.

MP: Yes, absolutely. … Rosemary had organized a state chapter of the National Federation of Democratic Women. She also started the county chapter in Morris, and I succeeded her as president. … Then, when I later moved to Hudson County, I organized a Hudson County Chapter. We had about forty-five members. A gal, who was in the Assembly, joined our group. We had a good thing going. … The county executive was very supportive.

KP: Which county executive?

MP: Hudson County. Bob Janisliewski. In fact, I just saw him in August, in Chicago. I was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, and he was there.

KP: So you're still very active in politics.

MP: Yes.

KP: Oh, okay.

MP: I am now the treasurer for the county organization in Pinellas, in central Florida.

KP: When did you become so interested in politics?

MP: After my marriage broke up, I tried to find care for my two children- while I worked and really needed daycare. There was a big push on to have day care centers, as women were entering the work force and there was no adequate childcare. Nixon was the president at that time, and, along with a lot of other people, I wrote letters. … At that time, New Jersey had a representative on the Ways and Means Committee, where this whole thing had to go through. … I deluged him with letters, and, a bill finally went through. Congress passed the law and set aside fifteen million dollars of seed money to the centers. Nixon impounded the funds. I just went ballistic over this. Presidents cannot do that anymore. As you know, there was a law passed after that, that once it goes through, the funds cannot be impounded. But that's when I really started. You have no idea of what kind of a catalyst that was to get me started.

KP: Could you talk about what it was like to be a single mother?

MP: Okay.

KP: I'd be curious about your thoughts and your experiences.

MP: Okay. Well, really, it was very difficult, because at that time there was a lot of discrimination in many ways. Before I was married, I had been the one who had the credit cards and everything, as Bob was going to school, as well as teaching and had paid cash for everything. I had to transfer everything to his name. And, of course, after we were married, my name had to be changed. When we split up, guess who got the credit cards? He did. I had no standing whatsoever, even though I had worked almost the entire time, paid the bills, everything. I had to start from scratch. … They only considered, at that time, the money that you were earning. They did not consider child support, or anything, so I didn't have enough income. They took a look at that and took a look at the mortgage payment, so I couldn't qualify. And women, at that point, if one ever finally did get a mortgage, paid a two percent higher interest rate. It was just incredible. The young people now have no idea.

KP: So it sounds like all this pushed you to be active in politics.

MP: Yes, I didn't choose to be as [active], but I just did. When you fight for your rights, it just happens. I was in the man's profession at that time, too, which contributed to my experience.

KP: You mentioned that earlier that you were in an accounting firm.

MP: Yes, I'd go out in the field as a junior with three guys, the manager, a senior, or semi-senior, and two juniors, of which I was one. We'd be at clients' [offices], and they would refer to the men as the accountants and me as the bookkeeper. Oh, it was just incredible. All these little insignificant [things], but very prominent insults, you know.

KP: Was this after you had your accounting degree?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you take your CPA exam?

MP: Yes, I did.

KP: That's a very difficult test.

MP: Yes.

KP: I've heard a number of horror stories about it.

MP: Yes. It really was miserable. It was a Jersey license, and I worked in New York. I started working for a firm there, an international firm, Touche Ross. Then in 1990, Touche merged with Deloitte, Haskins, and Sells, and about ten months after that, I was retired. I don't have a license anymore. I let it expire, as there's no reciprocy between New Jersey and Florida.

KP: What type of projects did you do in accounting?

MP: Well, in the early years, of course, you did everything. Write up, and this was in the days before computers, so you did your write up, you carried it right through to preparation of financial statements. You had a lot of fieldwork, where you would go to clients, and depending on what stage they were at (some of them had bookkeepers, some didn't) you would pick up at whatever point they were at. Most were good-sized firms, had bookkeepers. Then you would review the books and prepare the financial statements, if they didn't have them prepared. … Then, at the end of the year, you would do your audit or compilation. There's a compilation, review or an audit that can be done. Most of them were compilations, 'cause they weren't public companies. The last place I worked in New Jersey was in Florham Park, and I was there eight years. I was on a manager level when I left. I've always had a job. I'm an achiever-type, I guess. That's why I can't stand this retirement business.

KP: You're not a happy retiree.

MP: No, after Florham Park, I went then to New York City to work.

