

Interviewee: Priscilla Starn

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 29 September 2002

Location: living room of the Starn home, Apple Valley, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, October 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, January 2003

Priscilla Starn was born 31 August 1929 on a 160 acre farm near Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. The youngest of six children, she attended local schools, graduating from Sleepy Eye High School in 1946.

During the war years Priscilla lived at home with her parents and attended high school. Two brothers served in the military, meaning much of the work on the farm fell on her shoulders. In addition to school work, Priscilla helped care for livestock and worked in the field, and also assisted with cooking, canning, and other housework. The shortage of labor during the war years had a direct impact on her life.

After high school Priscilla attended South Dakota State University (class of 1950) before enlisting in the US Army in 1951 and getting into the field of dietetics. She was discharged in 1953, married and raised a family, and worked many years as a nurse here in Minnesota. At the time of this interview (September 2002) Priscilla lived in Apple Valley, Minnesota.

Priscilla provides the perspective of a high school student, living during the war years on a farm in southern Minnesota. She also describes how German POW's were brought to the family farm as laborers.

Interview key:

T = Thomas Saylor

P = Priscilla Starn

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is the 29th of September 2002 and this is our interview with Priscilla Starn. First, Priscilla, on the record, thanks very much for taking time before you leave to sit and talk with me. I know from talking to you before we began taping that you were born on a farm near Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, on 31 August 1929. You were one of six children, and your parents were of German ancestry. I guess it was your grandparents that came over. Your parents were both born in Minnesota?

P: Yes, they were.

T: Your dad and mom had a one hundred and sixty acre farm about three miles outside of Sleepy Eye. During the time of World War II you were in high school. You graduated from Sleepy Eye High School?

P: Sleepy Eye High School, in 1946.

T: In a class that was thirty-six people, I think you said. During the war you had two brothers in the service. Both in the Navy. One enlisted and one was drafted.

P: Yes. Well actually, I think Lloyd enlisted in the Navy also because he didn't want to be in the Army.

T: The one who was a dentist.

P: Yes.

T: So they both enlisted.

P: He was commissioned.

T: That's right. What rank was he, do you remember?

P: I think he was a lieutenant.

T: And he spent his time as a dentist, you said.

P: Yes.

T: And some of that time in Hawaii.

P: Right.

T: The first thing I want to ask you, when the US entered the war, the attack on Pearl Harbor of 7 December 1941, you were in school that year. Do you remember what you were doing when you first heard that news?

P: Yes. I was at my aunt's house. We were at my aunt's house for dinner. And the news came over and everybody was in shock.

(1, A, 39)

T: Over the radio at your aunt's house?

P: Yes.

T: What was the reaction of the adults? Your parents were there, and your aunt.

P: I guess it was a case of sort of shock. They didn't believe it at first. They heard President Roosevelt talk.

T: How about you as a young person? What seems to be a pretty big piece of news. The adults are all shocked and up in arms. What did that mean for you?

P: I remember. It didn't mean anything to me at the time, but I remember where we were and that the President Roosevelt talked.

T: On the radio.

P: Yes.

T: Was the radio often on when you were at your aunt's house?

P: Yes, it was at her house. She was younger than my mother. They had the radio on.

T: Let's get into how this may have impacted the town where you lived. Sleepy Eye was a town I think you said of around 2200 people at that time.

P: Right.

T: Did you notice changes around town during the time of the war?

P: I think everybody contributed to the war effort. I remember that we looked around the farm for any kind of steel. We'd take into town to be processed someplace. I don't know where.

T: Was there a call for that kind of stuff to be turned in?

P: Yes.

T: What kind of stuff did you pick up around the farm that would qualify?

P: Old fence posts. On the farm you get a lot of steel stuff. I can't really remember. But I remember picking stuff up and dad would load it into a wagon and they'd take it into town.

T: Were there other things that impacted the town? Were there blackouts for example?

P: No, no blackouts. The only thing that I can remember, we didn't go to many movies, but when we did go to a movie, they had the war newsreel, before the movie they always had a war newsreel on, and that would show some of the fighting that was going on. That's about the closest we came to seeing what was actually going on. I don't know. I'm sure they picked out what they were going to show us too. That and the newspapers, and actually we listened to Ernie Pyle.

T: On the radio?

P: Yes. I think we got most of our news from him. He was a great war correspondent.

T: He was killed in 1945.

