

## Texas City / World War II Oral History Project

### Audited Transcript

Interviewee: Lou I. Ringer

Interviewer: Rebecca Snow

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[0:01]

R: Okay, now here we are. My name's Rebecca Snow, and I work for the Moore Memorial Library, and we're here on July 10, 2012 to interview Mrs. Lou Ringer about her experiences during World War II. And thank you very much for coming.

L: Oh. Thank you for inviting me. Whatever story it may be. (Laughs.)

R: Right. Right. And we understand that you were young at that time. So first I wanted to ask you about your background, about your family. You were living in Galveston at the time, your family was. How long had they been there? Roughly.

L: My mother—I'm eighty-one now. So my mother was born on the island. So we were there when Jean Lafitte was there, I think. (Laughs.) But my mother was one of about eight children and had about a third grade education, because she had to stay home and help with the dairy that they had there.

R: They had a dairy.

L: Uh-huh. Or they ran the dairy, they didn't own it. She had to stay and take care of her brothers and sister. And my mother married my father, Ivan Ites, and I have two older brothers—I had two older brothers, they're deceased, Ivan Leveigh Ites and Robert Ray Ites. I was the third child of this couple, Adeline Louise Milo.

When I was eleven months old my father was killed in a car accident. He delivered milk for a dairy. So I had a very humble childhood. My mother stayed home and took care of us, a widow with three little children.

[2:16]

I was eleven, one brother was two and one brother was four. So, we had a very difficult—

R: I'm sorry, you were eleven months?

L: I was eleven months old.

R: Was this the same dairy that your mother's family (unintelligible)?

L: Oh no, no, no. She married this man who drove a truck. This is when they delivered milk to the door.

R: Okay. I'm so sorry to hear that.

L: Yes, I was too. (Laughs.) At that time, compared to today, if a man was killed in a car accident—because the man just drove through the side of his milk truck, and immediately killed him—today there would have been thousands of dollars poured out. There would have been all kind of people coming with stuff, with TV coverage and everything, "This poor little widow woman with three children and no education" and on and on.

But, she got not one penny from anybody. And the government gave her—I don't know who it was—but somebody gave her a fifteen dollar a month check. With my grandparents living in the next block, somehow or other we managed.

And when—I would say, that was a blessing when the war came, my mother got a job. I was about eleven, twelve, whatever. She was a machinist helper, at Todd Dry Dock, (laughs) in Galveston. We were living very high on the hog at that point.

R: So she got nothing from the family, from the man who caused it, you didn't go to court or anything like that.

L: No, there was nothing. No, nothing. So I'm told. I didn't know, I was eleven months old.

R: When you were growing up, were you still in your own house?

L: Yes. That's the thing. We grew up in that house. I guess it must have been paid for because somehow or other—.

R: (Unintelligible.)

L: Because I remember, with my first job—my mother married when I was about thirteen, and I told her, "It's a little late. I don't need a father now." So I made a deal with this gentleman. I said, "I will help you if you will help me."

I went to work at City Hall, and the taxes on that house for all those years had never been paid. And somehow or other they never put my mother out.

[5:25]

And it was very interesting that when we'd pay off one year, and then we'd pay off ten years. Before I quit work, every month, my stepfather and I, Mr. Emil Frank—he was from Bellville, Texas—we would take care of that. Take care of the taxes for that time.

And it was fortunate that my first job was at City Hall in Galveston. I went right from Ursuline Academy to Galveston. And that's another whole story, how I got to Ursuline Academy, because you had to pay tuition.

R: So you were in the house. Were you helping your mother with chores, and things like that?

L: Oh my goodness yes.

R: How about your brothers, did they help like you, or did you have—

L: They did the yard. They did the yard, we did the house. And my mother always had flowers. That's one thing I just am very grateful for. Everything was orderly, and we had flowers. If I were ever hungry, she'd tell me to go in the yard and eat something.

And we had figs, and plums, and grapes, and grapefruit, and oranges, and mulberries. Until somebody said that polio was being spread by the flies that got on the mulberries that the children were eating without washing them. We ate all that food—plums, everything, and we never washed anything. So, I guess that's why I'm eighty-one and still pretty hale and hearty.

R: Yes.

L: So, the early diet and this led you to kind of eat right, and eat at least two or three pieces of fruit a day.

R: Well, that's great. Did she cultivate them, did she take care of them?

L: Oh yes.

R: Like the flowers, she was a gardener.

L: Yes, yes. And everything in Galveston at that time just grew.

R: Let me see. Did you have electricity when you were growing up?

L: We had running water that was outside the house. The bathroom was on the alley, and we lovingly refer to it now as "a bath with a path." (Laughs.) I just remember that old stinky bad outhouse.

The city tried to take care of their poor people at that time. A man would come down the alley on a horse and wagon, and he was very nice always to the children. He put—I think it was lime, in the two holes. That was our sanitation.

R: Yes, I remember outhouses. Outhouses make a big impression on children, I think.