KP: How do you think your life would have been different if you grew up now, if you were twenty-one right now?

MP: If I were twenty-one now, I would immediately finish college, you know, if possible, assuming that ...

KP: You could afford it.

MP: … funds were available. I would immediately start on a career and hopefully find somebody to spend my life with. But a career would still be very much a part of my life all the way through.

KP: When you were growing up, did you feel that women were pressured to find a husband?

MP: Yes, definitely. Your goals were your husband's goals. In Ann Arbor, all the wives were working. Sometimes they'd have a baby, but they'd be back at work at the end of a week. They didn't keep you in the hospital very long then. Their husbands were in school and needed the money. They were the breadwinners. Unfortunately, you don't split credits or a law degree when you get divorced, but that's the way the world worked then.

KP: Did you remarry?

MP: No, I didn't. I've never remarried.

KP: What led you to retire to Florida?

MP: Oh, it was just I knew I couldn't afford to stay in Hoboken. I was forcibly retired from Touche. I was sixty-five anyway, so I couldn't really complain, I guess. Also, they could get somebody a lot younger and for a lot less money than they were paying me. Really, you're at risk [if you're] over fifty-five. … My sister was living in Naples, Florida. She and her husband had retired down there. She was sending me all this propaganda all the time. I went and I liked the Gulf side. I don't like the Atlantic side as well. It's more heavily populated and more expensive. I just started north of Tarpon Springs (about the middle of the state), picked up newspapers and visited models of homes. My sister met me in Tampa, and we went right down the coastline to Naples. I liked the Tampa area because there was more things going on. I thought there would be a better opportunity to develop a client base, if I needed it. I didn't do it, but, at that time, that was the philosophy behind it.

KP: Did you work at all when you went to Florida?

MP: Yes. I worked during tax season last year and the year before.

KP: So you only recently moved to Florida.

MP: Yes. August of '93. I actually moved my furniture down in June, but I had to come back up here and work to help with the August 15th extensions. I left on August 16th to go back down to live permanently. At that time, I was doing *per diem* work, but largely for one firm in Manhattan. But I did work tax season for one firm, which I didn't care for at all. … Then, last year, I worked for a firm which was really a good, quality firm. But the computer skills that are required right now, I mean, I do have some, but they're not up to par. … We were in and out of about four different kinds of tax programs, you know, as well as just regular, and, in some cases, write up, on a couple. It was a real struggle for me. They had no idea how old I was when they hired me. I was the only one on the professional staff over thirty-five. I can't compete anymore. It was such a bitter pill for me to swallow, you have no idea.

KP: So you've really seen the computer really change the accounting industry.

MP: Yes.

KP: Because your education was still pretty recent.

MP: Yes.

KP: But it's changed that much since you've been in the business.

MP: Right. … I started a Master's program at Fairleigh Dickinson (in taxation), but I never finished. [I was] within fifteen credits of [it] when I moved to Florida. But tax is my heavy, although I did do some certified audits on non-profit organizations in Manhattan toward the end (the entertainment industries). It was kind of interesting, and we'd get free tickets to the plays and shows.

KP: Oh, that is very nice.

MP: Yes. Some of them. Not always.

KP: You mentioned that you're not a happy retiree.

MP: I have to feel like I'm accomplishing something. I tried volunteer work down there. Of course, up here, I was a volunteer. In Hoboken, I was a volunteer with the AIDS program, when the Franciscans first started it, with Brother Bob. I'm going to be seeing Brother Bob on Wednesday. Also, I got active in politics again. But I just feel like there's a big vacancy. At Christmas time, when this ad was on television (it was only on twice) for the Peace Corps wanting people with accounting backgrounds, that was the catalyst to get me to apply.

KP: So you've joined the Peace Corps.

MP: Yes, there's one last step I have to do. I have to be fingerprinted, get my reference letters in, and medical and dental check, and then that's it. I'll find out exactly what country.

KP: While it's not unheard of to have senior citizens join, if you don't mind me using the term ...

MP: No.

KP: … the Peace Corps.

MP: Senior citizen. I will be seventy-two very shortly.

KP: It's still not that common. I think most of Peace Corps volunteers as being in their twenties.

MP: Yes.