P: Yes.

T: Priscilla, when the war first started you were in eighth grade.

P: Yes.

T: Was there a separate K through 8 school, or a junior high school, in Sleepy Eye?

P: I went to an old country schoolhouse for four grades. Then I went into our church school, Lutheran, for grades 4 through 8. Then I went to Sleepy Eye High School.

T: It sounds like, from the dates that you gave, that you were still in the Lutheran school.

P: Yes.

T: Did things begin to change around school to reflect the fact that the nation was now at war?

P: I don't think so. I can't recall anything.

T: How about when you went to the high school? You spent the whole wartime in high school? You graduated in '46. How did the war make itself felt around your high school?

P: Other than the eighteen year olds going off to the service, really there was nothing. We continued on with football and the band. School progressed just as normal.

T: So school activities weren't curtailed or...?

P: No.

T: Or seriously impacted?

P: No, no.

T: How about in the classroom, Priscilla? Did you notice in classes like history or government classes that the war became a theme of those classes?

P: It was a subject that was brought up. It had to be at that time. It was mentioned but it wasn't really dwelt upon.

(1, A, 118)

T: Were there things like assemblies or things where teachers or the administration would speak to students about certain events?

P: No, not that I can remember.

T: Posters around school?

P: Oh, yes. The ones with "We want you!" US Army posters.

T: Really? In the schools, looking for the young men and women!

P: Yes. "We want you!"

T: When you got to be old enough, when you got to be a junior or senior, was there discussion among your friends, boy and girls, about joining the service?

P: Not amongst the girls. But I think the fellows took for granted that they would be drafted. Everybody else was being drafted, so...

T: So they figured that they would be...

P: They would be the next when they got that age.

T: Were people volunteering for the service and not waiting to be drafted?

P: I don't think so. I think they waited for the draft. The ones that went into the Army anyway. The people that opted for the Navy or Air Force you know... But otherwise, people just waited to be drafted. Hoped their number wouldn't come up.

T: Most of them did though.

P: Yes, I know. I know.

T: How about your church? Did you attend church in those days?

P: Oh, yes.

T: What church did you go to?

P: Lutheran.

T: How many Lutheran churches were there in Sleepy Eye?

P: Probably about two at the time.

T: Did you have a large congregation, then?

P: It was probably about two hundred or so.

T: That's pretty big considering the size of the town.

P: Sleepy Eye was divided into two school areas. In town there's the railroad tracks. The Catholics were north of the tracks, and they had their own high school and everything.

T: No kidding. There are two high schools in this town?

P: Yes. They had St. Mary's High School, and the public school was south of the tracks. All the protestant churches were south of the tracks. Strange. It still is that way.

T: Really. A small town like that, yet there's still this very careful divide?

P: Yes. At least there was when I was growing up there. But I suppose a lot may have changed in the past fifty years or so.

T: So you lived on the south side of town, I take it?

P: Actually I lived on a farm, slightly outside of town. But we went to church and school on the south side of town.

T: What about your church? Were there reminders in the church or during services that the nation was at war?

P: There were prayers for the servicemen, I remember. That's about the extent of it. I wasn't there at that time, but I'm sure they had some other projects going on for the war effort. Wrapping bandages and things. I can remember that, but I wasn't involved in that.

T: But that was one of the things that your church sponsored?

P: Yes.

T: Was your mom involved in that or any other women that you knew?

P: No. She was too busy.

T: I imagine she was. How about the sermons on Sunday morning? Did those become politicized at all?

P: Not that I can remember. No.

T: So it seems like there was a fairly careful separation between politics and the war effort and...

P: As I recall. I can't remember that the sermons had anything to do with the war except prayers for the service people.

T: Were those fairly regular?

P: Yes.

T: Praying for those who were overseas?

P: Yes.

T: Did bad news come sometimes? That somebody had been wounded or captured or killed in action?

P: No. Not that I can remember. No, I can't recall anybody that they mentioned at the time that was killed or anything.

T: Let me focus now on your life around the farm. A hundred and sixty acre farm is a pretty standard size farm.

P: At that time.

T: Now, at this time, it's relatively small.

P: Yes. Right.

T: That's changed a lot. Who was living around the house when the war started at the end of 1941?

P: My parents, my brother and I.

T: And you are the youngest, is that right?

P: Yes.

T: So even when the war started there were only two kids at home.

