

Can you tell us where you are from and where you were living during the depression and during the war?

Mrs. Bridges: My name is Mildred Bridges. I was born and reared in Hardin County in a little small town at Morris Chapel near Savannah.

Where were you living?

Mrs. Bridges: We were living in Morris Chapel during the depression years. I call the depression years through the 1930's and maybe part of the early 40s.

During the war where were you living?

Mrs. Bridges: At this place.

Right here.

Mrs. Bridges: I was born and reared there. 1924 was my date of birth. So right now that makes me 77 years old.

We will just go through this list of questions since you got your answers all ready to go. Anytime you want to stop to think about something fill free to do it.

How did you and your family manage during the Great Depression? What did your father do for a living? Was anybody in your family long term unemployed?

Mrs. Bridges: We managed quite well during those depression years. My father was a farmer. He grew an awful lot of cotton, corn, and beans. He raised cattle. There were seven children in the family so he had lots of help. As we began to get older we were expected to go to the field and help with the chores, but it was fun back then. Everybody in this community were farmers and they had big families. So it was just one big community of families that were doing the same thing. Even though we were deprived of lots of the good things in life back then, we didn't know it. We were happy and everything worked out fine through that period in our lives. I know it was hard to feed, clothe, and educate all of because money was scarce, but we made it and dad never had a public job. He stayed on the farm as long as he lived and enjoyed every minute of it.

Just for my own information you said that everybody in this community did the farming and all of the kids and all of the families helped out. I'm assuming that families helped one another as well.

Mrs. Bridges: That is right. If one family got behind and we were caught up then we would all go and help the family next to us that needed help.

I wish we did a little bit more of that today.

Mrs. Bridges: Let me tell you this also about my dad. He was a big farmer. He was a big musician. He loved to play the French harp and he could pick the guitar and he loved to sing. In the fall of the year he had a sovereign built. He made sovereign molasses and people from far and near would come by to buy I guess it was a gallon bucket of sovereign. He sold them for a quarter a bucket. Even though today a gentleman on the square came in the beauty shop where I was and had some honey he had made. He was selling it for \$5.00 a pint. Of course that reminded me of the gallons of sovereign molasses that my daddy made and sold for .50 cents apiece; a quarter and 50 cents apiece.

How old were you in 1939 and were you aware of the political developments and the threat to the US, specifically with the Nazi-Germany and the military in Japan?

Mrs. Bridges: In 1939 I was just about 15 years old. The people around were beginning to become aware of the problems between the two countries, Germany and Japan. I know in the back of everybody's mind they were wondering what the outcome was going to be.

Did anybody in your family have any idea before the attack on Pearl Harbor that the US would get involved?

Mrs. Bridges: I think so because my older brothers were very concerned at that time. They had graduated from high school. One of my brothers had enrolled in college at Memphis State and that was just about the time that the draft, I know you've heard of the draft. It was getting started and he realized that he was going to have to go sooner or later. So he volunteered for the service and of course others did too but it kept our parents always in fear not knowing what was going to be the outcome of that.

Then, there wasn't the exemption from the draft for being enrolled in college?

Mrs. Bridges: There possibly was but he felt that he wanted to go on so he could volunteer and get in the branch of service that he wanted to be in.

That was a smart move. Did you or your family generally support President Roosevelt in the way that he was handling everything? Did you all believe that he was leading the country wisely and well?

Mrs. Bridges: We did. My father was a Democrat and of course Franklin D. Roosevelt was a Democrat. As far as I know he was supported by all the people that was in the same predicament that we were. There just weren't any public jobs around. Under the programs that he got going he helped an awful lot of people. So we supported him wholeheartedly and trusted him.

The programs and the jobs that were around how was your family affected by those like the WPA and groups like that?

Mrs. Bridges: The main thing that I remember our family being helped so was under the WPA. Of course everybody had outside bathrooms at that time. Under the WPA program lots of people got to work under that program, lots of local people that didn't have jobs. They went around from home to home building a new toilet outside. I want to say a new bathroom, but it wouldn't be a bathroom without a bathtub. We were all thrilled because it was something that was needed. That type of program took care of all the new outside toilets for the people, the WPA. Of course they did other types of work too. One of the other programs that was very helpful to people was the CCA camps.

