

Interviewer: Good evening Grandma.

Mahan: High how are you Kacey?

Interviewer: Doing good.

Mahan: I'm Helen Mahan my maiden name was Lohr. In the distance way distance I was related to General Pershing. We tracked our family bad to General Pershing.

Interviewer: Oh wow Black Jack Pershing.

Mahan: We have the book but my names not in it because I was born the year after the book was published.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Mahan: Nineteen twenty-five.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

Mahan: I was born in New Kensington the fifth of five children. I had three older sisters and an older brother. My father was a carpenter a very good carpenter.

Interviewer: Did he build your home?

Mahan: No he didn't build anything he worked for other people who built homes.

Interviewer: Okay so did you stay in one house your entire life?

Mahan: No I lived in ever house I think in town we moved a lot for reason I won't go into but we moved a lot.

Interviewer: Okay

Mahan: I went to New Kensington High School Kensington School for two years.

Interviewer: I'll direct us to that. So what was your first childhood memory?

Mahan: Probably of probably first grade. I had the chicken pox.

Interviewer: Oh you had the chicken pox.

Mahan: And in those days you were quarantined. They came and put a sign on your door and you weren't allowed out for 30 days. I didn't go to school and my sister couldn't go to school.

Interviewer: What about your family members?

Mahan: My older sisters went and lived with other people because they were working.

Interviewer: Oh so wow as long as they weren't in the house?

Mahan: That's right.

Interviewer: And what about your parents were they allowed to go out?

Mahan: Oh yeah I guess so my dad would have gone to work. And anyway the day they were to come on a Saturday to take the sign off the door. And my sister Janet and I were gonna go to the movies to see Skippy with Jackie Cooper. And the man never came and took the sign off the door.

Interviewer: Oh so you couldn't go.

Mahan: And we were really sad. My mother went to the store and bought ice-cream and cherry pop and cookies and we had a little party.

Interviewer: That sounds like a great thing.

Mahan: Yeah I remember that was very vivid in my mind.

Interviewer: How big was your school? Like how many students were in your

Mahan: I couldn't tell you that. When I graduated there was 167 in my graduating class from Arnold.

Interviewer: Oh wow that's bigger than mine.

Mahan: From Arnold but Kensington was probably like three or four hundred.

Interviewer: Okay

Mahan: It was a lot bigger school.

Interviewer: Did you have any favorite subjects' school subjects?

Mahan: Well I was in the marching band. I was in the choir, I liked math and English.

Interviewer: And English was there any subjects you didn't like?

Mahan: I didn't care too much for Geography and History.

Interviewer: Oh that's my

Mahan: Science probably I hated I didn't like science.

Interviewer: We are kind of the exact opposites then.

Mahan: Yeah well that's what happens.

Interviewer: Um we're gonna go to the great depression. Do you when do you remember hearing that it was a depression?

Mahan: Well I didn't know the big word depression. I just knew that times were very hard. My father didn't have any work, we were on welfare we had to get and I remember walking down to the welfare office with father and we got milk. I would since I was the youngest child I was eligible to get milk and my father and I would walk down and get a couple quarts of milk every so often.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of the sacrifices your family had to make? I hear stories of people saving string from mailboxes.

Mahan: Oh we always saved string and aluminum foil. We just saved it had a big ball of string always.

Interviewer: Did you all have enough food to eat or

Mahan: It was very scarce.

Interviewer: Very scarce.

Mahan: Very scarce.

Interviewer: So your father was unemployed for a time. Was he able to finally find work?

Mahan: Well being a carpenter he didn't always have work because he worked on houses and he couldn't work in the winter unless they had the house under roof you know under the roof and he could do the inside work. But he didn't have work a lot of the times during the depression nobody was building houses.

Interviewer: Okay what was your view on FDR because I know you described giving milk to children which was something FDR created. How did you

Mahan: Well that was before FDR.

Interviewer: Okay

Mahan: I thought he was a good guy I really did. I mean if we wouldn't have had social security I don't know where this country would be today with myself included.

Interviewer: Do you know any of your views on his foreign policies?