P: Yes.

(1, A, 180)

T: When did that brother that was living at home, when did he go into the service?

P: Must have been 1944.

T: So he went in pretty late.

P: Yes.

T: During the war, especially after that last brother left, a lot fell on you and your brother and your dad and mom to keep this farm going.

P: Yes.

T: What kind of things were you doing around the farm? What kind of jobs?

P: *(laughs)* As I told you before, I was the hired man. I did everything. Everything. I was a strong girl. I would work out in the fields, shock grain, I rode a tractor in front

of the hay wagons when we had them, before we had the combine. Other than that... I did everything. Milked cows. Shoveled manure. I remember that!

T: I bet you do! *(both laugh)*

P: At that time we had a cream separator that you had to turn a handle. You put the milk into the thing and it separated the cream.

T: You turned it by hand?

P: Yes. It had to be turned by hand at that time. The cream was separated from the skim milk. Then we sold the cream and the milk actually to the dairy, and they'd come out in a big truck and pick up the cans. I did a lot of lifting. Mom had a lot of chickens and we used to help feed those. Pick eggs. She used to do a lot of canning and I helped with that a lot. I did a lot of baking. Then we had the corn pickers, the pea viners—we raised corn and peas for Del Monte, too. I was out helping pitch peas onto the truck, too.

T: And all this while also going to school at the same time.

P: This was in the summertime. Summertime. I remember one time I was raking hay out in the further forty, had a team of horses with one of those dump rakes that will let you... You know what a dump rake is? It's a rake--the horses pull this thing and it has tines back here. Then you pull up your leg and it dumps the pile of hay. And a bunch of hornets or wasps or bees came along and were stinging the horses, and they went home as fast as they could. I just barely hung on to this dump rake. They turned up in the farmyard and stopped *(laughs)*.

T: That's a pretty broad selection of chores that you were responsible for.

P: Right.

T: How much of that was typically done by a man, or a hired hand?

P: Most of it. Most of it.

T: Couldn't your dad, why didn't he hire a man?

P: There was no one to hire. There was nobody around to hire. No one. We had one gentleman that was probably a little on the retarded side that he would get once in a while, but everybody wanted him so, you know...

T: So there was demand for whatever labor was there.

P: Right. Right.

T: Now before the war started, had your dad from time to time hired someone at certain times of the year?

P: No, because my brothers were home.

T: You had a number of brothers, right?

P: Yes. Two older brothers, but they were both gone, also on farms. But the brother next to me was home, and so he and dad did most of the stuff then.

T: How much older was he than you?

P: Three years.

(1, A, 232)

T: So it was possible for a farmer, in this case your dad, and one son or one hired person to manage a farm of this size?

P: Right. Along with my mother. She did an awful lot, too.

T: Right. It sounds like when that brother was pulled out of the equation and the labor market basically dried up, that, well, that you were the solution.

P: *(laughs)* Right.

T: How did you feel about your role in the household at this time?

P: I didn't think a thing of it. There was work to be done and you did it. It needed to be done. There was no one else. He needed help. We just did it.

T: That's the way it was.

P: Yes.

T: What kind of products did your dad and mom try to get to market from this farm? Was it a pretty broad section of things?

P: Eggs. Milk. They grew sweet corn and peas to the factory. They had flax at that time. The fields were just a beautiful blue when the flax bloomed. It was beautiful. They had wheat. There were no soybeans at that time. They came later. I guess that's about it.

T: That's a number of different things then as opposed to being mono-agriculture.

P: Yes.

T: A number of different things.

P: Yes. And strawberries. We sold a lot of strawberries.

T: Now the corn and peas, you said a bit earlier, were sold to Del Monte. That was a contract your dad you had with them?

P: Yes. Right.

T: How about the other things? Were they taken to town then and sold?

P: Yes. The wheat was taken to the granary or feed mill in town. The flax also. We had to take everything to town. Actually, the field corn was probably used for feed more than anything else.

T: Did you have cows and pigs too?

P: Yes.

T: How many of each of those? Do you remember?

P: Oh, gosh! I think we probably milked about twelve or fourteen. I don't know how many pigs we had.

T: Was pork one of those things that your dad also tried to market?

P: Yes, he did. At that time we got all our own meat. We butchered our own pork, pigs, and we butchered our steers or cows or whatever.

T: Did it yourself?