KP: I know Jimmy Carter's mother went in to become a nurse. I'm sure it must have given you some pause at times.

MP: No, not really. I have been always ready for a challenge. I mean, my life has taken such screwy turns. As a matter-of-fact, I think it was the CEO of IBM, who was on TV three months ago and is getting ready to retire. They had brought somebody else on board, and a comment that he made really stuck with me. He said, "I don't know what I'll be doing, but I'm convinced it's going to be something different, because I'm of the firm conviction that everybody should be repotted every fifteen years."

KP: So you like the idea of this ...

MP: Yes, total change. You need the challenge. It broadens your life. When I got into the AIDS volunteer work, I was assigned a buddy. It was the very beginning of the AIDS volunteerism. I met a whole group of people whose lifestyle was completely different from anything I had known living in Morris Country.

KP: I grew up in Morris County.

MP: Oh, you did?

KP: I grew up in the Roxbury, Mount Arlington area. I'm very familiar with that whole place.

MP: My daughter lives in Roxbury now.

KP: Oh.

MP: She's in Landing.

KP: Oh, yes.

MP: The one who's graduating on Sunday from Seton Hall (Master's program).

KP: That was my mailing address. So I'm very familiar with Morris County.

[tape paused]

MP: Regarding AIDS, the buddy that I had, David, had contracted AIDS from his lover, who was an older man, Randy, who still has a lamp store in the Village on Hudson Street. If you ever want an unusual lamp, or anything like that, go. … It was called "Uplift," and is right around the corner from Christopher Street. He took care of David (who was my buddy) in his apartment in Hoboken. Also in the apartment, there was his current lover and a transvestite (a black fellow who looked as gorgeous as a woman, much better as a woman). I was plopped into this environment, and I used to go over there, after David got out of the hospital, and take food and things. I'd come out of there with such a splitting headache- it was so different from anything

that I ever knew. And I can remember even the transvestite (who was called Marsha), whose name was Malcolm, asking Malcolm, "Wouldn't you rather be called Malcolm? It's such a nice name." You know, it's stupid, so stupid, now that I think of it, I mean, so prejudicial. Anyway, he said, "Doesn't matter." Anyway, to make a long story short, three weeks after all this, I was calling him, "Marsha." Just as curt as anything, and I didn't get a headache anymore. I realized how very narrow I had been on this whole thing and all the things I had been missing in my life, because they're very talented, creative people, usually.

KP: So you can really enjoy this new experience, because you're familiar with most of the aspects of it.

MP: Yes.

KP: But I'm sure that it's heartbreaking as well, because many of these people aren't going to make it.

MP: They all die.

KP: Especially in the beginning, there was really ...

MP: After the fourth one, I just burned out. When I went to Florida, I couldn't do it. I tried. I did sign up to do it, but I just couldn't. I had no more feeling. The last one I had was this Hispanic gal. The incidents of AIDS among the Hispanics, now, is rising, and they're mostly heterosexual. They're getting it from dirty needles. … This gal got it from her husband and had two little kids. That was a whole painful thing for me. She wanted to live so badly. I just couldn't deal with it anymore. Brother Bob bawled me out, when he called, and I was sobbing and crying. He said, "What's the matter? How are you doing?" and I told him. He said, "Get back on track. That was not your purpose, to get involved like that. You were supposed to make her quality of life better. She told me many times how much she enjoyed [your company]." It's a cardinal rule, "You're not supposed to get personally involved."

KP: It's very hard to actually accomplish that.

MP: I can't, I just can't do it. … When they die, it takes something out of you.

KP: Did you know anything about gays in the Canadian military during World War II?

MP: It was never even discussed.

KP: No instances?

MP: If there were any, I didn't know about it.

KP: In the processing, did you ever come across some guy who was discharged because he was gay?

MP: They would never have said. It would not have been discussed. The Canadian Army and the Canadian people, like the British, have a cardinal rule that discretion is the law of the land. Doesn't really matter so much what you do, just be discreet about it, and if you're not, that's when the sky falls in.

KP: So you had no experience with gays in the Canadian military.

MP: I didn't. I didn't even know such a thing as homosexuality existed.

KP: In the American military, there was a real effort to screen out people who could be gay.

MP: Oh.

KP: I mean, it was dependent upon the needs for manpower.