Mahan: No

Interviewer: Okay

Mahan: I didn't

Interviewer: Alright we are going to start a little bit international. Do you ever remember hearing Germany starting to get aggressive in 1938, 1939?

Mahan: We knew that was going on. You know this is the time before televisions we had one radio in the house and it sat right beside where my dad sat and it got turned on when my dad said you could turn the radio on. We didn't have any other radio.

Interviewer: So no news

Mahan: So and we didn't pay any attention when there would be something happening outside like you would hear the paperboys going up and down the street saying "extra, extra read all about it." That was how we got the news.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Mahan: Yeah but we lived we lived through it and it didn't hurt us.

Interviewer: Um so you didn't hear too much about Germany prior to Pearl Harbor?

Mahan: No, well you know I was in high school that was the furthest thing from my mind.

Interviewer: Okay

Mahan: You know until Pearl Harbor hit then it was different it was on my own turf.

Interviewer: Okay did you have a job in high school?

Mahan: When I was a senior I got a job working at the bank in Arnold.

Interviewer: Do you remember how much you got paid?

Mahan: Very little. I remember the day on Monday morning the principal the super intendant of the school called me to his office and all the kids said uh huh the super intendant calling you. Well fortunately he went to my church and he knew I he knew me and he recommended me for a job at the bank down in Arnold. And so I went every day about a quarter after two and I worked until six or seven whenever we finished and I worked on Saturdays.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Mahan: My senior year in high school. I think I got 27 cents an hour.

Interviewer: Wow

Mahan: That was a lot.

Interviewer: A lot back then.

Mahan: Yeah

Interviewer: Uh do you remember when or where and when you were for Pearl Harbor?

Mahan: I was at home it was a Sunday afternoon. My older sister had had a baby and my mother and dad were in the hospital went down to see her in the hospital and my best friend Helen was at our house visiting. And my mother and dad came home and they had heard it on the bus and my girlfriend wouldn't believe it she didn't want to believe anything like that. But that's how I heard about Pearl Harbor. And the next day I went to school one of the girls came in the office came in the room and told us about George Lesley he was killed at Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Oh so someone

Mahan: And he was a friend of my sister Janet's he had been at our house many times. He was killed on Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: So you felt the effects of the war?

Mahan: Oh my yes right away right away.

Interviewer: So it must have been the talk of the town.

Mahan: Yes it was very sad.

Interviewer: Now how did things change at home after Pearl Harbor like when did men start leaving and maybe was there a scarcity of jobs?

Mahan: Well I don't know about the scarcity no I would think more people got hired because we had the aluminum company and they were making different things for the war in the aluminum company. I remember when I was probably a senior in high school down on 18th Street there was a little railroad station. It wasn't even a station it was just a shed where people could stand and wait for the train. And about once a month or once every six weeks the men that were drafted would go down to this little station like and the band would go down and play.

Interviewer: Oh so it was like a little

Mahan: And all the people were crying. And it just seemed when the train would be coming up the tracks my teacher would say we had to play this one march. And every time I hear it today I say the trains coming. It was real sad days real sad.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of volunteers in the beginning of the war?

Mahan: That I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know okay. Were you afraid that like some of your close friends would go off to war?

Mahan: Oh a lot of the kids I went to high school with the kid I went to the prom with was killed a lot of the kids I went to high school with were killed in the war yeah.

Interviewer: How did you get your news after?

Mahan: On the radio.

Interviewer: One the radio?

Mahan: Uh huh the newspaper.

Interviewer: Did you ever go see the film wheels?

Mahan: See what?

Interviewer: The film the news films?

Mahan: Yeah we would go to the movies because that's about all there was to do. And you could go to the movie and stay all day you didn't have to buy a ticket for one show. You could go in in the middle, sit through the ending, and then see it again and if you didn't have anything else to do you could see it again. And there always was a big news reel.

Interviewer: Okay did your job change because when did you graduate high school?

Mahan: Nineteen forty-three.

Interviewer: Forty-three so did you get different type of employment other than the bank at that time?

Mahan: No I stayed there until 1946 and then I went to work in the Miracle Window Glass in the office as a secretary.