What were those?

Mrs. Bridges: It was a program where young men could volunteer to be in so they built camps for these men to join. They just more or less joined for what we refer to today as the CCA camp. They were paid a small amount of money each month. They were furnished a place to live. Their food was furnished and their clothes. They did a lot of ____ for farmers and people around there. There were just different things that the CCA boys, that is what they were called at this time, could do to help people during this time of need. It was a program that they benefited from.

So the CCA boys just went around doing whatever needed to be done?

Mrs. Bridges: That is right. Under the _____ program farmers always needed to have that done. They also set out trees, different types of trees for people that needed it. The government, I believe, furnished the trees and the CCA boys did the work. I know my daddy had lots and lots of pine trees put out. It helped to beautify the farm, especially around the edges and all.

Between 1939 and 1941 were you employed during those years or were you still just real, real young?

Mrs. Bridges: Well in 1939 and 1941, I graduated in 1942 so I was still in school during that period.

Once you graduated the jobs that you held, I mean did you have trouble finding work? Was that even a goal for you or did you want to stay with your parents?

Mrs. Bridges: Of course I hated to leave home but the sister that was a couple of years older than me had already left home when I graduated. She went to Nashville to go to Draughon's Business College. Of course I knew I needed to get into something too but I am going to have to back up now and bring you up to date of where we are at this point. My husband to be graduated in 1941 and I graduated in 1942. He saw what was happening toward the war and he also volunteered. He went into the Air Force and he trained in lots of different camps all over the United States while I finished my senior year in high school. By the time, almost, that I graduated from high school he was ready to be shipped overseas. We had not planned to marry at that time but he got a week's furlough at Christmas time right before he knew that he was going to be shipped off. He came home for a week and this was in Christmas of 1943. At that time I hadn't not had a job. We decided to rush it up and go ahead and get married. That is what we did. We had one week together. Then he was gone one year and 11 months overseas before we ever saw each other again. So my first job was in Nashville at Volte Aircraft Plant. That was a place where parts were made to build all the airplanes that was needed during that time. My sister had graduated from Draughon's Business College and had met her husband and he happened to be a foreman out at this plant and they were home one weekend and he told me to get my bag that and that they were going to take me with them, that he had me a job waiting when we got back to Nashville. That was on Sunday afternoon so I went to work on Monday morning. This was my first job out at Volte Airport. I was a store room clerk and took care of inventory for all these small parts that was issued out on a daily basis. I worked there until my husband Lloyd got home out of the service.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor did you end up getting a raise because of the increased need for the airplane parts?

Mrs. Bridges: I believe my first paycheck there the first week I worked was about \$24.00 for the 40 hours of work. To me that was lots of money because back then a postage stamp only cost .03 cents. My first hamburger I bought in the arcade in Nashville, I paid .10 cents for it. So that \$24.00 went a pretty good ways if I handled it right. I probably had two or three raises before I left there. I also signed up to have money taken out of each paycheck to save to buy war bonds with. When I would get enough saved up they would give me my check and I would buy a war bond with it. So I felt that I was really doing something that was helping in the war situation and helping myself in the long run too. My parents were so proud of me for buying war bonds. I would go home on a regular basis and dad would say, "Well have you got any more war bonds saved up?" I would say, "Yeah I am working on it."

Were your friends and your siblings and everybody else buying the bonds as well? Was that something that everybody did and was it something that you felt proud of?

Mrs. Bridges: Yeah, most everybody that had a job, that was one thing that they tried to do, was to buy war bonds.

You were still in school during the attack on Pearl Harbor weren't you?

Mrs. Bridges: Yes.

What was that like?

Mrs. Bridges: Oh it was terrible. I remember my mother cried all day long. We knew that something was happening during that time before they really bombed Pearl Harbor because it was the talk of everybody, you know, what was going to be the outcome of everything. I just remember my mother crying a lot the day that that happened.

Were you out on Christmas break from that?

Mrs. Bridges: Well it was December 6 wasn't it?