MP: Yes.

KP: If there was going to be ...

MP: Because in World War II, they needed people to go over there and carry a gun.

KP: But it could still apply, because people have told me stories about it. One instance, someone whose uncle reported for induction and told them he was a ballet dancer, and even though he was married, they didn't take him. He didn't fit the psychological profile. The psychological profile said he would be gay, so he ended up never serving in the military, because he was never inducted, which is probably an isolated story but it's indicative. That was never part of the screening that you ...

MP: Not at our depot.

KP: You became an American citizen.

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you have any ambivalence leaving Canada?

MP: Yes.

KP: You served in the military, and that is one of the ultimate symbols of patriotism. Did that make it harder for you to leave Canada?

MP: No, because you put the war behind you when it's over. … Once I got here, I realized I could go to school at night, which I couldn't do in Canada. They didn't have any university night schools, and here they did, so I knew that I could do much better here. The pay was better and

everything, so I didn't have any problems with that. The only funny feeling that I had was when I was going through my swearing in. When I became a citizen, a citizenship ritual was that you have to swear that you will take up arms against any country other than the United States. I had a problem with that. But I don't think I ever could have taken up arms against Canadians.

KP: That's where the loyalty lies.

MP: Yes, my ex-husband used to say, "Up here (my head), she's American, down here (my heart), she's Canadian," you know.

KP: There are a lot of connections between Canadians and Americans.

MP: Right.

KP: But they're also very different countries. They have really different cultures.

MP: Yes, they do.

KP: What's the biggest difference that you've noticed between the United States and Canada?

MP: Well, again, we have to put this in a context of the era in which this occurred, which would be 1950s. The thing that I had the most difficult time with coming over was the color of the money. I used to panic that I'd give out a ten dollar bill instead of a one.

KP: Oh, yes, the Canadian money is different.

MP: Yes. And I did do that once. In Canada, they're all nicely colored. The other thing was the friendliness up front when it didn't really mean that they wanted to be friends. It seemed to me to be almost like hypocritical. They were calling me by my first name at the bank after I had been there two days. That shocked the heck out of me. In Toronto, when I worked at the trust company, the man who sat behind me called me Miss Nelder for three years. This was a tremendous contrast.

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

KP: Did you notice anything the countries had in common?

MP: The commonalties, basically, our lifestyle, which was, at that time, a little better here. We have a lot of the same foods, a lot of the same living conditions, and so forth, so that there wasn't really much of a difference there. I think the differences are minor- the friendliness issue was one, the money was another. … Then, I think Americans tend towards ebullience. The Canadians tend to be somewhat subdued in relating their own accomplishments as opposed to Americans. One tends to downplay. It's not considered socially acceptable. Americans don't have that problem. I can't think of another thing that was really different.

KP: Could you talk a little about D-Day and its effect on where you were?

MP: It was a very mournful day. They got us right up and we were put in formation. It was right after reveille. We had to march into the center of town, where they had a cenotaph, where they were going to hold prayer services. It's a very moving time. We marched using step- a sort of subdued goose-step, accompanied by muffled drums. We marched to our pipe band, and muffled drums meant that the skins were thrown over the drums. [There was] another thing [that] happened that day that I will never forget. They played taps, of course, at the end, following the mayor's service, where he referred to us as the Canadian Army "Corpse." Then this piercing, agonizing scream was made from one of the gals in our platoon. Then she slumped to the ground. It turned out that her brother had been killed in Italy two weeks before. I've never heard a human cry like that in my life, and I hope I never do again.

KP: The service really had stirred up people's emotions.

MP: Yes, it did. It made one realize, "This war was no fun thing. There is going to be a lot of people killed, so you better get on your knees right about now."

KP: For Americans, World War II is viewed as the "good war." Is that how they viewed it in Canada?

MP: Yes.

KP: I get a different sense from the Canadians.

MP: No.

KP: Did they have a lot more ambivalence toward the war?

MP: I don't think you'll talk to any Canadian, including me, that feels that any war is a good war, and that was not a good war. We lost a lot of men and some women. It just destroys the whole fabric of your country, right from family life on up. And I don't know that you ever regain it all.

KP: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

MP: No.

KP: The Canadian Legion never asked you to join?