P: Oh, yes. Yes. And chickens. I tell my grandkids about cutting the heads off the chickens and letting them run, and they still walk after their heads are cut off.

T: My mom grew up on a farm in eastern Pennsylvania, and she tells the same story. How were the prices for the products that your dad and mom had on the farm?

P: I didn't really pay any attention to that. I knew what you got for a quart of strawberries, because I would deliver them in town. I know that when they made a hundred dollars an acre out of something that was really great.

T: Did you get the impression, and maybe this is more just an impression that specific evidence, that your folks were doing better during the war, about the same, or not quite as well as they had before the war? Financially.

P: I think it was about the same. We weren't hurting for gas, because we could get gas for the tractor, for the machinery. We had our own meat. We had everything we needed on our own except for sugar. We had to get that. Actually we grew sugar beets, so we could make our own sorghum.

T: So the farm was pretty self-sufficient.

P: Self-sufficient.

T: I wanted to ask about rationing later but since you're on it, let me ask. Was your family impacted at all in your opinion by the rationing?

P: Not too much. Not too much.

T: The gasoline you mentioned was something that because your dad had tractors he could get gas for that.

P: Yes. Plus the ration coupons. We didn't have any trouble with that.

T: Even though you lived on a farm, did you get ration coupons for different products, meat, butter, sugar? Or not?

P: Right. We did.

T: So you probably didn't need to use them.

P: Not too much, except sugar.

T: Do you know what your folks did with the coupons that they didn't have to use?

P: They used them. They used what they had to buy things. They didn't give them away or anything like that.

T: What I'm hearing you say is that they had the coupons and they used them, but they probably would have done okay without them because they were pretty self-sufficient--with the exception of the sugar coupons that you mentioned.

P: Yes, except for sugar. Yes.

T: Did your mom do most of the baking, you and your mom, do most of the baking at home?

P: Yes.

T: Did the foods that you ate seem to change? Were you eating a more restricted diet, or have more stuff, or...?

P: I think about the same, but just like when sweet corn was in season, that was our meal. Sweet corn. We didn't have anything else. Just sweet corn.

T: Because there's a window when it's in season?

P: Yes.

T: So you eat it when it's there.

P: Yes. And it was so good.

(1, A, 301)

T: Can that be canned as well?

P: Yes. She didn't do a lot of canning of it, but it's so good fresh. And that was the meal. Mom was a good German cook. She grew her own cabbage and made her own sauerkraut. She made a lot of that. We had apples. She made applesauce, and made lots of apple pies. We rendered our own lard from the hogs, so we had that. She made her own soap.

T: Really. So self-sufficient. Did your mom have to go to town very often for supplies?

P: Not really too much. There was one bakery that had great raised donuts. At least once a week she had me stop at the bakery and bring home some raised donuts. She made her own soap, and that soap made the clothes so white. It's sort of like that Mexican soap. Have you ever seen that?

T: No.

P: It's called Maxim or something like that. You wash with that and your clothes just get really white. That's why the Mexicans down there, you can see them in those little shacks, and the kids come out with their white clothes and they're just sparkling white.

T: They have a secret we don't know about?

P: Yes.

T: Would you say that with going to school and having a car to drive, it sounds like for a couple of years, were you in town more than your folks?

P: No. My dad was, but not my mother.

T: Was the high school in town?

P: Yes.

T: So you went to school during the school year, you went each day but you had a number of things to do ahead of time?

P: Yes.

T: Before I move on I wanted to ask, your mom did canning?

P: Yes.

T: From your perspective, was there more canning done during the war, less, or about the same?

P: About the same. She always canned a lot. At that time you could buy a crate of peaches for a dollar. The dollars were worth more at that time.

T: But if you have a crate, you have to can them.

P: Yes. She had many crates.

T: Did you have a cellar with stuff in it?

P: Oh, yes.

T: It sounds like life was in many ways the same.

P: It was as far as our family was concerned. Our living was the same. We didn't really suffer anything on the farm I don't think. We never had an abundant life. We didn't do much socially except get together with the neighbors for cards and go to church. We really didn't spend anything. There were no vacations. Never. They never took one anyway. But there wasn't anything to spend money on.

T: It sounds like it was a simple but sufficient lifestyle.

P: Very much so.

T: Kind of continued on the same way, the way you describe it.

P: Very much so.

T: Now your family was impacted by the fact that you had two brothers in the service.