Oh so you all were still in school?

Mrs. Bridges: We were still in school. Was that in 1941?

I believe so.

Mrs. Bridges: December 6, 1941 I do believe.

Did you all talk about it a lot in class?

Mrs. Bridges: I can remember it was mentioned some but it seemed like the teacher we had never really gave us a lot of background on it. I guess they felt like we would be in history books yet to come. I don't believe that it was highly discussed on a daily basis. I will put it that way.

This is my favorite part. What do you recall about the rationing? What was it like living with the rations during the war period?

Mrs. Bridges: It was hard to get used to it but we did. I remember shoes, we could only have so many shoes; new pairs of shoes. We were a mile from the high school. There were four high schools in Harden County and we lived about one mile from school. There was no bus service, we walked. Maybe we had a bus service, probably, the last year. We walked everyday on a gravel road. You know how hard that is on shoes. That was our main problem. Butter and sugar, and sugar was another problem that was rationed. My mother knew how we all loved sweet stuff to eat and still do. She kept us eating teacakes we called them. When she could afford to buy bananas we would have banana pudding and always boiled custard at Christmas and other times of the year. We managed to live with it. Right now it seems like it would almost be impossible but it wasn't really all that hard back then. Our shoes were our biggest problem.

Well having to walk a mile on a gravel road I can imagine it would be.

Mrs. Bridges: That's right.

I don't know of anything that would stand up to doing that every day.

Mrs. Bridges: We also played basketball all four years that we were in high school. We had to have basketball shoes too. Of course they were not as expensive then as they are today.

I've heard stories that I heard my grandmother tell before she died, the stories about the big piles of scrap metal and the rubber and everything that would be here. What was going on in Harden County then? What did they do with the scrap metal drives?

Mrs. Bridges: I'm sure it had to be going on there also. To be honest I can't tell you too much about that. I'm sure my brothers knew a lot about it. Being next to the youngest and them being so much older I don't even remember my oldest brother being at home. He had graduated and married before I was old enough to remember. I don't remember his wedding or anything like that because having the seven children. We were not just one right after the other, there were four years difference between me and my younger sister, the youngest girl. They realized a lot more about the things that were happening during that period I'm sure than I did.

Was the plant where you were working, what was the labor union situation there? Was there one and was it run by a labor union or was it fairly untouched?

Mrs. Bridges: I don't know how long this plant had been in operation but I know I never did join a labor union. It could have had one. If my brother-in-law were living today I could ask him and I know that he could tell me. I do know of other places where they had labor unions and had problems in their plants, but not where I was working.

You already mentioned the war bonds which you bought but other than that did you feel like you were doing pretty well with your earnings but there was not a whole lot to spend it on?

Mrs. Bridges: I was proud of myself. That is the first money that I had ever made that I could call mine. I saved every one of them and after my husband got back from the service, you are not going to believe this, but the furniture that is in this room and the dining room, my piano, two bedrooms of furniture; this is the same furniture that I bought with my war bonds. I had saved enough to furnish the first house that we ever bought. We lived with my sister and her husband after we moved to Centerville. The funeral home and the apartment upstairs was a three bedroom apartment. We lived there 11 or 12 years with no rent because Lloyd was working there. He trained there and then went to Nashville and passed the examinations to be a licensed embalmer and licensed funeral director. So having those years to save some helped us to buy our first home, but the war bonds bought the furniture in the house and we are still using it today. I would say that was back in 1956 when this was bought.

What year did Mr. Bridges get back from war?

Mrs. Bridges: He got back in 1945. Imagine going that long without seeing each other and only having one week together after we were married.

I don't think I could handle that.

Mrs. Bridges: I look back now and I don't know how I did. He wrote me every day and I wrote him and sometimes I would get five and six letters at one time. Occasionally he would get to send me a picture of the little old set up places on the ground over there, in tents that don't look like they could possibly keep you warm in winter. Anyway we made it. We had a very happy reunion. I knew about the time that he was going to get back home. It took about 12 to 14 days on this boat coming back. He got into Nashville at midnight on a certain night. I heard the car door slam. It was a cab door in front of the house where I was living. I was boarding on 16th Avenue South. I knew that was him. We immediately got up and packed our things and he had enough money in his pocket that we went downtown in Nashville and got us a room at the Andrew Jackson Hotel. We spent three or four days there right after he got back. That was a great time.