L: Oh, absolutely. And when I got to be a Girl Scout leader and I took my Girl Scouts and we went to Camp Windermere and they had an outhouse, I nearly died. (Both laugh.) No, no. I'm above this now, I don't want any part of this.

R: Well, you didn't have a big family at that point, because of course your dad had passed away, but—

[9:02]

L: Well, my grandfather and grandmother lived in the next block. Big Italian family, bunch of uncles and one aunt. Whenever we went there, our Papa Milo would always have something cooked, something to eat.

He was very good. He was always the very best to the youngest in the family. I was the youngest for a long time, three years. My cousin Bonnie Milo Rice, she's Bonnie Rice now, from La Marque—came along. And when she would come, she was the queen. (Laughs.) I had to abdicate!

R: You got to see somebody else take that place. (Unintelligible.)

L: Yes, yes. You got to hold his hand and walk to the corner grocery store. And the Andridge family owned the corner grocery store. Madell, Steve, and Bobby. And Bobby Andridge was just a few years older than I was. Somebody said he owned a casino in Vegas. I've been to Vegas many times, and I don't ever see any Andridge Casino out there. (Laughs.)

R: Andridge Casino. But he would be there when you would go to the store?

L: Oh yes. Yes, yes. But the story was my grandfather would let the baby walk with him to the store, and you would get a little penny candy or a bubble gum or something. You knew there was a treat in it for you if your grandfather took you by the hand. And my grandmother was always sickly and didn't walk very well. She didn't have too much to do with us.

R: But your grandfather, maybe being Italian—he also cooked, you said.

L: Yes— yes, yes.

R: Oh, that's great.

L: And she was Irish, and he was Italian and she always wanted to have chicken and dumplings, and he always wanted to have spaghetti. And he says, "I'll tell you one thing, Lula, we have no spaghetti today, we have no dinner at all." So, we usually had spaghetti every Sunday, and the whole family would come. So I had that sense of family, even though we were three little orphan children.

R: That's great. Right. But then if you had just the pump outside, did your mom have to do the clothes? Do you remember washing? Did you help her?

L: Oh, I remember on a scrub board—

R: How did you wash the clothes?

L: On a scrub board.

R: Where did you get the hot water?

L: Oh no. We washed in cold water. (Laughs.)

R: You did.

L: We were ahead of the times, because now they tell you that you should not wash your clothes in real hot water, and use less soap. So we were ahead of the times even back that far away.

R: So you just pumped it and you washed and then you rinsed—outside?

L: Yes. And then when we got a washing machine, it was so exciting. Somebody gave it to us, and you cranked the clothes through. And a boy's pair of blue jeans going through there was a killer. But you know, girls' dresses and towels and things like that went.

And to take a bath, the number three washtub was put in the kitchen. One thing of hot water, and then a pot of cold water, and the boys bathed first and got out—(coughs) pardon me—and then it was my turn. And I thought, "I want to be first. There's fleas and grass and everything in this water." But, hey.

R: You couldn't take a turn. They wouldn't switch around.

L: Couldn't take a turn, no. They were always first.

R: Some families did that.

L: Boys first.

R: Some families changed the order. How about your mom? Was she after you?

L: I don't know what she did. (Laughs.) Probably that, yes.

R: Well kids have to be—

L: Well, I'm sure that's how she—yes, how she did it.

R: Kids have to be washed more than that, so—

L: Yes, and we did not have a telephone. And I want to tell you, when I was thirteen, fourteen—can you imagine, when we got a phone, the first time I heard that phone ring in that house, I thought, “This is what it’s like.” (Laughs.) It was such a wonderful sound.

[13:27]

R: But you had electricity, do you remember oil or did you always have electricity, lamps—lights, when you were little?

L: No, I always remember lights. We did not have to strike matches or anything. Oh, it was my job—I walked from 49<sup>th</sup> and Q to 53<sup>rd</sup> Street to Alamo School, and my brothers walked with me. I would always—I got out a little earlier, because I was a lower grade, and I walked all that distance home by myself. The house was not locked—went in, struck a match, and lit the gas stove, no matter how cold it was.

And so I think the more children have to do that helps the family, I think the better off they are, because I’m still the caregiver, and want to keep everything in order. Some people might call that opinionated. (Laughs.)

R: No, but you’re right. It gives a responsibility at young ages, it’s (unintelligible).

L: It’s like I see a better way to do it, so let’s do it this way. And my mother would go along with me whenever I did anything like that.

R: So the gas stove was for heat.

L: Yes, yes. A radiant heater. You’d just strike the match and stick it in the radiant and turn the gas on and it would go “phew!” (explosive noise)

R: And you weren’t scared about it.

L: No. That was my job.

R: But it seemed like a long time (unintelligible).

L: I had to have the heater on for when the boys got home and Mama got home, because that’s when she was working at Todd Shipyard.

R: Right. So she was a housewife then, through your early grades of school. Which school did you go to first?

L: Alamo. Alamo School, and you went there through the fifth grade. Seventh, eighth and ninth was at Lovenberg, on 39<sup>th</sup> and Seawall Boulevard. It's gone now.

