RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PEARL PATERSON THOMPSON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

GREG KUPSKY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Greg Kupsky: This begins an interview on December 18, 2001 with Mrs. Pearl Thompson in Chesterfield, Missouri by Greg Kupsky. First of all I'd like to thank you for talking with us today. To begin, tell me a little a bit about where you grew up.

PT: I began life in Irvington, New Jersey, in 1920. We moved to Union, New Jersey, when I was five, and then to France in 1929. I went to French schools, in Paris, so that French was my first language for a long time. When I came back to the United States, in October of 1935, things were getting very ugly in Europe, where Adolph Hitler was planning World War II.

GK: What do you remember about France when you got there? How were the people towards you?

PT: It took them about three or four years to decide to get friendly. But, it was a very exciting time. There were all sorts of scandals and things going on (ballet rose ?) scandals and there were several assassinations. The president of France, Paul Doumer was assassinated in 1932. King Albert of Belgium fell off a mountainside while climbing and was killed. There were all sorts of very exciting things happening. … The children were very politically minded and would be shout, "A Bas Daladier, A bas Saladier." He was a radical Socialist, and contaminated by the Stavisky scandals of 1934. This caused riots in the streets, and one in particular occurred in the Place de la Concorde, where busses were overturned and set on fire. Mounted police used truncheons on the crowds to disperse them. These fled back up the Champs Elysees driving all promenaders before them. I was one of them out for a Sunday stroll with my parents. The riots forced the resignation of Daladier. These were very young teenagers, but they were very politically minded. But, also in my family, you've already read my account, we knew what Hitler was up to, and it was clear that there would be trouble pretty soon, so we came back at the end of 1935. Then, I had two years of high school where I was, again an alien, I didn't even know what linoleum was. It was a very simple society compared to the very sophisticated society in France where, you know, I've been taken to nightclubs and the theater, all sorts of things that did not happen to … young teenagers in America.

GK: Where did you live in New Jersey when you came back?

PT: In Union. That's exactly where we had started.

GK: What was the reaction of the children there to you when you got back, how did they treat you?

PT: Well, they thought I was a bit [of a] high hat. Well, I was very reserved because, you know when you're new in any area, you tend of stand back and observe first to see what's expected of you, and it takes a while. So, they just thought I was snooty when I was only really reconnoitering the territory.

GK: You had mentioned a little bit about reading *Mein Kampf,* Hitler's newly published book of intent. What differences were there between French reaction to what was going on in Germany and the American reaction during the '30s?

PT: Well, the French positively could not believe that their Maginot Line could be breached, so they did not take it very seriously. Unfortunately, the Maginot Line had all its guns pointed only in one direction, east, and they could not be swiveled to turn around and fight when the enemy got behind it. So the enemy simply circumnavigated the top and bottom, and, you know, it threw them completely. But, they preferred to give up Paris than have it bombed, which I suppose is an understandable attitude, but it seemed not very smart. I had some Jewish friends and I've never known whether they ever escaped, if they were smart enough to get out. I don't know whether they did. I've never heard, I've never known, and I've always wondered.

GK: Did you notice differences about Americans and French opinions about the rise to power of Hitler before the war began?

PT: Well, Americans never really thought that the war could reach them. They thought, of course, "Sooner or later, we'll be in it, but, it will be like World War I, we won't get that involved." There were, even at college later on, many groups that did not believe in the war, and did not think that it was going to happen, and they would campaign against any possible involvement. Even Roosevelt said, "I hate war," but we got there just the same. … Of course, no one could have imagined, anyone in power, that we would get bombed at Pearl Harbor, although one of my journalism classmates was smart enough to think of it. … It was in May, probably of 1941, in the journalism class, he chose to hoax the AP [Associated Press] machine, which was the machine the news came in on. … He waved a news bulletin, which he purported to have come from AP, saying that "the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor." It impressed me enormously when it actually happened, but this was a good nine months later. But, apparently, it didn't occur to anybody in power.

GK: Do you remember his name by chance?

PT: I think it was Win [Winfield C.] Goulden.

GK: He was a journalism student.

PT: But, I don't know whether he would even remember. You remember the quirkiest things, and sometimes they're not at all important. There are much more important things that happen that you forget. But, for some reason it just raises a little flag in your mind and that's what you remember.

GK: So when you got back to Union, and had two years of high school, did you know then that you wanted to study journalism?

PT: No. It was intended, really, that I would major in languages, because I already had about four of them. In my French school, they insisted on teaching me Spanish and German, because I refused to take Latin. I said, "I would have no use whatever for Latin." … Then they wanted to teach me English and I said, "I already know English." I was really very stubborn, but, you see, this was a private school, so you can get away with all sorts of things. So, they substituted Spanish and German. … When I came back, they, more or less, expected me to major in languages. But the first year or so at Douglass [formerly New Jersey College for Women], I was

hitting the top grades, you know, it seemed to me that I might do better adding something else. I had a great-grandfather who was a journalist, and rather a sensational one at that. … He wrote about five books and so I thought, … "Well, maybe that's what I'll do." At his death [in 1895], he was the Foreign News Editor for the *Newark Evening News*, which is now defunct.

GK: What was his name?

PT: George Bennett Herbert.

GK: Whom do you remember at Rutgers?

PT: Hubert Ede was a Journalism professor, still working for the *Newark Evening News*.

GK: How did you decide on Rutgers? What made you to decide to go there, or even to college at all?

PT: Well, it was my parents' decision not mine. … They decided because it was close and they thought I'd be homesick. Of course, a lot of our area people did go there simply because it was one of the few state universities, it wasn't a state university at the time, but, it was still in the Depression era, in the sense that many who were qualified could not go. There wasn't enough money around for anybody to, especially if you had a brother, you know. I didn't. I was an only child. But boys were educated first, and if there was anything left over, the girls were, so there were a few really, who were able to go.

GK: How did the Depression affect your family?

PT: Well, it didn't affect us very much at all because we were in Europe all the time this happened, and our lives really reflected nothing about it. Whereas, of course, back in the States, there were people selling apples in the streets, because they couldn't get a job and having very hard times. We rented our house while we were gone and we had a succession of tenants who would stay six months, pay no rent, [and] move out. … One of them was so hard up, they burned all the wooden parts of the house in the burner to keep warm, you know, even things like toilet seats disappeared in there. [They burned] anything that was wood and would burn. So, we came back to a rather wrecked house that had to be restored a bit, but that's the only effect it really had on us.

GK: I was wondering did you have any relatives who stayed with you during the Depression?

PT: Well, most of my relatives are in California, or Canada, though I did have a few, but, one was a cousin who didn't get married until she was forty. I mean, really not much family at all. I had the same next-door neighbors. They were still there. They were very kind. In fact, the man next door had a hobby of collecting square dancing. [He] went all over the country collecting square dances and then he would … go to places where they had square dances and call them all night long. He invited me because he said, "You don't know anybody, so, you know, you come along." So, I went square dancing and all night long, it was *allemande* left, on the same leg, until I thought that I would like to unscrew that leg!

GK: So did you meet a lot of friends there?

PT: Yeah, I met a lot of people that way and then he also would put on shows at the high school, we put on a minstrel show. Those were the days when a couple of the cast members would wear black face and tell jokes, and then the rest of the cast, one or two could sing decently and the rest were the chorus. So, he invited me to join that. But, I said, "Well, I can't sing. I can't even carry a tune." … He said, "Oh, that's all right. Just don't sing loud enough to get everybody else off-key." … That's where I met my husband, and I was fifteen or sixteen and he was eighteen. He had graduated from the school. They made the boys up, too, with lipstick and rouge, you know, they didn't have a black face. So, he said afterwards, "How do I get this stuff off?" I had a jar of Ponds cold cream and I handed it to him and said, "That's how you do it."