I'll bet, after not being able to see him for that long.

Mrs. Bridges: It was almost two years.

When we talked last week I asked you about this and you weren't real sure about it. Do you recall the significance about the blue and the gold star mothers?

Mrs. Bridges: I didn't at the time you asked me last week but I checked and was told that the gold star in the window represented the fact that that family had lost a son in the service. A blue star meant that they had a son or sons that were serving in the war.

What about service members, your friends, family members, family acquaintances that were injured or killed in the war. Did you know many?

Mrs. Bridges: None of my family members were killed or wounded. We were very fortunate. Of course Lloyd was in the war, my husband, and then I had a brother that was in the Marines overseas, and I had two brother-in-laws. They all made it home fine. I did have a cousin that got killed in the war. I knew of other families around close that had sons to come home that were injured. In fact some of them had to stay in the Veterans Hospital in Memphis quite a while until they recovered. We were very fortunate.

I know that TVA didn't manage to make its way here until the early 1930s, but in Harden County did you all have the telephone service?

Mrs. Bridges: We did. You probably don't remember seeing the big old telephones that we put on the wall.

I may have seen them at some point.

Mrs. Bridges: That is the type of phone we had at home. You had to read it before you got to call somebody. There were no buttons to dial or anything like that. Families had different rings that meant you were ringing. You would know when to answer your phone. The sad part about it was anytime somebody would use the telephone, the kind that we had, calling somebody else your phone would ring too. Everybody had every opportunity to pick up and eavesdrop on everybody else. That is the way a lot of the things got scattered and spread through the community was people eavesdropping on other peoples conversations. I remember that distinctly.

That is how the telephone got its reputation as being an instrument of gossip.

Mrs. Bridges: That's right. We did have a radio. It was a little Silvertone. I remember the day that dad got it. The sister that was two years older than me, we thought it had to be handled manually, constantly. We were so proud of it. Dad had already made a, he called it a little radio table. I still have the table downstairs. It is real neat and just as sturdy as it can be. That is where this little radio would sit. The first day we fought over who was going to sit in the chair and control it, you know the buttons and all. My mother had a very hard time keeping us separated and straight that day, but we soon learned that it could operate all by itself.

Obviously you got all of your news from the radio.

Mrs. Bridges: We did. It was a general thing. Each night after the evening meal we would gather in the living room and turn the radio on at a certain time to get all the evening news. Some of us kids would be sitting around and if we got a little bit noisy, well dad wanted to hear everything, and he would quiet us

down until the news was over. On Saturday night before we were old enough to date and go out and have fun, we would always listen to the Grand Ole Opry. We each had favorites. That was lots of fun. Some of the neighbors didn't have radios. We would always invite them over and dad would make ice cream. Sometimes we would have 15 or 20. We would play outside until the ice cream got done and then we would eat that and listen to the Grand Ole Opry. That was our way of entertainment back in our teenage years.

Just out of my own curiosity did you keep the letters or did Mr. Bridges keep the letters that ya'll sent back and forth?

Mrs. Bridges: I'm so glad that you asked that. I kept every one of them. Last year I finally made up my mind that I had to do something with them. I had the first letter he wrote me in high school and Lauren I bet with this letter and him helping me, I bet we sorted 500 love letters. Going through the process I couldn't help but open some up and thumb back through them. I ended up keeping about 10 or 12. That was the same way with the letters that I got from him overseas. I am holding on to the letter that he wrote me telling me that he couldn't wait to get back home. All he wanted me to do was just cook him some good hot meals and love him to death. That has been fulfilled.

I'm sure it has.

Mrs. Bridges: Now are you sorry you asked that question?

No, not at all.

Mrs. Bridges: It's very fitting for war years though because the letters were back and forth. As I said, sometimes we would get five or six at the same time.