R: Lovenberg, okay.

L: So you either went to Lovenberg or Austin, that was the other junior high there in Galveston. And I think they have only one now, one junior high school. I think it's just seventh and eighth, and the sixth grade is considered middle school. Fifth and sixth is middle school.

R: Yes, they've changed that now. Right. So you walked all the time?

L: Oh. I never rode in a car. Never, ever, ever. We would catch the Crockett—

R: Or bicycle?

L: Oh, no, I never had—

R: (Unintelligible) bicycle.

L: I had a bicycle with no wheels and I used to just exercise on it. It was at the very back of the yard, and I could go sit on that bicycle with no wheels. And I remember the lady, Miss Smith, next door, she said, "If I had the money, I would certainly buy you a bicycle."

But my mother wouldn't have let me ride it, because you had to go in the street. If you went in the street, you'd be killed. It's a wonder I'm not just paranoid about cars and streets and you know—I was going to be killed. So I had the death fear placed on me at an early age.

R: Because of what happened to your dad.

L: Yes. Yes. And she just thought, this is not good.

[16:52]

And then the war came. And this little nothing story that I have, is—I heard it, it was a Sunday afternoon. I heard it on the radio. And the radio was my greatest love. I guess—

R: So you had the radio from an early age.

L: Yes. Oh my goodness. Without that, I wouldn't have known a thing. I would not have known a thing.

R: But what do you mean, there was just like entertainment shows? Or soap operas?

L: Well, like my mother could not read. So she did not—she could not read to us, or anything. There was a program out. It just came on on Saturday morning, and it was called "Let's Pretend." It was all the little fables and stories and make-believe stuff.

R: Aesop, or Mother Goose, or—

L: Yes. Every childhood poem and story that I know was then. I was so grateful for that radio.

R: So you didn't have a book that you could look at, when you were little.

L: No.

R: But you learned to read at school?

L: I did not—oh that's another story. I did not learn to read until I was in the eighth grade.

R: Wow, so you missed out then.

L: Oh, so much. But the sister, Mother Philip—I went from Lovenberg to Ursuline Academy, because—this is another story.

The young man next door to me was the Schattel family. And his father was a typesetter for the *Galveston News*. Can you imagine, they used to do one letter at a time, and they were metal letters? The Schattel family was very influential in my life.

In fact, the Catholic that I am today is because they invited me to go to Junior Schattel's confirmation at St. Patrick's Church. I had never been inside any church except Crockett Place Methodist Church. Rather austere, one aisle—benches on each side, a picture of the Garden of Olives, and a pulpit. (Coughs.) That was my church experience.

R: Do you want to take a break to get some water?

L: Oh, I don't care. It's just—I'm having drainage. (Laughs.)

R: Well, these are old books in here, too. That's what I'm thinking.

[19:47]

L: Well, I was a librarian for six years at Our Lady of Fatima School. Madeline L'Engle was one of my favorite writers.

I had two children at Fatima School, and I had Robin, and Robin was the assistant—she always said she was the assistant librarian at Our Lady of Fatima School. When she was three years old, I could put the "A" books in front of the "A," and she would very neatly put them in, and the "B's." She had a little trouble with the nonfiction. "92A" didn't mean too much to her, so I told her, "Mother will do that, and you do just the ABC," because it was just by author's last name.

R: When you were how old was that?

L: Oh, this was when I was married and when I was librarian at Fatima School.

R: Well, do you want me to get you some water?

L: No. That's fine. I'll just spit out whenever I have to. (Laughs.)

R: No, no, no. It's fine. I just didn't want you to be uncomfortable. So, then you went to the confirmation, and you saw what a difference it was?

L: I went to his—I went to Anthony Schattel's confirmation, and I walked into St. Patrick's church. I was thirteen years old. And I had never, ever—I could have been in the Sistine Chapel. It was just magnificent. The stained glass windows were all the way up and down, the altar and its adornments were just breathtaking.

And then, for the ceremony, here comes—I didn't know who they were then, but I do now—the Knights of Columbus was carrying the canopy over Father Murphy, who was the pastor at St. Patrick's at that time, carrying the monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, and the bishop. And they processed to the main altar, and it began. These beautiful little children in white dresses and white suits came down the aisle. The bishop spoke exactly to the children, and I thought, "Oh, this is so beautiful."

I asked Mrs. Schattel when it was over, I said, "How long does it take, or does it cost anything to join this church?" And she says, "Oh no, you just can talk to the priest and he will let you know." And I thought, "Would you wait just a few minutes?"

I went to the rectory door, at thirteen, knocked on the door and asked Father Ruddy, the young priest, the young priest that was there, if it would be possible for him to baptize me, because I want to join this church. And he says, "Well, it doesn't work like that. First we have to have permission from your parents, and then you have to take instructions. But we can talk about it once I get permission from your parents."

[23:16]

So, my attitude was, "Well, I don't have a father, and my mother doesn't care what I do." (laughs) And so he says, "Well, she has to tell me that."