GK: So, that's how you met?

PT: That's how we met.

GK: Then you started visiting with him a lot or dating right away?

PT: Oh, he collected me. He thought I was an oddity. He was born in England and he was an *émigré,* you might say, at the age of about six or seven. I think he probably was a little bit of a displaced person, too, in a sense and that's what attracted me to him the most. Two displaced people make one that isn't.

GK: Right. Did you keep in touch with any of the people you met in France?

PT: Oh, yes. I knew a French boy until his death at about age seventy-nine and he and his wife married and had two children. We visited them in France. They came and visited us in America several times. So, I kept in touch with them all that time and there was also an English girl whose family was, well, her mother was French, her father was English, and they were interned during World War II. He in one camp and the mother and daughter in another and I kept in touch with them all those years. … Then, I still know her, she's still alive. … During the war, I met some of the ATP flyers who were transporting planes from the United States to bases in Great Britain. By means of these men, I could send packages to my friends in France and England, such as butter, bacon, or other scarce foods. He could mail them or take them. My friends always wondered how it was done but I never told them.

GK: You would have graduated high school in what year?

PT: '37.

GK: '37? Okay. What were your first impressions of Rutgers when you got there?

PT: Well, it was very friendly. It was quite different in those days because it was so small. There was still the Depression factor in the sense that large parts of Gibbons campus were not open or used. … Over at Rutgers, they didn't have the joint female/male situation yet. There

were just a few fraternities, and the entire school could not have been more than five thousand [people] maximum at that time. Everybody was very friendly. It was just a habit that you spoke to everyone you saw, "Hello, how are you?" … It was sort of, you looked after everybody else. … It was a dressy period in the sense that we went to concerts [and] we always had to dress in long clothes, you know, formal clothes. Many of the girls just didn't have enough clothes to wear to the proms or the concerts, and so they would loan them to each other back and forth. Some of them were in the dressmaking courses and would make them for other girls. So, it was a remarkably friendly, small-town atmosphere, which is quite different today, people are much more separated. Even though you have diversity and people try to be friendly, you don't have the small town, village, almost, that we had.

GK: You decided to go into journalism. How long were you at Rutgers before you decided to go into this?

PT: It would have [been] just two years because by your junior year you decide, so I was decided then.

GK: What professors do you remember being your favorites, either in journalism or just in general?

PT: There's a whole list of them in the brochure Thanks for the Memories, the book I wrote for the Fiftieth Reunion of my Class of 1941. You can get the whole list of all the ones I remember. I'll tell you because this kind of amusing professor Salas who was the head of the Spanish department, was one of our big characters. Professor Salas, in speaking Spanish, would curve his fingers around his ears like horns, and prance and paw his way around the room. Just like a bull. He was quite fascinating, everybody got a kick out of him. There were a number of characters.

GK: Who would you say was your favorite professor?

PT: I didn't really have favorites. I think the ones that impressed me the most were the ones who were the most used, to put it that way. [Like,] the economics professor who said, "Big ants have little ants who feed on them. Little ants have lesser ants and so on *ad infinitum*," or something to that effect, which impressed me thoroughly. So that's what I remember.

GK: That's an important message.

PT: Oh, it was.

GK: Do you remember his name?

PT: Offhand, no, but he is listed in that book. The professor was Francis Hopkins.

GK: I heard a lot about Dean Metzger, do you remember Dean Metzger at all? Was he there while you were there?

PT: No, I don't remember Dean Metzger. President Robert Clothier, [President of Rutgers University] was the head of the whole shebang when I was there. We had a history teacher who was quite interesting, yes, you should mention her, Emily Hickman. She said, "When you learn anything you can put a circle around it, and then, as you grow older you always discover there's more that you didn't know outside the circle." Those weren't her exact words but that was more or less what she meant. Dr. Hickman was pro-Nazi at the time. That is to say, she made excuses for the German Socialist government. But then when the Nazi era ended and she discovered what she had really not known, somehow that saying applied more to her than it did to us, because she was teaching courses and we weren't. Now, we were always sort of struck by this anomaly, you might say, of someone in that position. The political science teacher taught me that reporters, in journalism particularly, are generally liberal, extreme left towards middle, but scarcely ever on the right, which means you should always listen very carefully to anything they say. … In journalism, I learned, too, that it is not what you put into a story but what you leave out which really affects the outcome of a story and the impression you get. So, I suppose, I learned a number of interesting things. The things that I enjoyed the most were music appreciation and the art appreciation courses, because, in later life, those were the things that I was able to enjoy. Most of the art in this room is mine.

GK: As a journalism student, learning to analyze everything you heard, how did you look at some of the radio broadcasts and the news you were getting in the late 1930s from Roosevelt or other sources?

PT: The ones we got, I suppose, that had the most impact was the abdication of King Edward VIII, who never really was crowned, but, he decided that he'd rather marry Wallis Simpson, who was twice divorced, utterly plain and forty, than be king. So that made a great impression on all of us, but most interesting about that story was that this was kept from the British public. They did not know what was going on. Whereas all of America and the rest of Europe was well aware, and tracked the couple everywhere they went and knew everything, but, none of it was told to the British. Well, they hoped that it would all just disappear and that when Edward was threatened with abdication he would, of course, let her go. It didn't work out that way. Well, I'm quite sure that England got a much better king when Edward abdicated, with his brother, George, because Edward was pro-Nazi, and George, although he had a terrific temper, depended a lot on his wife, who was Scottish, and the Queen Mum, who is still alive, I think, one hundred one [years old] now, was the key influence on his life and she kept him calm and reflective. … They stood by in Buckingham Palace when it was bombed in World War II instead of skedadling, so, I think, that he made a much better king than Edward would have been. But, that's a guess, you know.

GK: How did you look at Roosevelt and his announcements?

PT: Well, we did have a question in *The Caellian*, which is the Douglass newspaper. I was on the staff at the time, and we asked, "What do you think of the third term?" … The queries are in that book that you have there, and some of the answers. "Sure, why not?" said most of them. [Editor's Note: Mrs. Thompson is referencing the book she wrote with Frieda Finkelstein Feller, *Thanks for the Memories, or Fifty Years Later;* published by the Associate Alumnae of Douglass College in 1991] But, we just took it for granted. It was our country. In those days, everything

your country did was right. You really didn't explore too much political motives. We were very innocent as to public and political statements made by our government. They were right, they have to be, you know. We were self-sufficient, there was no question of global invasion, and they're not depending on anybody else. We thought we were being generous to go and help other people out, which wasn't quite as simple as it sounds because, in our Revolution, France loaned America one million dollars, which was a heck of a big sum in those days, and we never repaid it. So effectively, going to their aid in World War II was a way of repaying what happened. … I never heard that in any American history books. I read it in a French history book written by Andre Maurois. A little detail that America didn't choose to tell in the history books of those days. You know there are certain people who decide what goes in the history books and what doesn't. History is always a case for revisionism, and people who write their own history always put it in the best possible light.

GK: What were some other differences you noticed in history from what you learned in France and America?

PT: Well, I learned a great deal about the [Spanish] Inquisition and a lot of French history and a lot of British history, which were details that didn't come through in American history. Naturally, you dig into areas which are around you more and I never heard very much about the Balkans, or anything. You're polarized, always, wherever you are your history is what … you are the core and the centerpiece and it's everything that's around you that counts, and as you get farther and farther away from the core it's less important to you. So it take maybe years to discover that what happened in Russia, China, the Opium Wars, things which have a great impact on everything that we did, but we really didn't hear about these things.

GK: Were there differences in how France and America taught World War I?