Back to talking about the news, another just for my own curiosity sort of thing, I have grown up in an era where CNN rules and we are getting news at the drop of a hat, as it happens sort of coverage. What was it like then? Were you getting news that was a couple of days old?

Mrs. Bridges: Yes we would. It was just nothing like being able to see it firsthand on TV but a lot of our news was old. It was pretty well up to date. We knew and were well aware of what was going on. But it was just, you might say, one hour a night because other programs would end station. It is not like it is today.

Right, it wasn't a constant feed of information.

Mrs. Bridges: No.

Do you look back on those years as being some of the best of your life even though when you were in school and still at home and then when you went away to work? Even though there wasn't, you didn't have all of the little extra things and all of the fun things going on, do you still look back on those as being some of the best?

Mrs. Bridges: I would have to say that in certain ways that they were. After the years that have passed since that time I can't say that they were actually the best years of my life. When you get accustomed to the things that we have today and all the foods that you want to eat, I'll put we had all we needed to eat. I will say it this way, all of the special things that we didn't have back then; the TV, your own car. I just can't say that it was actually the best years of my life, but let me go ahead and say I look back on them and I feel more grateful and thankful everyday that I went through that period. Now it helps me to

appreciate the things that I have this day and time. The younger generation, and this is no reflection of you, I am speaking from experience of my own family, nieces, nephews, is more or less kind of handed to them. They just don't realize yet how hard it was, but, of course, there were a lot of things that we didn't know about back then. If I had to say yes or no I would not count that as the best years of my life.

Now here is an interesting question and this is the last one on the list. Was there anybody in your neighborhood or anybody that you knew whose loyalty to the United States and to the American point of view and the American cause that was suspect? Was there anybody that was under suspicion for supporting the enemy?

Mrs. Bridges: Yeah, I don't hesitate to say that there were people in that category.

How were they treated? Any differently?

Mrs. Bridges: Well when it became a known fact that they were conscientious objectors and all that type of thing they were treated with disrespect by the people around them. Some of them, I don't really know how to say it, they just objected going to the war. Some of them got away with it and some of them didn't. Some of them were made to go ahead. I can remember hearing a lot of talk about certain ones in Harden County that were like that.

Do you think that that was because the country was so united, so determined as a nation to see something done about that situation; about the situation overseas that the people that objected were just not going to be put up with? Do you think that that was the cause?

Mrs. Bridges: Probably. In our county there it was mostly 100% Americans. There were no Hispanics like we have today or people from other nations that had moved in. Most everybody was backing the United States and what we were doing and everything.

Another just for my own curiosity, thank you for being so patient with me, when D-Day came around Mr. Bridges was already home then wasn't he?

Mrs. Bridges: After the war?

Right. After the war. The landing at Normandy, when that was pulled off, was he already home?

Mrs. Bridges: I thought that was part of World War II.

It was. Was he already home when that happened?

Mrs. Bridges: No, I don't think so.

Were you worried that he was going to be involved in that?

Mrs. Bridges: Oh yes. To tell you the truth I more or less lived in fear. Lots of people in Harden County we would hear of it, had these telegrams telling them that their son was missing in action. I know in Savannah, the Savannah Courier was the county paper and each week we would get it. We couldn't wait to pick up the paper and look through it and see. When you would read and hear of things like that I lived in suspense not really knowing because I knew he was in the heavy part of the war. He was in 92nd Squadron I believe it was and there would be 500 of them at one time going over at the same time I mean dropping paratroopers just so high off the ground with fire coming up shooting at them. I never knew from one day to the next when I might get word or something that his plane had been shot down. As I say

he was just one of the fortunate ones. Even today the people that were in the same outfit that he was, they still correspond. This past year, we have kept up with it; four of his closest buddies have passed away. We have been to the Army reunions and renewed friendships over and over. It's sad to meet the wives again that they have lost their husband. It was a fearful time.

To end on an up note would you be so kind as to share your most favorite memory of these years, the one that never fails to make you smile.

Mrs. Bridges: Of course my favorite was his one week vacation at Christmas time because we had not planned to get married but we were madly in love, all through my senior year. Of course he was out a year ahead of me. He felt the same way even though we were separated and saw very little of each other.

(End of Interview)