R: So you were quite sure of yourself.

L: Yes.

R: Even though you went through the experience of not—

L: Not having anything. Anything.

R: —of having trouble with the reading, at school?

L: At this point, at this point I don't know how I got through it. Because I don't know if I was dyslexic, or what, but I could not read. It just did not make sense to me.

R: You didn't have the right teacher. You just didn't have the right teacher.

L: Well, when I met Mother Philip at Ursuline—oh, that was the story, it went on there. So, Father Ruddy says, "If when I talk to your mother, if you could come every day for instructions"—can you imagine having this much time on your hands? But he was the young priest there, and Father Murphy was the pastor.

And he says, "If you could come every day for the summer, you would get enough instructions." So, Mother—when we were through about two months, I'm sure it was almost two months—that man met with me every day, and I studied and studied and got people to help me read the lesson, the catechism, the Baltimore catechism, "Who are you? Who made you?" Another story: in order to get there every day was going to cost a nickel.

R: I was just thinking about that. You weren't close by.

L: And a nickel home.

R: Where was your house exactly?

L: 49<sup>th</sup> and Q, and St. Patrick's was on Broadway and 35<sup>th</sup>, something like that. So I went next door and told this Inez Smith. She was the lady at the Queen Cleaners, they owned the Queen Cleaners. And asked her, "If I come over every evening and roll your hair, I will do it for 25¢. Every day. Every day, 25¢." And she said, "Okay." And so for the whole time that I went there, I went over every day. When she got ready to go to bed, I would go and roll her hair. And all my girls say that I am a frustrated beautician. (Laughs.) From that experience, probably.

R: Was she the woman who wanted to buy you the bicycle?

L: No, her mother was.

R: That was her mother.

L: Her mother. Mrs. Smith—I don't even know what her real name was, her first name. After I did that for the summer, then it was time to go to school. Father Ruddy said, "If you could find your way to go to Ursuline, we could baptize you, let you receive your First Communion and let you receive Confirmation." I thought, "Good. I'll do that." I said, "But I think—don't they charge to go to that school?"

[27:01]

And he said, "Yes, they do." And I thought, "Well, I'm going to have to think about that," and talked it over. But anyway—I did go, and I did figure out a way to pay for it. So, when I was going to Ursuline, that's when my mother was working at UTMB in the blood bank.

R: Okay. So that was a bit later. And you're right. This is really interesting to me. You're right, we need to talk about—we're going to take up all your voice.

L: Yes. (Laughs.)

R: And we do need to talk about World War II.

L: When I was a little girl. Okay.

R: So, actually you remembered—on the radio, you thought you remembered—but he never said "We are at war," I think, on the radio. He only said it to Congress.

L: You know what—

R: I looked it up. I looked it up.

L: Is that right?

R: I looked it up.

L: "America is at war." Then it could have been the announcer.

R: The announcer. Yes.

L: "America is at war." That's what I heard. Oh, it just struck such fear. I thought, you know, "They're on their way. We're all going to be annihilated in twenty minutes. We're at war!" I just think, "Goodness, gracious. What are we going to do?"

I thought, "Well, my grandmother's house is safer than our house," because it was a little old, old house. My grandmother's was too, but it was in good repair. (Laughs.) So I thought I'd be safer at my grandmother's house, and I went running down there, and I was telling everybody that I saw along the way, "We're at war! America is at war!"

It was just such a gut-wrenching feeling for that little girl to know that "We are at war!" I had no idea what that meant, except everybody's voice, intonation was: "This is a tragedy! This is something really bad that's going to happen to us."

R: Right. And you pick up on that. But now, if you were eleven, then your brothers were like already fourteen and fifteen, no?

L: Twelve, thirteen, fourteen. Yes, yes.

R: Just a little older.

L: Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Yes, that's correct. Yes.

R: I was thinking you were eleven. In 1941. Do you (unintelligible)?

L: Yes. And they were each two years older than me. So that would make that correct.

R: So they weren't any ready to go to war.

L: Oh no. No. But all my mother's brothers were. The Milo family. It was Joe Milo, and Johnny Milo—Harry Milo. Joe Milo. Joe, Harry, Johnny, and Bill. And then she had a

sister, Ida Mae. Those four boys went to the service. Four young men. Some were married and had children, and some were not, but they all went. Today, I can't figure out—why did they all have to go? You know—

R: Especially if they were married, sometimes with a family.

L: And family, married and had a family. Or maybe jobs were not good at that time, so maybe they went just to have a permanent occupation.

R: Did they make them go overseas?

L: Oh, all of them did. All of them did. And my one uncle came back very traumatized. I can remember he took like a drink, some red liquid, and that would calm him down. So that was called "the nerve medicine." (Laughs.) I didn't know what it was, but that's what it was.

R: I don't know. So when you—

L: The part that is really interesting is that Fort Crockett was on Galveston Island, at that time.

[31:20]

We could go to the movie there. Some of these uncles would come and pick up us three kids, and we could walk down from 49<sup>th</sup> and Q to the Boulevard, that's where the movie theater was.