MP: Yes. Until recently, I've been somewhat ashamed to admit being a CWAC, because of the reputation the Canadian Army had for women service personnel.

KP: Really? Because Canadians, in general, really had a ...

MP: Had a very dim view of the Canadian [Women's Army Corps].

KP: So you wouldn't tell people that you were in the Canadian Army.

MP: No, I never talked about it. I never said anything, not even to my kids.

KP: Really? When did your kids learn about it then?

MP: Oh, about, I guess, about ten years or so ago. We were talking about something and my neighbors mentioned, as they had been talking to me, and this thing came up about the poster. He said, "Where's the poster?" I said, "I don't have a copy of that poster." It was like War Bond Drive #9 was no big deal.

KP: Yes.

MP: They just needed another face to launch this thing. That's when my kids found out. They wanted to know what was going on.

KP: Did they ask you what you did during the war?

MP: No. I've just now given them this summary.

KP: Oh, okay. I can make a copy of the interview if you'd like to give them the interview.

MP: Oh, thank you. Yes, I would love to have that.

KP: Hopefully we'll have your transcript by the time you get back from …

MP: From the Peace Corps.

KP: I wouldn't mind interviewing you about your experiences in the Peace Corps.

MP: Oh.

KP: It's a two year commitment.

MP: Yes. It's two years, actually.

KP: Yes. Well, let me try to get you a copy of the tape before you go.

MP: Okay.

KP: I'll ask Melanie to dub a copy and send it to you right away.

MP: Okay, I'll be in Florida.

KP: So your kids still don't know a lot about what you did during the war.

MP: No, they don't. This is the first.

KP: You mentioned that you did go to a reunion.

MP: Yes, I did.

KP: Was that in 1980?

MP: Yes. That was very interesting. There were not very many of them that I knew, other than Ruby and a couple other gals that I looked up on the list to see who was going to be there. … I had put my maiden name down there, as well as my married name, so I'd be recognized. It was real fun to see them there.

KP: What had happened?

MP: Most were married. One of them was a grandmother. Her husband had died.

KP: Did any of them have careers?

MP: No, not that I know of.

KP: So you were the exception.

MP: Maybe.

KP: It's interesting, because you've done a lot with your life, even when you were twenty-one. You've had a lot of experiences and people, nowadays, don't really think about that.

MP: Yes, it's been interesting. That's why I feel I've got one last shot here to do something interesting in my life. I'll be seventy-five when I get back. Maybe then I'll be able to put my feet up.

KP: Do both your daughters have college degrees?

MP: Yes.

KP: Did you want them to go to college?

MP: Yes, it was a definite part of our philosophy, and I just expected them to go. Surprisingly enough, even though their father has a Ph. D., he was more concerned about how much it was going to cost to send them, so he downplayed their college career. He wanted the older girl to go because she is extremely bright. He tried to steer Lisa in another direction.

KP: Yes.

MP: Lori's in research, like her dad, and works for Abbott Labs in Chicago. She's had some papers published and things like that. … She wanted to go to school. She wanted to go into the sciences. She went to Delaware. That was the only one that I could afford, as he didn't contribute for that and I didn't have the money for a lawsuit. It was either tuition or court.

KP: Yes, I understand. No, I had the same. Well, my natural father went to Germany, so.

MP: Oh, gee ...

KP: So divorce laws don't cross borders.

MP: No, they don't. There's no reciprocity between international laws anymore, it seems.

KP: Yes.

MP: Lori graduated from Delaware with an honors degree in biology, worked at Dupont for awhile, then went on to Abbott Labs in Chicago. Lisa works for Nabisco. And she went in there as a temp. I didn't think that kid was going to finish college. She dropped out in her senior year … but then she went back and finished.

KP: But she has an MBA.

MP: Yes, she has it. Her last class was on Saturday. She's getting an MBA in finance at Seton Hall.

KP: So your daughters have followed the path that you wanted to follow.

MP: Yes. They have. … I have a foster daughter in between there that I didn't get 'till her early teens. She has not gone to college, but she's now talking about doing that. That's my hope, because she'd make a marvelous lawyer. I keep hoping.

KP: Hoping that she'll go to college.

MP: Yes.

KP: Was there anything that I forgot to ask you?

MP: No, I don't think so. I can't think of another thing. We've really gone into this in great depth here. I'm amazed.