PT: Well, no, I can't remember any real differences, except that the French hated the Germans and I don't suppose that in America we really took sides to that extent, because, you see, in America, particularly in New Jersey and I am sure in other states, there were large colonies of German people, who we knew, who we were friends with, and who were perfectly ordinary, nice people. We just couldn't imagine them doing any of the atrocities and things, so we didn't take it as personally.

GK: What else do you remember about Rutgers campus at that time? What was the mood on Rutgers campus when Britain and France went to war with Germany in 1939?

PT: Well, we knew, anybody who gave it any thought knew that we would have war, sooner or later. We just knew we were not going to escape it, and, of course, the French liner, *The Normandy* was in our port, which you may remember was brand new, gorgeous, decorated in ultra-modern fashion, in the most expensive ways, truly meant to showcase French art. … It was in the Port of New York to save it from Germany, and during some fitting, the liner caught fire. It was never known whether this was sabotage or an accident from a blowtorch by a workman. The result of it was that water poured onto it to such an extent that the liner keeled over in the Port of New York and sank on its side. So, it never was operative again, but such fittings as could be rescued ended up in some surprising places and the second class lounge ended up in my

lounge in Washington, DC. When I was a WAVE and we had barracks at 1809 G Street, in the lounge there were the items from the second class lounge, because this was enlisted territory. So I don't know if the officers got the first class. I don't know who got the first class.

GK: Are there any other things that stand out in your mind about Rutgers?

PT: I remembered a lot of people and some of them are still my friends, but out of my class of six girls, and many more boys, who later went to war. Four are still alive and we still get together and talk, and so forth. I suppose one of the things that intrigued us the most was that we got a brand new head of the journalism department named Frederick Merwin, who arrived from a midwestern university, and I don't remember whether it was Wisconsin, or one of those. He was thirty-six and had in tow his eighteen year old bride and since most of us were about nineteen or so, I guess, that tickled us more than anything.

GK: Do you remember mandatory chapel?

PT: Yes, but it didn't bother me that much. In other words, a lot of people objected to being told they had to do anything. … The first Tuesdays and Fridays were chapel days and we went, and we listened to … the woman who wrote … *Cheaper by the Dozen*, Gilbreth, she came and lectured to us. Margaret Mead, who wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa* [spoke to us]. Most of the history that Margaret wrote turned out to be fiction but she also came and talked to us amongst the others, she was the graduation speaker. The actress referred to as Elissa Landi … was someone else I remember and I remember her only because she said, "How do you describe a spiral staircase without using your hands?" But, you know, people talked, they gossiped, they wrote letters, they studied. If they didn't care for what was happening, they just didn't bother to listen. So it was something you did, like a class, but, it didn't bother us. It bothered the activists, who were always looking for something to be fussing about. … Also the end of the year, when we had carol singing and gift giving and things, it did bother the Jewish girls because they said, "It is not our holiday, it has got nothing to do with us, but we still have to go and sing carols." … They objected, too, to the registration day in September, 1937, which turned out to be on *Rosh Hashanah*. But, I said later, describing all this, you know it was just a simple mistake, you have today a calendar which tells you when is *Rosh Hashanah*, *Hanukah*, all the rest of the holidays, which you didn't know then if you weren't Jewish. So, the people who are organizing these things didn't know, couldn't have known. It was just simple accidental stupidity and nothing nasty was intended. It is simple ignorance and I suppose now we're all finding out about *Ramadan* and everything and we'll be expected to know when that occurred. But as it happens, I don't even know when Easter occurs since it's always on a different date anyway.

GK: Did you ever see any examples of anti-Semitism at Rutgers?

PT: Actually not. There was, well before our arrival in 1937, quite a nasty story. … You see there wasn't a Jewish fraternity, and so some people that I knew, I knew one Jewish boy, whom I thought was very cultured and a very nice chap, chose to join only the Scarlet Barbs and not a fraternity because he didn't want to classified, and another one, who had a Jewish mother and an non-Jewish father, chose not to reveal it. … It was also said that during the earlier period there had never been a Jewish instructor. This is something I couldn't speak about one way or the

other because often names were changed, you didn't know. … There was someone else I knew who changed his name, and there was a very famous columnist, Martin Agronsky [Rutgers College, 1936], who is listed in the Rutgers yearbook as Martin Agrons, but later, a few years afterwards when he became famous, he decided to live up to his name. So, I had and still have some very good Jewish friends. I send them Christmas cards and I say, "Look, I don't care about Christmas, I'm just checking on my friends once a year and wishing you a good, Happy New Year. It has nothing to do with how you celebrate your holidays and how I celebrate mine. It's checking up on you once a year." They enjoy it. It's got more to do with because they're friends, and one of my best friends still today is a Jewish girl. We get along beautifully, and we always have. So I think there was a lot less of it when I was there, and, in fact, I think my freshman year when we had houses and there might have been eight to twelve girls in a house depending on how the rooms were allotted and that year there were a couple of Jewish girls who went to their Jewish meetings once a week. Most of the rest of us professed to be nothing at all, and one girl said she was Dutch Reformed, at which we laughed. I mean, we were insensitive in that respect, [not] to somebody who was that type of Protestant, but because we felt we knew it all. We weren't religious to any strong extent at that point in time, and that would have been 1937-1938. It was a kind of scientific know-it-all attitude, I suppose, you know, religion was not important to us. We went along with everything because we weren't activists on the whole. Well, I did know a couple of girls in my class who were very, very Communist inclined, and because they felt the need to share, they were idealistic, they did not know the reverse of the coin was oppression. One of those girls had a report on her by the FBI and it crossed my desk when I was in the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, DC. This girl, that I knew I was surprised. I knew she had Communistic inclinations but I hadn't realized she had ever joined the Communist party. … There was, at that time, in the school "red scares," and believing that there were "reds under the beds," and all these sort of things, and, I suppose, there were more quiet Communists than we knew. But this again shows how little religion was important for us at that particular time.

GK: How were the people who were Communists treated at the time?

PT: You just took everything in stride, truly, nobody got that excited about anything, except Lend Lease, the boats, you know, the destroyers that we sent in. There were people who objected to that sort of thing.

GK: How did you feel about that at the time?

PT: I thought it was a good idea, very dangerous, of course. The merchant ships were getting sunk, so anybody who served in the Merchant Marine was in graver danger because they had no protection.

GK: Were most people resigned to the fact that we were going to have to get into the war?

PT: Oh, yes, we knew it was coming in the [spring of] the final year there … the tension was so strong you could really feel it. Everybody was excited and, yet, tense, because the boys were getting their draft numbers. We knew by the lowest number which ones were going to go first and we were all sort of, for four years we had been confident, you know, everybody looked after us and after that we're going to fend for yourself, so that there was a great deal of tension,

excitement and worry all at once, which was very tangible. We sort of were saying goodbye to the good times in Europe.

GK: What do you remember about December 7, 1941?

PT: Well, a lot of us have memories. Even though we had a port in Pearl Harbor, they said, "Pearl Harbor, where's that?" That's how little we knew about our defense system. It certainly never occurred to us that we would be fighting a war on two fronts, but that war, as they say … all bad things have some good about them. The good part about it was that with a war on two fronts, it thinned out most of the able-bodied men, which meant that the women had to be offered jobs they never would have been offered in the ordinary circumstances. So you could not, for example, get an engineering degree. There were various, oh, architects' jobs, which women could not look forward to. You could only look forward to, four or five possibilities, secretary, teacher, nurse, librarian, dieticians, that sort of thing. There weren't many opportunities for women until the war came along, which broke it wide open. … Then they got opportunities which they hadn't really had before, so, in that respect, it did them good. But, I can remember I thought with my background in languages, I would like to be in the Diplomatic Corps. Well somebody told me, and I don't remember who, "Forget it, only well connected males are able to take that job." But, at the end of the war, I was an officer in the Navy. I'd been in intelligence. My commanding officer sent me over to the State Department to take the very exam for Foreign Service, which I passed without any problem whatever, and I was offered a job, which I could not take because, by then, I was married and pregnant. If I had known … the possibility would arise, I don't know what I would have done, whether I would have gotten married, … or whether I would wait and find a job first; what I had dreamed of doing, thought I couldn't, and found I could. So the war did have some very positive effects, although, you know, no one would ever really want to have a war to achieve it.