For a nickel, we could go to the movies. I'm sure it was probably free for the servicemen, but they let the children around there come and use their movie theater. Then, when we really got into the practicing shooting, being in an army fort atmosphere—and whoever wrote the book *Submarines in the Gulf*, or *Nazis in the Gulf*—

R: Melanie Wiggins?

L: Yes. It probably was true, they probably were right out there. And the seawall had a blackout because of that, and I remember if—

R: Do you remember the blackout?

L: Yes, yes.

R: What did you do? Like how did you cover the windows, and things like that?

L: Oh, it wasn't so much the families. You just pull your shade. You just pull your shade. And it was completely darkening.

R: Did that happen like every night?

L: Every night. The Boulevard—if you would ride down the entire length of the Boulevard, and there would be not one light showing. I can remember some places that we would go into, for something—we would go to a side door, so it wouldn't flash to the Gulf. I don't remember what I would be going there for. (Laughs.)

R: Was there like a signal that it was time for the blackout? Did they decide what (unintelligible)?

L: No, it was just every day, every day, was—it was just blackout every night. Because we're this little island sitting there, but we do have a fort there with many, many soldiers. I think the girls in Galveston, that's how they all moved away—they all met and married nice cute little soldier boys from the North. I was too young for all that.

R: And in school, did the teacher talk about, ask how many people in your family—did you have like assemblies where you like had any war bond rallies, things like that?

L: No. No. I don't remember that because we didn't have any money and couldn't buy it anyway. But I do remember the rationing tickets.

R: The rationing.

L: They would come in the mail. My mother—she had learned to live on a shoestring from the Day One, and we never had a car. So we gave Mrs. Smith, the lady next door, the gasoline coupons, for which she was most grateful.

[34:38]

R: And did you expect something back from her, or you just gave them to her.

L: Well, no. They just gave them to her.

R: And what about the other things, for like meat or for (unintelligible)?

L: Yes, that's it. I think Mrs. Smith was the recipient of a whole bunch of our ration tickets. Everything was rationed.

R: But do you— (Unintelligible.)

L: Shoes. Shoes. Leather had gone to war. Everything went to war, (laughs) and we were left there.

R: Do you remember not being able to get clothes because of that? Or having trouble, or standing in line, or anything like that?

L: No. We didn't buy many clothes. All our clothes were given to us.

R: They were given. Your mom didn't sew, though?

L: No. Our neighbors. No, no. My mother didn't know how to sew and we didn't have a sewing machine. It was very simple. Very simple, simple life.

R: But how about things like getting butter or getting—margarine?

L: Oh. The butter was so cute. Yes. We would get the box of—the yellow went to war, so you were given your own little packet of yellow. You would get what looked like a pound of lard, and you would work this yellow into it, so your butter would be yellow.

R: Right.

L: That was just—

R: Did you miss butter? Did you use butter usually before the war?

L: No. No, no. I said, I am eighty-one, and I take no medicine. And I think it's because, as a child, I ate beans and rice probably four times a week. And we drank Pet milk. It'd be like keeping a baby on formula for all his life, because you could get it like 3¢ a can.

R: What was Pet milk? Was that Carnation?

L: Carnation, Pet—you know—

R: Was it powdered milk?

L: No. It was in a can. And that's what we had on our cereal, and we'd even dilute it down sometimes.

R: But it was different from dairy milk, being delivered by the—

L: Oh yes. We didn't have any delivery. And we had milk, once a month, when my mother got her check. I remember she got a Peter Paul Mounds bar. That was her treat. She got one of those, and we got a quart of milk for the three of us. And that was just always the sweetest taste. And to this day, I don't care for milk. I put it on cereal, but that's about it. I would never go and deliberately drink a glass of milk.

R: So your mom, before the war—was she doing anything else like to make money? Or she was being the housewife?

L: No. Raising the three children.

R: Right. Looking after you.

L: Three preschool children. How she did that with what she had, I'll never know.

R: But then, by the time the war came—so how did she get that job?

L: Somebody in the neighborhood told her that all the men had gone to war, and this would be a good opportunity for her. Because she was very mechanical, now, she taught herself, you know, if you're going to tear the fence down, you're the one that's going to do it. And she was just going to be a machinist's helper, that's like handing him his instruments to work with. But she was the one that would carry it up the ladder.  
(Laughs.)

R: Wow.

[38:18]

L: She was very strong. Very strong lady.

R: How did she get to work? How far was it?

L: On the bus. On the bus.

R: On the bus.

L: From 49<sup>th</sup> and Q, you could get on the Crockett bus and go to 21<sup>st</sup> and—well, it was at Todd Shipyard, let's see. So maybe she got off on 53<sup>rd</sup>, or wherever the boat was that

would take you there. I think it was close to the—Todd Shipyard was—hmm. It still is, like right over there by the wharf. You know. Fisherman's Wharf.

R: But did it change your life then, when your mom went to work? Your routine (unintelligible)?

L: I had to do everything she used to do.