KP: Oh, no. It's been a real pleasure. As I said, I want to put on tape again and I hope we can talk again after you get back from the Peace Corps.

MP: I'd love to.

KP: Because I'd love to do a follow-up interview about your Peace Corps years and compare that with your military. I knew someone who was one of the first people who joined the Peace Corps, and he said that the boot camp training was like military training.

MP: Oh, really?

KP: He said they used to have forced marches. It was almost para-military. I'm sure that it's changed a lot since then.

MP: Yes.

KP: I'd be curious to hear your experiences.

MP: Okay.

KP: Well, thank you very much.

MP: Thank you.

KP: I realized I forgot to ask you what you thought of your uniforms.

MP: They were all right. I liked them. We had a summer and a winter uniform, and the summer uniform, if I can find it in here, actually I liked better. We also wore battle dress, just for the office. The uniforms were beige with the olive green, or khaki. Canadians don't say "khaki," we say "kharki."

KP: So you felt very professional.

MP: Yes, I did.

KP: Because some of our military women really complained that some of the services really have awful uniforms, that they're very uncomfortable, they're very difficult to maneuver in and they don't feel very professional in them.

MP: No, I never felt that way. Really, I thought they looked pretty good, as they were tailored to fit.

ADDENDUM
TO
RUTGERS WORLD WAR II INTERVIEW

I was inducted into the Peace Corps in May, 1998. I was sent to Kazakhstan, a Russian Republic formerly part of the USSR. After my twelve weeks of in-country training, I was posted to Almaty, a city of one-and-a-half million people and the former capital. It is more European than any other city in Central Asia. It's quite beautiful, with lots of trees (no lawns), with gorgeous, high, snow-covered mountains at the south end. With just a fifteen-minute bus ride, one can be hiking in the mountains.

My first five months, I worked as an accountant for an NGO (non-governmental organization), however, they really didn't need my level of expertise. I asked the Peace Corps for a change; I then started calling some of the universities in town myself to see if they needed teachers in Accounting. The Kazakhstan Institute of Management and Strategic Research (KIMEP) welcomed me immediately. I started there March 1, 1999. At that time, it was an MBA School (not comparable to western MBA schools), however, they were preparing an undergraduate program to begin in September, 1999.

I was given the job of compiling the accounting curriculum (based on an older US program). In May, I began teaching (Summer School) "International Accounting Standards" and "Taxation." Taxation was a real challenge - the Kazakhstan portion (half of the semester) was from an English translation of their Tax Law (which changed every two months), some of which was entirely incomprehensible to me!. By the way, KIMEP is the only English language university in Central Asia. The day students had to pass an English proficiency exam before being admitted. The night students did not, so, I had both a (Russian) class interpreter, and a translator for my lectures. (Students there have no books, they just come and take notes from oral lectures.) I fully prepared my lectures and had them copied for distribution to the students. It was much appreciated. In addition to teaching the above two courses, I led accounting workshops for undergrads (I had approx. 125 students in those classes) for one semester. I resigned from that after one semester as I was working six days a week by this time. The above was my PRIMARY project. We volunteers were required to have secondary projects as well. For that, I taught Advanced English for two classes of young diplomats and local public officials attending a government school, gave two three-week seminars on Accounting, Marketing and Business at another University, (largely Kazakh, where grades were sold, but, not by me), gave a one week course in "Endangered Species of Kazakhstan" at a summer camp in the mountains (for teenagers), wrote a successful Grant for Special Olympics-Kazakhstan, so they could open and equip a new branch.

I joined an English Club that had been formed in 1986, when it was not healthy to do so, by scientists and medical professionals who were members of the National Academy of Science. Club meetings were held in the National Academy of Sciences Building. I enjoyed it all very much, until NATO bombed Kosovo! Americans aren't too well liked over there anyway. The members were predominately Russian, although a few Kazakhs began attending the last year. During our club meetings, if anything political was being discussed, someone would jump up and lock the door! The Russians are no longer the dominant ethnic group in Kazakstan now - the Kazakhs have taken over what used to be their country in the first place. Kazakhs are descendents of ancient Asian tribes and the Mongol Hordes. They have very white skin, black hair and dark, almond-shaped eyes. Divisiveness is still readily apparent between the Kazakhs and the Russians..