GK: How did you feel at that time, were you accepting of your limitations??

PT: Well, you know, there were a good many things that we couldn't do, which irked me and I thought I'd rather …

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GK: Did that bother you?

PT: At that time, for example, women could not buy a house and get a mortgage. You could buy a house if you could afford it and there were many restrictions. So that was just one of many things I found irksome. It's quite different today.

GK: So, at the time, were you resentful?

PT: Well, it was like a pebble in your shoe and you didn't really dwell on it. Most of us accepted it and assumed that not much could be done about it. There were exceptions always.

[TAPE PAUSED]

PT: The Coast Guard got its SPARS. The Marines got their girls, whatever they were I don't remember, but the Air Corps did not accept the very famous American women flyers as part of the Air Corps, but they used them. They flew planes for them back and forth, and wherever possible they were used, but they did not make them an official category, the way the Army, the Navy, the Marines, the Coast Guard took them in.

GK: So to go back to December 7th, where were you on that day or how did you hear about it?

PT: Over the radio. I think it must have been a Sunday, or I wouldn't have been listening to the radio. We were shocked, of course.

GK: What were your thoughts, do you remember?

PT: Just [a] complete standstill, I guess, and knowing that, well, now we know we're going to war. Before we thought we were, but it wasn't definite, or when, and then, suddenly, there was Roosevelt declaring war on two fronts, and, you know, my father had been in World War I, he had been in the National Guard. He had chased Pancho Villa around Arizona, and he was recalled to serve in World War II as a special consultant. So he went back to war. My mother joined the Red Cross and she was allowed to drive into Camp Dix, the staging area for new recruits, at any hour of the day or night. Later when the wounded came back, she went up to the various veterans hospitals, and taught them skills such as they were able to do, leather work and copper work, and that sort of thing, whatever they were able to, so, … the entire family went to work. I viewed it as, "my house is on fire," I have to help put out the fire. There were people, men, who thought that it was unladylike, and didn't quite agree that this was a good idea. They weren't ready yet to accept this equality notion. … Even some of the various commanders of the Army and the Navy looked askance at their female recruits, you know, "what are we going to do with these?" The Navy asked Pathe Films to make this sex education film. As a result of that, I was tapped to appear in a sex education movie for Pathe Films on the request of the Navy because they said, "Here we got all these females to look after, we better tell everybody what they're in for," so that was how it happened that I got into that. … At the same, time, *Life Magazine* came through our camp and chose seven of the girls present at dinner, to pose for some photos of life in training and of the type of girl who would actually join in the service because they couldn't believe it. So I wound up on the cover of *Life Magazine*. That was March 15, 1943 and I happened to be in Chicago in February, one my friends wrote, "I saw you in Chicago," "Why did you happen to be there, why didn't you say hello?" She said, "I mean, I saw you on the cover of *Life Magazine*."

GK: Did you know that you were going to be on the cover?

PT: No, no, no. Because *Life* just came and took a lot of photographs all over the place, having people doing everything that they were doing, you know, marching and everything. … They just found this particular photograph and decided that it was the right one for the cover and we didn't know it 'till it happened. That same week that it was published, I was in Washington, DC, in my Navy department and my whole department was ordered to go and view the movie that had been

made, and then a few days later, out came the cover of the magazine. They said, "Wow, we've got a celebrity in our department, we didn't even know it."

GK: Not too many people can say they've been on the cover of a major magazine.

PT: Oh, there's been a surprising number over the years.

GK: So, was that before you graduated that you decided you wanted to go into the service?

PT: No, it was afterwards. I was working when I graduated. I had an offer to write advertising copy for Koos Brothers Furniture Company in Rahway, New Jersey and I was doing that, and then when Pearl Harbor happened, I said, "Damn it, I don't want to write about furniture. There are much more exciting things to do." So at the time, I guess the Army had realized what was happening and had already started the WACS program. The Navy very prudently waited to see how the WACS program was received, and then they started their program, that was the WAVES. … Douglass [NJC] had been aware that something was going to happen, and that they ought to do something about it before we graduated, so they offered two courses taught by the Red Cross on bandaging and tourniquets, and that sort of quick first aid, and the other course was Motor Mechanics, and they had it on station wagons with mechanics who would teach us what was under the hood. I took one look at all that dirty gunk under the hood and decided I would join the Navy. It was a lot cleaner.

GK: That's why you made the decision then?

PT: That's how it happened.

GK: How did your parents react to this?

PT: I never heard at the time what they thought, but years and years later, I heard they were very proud of me. So, I guess they approved. I'm sure they didn't object. They couldn't have.

GK: Did you go by yourself or did friends come with you?

PT: No, no. There was a train out of Lackawanna Station, an old station in New York City, which may now be shut down for all I know. All the good cars had been … taken over by the military so that all that were left were the rickety, old vehicles and all we New York area girls met at the station and got on that train to go out to our first training spot, which was in Oklahoma. … Along the way, we got to Chicago, picked up more … so that we arrived in Oklahoma, of all the funny places to train the Navy. I guess, they must have moved a lot of people out, or something, because we took over a big campus dormitory there for our trainings. … Then later, they took me only as a yeoman, to begin with, because I have peculiar eyesight, and they decided it wasn't good enough as an officer, but later my commanding officer said, "The eyesight isn't important to me, there are other things that are much more important," so, he sent me to officers training. That training took place at Smith College up in North Hampton, Massachusetts. The officer candidates took over part of the dormitories at Smith College and got

to eat … in North Hampton Inn and fed on Maryland crab and all sorts of delicacies. There was a considerable difference between the enlisted and the officer categories.

GK: How long were you in Oklahoma before you moved out to Massachusetts?

PT: About a year and a half.

GK: What did you do there?

PT: No, … I was there about four months, just yeoman training, and that sort of thing. Then, I was in Washington, DC in the Intelligence Department, ONI. (Office of Naval Intelligence) [It was] … my knowledge of Europe which decided all these. I knew all those beaches they landed on. My photographs and my father's photographs of all those beaches were in the intelligence department, before we had even gone, they were using them. So they knew that there were pebble beaches in Normandy. It would make a lot of noise if you landed on those and there were other beaches, you know, so we knew the whole geography of what they had to face before they got there.

GK: What were the dates roughly when you went to Oklahoma?

PT: I would have gone to Oklahoma in October of '42 and left in the last week, in February of '43 into Washington. … Washington at that time, was one of the safest cities you could possibly live in, because most of the trouble making men were in the Army, the Navy, the Marines, etc. and the streets were patrolled by the MPs for the Army and the SPs for the Navy. … My hours were changed every three days … to confuse the enemy so he wouldn't know where I was when I was and what I was up to, which meant that I worked around the clock, twenty-four hours. But, I worked nine hour shifts and changed every three days, each time, advancing, so that I would be having my dinner sometimes at one thirty or two o'clock in the morning, or my dinner at 8:30 in the morning, nine o'clock, depending on which shift I was working on.

GK: What building did they have you in?