Interviewer: Did you do the same work as you did before?

Mahan: Not really I worked well in the bank you work with figures and checks and all of that and the Glass House I just didn't do a whole lot.

Interviewer: Okay do you remember the rationing during the war?

Mahan: Oh yes

Interviewer: Can you

Mahan: Sugar was rationed shoes were rationed meat was rationed gasoline was rationed but that didn't bother us because we didn't have a car. Oh yes

Interviewer: How did you guys deal with some of the rationing like you know sugar with coffee drinkers?

Mahan: Yeah well you didn't not only were things rationed but they were very scarce. You would go to the grocery store and see a line you had no idea what they were in line for. But you would get in the line because you knew something you hadn't had for a while was going to be there. And a lot of times you got to the end of the line and there was nothing left.

Interviewer: Now was there anything that was rationed that was a real treat that you know you might have been able to get once like a good piece of meat or something like that?

Mahan: No

Interviewer: Did you guys participate in any like the tire drives and the scrap metal drives?

Mahan: I didn't, they probably did in high school I didn't.

Interviewer: When people started dying they would put the gold and the blue stars

Mahan: The blue and gold stars mothers would have a little flag and put it in their window.

Interviewer: Do you remember seeing them?

Mahan: Oh yes there were a lot of them. We had a little church the church I went to at that time it was a small church probably a couple hundred people if that many. I think we lost seven young men from it.

Interviewer: Did you have memorials for them or?

Mahan: Yeah we had a big memorial at the end of the war yes.

Interviewer: Oh it was just one big one at the end?

Mahan: Uh huh for our church they had a big memorial.

Interviewer: Do you know anybody who received a telegram you know the war telegram saying killed in action?

Mahan: Well I'm sure everyone that I knew I didn't actually know them personally I didn't I wasn't in on that but I do know people that got them.

Interviewer: Okay do you have any other memories during the war?

Mahan: Well when I went to the prom I had a corsage made out of defense stamps and flowers.

Interviewer: Wow patriotic.

Mahan: Well mostly you just had defense stamps you know they made a corsage out of defense stamps. And when you would put them in a book you would save them until you got enough money and you bought a bond with them. But the fellow I went with must have had a little bit money and he put roses in he put some flowers in it. I don't know what kind they were now I don't remember but I did have that.

Interviewer: Did you yourself buy any war bonds?

Mahan: No

Interviewer: No

Mahan: No not then no.

Interviewer: Did you do a lot of war bonds at the bank?

Mahan: Yeah we did yes.

Interviewer: And do you remember the drives?

Mahan: No

Interviewer: Okay let's see you know looking back 50, 60 years later how do you feel about you know your life during the war?

Mahan: It was sad. It was a sad time because all the young boys were away and some of them like I said some of the kids that I knew for years were killed. And this should be a happy time when you are a teenager and it really wasn't it was a sad time for us.

Interviewer: What was your reaction on VE-Day you know victory over Europe?

Mahan: We went well VE-Day VJ-Day we went down in New Kensington and they had a big everybody was there and there were noise makers and people throwing confetti yeah. And I remember going over to my girlfriend's house and sitting on the floor listening to the radio when they were declaring the war was over and her dad was saying Helen's such a good girl. She cried and she cried she cried here. But it was a sad time.

Interviewer: It was a sad time until the celebration. Did you have a boyfriend during?

Mahan: No no

Interviewer: Were there a lot of boys to date or were they all serving?

Mahan: No there wasn't much left to. No there were very few fellows around.

Interviewer: Did you have any friends that were denied service?

Mahan: No my brother served in the Navy. He was on a merchant marine ship and other than that I didn't know anybody that didn't go.

Interviewer: Well we already talked about your husband before this interview but how did you meet him?

Mahan: Well I was a teenager and he worked at the A&P Store several blocks away. Of course in my day at that time we didn't have refrigeration we didn't have a refrigerator. We had an icebox where you bought ice and put in so you went to the store every day because you couldn't keep things too long.

Interviewer: Like milk?

Mahan: Yes so I went to the store every day. So I got to know him, who he was, and my neighbor went to his church. So she told me what his name was but I never actually met him.