R: Because you were in like, what, maybe sixth grade or fifth grade?

L: Probably.

R: Something like that. Did you have to do like more ironing, or anything like that?

L: Once I got to—no, that's the one thing I—my mother would iron everything. And now to think that I spent all the years that I spent as an adult, that was impressed in—you iron everything. And I would—

R: People ironed sheets. (Laughs.)

L: Absolutely. Pillowcases.

R: Yes.

L: I started ironing pillowcases when I was three, I think. (Laughs.) And that was that. But anyway, back to this—

R: So, for the war.

L: For this war thing, and the rationing—and oh, and of course there was no air conditioning and no locks on the doors. I don't think we even had a fan. But there was a really big window here, and a really big window there, and we slept right here. And there's always a breeze in Galveston.

But I was always afraid, so I was all covered up and hot and sweaty. And I slept with my mother. I would get a heat rash on my neck, and whenever it got bad enough—and I was also a little devious, sometime I would almost make it happen—because then she would take us to the beach and the salt water would cure it.

We would go into the water. We lived on 49<sup>th</sup>. We would walk down to 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, and then go from 53<sup>rd</sup> and Q to the Boulevard. And that's another thing. Even at my age, I probably walk four times a week, and do about three miles. Did it yesterday.

R: There's a friend of mine, Shirley Cucco, who lives in La Marque. She grew up on the island, and she said it was just nothing for them to walk like even—she talks about walking—I don't know, the *length*, everywhere.

L: Everywhere. That's it. Yes.

R: Says, "Oh yes, we did that. We went up and we went down." But I mean, that was when you had some time, like you were just saying, if you had to go for the instruction, you couldn't take the time to walk like that.

L: That's right. No. No, I couldn't. I would be alone, and that was a real far walk for me by myself.

R: Well, what were you scared of, when you were lying there with your—

[41:37]

L: Oh. I was going to tell you about walking to and from the beach, when I had my heat rash. Whenever I'd get the heat rash, then Mother, all two boys and me, and we would go—

R: This was during the war.

L: Yes. And we would go down to the beach. So we had to walk past Fort Crockett on 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. And there was always a soccer game going on, on the campus of Fort Crockett. I mean, she impressed on us: do not look over there, do not wave at those people, do not do anything. Just walk past them with your eyes to the beach, because they're German prisoners. So we had prisoners of war on Galveston Island. What a cushy job.

R: Why couldn't you look at them?

L: Because, we did not want to encourage any kind of camaraderie. But—tell me not to do something, and that's what I'm going to do. I would lag back. And I (laughs)—little girl waving, and they would wave back. And Mother says, "Don't anybody wave at those people!" You know, like they were the evil monsters.

They were the prisoners, they had been brought there. And I didn't understand any of that. They were just a bunch of really fun-looking young men playing soccer. And I didn't know what soccer was then, they were just kicking the ball, as far as I was concerned.

R: Right, right.

L: Baseball, I knew a little bit about. So anyway, that was our thing. We would go to the beach, and cure all our ills with the salt water.

R: Right. Which it does.

L: Which it does.

R: So why were you covered up? Were you afraid because there was going to be a burglar, or were you thinking about—

L: Oh, and if the wind blew, I was most afraid of the weather. Oh. If it would rain, and the wind would blow, I just knew our house was going to fall down. Because it did shake.

R: Oh. So you weren't scared of the Germans.

L: No. No. The fact that they were there—no that didn't scare me, because they were really nice guys and all they did was play soccer.

R: Well, did the other girls or boys at school talk about like, "Oh, there's Germans out there," or submarines or anything, or was that just the adults, maybe thinking about it?

L: I think it was just the adults. No. We were just children.

R: Do you remember the boys playing war and stuff? Did your brothers play war?

[44:16]

L: Oh, yes. We went out in the morning and didn't go back unless we needed a drink of water, or something to eat. And people weren't constantly checking on us.

R: Of course. You just went.

L: "Where are you? Where are you?" You just knew to come back within a reasonable length of time. And I pretty much gave my children—but we lived in a neighborhood here in Texas City, where from our house to the corner there were thirty-six children.

R: Wow.

L: They all went to Fatima School, so I said we lived in a little Catholic ghetto over here. (Rebecca laughs.) The Adams' family had thirteen, the Hutchinsons' family had six, the Hendersons' family had eight, we had—

R: How many did you have?

L: —five. Five.

R: You had five. You and your husband.

L: And they were seventeen years from number one to number five. The first was a boy, the last was a boy, and there were fifteen years of girls in the middle. It seemed like the first two babies were within fifteen months, and then it was six years and we had Robin. Then it was six years and we had Monica. In two years we had Philip, and he was the last one. So from twenty-one to—what was it, thirty-nine when I had Philip? (Laughs.) I used every childbearing year I had.

John and I are probably the last of the real fearless Catholics. (Laughs.) People aren't going to have families like that anymore.

R: Oh no, but some of them do now. In this—well, that's another story.

L: Yes.

R: But some Catholics are interested in bringing that back and having big families and having like six, seven, eight, nine kids.