PT: Well, this was the Navy Department building, which … I'm not sure if it's been torn down now or not, but the whole back of it had all these temporary buildings, which are now removed and are part of the Mall. But, I would be walking around in the middle of the night, two o'clock in the morning, in the middle of Washington, DC and never see any problem, ever at all, anywhere, except possibly one drunk on the sidewalk. … As far as I recall, there were no crimes committed of any nature, serious nature, except one by a Marine, named Earl McFarland, who strangled a girl in Rockwood Park with her snood. This snood was a kind of a hand-knit item meant to envelop the hair. … I remember this because it was the only one. You could walk anywhere, anytime of night, and not be molested. Everybody was considerably safer than anywhere today, at those hours. [Editor's Note: Ms. Thompson is referring to the murder of Dorothy Berrum by Earl McFarland, a veteran of Guadalcanal, in East Potomac Park].

GK: It's a lot different now. What were some of the things you did at your job while you were there in Washington?

PT: [I] checked on people leaving the country and what they were going for. … There was one lieutenant, naval lieutenant who left from Brownsville, Texas, who should not have been let leave, but somebody let him go, and we turned up all sorts of damaging information on him. His history was that he actually went to Berlin and was trained as a spy, sent back to the United States, landed off the coast of Maine, in the middle of winter, in a business suit. … Some smart, little boy happened to be down on the beach that day and saw footprints in the snow coming up out of the sea and none going down. So he went home and told his father and they picked him up, the man, in the town in one of the cafés just in his business suit, but with all sorts of secret ink and everything else on him, all ready to start spying, but, they clearly didn't understand the weather and the geography of the United States.

GK: What was your reaction when you saw that file on your classmate, claiming that she was a Communist?

PT: Well, I wasn't that surprised that she was under surveillance. I just didn't think she was in that deep. There were a lot of people, with good intentions, who got snookered.

GK: Did you realize at that time that a lot of these people were being watched, even though they were not necessarily doing anything?

PT: No, I was too busy with my own problems, my own … things I was supposed to be doing, or not to be doing, to be worrying about what anybody else is doing. But there was an awful lot of loose talk in Washington, I mean, you didn't really have to be much of a spy. All you needed to do was frequent the tony places where other people ate and drank and gabbed. You know, people would be talking about information they had no business talking about, restricted information. One of my co-workers started off in the middle of a dinner party one night and I said, very quietly, "Where did you hear about that?" "Oh," she said, as she got very red in the face. She had been telling something she had no business telling.

GK: Why?

PT: This was in a public place and was material that was confidential. So, spies didn't have to do very much at all.

GK: So you checked people leaving the country. Were there other jobs that you did then?

PT: Oh, yes, but I'm not going to talk about those. I was told to forget everything I knew when I left and I did my best to do it. In fact, I got a special confidential report later from somebody, coming from my boss. I have no idea what he was talking about. Something I had done, been responsible for, and he complimented me. I no longer knew what it was all about.

GK: So how long were you in Washington?

PT: Well, I was there for four and a half years.

GK: How did they discover your background and decide to give you this job?

PT: Well, when we first reported to Washington, in the long lines, you know, going in, they tried to get some sense from everybody as to what they could do and when I said I had the languages, you know, it was just automatic, they thought I was more useful there.

GK: I realize you cannot talk about it too much, but did the languages come into play in your job?

PT: My general knowledge was very useful, because there were files on any number of people that I actually knew about, and I was able to correct them in several instances [when] I knew more than they did. So the general knowledge was extremely helpful.

GK: How did the Navy or the military get the pictures that you and your father had of the French, even before you were working there?

PT: They sent out a request, probably in the newspapers. Anybody who had any photographs with any of the sensitive places was asked to send what they had, and we did. They were trying not to tell where they were interested in, to confuse the enemy if they heard what it was, so it was a sort of a general request. It was understood, of course, that there would be an invasion, but exactly what invasion was coming, where, … they were trying to keep that quiet.

GK: What did you say your father was doing then when he was called back to the war?

PT: It was in military supplies of some kind. He was an engineer, electrical engineer, so it would have had to do with something engineering, probably armament, that sort of thing.

GK: I was wondering if maybe they saw a similar use for his intelligence, but he wasn't really doing anything there.

PT: He worked for Otis Elevator Company, but he had a knowledge of engineering. They took him away, but he was still working for Otis when they requested him. They wanted somebody with that particular knowledge that he had.

GK: While you were in Washington did you run into any prominent people?

PT: Well, we went to a number of cocktail parties and I remember one gentleman who was rather high up in the Italian Consulate Corps. I didn't speak Italian at the time, I do now, but I didn't then, but I spoke Spanish. So he discoursed in Italian and I discoursed in Spanish, and we got along fine. I don't really remember anybody in particular.

GK: You worked there until when?

PT: … I had thirty days leave, and I was married by this time, and we were walking on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, August 8, 1945, and we heard that the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, and then a few days later the second bomb, but although we were both rather

shocked, in the end, I have to admit I was pleased, because my husband would be in the first invasion of Japan, and it was considered to be seventy-five percent casualties, … this, of course, never occurred due to the dropping of the atom bomb. So I was inclined to applaud Harry Truman, I thought he had a great deal of courage. You know that in war, it's ugly, and nobody can make romance out of the war, really, but it's ugly, somebody is going to die, well, you'd just assume it was the enemy, who started the whole *fracas*, than yourself, which was our attitude about it.

GK: I think that's pretty common.

PT: Well, we wouldn't choose to do it and to vote, none of us would have, and my husband was with Patton's Thirteenth Armored [Division] before that, and the European War had wound down, so he had come through that safely, and he was back getting his thirty day leave and then he was due to go up to Japan. So, I guess, it was a great thing for us. But, we were both in it until December of '45 and I could have gone on and I could have had more of a career and they offered it to me, but, it was over, and I just didn't want to do this thing anymore.

GK: What were they offering you?

PT: [They offered me] more responsibilities and, of course, higher command.

GK: When did you and your husband get married?

PT: January of 1943, as I ended my training. It happened that the Navy had sent me to Oklahoma to the A&M, which was at Stillwater, and the Army has sent him to officers training in Norman, Oklahoma, which was about as far south of Oklahoma City as Stillwater was north. So that Christmas, we decided to get together, and we had to get leave, we had to ask for it. Unfortunately, none of us could go home that Christmas. … Some damned fool put the song on the broadcast system, "White Christmas." There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Everybody was in tears. So I think it made us all realize that you cannot go through life alone. So the next leave we could get was January, simultaneously, and we each had to have a witness. So we had to get a suitable witness to match the times we had on leave. So, on the 23rd, we got leave, we met in Oklahoma City and we got married.

GK: And that was '44?

PT: '43

GK: '43, January of '43, were you able to keep in touch with him?

PT: Oh, off and on. Yes, he would come to Washington and then he was overseas of course.

GK: When did he ship over?

PT: I don't know. I don't remember those dates.

GK: Did you write back and forth a lot?

PT: To some extent, we had to write to an APO number, you know. He didn't write directly and I had a cousin, who was assigned in the Air Corps, he was twenty-three and he was assigned as a bombardier on a plane flying out of Australia. I don't know where he was at the time. You know, I can't remember these numbers, but, anyway, his plane was shot up, but it made it back to the base in Australia. Every member of the crew was dead or dying when it got there. He was only twenty-three. [I had] … another cousin who was half Irish, half German, he stormed a gun emplacement in France and he's been awarded the Bronze medal. Our whole family was involved one way or another.

GK: Your mother, when she worked for the Red Cross, did she stay in the country?

PT: Yes, she stayed.

GK: You said that the navy offered you this position, right after the war ended to stay on?

PT: Well, at the same time I was working in the position with the State Department, too, but, no, I was married. … By the time they let you know, because there were several months passed between your interviews and recommendations and so forth, by that time, I had gotten pregnant and said, "No, this is not possible," either way.

GK: So, that would have been in '47 or '46?

PT: '46, yes. My daughter was born in September of '46.

GK: Then, did you work anytime after that?