I also opened a Scholarship Fund at KIMEP for Accounting majors. Any money I made was deposited there, along with donations from KIMEP programs I had been active in. The first distributions were given out this past April (2001).

To summarize, living conditions were akin to being spit out of a time machine back into the 1950s. Medical care was even worse, so we had our own PC medical staff, or would go to the American doctor over in the Embassy. Anything needed beyond that meant being sent back to Washington for care. My apartment was quite nice, after I got it clean. I had a furnished bedroom, living room (complete with all fifty volumes of Lenin in a bookcase), kitchen, bathroom, toilet closet and balconies off the living room and bedroom. The plumbing left a lot to be desired; all pipes are outside of the interior walls, as the walls are cement. I loved the people, especially the Russians. Poetry, music, parties (with many vodka toasts) was a frequent and natural part of their everyday living. I miss it. Incidentally, vodka is very inexpensive. Good Russian and local vodka was $1.25 per liter. The cheaper kinds (around .75 or .80 cents) are also used for antifreeze, paint thinner, to remove black marks, etc.

Regarding World War II, I attended a luncheon at KIMEP given by the school president for Veterans of the "Great Heroes War" (which is World War II.) I have never seen so many medals in my life. One old soldier had his entire left uniform jacket covered. He had been a battalion tank commander and involved in two famous Russian battles where he was wounded three times, had the "Medal of Lenin" (the highest medal), two of the "Order of the Red Star" medals and twenty other medals for bravery. Another had been in the Battle of Stalingrad. He had been a university student in Moscow when war broke out (for them, June 23, 1941), had the rank of Senior Lieutenant, and was chief of the division inside Stalingrad. For one-and-a-half years, they had virtually no water or food. Russian planes flew over to drop bread, but, many times, they missed and it went into the German lines. One million people died of hunger and the city was two-thirds destroyed. They were bombed four times a day, then, shooting in-between. It took him a year in a hospital to recover (after the war). I wish I had been able to talk to them more, but, I was dependent on any time an interpreter could give me, so, I have only a few notes. The old soldiers are revered there and there's only a few left. They aren't living as long as our vets are. Old Soldier's Day is celebrated on February 23rd. (The men all get drunk).
There is a Women's Day as well, May 8th, a national holiday. The day before, we all got flowers and were taken out to lunch.

I went to Thailand over Christmas, 1999. What a great country! They LIKE Americans there. I spent one week in Bangkok (saw the beautiful temples) and one week in the north, Chaing Mai, a lovely little city in the mountains, near the Burmese border. In fact, it was under Burmese rule for two centuries, so, the spoken Thai language has a different sound there. They have a "Midnight Bazaar" where one can find the best bargains (silk blouses for $5; sterling silver earrings for $10). They have fast food places there, KFC, Burger King. There was an American airfield near there during the Vietnam War. On New Year's Eve (1999), there I was, eating a Big Mac, (a bit different from ours), in McDonald's and listening to Bonnie Raitt over the intercom!

May, 2000, (just before I left), I spent a week in Uzbekistan. It's completely different from Kazakhstan; the people are largely Turk/Arabic, which is reflected in their food, music and dress. It's eighty percent Muslim, so, women wear pantaloons, covered by a plain sheath with an overdress of shiny silk, sometimes covered with sequins or decorative stones. Even the women working on the roads were dressed this way. It blew my mind! I visited three of the ancient

cities on the old Silk Route, Tashkent (the capital, with an "old" and "new" city), Samarkand (where Putin's father lives), which has the only structure, a beautiful, blue-tiled Minaret, that Genghis Khan didn't level. He evidently galloped up to it, looked up and his hat fell off. This was interpreted as an omen that if he touched the Minaret, he would be beheaded, so, he prudently left it alone; Bukhara, a beautiful city carefully reconstructed on the original foundations (after Genghis) with awe inspiring blue-tiled mosques, mausoleums and attendant classrooms. Also, the old "Merchant's Center" of cavernous adobe brick buildings bordering the brick roadway where the camel caravans walked 1200 years ago was equally awe inspiring. The people are very artistic and the country is famous for its silk and the hand embroidery. I would love to go back (in spite of a day of food poisoning).

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

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