Interviewer: Until after the war?

Mahan: Until after the war. A friend of mine that I worked with at the Glass House her husband played ball with Sam and she decided she showed him a picture of me. Yeah he knew he had seen me he didn't know who I was really. Well she was going to have a hotdog roast and she wanted to invite him and me which she did. But that's how I met him went to a hotdog roast together. We didn't actually know each other sort of a blind date.

Interviewer: Did you guys start dating after that?

Mahan: No it was a couple months later he called me. He said where have you been? And I said where have I been? Where have you been? But then anyway we did start to go together then.

Interviewer: Okay did he ever talk about his war experiences?

Mahan: No no

Interviewer: None?

Mahan: No

Interviewer: Dad was commenting that I probably know more about what his units have done than you guys.

Mahan: I know a little bit now but he didn't talk about it and I didn't either. It was something he wanted to forget. I do know that one night his lieutenant lived in Butler and he had been killed and he wanted the parents wanted Sam to come up and talk to them and he wouldn't go. He couldn't go.

Interviewer: So it was very hard for him?

Mahan: Yeah it was very hard for him. So we didn't discuss the war.

Interviewer: How was the post war experiences the boom in 46, 47?

Mahan: Well we bought we got married in 49 and we bought our first house in 51. And we didn't have a telephone for quite a while we couldn't get a telephone.

Interviewer: Now I've heard stories where if somebody had a telephone you could kind of walk to their house.

Mahan: Oh yeah that was the thing we didn't have a phone. Well we had a phone when my older sister worked at the telephone office we'd have a phone then but other than that we didn't have a phone. And if you wanted to make a call you'd go to your neighbor and whoever had one and say could I use your phone and you would go.

Interviewer: Wow

Mahan: It you know but we survived.

Interviewer: Got through it huh?

Mahan: Yeah we survived without 15 phones in the house. Now I have one on every floor.

Interviewer: Times have changed.

Mahan: Yeah they sure have.

Interviewer: Do you have anything else to add to this interview? Anything at all that can come to mind that's related to anything we've talked about?

Mahan: No I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay well I'd like to thank you for taking the time to

Mahan: Oh you're quite welcome.

Interviewer: To conduct this interview.

Mahan: I hope you got it all because I don't want to have to do it again.

Interviewer: Okay Grandma we're going to talk about your first date with your fellow.

Mahan: Well the first or second date he came and we went down I don't know where we were going I guess we were going to go to the movies. But anyway he took me down 5th Avenue and up 12th Street. Now that was a very bad neighborhood. And he parked the car in front of this building and I thought oh my, what have I gotten myself into. He got out of the car and went into this building decrepit looking building and I thought oh my what did I do you know. And pretty soon he came out never saying a word he came out and got back in the car. He said to me I work there I left my wallet in there.

Interviewer: So he brought you to the bad side of town.

Mahan: And I went whew.

Interviewer: I just remembered one thing. Fashion during the war I heard stories of you painting

Mahan: Yeah we painted our legs with what did they call it I can't remember what they called it. It was in a bottle and it was hard to put on.

Interviewer: What color was it?

Mahan: Like hose would be. The hose they had then they were so baggy they just they were terrible. So in the summer we would paint our legs with this you got it in a bottle and put it on your legs. And if you if you did a good job it wasn't bad. But it had a tendency to streak.

Interviewer: Were you guys able to buy clothes or just kind of

Mahan: Yeah we could we had yeah

Interviewer: So during the war

Mahan: Other than shoes I didn't have until the war was over then I got more shoes.

Interviewer: Okay now after the war were there any innovations like nylon that you remember? I know rubber and plastic was done up during the war.

Mahan: Yeah nylon hose came in then because we had silk hose during the war. Well if we could get them they were very scarce so we had rayon, rayon hose and they were very baggy.

Interviewer: You didn't like them too much?

Mahan: No I didn't but that's all we could get and everybody else was wearing them.

Interviewer: Alright well we've added those two things at the very end. Again I'd like to thank you for conducting this interview.

Mahan: You're welcome.