PT: You mean, subsequently? Well, you remember those days, we were sent to Italy in '55 and we were there until 1960 and then we were sent to Switzerland for two and a half years, and I was back in the States for three years and during that time I worked with the League of Women Voters and with local newspapers. I wrote articles for them for the New York budget in Albany, and what the League of Nations was like, and things like that. … Then we were sent to England, and we were in England for nine years. So we've seen "the town and country" stuff.

GK: Right after the war where did you live?

PT: In Union.

GK: Was your husband career military?

PT: No. Exxon, ex-pat.

GK: So then you lived in Union for ten years, what were the sentiments after the war was over, how did people look back on it?

PT: I think they were just too busy picking up their lives, because it was interrupted, a hiatus, you know. Like, some of the boys, for example, they've been gone for four years and hadn't been able to start their careers. So, they had to pick up and start from scratch at a later date than they would have expected. … I think everybody was just too busy. We had a large German contingent, and everybody just accepted them because they were your friends and you didn't really think about it. [We were] just too busy getting on with our lives. You know, when you are tossed into a stream, you swim, and that's that.

GK: As a journalist, what were your views on Russia and how our opinions towards Russia changed after 1944?

PT: I never really accepted them. I never really thought of them as good friends, knowing what happened during the occupation of Berlin, you know, when it was quartered and each section was separate. The English had their section, America had their section, the Russians had their section, and Germans had what was left. My husband and I visited Europe in 1956 to see a little bit of Germany and that area, and in some towns, like Cologne, the devastation was still exactly as it had been after the war. That was because it was in the French sector, and the French were not going to allow the Germans to rebuild. So, we saw the devastation. It might have happened the day before, except, of course, there were no corpses or things like that, but, the damage was still exactly that way. It was a bit surprising, because the English area and the American areas had been allowed to reconstruct. But, you see, they were neighbors, the French and the Germans, and they never really quite trusted each other. I don't know how this European Union is going to work with all these people, suddenly friends again, who had spent years fighting each other. I'm sure they do still disgust each other, to some extent.

GK: What about the Korean War? What did you think about that?

PT: I didn't give it a thought. I had an adopted brother, he was involved in that. [I had] another cousin who was involved with the Vietnam War, but our wars were over. This was somebody else's war and problem. We sort of took responsibility for World War II but the other wars, as they came along, belonged to different generation, of different groups of people, and we couldn't suddenly put yourself in the war mode again when you had taken on a civilian life.

GK: How many children did you have?

PT: Two.

GK: Is it a daughter and a son? Yes.

PT: My son, I live with him.

GK: Was he of an age to go into Vietnam?

PT: No. I planned it pretty well, I guess. He was born in '52, and, of course, the first one was a girl, and she missed everything.

GK: Even into the '50s, how did you feel about the roles of women? Have they changed since the war?

PT: You know, we were living abroad so much that I wasn't terribly conscious of all these women in NOW [National Organization for Women], and various other famous people who have been so vocal. I guess, it was needed, but I think I felt at the time that it was all a bit exaggerated, a bit too much. There always are talented people who are going to be able to do what they want to do anyway, and it's really more the middle groups who don't get the opportunities, and the lowest groups who have no chance. But, the really talented people just do it anyway. There have always been famous poets and writers in various other things who were women, and spacewomen, you know. … Not in America, but, after all, we had Margaret Thatcher in England. Everybody asked me at that time, "What do you think of Margaret Thatcher? How do you think it will work?" They had one of the greatest Queens ever in Elizabeth I, they're going to welcome Margaret Thatcher, I mean, why not? It's an attitude, which, I guess, … we're used to it. Your history is so much greater abroad. I think that's what impresses us the most is the fact that we have such a short history, comparatively speaking. [There are] thousands of years of European and Asian history … you know, what have we got to think about it, really? We're in a position, which we could scarcely have expected of such a young country, and not an adequate amount of experience behind us really, three centuries, and you would have respect for a different attitude.

GK: Since you were abroad so much, what perception did you have of the Cold War?

PT: Oh, we just accepted it. I guess, I was shocked there were the spies viewing what we were up to, but, you know, it's in your twenties and thirties that you are activists and you tend to change things, but, as you go on, you get your family and you worry about the jobs, and things, and what your children are going to become. These occupations belong to different generations, really. It's not myopia; it's just that you can't really help it. Your life is on its course.

GK: In 1955 where did you move to?

PT: Italy. Genoa, Italy.

GK: How did you like Genoa?

PT: Oh, I really enjoyed it. As a matter-of-fact, I was asked to write the history of Genoa while I was there for a group of expatriates, who didn't speak Italian, and who wanted to know. So I wrote them a history of Genoa in English and made a complete tour guide. I wrote in the places they could go to. You know, the opera in Genoa didn't cost any more than a movie in the U.S. So people were very much interested in opera, which is not the case here, you know, you don't get that as a general attitude. But, even my mailman would come down the street, singing operatic arias and then when he got to our street, if he had mail for somebody in our house, he'd sing out the name, operatically. So, you always knew, coming down the street, who was getting mail. … Not far from where we lived in Italy was an Italian military encampment and every morning at ten o'clock, they were practicing the *Anvil Chorus* from *Il Trovatore*, by Verdi. So, of course, you know, every single morning we knew when it was ten o'clock. You just have that

sense of living in an opera. In the Old Town, there was a large Piazza where stood the Cathedral of San Lorenzo. I don't know whether you're familiar with Italian operas or not, but there is an opera called *Rigoletto*, by Verdi. … Rigoletto was a court jester, and, unfortunately, the Duke of Mantua takes advantage of his daughter and jilts her, so Rigoletto would like to get back at the Duke, so he tries to assassinate the Duke. Rigoletto hires a man to kill the Duke, but that man is bribed and kills the jester's daughter instead. So you have the Duke going away singing *La Donna E Mobile*, while the jester is lugging away his dead daughter, unknowing. Well, this area of Genoa, where the cathedral stood at midnight, people went out to dinner very late, so at midnight, you're coming out of the restaurant, the moon is out, everything is shining, kind of green light, and in these little alleys, two people could barely walk abreast. You're positive that the Duke of Mantua is going to come out of one of those alleys and the poor jester; you know, would be up another alley. You just have that feeling that you are living in it. It's the atmosphere. … It's exaggerated, of course, but it seems so right. I loved it, I think anybody would, if they knew any of the history.

GK: While you were there, did you do other writing?

PT: Ah, well, I don't know. I joined, helped to form the American Women's Club of Genoa, and we used to actually try to do as much good as we could, without hurting anybody's feelings. That is to say, you would be very careful not to step on any toes. So we would hold white elephant sales, and, of course, Italians had never heard of white elephant sales, "What is a white elephant sale?" … We'd landed on the front page of the daily newspaper with a photograph. "These women, these American women, are having this benefit, *elefante bianco*." They were all excited about this notion. "The money they get they're going to help various orphanages," which is what we did. We had to pick several and I had gone around with someone else to various establishments and, I'm telling you, I saw such terrible, terrible deformed children that it is very hard to believe that there are any others like it anywhere. In one state institute, where they took me around, there was a boy who had no bones in his leg; they dragged behind him like spaghetti. He walked on his hands. There was another boy who had no legs, but he had feet attached to his buttocks. There was a gorgeous little girl of about four in a bed who had no brain. She was looked after by a retarded child who had a brain and couldn't get about. You know, it just tears your heart out, and the reason was, it was a port city. The sailors would come in, meet the prostitutes, [they are] theoretically forbidden to use any kind of preventive, and so you'd have all these deformed children because they were all full of diseases. …Then there was another one, which was the Dominican Convent, which took care of little children, and we would go there. The first thing I asked was, "How can I help you?" "Well, when Monsignor comes with his staff he has no place to sit, we have only little chairs. We'd like you to buy chairs for Monsignor and his cortege to sit." I said privately. "I'm not providing chairs for fancy people to sit in." So what we did was provide the children with new shoes twice a year. We also arranged to have a very peculiar kind of stove built in, which was heated by sawdust, contributed by the local merchants, which would heat both hot water and cook for them, because they had no means to do that. … Then we had a refrigerator built into the wall, and local merchants would contribute day-old produce. So, we found practical ways to help the children. Not Monsignor, who was already clothed in purple and wealthy. … You know, I'm sure they wanted to have me at a special ceremony, until they found out I wasn't Catholic. They said, "Well, I'm sorry, but we can't." It didn't bother me any. Even my husband's boss in the Italian company was amazed at all

this. …We were all mothers, you know, it's the children that matter. …Then we also contributed an incubator for babies born prematurely, through one of the doctors, to an area of Genoa which was heavily communistic, and we got a big bang out of this because he had a plaque put on it, "Contributed by the American Women's Club of Genoa." He got a big bang out of that.