L: Yes.

R: And it's hard on the mom, but I think it's maybe easier than it used to be, too.

L: Oh, my goodness, yes.

R: But I think you're right about that, it's a great thing when the kids can just get out, and they're like—explore the neighborhood and be with each other, and you have a whole life out there.

L: That's it. And they had individual friends, they had group friends, they played everything together, our children.

R: When you were little—

L: When I was little, they weren't—

R: —was there a certain area you couldn't go to? Or you could only go so far?

L: No, I never ventured past the corner, which was where Andridge's corner grocery store was, Andridge's groceries, and my grandmother was at 5022 Q. We were 4920 and she was 5022. So I went from there to there.

And I went across the street to the children and across the alley. You said, my clothes as a child—there was people in a big two story, beautiful house that—her playhouse was nicer than our house.

And she used to let me play with her, Mary Catherine Mayers. He was Anheuser Busch—he accepted the yeast, or something. This yeast stuff used to come in a barrel. The barrel was filled with ice and sawdust. He had a vacant lot next door to him.

[48:01]

The truck would come and dump the barrel, and then Mr. Mayers would come, open the barrel, throw the ice and the sawdust. He had a refrigerator in his, and if we would run the little packages from the sawdust pile to his refrigerator, he would let us have all the ice that was in the sawdust.

And so we'd pick the ice up and go rinse it off, and that's what we had in our tea in the evening. And I think, "Oh my goodness." I see today if an ice cube falls on the floor, they just go to pieces. You know, "Throw it away, throw it away." And this ice—God only knows where it came from. We would eat it. Sometimes we'd just wipe it off and just eat it, because it was so cooling and refreshing. I don't know how I got to this point.

(Laughs.)

R: You were talking about—I was asking like whether you were playing the war games, and you said your brothers were.

L: Oh yes, yes. The Nazis were always the bad kids.

R: But did you play that too? And the Nazis—how about the Japanese? Did they get into the Japanese?

L: Well, this is it. We didn't know much about who were the Germans and who were the Japanese. We lived in a very small world. It was really brought home when Mr. Schattel, the man that lived on this side, that was the newsprint setter for the *Galveston News*, built an air raid shelter.

Well I thought, "If Mr. Schattel has an air raid shelter, what are we going to do?" He got somewhere a steel plate. He made it about this high, and it was probably as big as this table, with maybe a foot on it. Yes. He had children, and his wife. He built the cement wall up this high, and it had one little square on this side, and one little square that was for ventilation, and the front door was a number three washtub. It was round, and he put it in. That's how thick that wall was. And then that piece of metal was on the top.

We always talked and laughed and everything about the air raid shelter. The worst part was, his wife was a huge Czech lady. She's deceased now, I'm sure. She couldn't get in it. (Laughs.)

R: Oh dear.

L: She was too large to get through that tub. So that was kind of a, "Gosh, hope they don't ever bomb here, because poor Mrs. Schattel will just have to block the entry to the air raid shelter."

R: Oh gosh, right! (Laughs.) Just a running joke, yes.

L: Whenever we played hiding or something, they would go looking in the air raid shelter, if someone was in the air raid shelter. And they never stored anything in there, because it was always at the ready.

R: Right. Do you remember when you went to the movies? The newsreels—and did they show the war?

L: Oh, absolutely, yes. Yes. And like I said, we'd walk down to Fort Crockett. And some of the young military men would boo at this part, if they showed them doing something bad to our planes, or that. And so I thought, "Just to boo it is all we can do. We have no control over it."

And it was just one really awful terrible thing. I just—in Galveston, when the war was going on, there just was—with the blackouts, with the rationing, and everything that went on, it just was—it wasn't a happy time.

[52:37]

I don't remember happy times. On the Fourth of July they did fireworks. And my mother—we had to go to bed at eight o'clock. She would wake us up, at about, I don't know when they did it—ten maybe, when it was dark. And we would stand in front of our house on 49<sup>th</sup> and Q, and look straight down and we could see the fireworks. She would wake us up to see the fireworks. So it was interesting.

R: Do you remember your uncles or something, coming back for like leaves and stuff?

L: Oh yes, that was—yes.

R: Or your grandmother crying or anything?

L: Well, see, that's the thing. When they came back—by then, I was a big girl. I was on the go.

R: Fourteen, fifteen.

L: Yes. With my Ursuline friends. Oh, that's the best thing that ever happened to me, because those nuns taught me a different fear that I use to this day. And it's not really fear, it's love. If you have—to know and love and serve God, you have it all.

And I feel like from that age, when Mother Philip brought me in—I went from Lovenberg to Ursuline, and I was in her class four weeks, first month. And she says, "You come after school every day for six weeks and I'm going to teach you to read." I thought, "I can read." And she says, "Don't make me embarrass you by having you read something, because you cannot read."

And I went every day, and that magnificent wonderful lady—and I would have named my first son Philip, but John Ringer wanted a Junior, and so I had to wait until the very end, and he's named Philip. Philip Travis Ringer, named after my husband's best friend and named after Mother Philip.