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

GK: You were talking about the incubator.

PT: Yes, towards the end of our stay, I was asked to speak on Italian radio and talk about all this, and, before I was allowed to talk, I was told by my interlocutor, "Now you mustn't hurt anybody's feelings, so, when you say that you raised this money you must not say exactly how much," and so the conversation went. It was to be understood that I wasn't doing this because the Italians couldn't do it themselves, in other words. It was quite interesting to see how a conversation gets shaped that you are hearing live on the radio, and you think it's all spontaneous but it is not.

GK: How long were you in Italy?

PT: Five years.

GK: Five years? Okay, now what was the next place?

PT: Switzerland.

GK: Switzerland?

PT: Zurich.

GK: How did you like Zurich?

PT: It was one of the cleanest, nicest cities we had ever been in, which it is not today, unfortunately, because there was an area of railroad yards, which, misguidedly, they gave over later, many years later to the drug addicts. So, from all over Europe they collected in these yards and shot up whatever they were using, which meant that the streets got dirtier and life got more hazardous. But, while we were there, before all this happened, it was a beautiful, clean city. They had a wonderful ceremony in the spring, which was getting rid of winter, and they would have this huge snowman made out of cotton of some kind, stuffed with firecrackers, and they light that, and they'd have parades. All the guilds would parade, eat sausages and various things from the vendors, but, it's a delightful kind of event. But, the one I didn't like was just before Christmas. Instead of having a Christmas tree, each child gets a birch collection of branches, like a broomstick. The branches are tied with gifts, if the child has been good, and nothing if they've been bad. But, before they do that, they are allowed to whoop and holler all over the town, all night long, banging pots and pans and then proceed directly to school. My son was eight years old and he came home from school with his tale. I said, "I don't believe it. I don't

believe these kids are allowed to go out," at night to do this. Well, two o'clock in the morning, our doorbell rang and it was a whole gaggle of little kids, all with their pots and pans waiting for my son. I said, "I'm sorry he can't go." I wasn't allowing this eight-year-old to go about a strange city in the middle of the night like that. It's a little bit too free for me.

GK: How did your children adjust to moving everywhere, how did they seem to deal with that?

PT: I guess, like myself in the earlier generation, we sort of put up with it at the time. [It] had some bad moments, but we looked back on it afterwards as being very, very good and useful, and we know more and understand more about the world than the people to whom nothing like that has ever happened. We counted [it as a] a plus, now, after it's all over, but there were times when we didn't enjoy it, and my daughter, in school in Italy, began speaking English as though she was an Italian, with an accent, which we said would never do. So, I sent her away to an English school in Switzerland, and, you know, being British, the Americans aren't worth much, so she had a couple of rough years. But, you know, overall, after it's all done with, I don't think I'd change it. Maybe in small details, to make it a little less rough, but, it was a wonderful experience, and my husband, who died about seventeen years ago, he was sixty-six at the time, said to friends who came to see him, he knew he was dying, they knew he was dying, he said, "Don't feel sorry for me. I had a wonderful life." … That's the way we look at it. It was a wonderful and privileged life, privileged in many ways. So, you know, we could have spent our lives in some small town in New Jersey and not have known all this. … I don't think the experience would have been nearly as rich and, you know, you wouldn't be here, would you? You wouldn't be listening to any of this, not that that's a reason.

GK: What else do you really miss?

PT: Well, the food, in a way, because it's a habit, you know when you go to a restaurant, and you have ordered and eaten, they change your plates. You are looking forward to the desserts because they have such fabulous ones, but the waiter takes brings a second helping of exactly what you have just finished eating, expecting you to start over. This habit just threw us because we did not have the capacity to do this. In addition the Swiss people would start out at ten o' clock to eat pastries in various cafes, as though they had not had any breakfasts and start again in again at three o' clock, as though they had not had lunch. Which they had. The sign posts on the street corners did not tell you how many kilometers it was to the next town but how long it would take you to walk there, so as to make sure you did not get away from your food, or could take a sausage or something in case you got puckish. Well, it's kind of fun. … Then, you get to the French speaking area and you get signs in both French and German. So, you get to a town, which is called Biel on one side of the border, it's Bienne on the other, … you think these are two different places, because they give you the sign in both languages. Well, the Swiss are wonderful that way. They always speak at least three languages. If they are living in the German speaking area, they send their children to relatives in the French speaking area so they'd pick up French and vice versa, and they all, almost all, speak English. So, they have at least three languages to start with, as a basis.

GK: Did your kids manage to pick up other languages?

PT: Oh, yeah, they picked up a lot of this, and a lot of that, maybe not enough, but, they picked up a lot of it. One of the things, a particular thing, that shows you what they liked, was the museum in the area, which had a room in it dating back to the medieval days. It had one bed, one chair, one table, one spoon and fork, one plate, and that was about it. But, it was meant to be inhabited by a husband and a wife who were fighting and they were condemned to stay in there until they managed to share.

GK: Interesting therapy, I guess.

PT: Well, Swiss women didn't get to vote until 1970, or something, long after we left, and if you were born in a town you expected to die in that town. You didn't have to stay in it, but if you were born in it, you came back into the town to die in it, because each side had its manner of dying, in the sense that if you were Catholic, and you went to the Catholic Church, you will be cremated at State expense. [At] your own expense if you chose not to be, but you could only inhabit your plot for a certain number of years and then you have to get out of it, so someone else could use it, because it's a very tight little country. So they have some customs, which we found really quite fascinating. I always enjoyed wherever I went because I always managed to learn something and in Zurich it just happens that Jung had his institute there, and I was able to attend a couple of psychology lectures at the institute. He was dead by then, but it was being run by someone else and they wanted me to come and tell me, tell them all my dreams and he said, "Do you dream in color?" I said, "Yes, of course, I do. You know, I don't have time for this stuff. I can come in for a lecture or two but I can't spend days and days giving you my dreams because I only have a couple of years, and I have things to do besides." I mean, I wanted to see whatever there is to be seen, you know, and not to be stuck on a couch recounting my dreams.

GK: How are the people, in general? Were they friendly towards you?

PT: Well, we had friends, some were very friendly and some were a bit standoffish, but that's because, you know, my husband was with an oil company, which owned the Swiss company, but, they didn't want him to know all their secrets because they said, "These are war secrets." So, he was very frustrated, because he wasn't allowed to know all that he should have known. Every able-bodied Swiss male had to spend part of his summer in military training until he was about sixty. So, every summer they all went off on these military training things, and, on one occasion, it happened that we were at the top of a mountain going down from a pass and the fog came down. So, we were going down to the bottom, so it was a case of hairpin turns and watching very carefully so you didn't meet anybody because your headlights couldn't pierce very much in the fog. You get down to the bottom, and the sunshine, and we discovered we had led the entire Swiss army down. We had been their beacon. They were following our lights. Here they were, trucks filled with men, jeeps, tanks, everything under the sun, coming down behind us and we didn't even know it. It was a very interesting country.

GK: You said the women didn't get to vote till the '70s, was there an obvious difference in the status of women?

PT: Well, in that respect, there certainly was. But, they had also a very peculiar system where they voted every five minutes on something, new streetlights, for instance, in your town, so that

you have to go back to the area in which you were born to vote, as well. So you scoot back there, maybe just to vote about streetlights, as well as whatever else was on their minds. So, I'm not so sure they minded all that much but they did have this saying, "Children, church, cooking." … Every female had to take domestic science, learn how to cook, unless she's already married, in which case she didn't have to. I really enjoyed it.

GK: You were there a few years?

PT: Two and a half.

GK: It would have been '63 then when you moved?

PT: Back to the US for three years, and then back to England.

GK: What about England, what did you think of it?

PT: Oh, I loved England. I would like to have retired there. But, my husband was born in England and he said, "All the taxes and everything would be terrible. We can't do that."

GK: Where did you live in England?

PT: In London, right across the street from Hyde Park and the Horse Guards Barracks, where the horses came out every morning at ten o'clock, to parade around Buckingham Palace. You know, it's always drama, always a show, terrific rest stop, you know. …. I thought it was one of the most civilized places in the world to live, and would just love to be able to stay there. I could have had dual citizenship had I wanted it, because I was told at the embassy, when my passport happened to be expiring and had to be renewed, and when I talked to the people at the embassy about it they said, "You know, you are entitled to dual citizenship if you want it." I said, "Why?" Well, for one thing, I was married to an English-born person. I had a grandfather born in Dundee. I had a grandmother born in Oxford, England, which meant that the pre-patrial system was still in place then. If you had a grandparent who was born in that area, you … were entitled to dual citizenship if I wanted it. But, I thought it would complicate my life.

GK: How did you get along with the English people in general?

PT: Oh, very well, very well. I have, or had, an English brother-in-law, who stayed there; he never came to the U.S. They had a training system, and at eleven, you're separated, either you go to the training schools or the higher education schools, so he stayed, because he didn't want to risk that, and he was in the RAF [Royal Air Force]. So, I, you know, had him to guide me around every time I wanted.

GK: What activities did you do there? Did you write there at all?

PT: Oh, I enrolled in art school and took my degree in art, that was very easy to do because they have practically subsidized schooling. Anytime, at any age, you want to go back to school, there are these courses that you could take on any number of things, from history to the gamut. Of

course, if there are not enough people who enroll in these courses, then they have to wait a semester. Here I took art; in Zurich I took psychology. I attended the University of Genoa for a philosophy course in Italian. It was a very peculiar year. The teachers had gone out on strike at the beginning of the term. By the time they got back and settled in the class, the students said, "Why don't we go out on strike?" So we went out on strike. … You can understand it's a very loose system abroad, where you can do all sorts of ridiculous things, including, in the Italian system at least, you could stay until you were thirty or forty. You graduated when you said you were ready, so, it didn't matter to them how much time they spent doing it. Oh, well, spring vacation came along. Finally, the class started and so all I learned was about the donkey from Bremen [The Bremen Town Musicians]. You know, the donkey story, the donkey had a dog on its back, and a cat on the back of the dog, and a rooster on the back of the cat, and together the four of them frightened burglars out of the farmhouse, which they had taken over, and, of course, the moral was, "together, no matter how peculiar you are, we can achieve results." … That was what I learned from that course, because half the time when he was talking he was burping, and … I didn't hear what he said, so it was a very peculiar philosophy.

GK: Then you moved back, I guess, from England?

PT: '75, we decided to retire to New Hampshire.

GK: Why did you decide to go to New Hampshire?

PT: Oh, it's a long story. My mother died. My father's half-brother retired up there because he had a wife born in Vermont. So my father and mother went up there to have a look at it, and they decided it was pretty nice up there, so they decided to retire up there. So we went up, and looked to see what they were doing, and bought some property. One thing led to another.

GK: Did you like New England?

PT: Yes, but you have to be really young to cope with it. It had such extreme temperatures and as you get older and you start to slip about, and such, you decide, maybe it's a little too extreme.

GK: So then when did you come back?

PT: Well, after my husband died, there wasn't much of a point of staying there, and I came back to New Jersey, [and had] been there for another nine years. … Then I was getting older, fraying at the edges, my son said, "Well, why don't you come live with me?" So I did.

GK: So what are you involved in now?

PT: Nothing. I paint, occasionally, and, well, I've been doing a lot of genealogy work, you know, getting the censuses. … This was a project of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to make work for the old WPA, to take all the censuses and put them on film and the idea was it would be self-supporting, because as you did it each year, and bought their films, that money went in to start the next project, and so on, so that, by now, … you can start from 1750 and go right through … the seventy-five year period, so 1920 was the last one, before you can release the information, so

that means that the next block wouldn't be due for a couple of years, 1930, and then 1930 census would be available. Then, through those censuses, I could discover a great deal, and I used various other sources of genealogy. In fact, my mother's family all the way back to January 25, 1624 when her ancestors arrived, from France, of all places, that's Huguenot. So it's like chasing every rabbit at the park. Well, if you've been a journalist, and you've been in intelligence, you have this natural curiosity to pursue information, and it led to some fascinating stories, and I've written those up for my children, my grandchildren. They've all been reading my history.

GK: What would you say was your favorite thing you wrote as a journalist?

PT: I suppose the history of Genoa itself, because they have a mythology that they were named for the god, Janus, who was two-faced, and that kind of tells you a lot. … Then following on the story, there was a great deal of piracy with that clan. The family of the Grimaldis, of Genoa. The expelled went to Monte Carlo, and this was the family that Grace Kelly married into when she married Prince Ranier. Oh, there is lots of fun in history. I mean, I'd far rather go back eons in history than care about what's going on in the future. It's so fascinating, you've seen and heard and written and done everything in the past. There's nothing, really, that hasn't been done, so it tells you everything. I think that's enough, don't you?

GK: This has been great. I'll wrap it up. I just have a couple more questions. One thing I ask everyone, if there's a lesson you would like people to learn from World War II, in your experience, what would you like people to remember about it?

PT: Well, I think always to question, always to be a bit suspicious. You know, because we're told so many things, which are not true, by a good many people, so it doesn't pay to be prejudiced about anything, [and] to be open-minded at the same time. The more you learn, the more prepared you are, and you never know what peculiar piece of information you may have learned is going to be useful to you, because the oddest things sometimes turn out to be very important and useful to you. So always, I think a learning experience, you never quit, you continue, always in your life. I used to think, and I'm sure my whole generation thought, probably today even, that when you are twenty, you're grown up. You are fixed; you are what you are, which is not true. You continually change all your life. All your attitudes change, everything changes. You change. You are never fully, entirely grown up, until you're dead, really, and your experiences are going to cause a lot of it and what if you just haven't passed on those experiences. … No matter how much you read, it isn't the same as actually happening to you. So I suppose that is, our family is very much oriented into learning. My eleven year old grandson is taking Greek lessons after school, because his mother is Greek and she wants him to continue having that heritage, too, because he is going to inherit properties on an island in Greece someday and she does not want him to be taken by the locals because he can't speak Greek and doesn't know what it's all about. So on top of his regular schooling, this child is taking Greek lessons and Greek is a tough language, you know, even with its own alphabet. So this family just believes in continuing learning.

GK: Is there anything else you would like to add?

PT: Not really. I think I must have told just about everything. Anything you want, call me up and ask me questions about what you really meant, okay?

GK: Well, thank you very much.

PT: You're welcome.

GK: I appreciate it.

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

Reviewed by Jessica Thomson 11/9/04
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/7/04
Reviewed by Pearl Paterson Thompson 1/2/05