And so I have two! One is named for Sister Monica, that was the principal that got me to be the librarian at Fatima School.

I would have book collections—who doesn't have a million books in their home that are barely read? They would donate them to the library, and I accessioned so many books at Fatima School when I was there.

This is all self-taught, because I graduated from Ursuline and went to work the next day at City Hall in Galveston. It seemed like the next day I was a mother with five children. (Laughs.) Wash on Monday, iron all day Tuesday—ohh, nightmare.

R: How did you end up moving up here, to Texas City?

[55:51]

L: We lived in Galveston and my husband worked at Monsanto Chemical.

R: Okay, right.

L: If the causeway caught you, you would be late for work.

R: What does that mean, "if the causeway caught you"?

L: If you were coming from Galveston to Texas City, and a boat was coming but they had to raise up the causeway for—then you were late.

R: Ohh. That's the old causeway.

L: The old causeway.

R: Is that the one that the railroad bridge is on now?

L: No, we had the regular causeway bridge there, because this was in the '50s.

R: Okay, they got rid of it now.

L: Oh, yes.

R: (Unintelligible.) It's gone.

L: Yes, once they built the good bridge. The railroad still opens and closes, but now it goes straight up. It just is much better. Everything is better.

R: But I can still be late for work if a train catches me, coming from Galveston.

L: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. And that's the way it was, and he says, "I'm moving." Well, my mother was still alive at that time and she thought, "Oh, no. You can't move. You can't move." And I thought, "I have got to. I've got these two children, this is his livelihood, and—"

R: But this was after the Disaster, too, right?

L: Yes. This was in the '50s. And so we moved to Texas City in 1953. And we've been here ever since. So funny, when we moved over here we bought a house at 1310 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue North—no, 1010. It was in the ten hundred block. 1010 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue North.

And a beautiful little 3 bedroom wood house—living room, dining room, kitchen, single garage. And it was \$8,500. And my mother said, "You will never pay for that." Well, nya nya nya nya nya. (Laughs.)

In about three years, we moved over to 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue North and bought a big brick house, and my mother was still alive. She said, "You will never pay for this." And I'm like, "Oh, yes we are." Can you imagine, our house note was \$79 a month and we were wondering how we were going to be able to buy this one, it was going to be \$114 a month.

R: Right. Wow.

L: That was a lot of money. I thought, "Okay, we spent twenty years there and we're still there." I think the value of the house itself—of course we made a lot of improvements and added on here and there.

[58:55]

Today, if you wanted to buy a house the size of ours—but, the salaries were even. You know, when we moved over here, I guess John made \$5,000 a year, which was a good salary for the '50s. We sent everybody to college, and three of them got degrees. (Laughs.) And the other two—

R: And you were able to eat.

L: And we were able to eat.

R: And you didn't have to have hand-me-downs all the time.

L: Oh no, no.

R: You bought clothes?

L: Yes. Anything we wanted.

R: Did you buy clothes in Texas City? This was really like a real shopping area, you could go and shop in Texas City, is that true?

L: Yes, absolutely.

R: You didn't have to go anywhere else.

L: No. When we were at 1010 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the railroad—the train came right up to—well, the ice house was there, and it came to within three, two blocks of our house. So this was kind of like prairie here.

The kids would go over there and play, and go to the ice house, and it just was fun. It was where Gus's is now, where Gus's used to be—there across from the old ice house.

So when we were early settlers here in Texas City in the '50s, and our children made lasting friends and we did too—people we still keep in touch with. Because everybody in Texas City, half their kids move away and then some of the parents went to be near the grandchildren.

R: Oh. And so there's kind of an exodus, there's been an exodus.

L: Yes. It was always that way. And there are some families that just stay here in Texas City. Those people are our friends that we knew from the beginning, and we have our church friends, and John and I both work diligently with the Chamber of Commerce in the Golden Division.

R: That's good.

L: We've been officers in that, and John's in the Men's Club at St. Mary's, and I'm in the Altar Society and we have many, many friends.

R: And a beautiful new church now.

L: Oh. It is just really so nice. And they're just about to finish—well, they at least have the roof on the—

R: Parish?

L: Parish hall. No, the parish hall is completely finished.

R: Oh, that's done.

L: It's Father's—the Rectory.

R: The Rectory.

L: It is right behind that. My husband and I walk from where we live down 16<sup>th</sup>, the same road even with the church—between the church and the city's high school property.

R: Right.

L: And we walk around the church and then go back down, because it's a very safe walk, it's a nice cement parkway.

R: And you can even do that walk, that's great.

L: And we do that probably four or five times a week.

R: That's great. But what about the air conditioning? Because when you first came in the '50s, you left those sea breezes, so—

L: I know.

R: What did you do for the first years?

L: We had air conditioning here.

R: But in the '50s?

L: We had air conditioning here, yes.

R: Fans?

L: When we moved into that house, we had window units.

[Camera lost power, interview concluded at this point.]

[1:02:32]