P: Yes.

T: The older of those brothers was already a dentist when the war started. So he was a good bit older than you?

P: He's dead now too. He was born in 1922, so he was seven years older than me.

T: Was he drafted or did he volunteer?

P: He volunteered.

T: How was that news received around the house by your folks and by you when that brother was headed for the service? When he volunteered?

P: I guess it was sort of exciting, because everybody was going and doing something and doing their thing for the war. I guess as I look back now, that war pulled together the whole country. Collecting steel scraps and doing everything, which is so different than now.

T: Your brother that was the dentist. Where was he living at that time?

P: He was in New Ulm.

T: Which is how far from Sleepy Eye?

P: Thirteen, fourteen miles.

T: Did you still see him regularly when he was living in New Ulm?

P: I think so.

T: So it wasn't like he was in New York or Chicago. He was clearly leaving and they weren't going to get to see him.

P: Yes.

T: You used the word "exciting" for you. Would you describe your folks' reaction about the same?

P: I think for him they didn't mind it because they knew he wasn't going to be fighting. He was a dentist. [But] they didn't really like it when Jim went. I know that.

T: Jim's your older brother?

P: Yes. The brother next to me.

T: He was the last brother at home.

P: Yes.

T: He most likely...

P: Could have been deferred.

T: And yet he chose to enlist.

P: Yes. I don't know why.

T: Did your folks talk about that that you remember?

P: They didn't talk about his deferment. They were very unhappy that he left because they needed him.

T: Do you remember any discussions between the three of them, your folks and Jim about that?

P: No, I don't.

T: Did he talk to you about the fact that he was going to go enlist?

P: *(laughs)* Never.

T: How did you react when he announced that he had enlisted?

P: I guess it didn't really... it was just one of those things, because people were going. I didn't even think about the fact that he could have been deferred. I made him fudge candy and sent him all kinds of good care packages.

T: He probably got better treatment from you as a sister after leaving the house.

P: Yes *(laughs)*.

T: He didn't leave the United States, you said.

P: No.

T: He was at the very end there. Your brother the dentist, was he married by this time?

P: No.

T: He was single and your older brother, the one next to you, was also single?

P: Yes.

T: What kind of a letter writer were you when they were in the service? Did you write to them?

P: Sure. Oh, sure. Regularly.

T: What kind of things did you write? What did you tell them?

P: That I was working hard (*laughs*). Just things that we were doing. They weren't long letters that I recall. Just things that happened on the farm.

T: Kind of daily routine things?

P: Yes. I can't say I wrote them once a week. Probably twice a month or something like that.

T: When you think about the writing of letters, was that something that you were encouraged to do...

P: No.

T: Or was it something you did yourself?

P: Yes.

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 380.

T: You say your mom wrote too?

P: Mom wrote too. Hers weren't very long either.

T: Were you both writing to both your brothers?

P: Yes.

T: How about your dad? Was he a letter writer?

P: No. He never did. That's was woman's work.

T: Did you get mail from both of them?

P: Oh, yes. Not as often as we wrote.

T: You sent more than you got.

P: Right.

T: When you got letters, what did you learn from them?

P: They weren't in the war. I mean, they really weren't in the fighting action of the war. I have no idea what Jim was doing.

T: He's younger or older than you?

P: He's three years older than I am.

T: So he was born in '26.

P: Yes. Lloyd, who was the dentist, I can't remember what he wrote.

T: Nothing that stands out in your mind, it sounds like.

P: No, there was nothing about... no details of the war or anything like that.

T: Were they both discharged pretty soon after the war ended?

P: Yes. Lloyd took up practice in New Ulm.

T: So he essentially came back to where he had been. How about Jim? What did he do?

P: He came home, actually and what did he do? I can't remember if he came home right away or not, but he eventually came home and worked on the farm. Dad built him a little house on the farm and by that time he got married. I guess he did come home right after the war. No, he stayed in Chicago for a while.

T: That's where Great Lakes [Naval Training facility] was. He was there anyway.

P: Yes. He stayed in Chicago for a while. Then he came home.

T: Did things on the farm ever get back to what you might call normal, or the way they were before he left?

P: By the time he came home I was in college.

(1, B, 427)

T: So in a sense you almost exchanged places.

P: Yes. Right.

T: You left and he came back.

P: Yes.

T: How old were your folks by this time?

P: Mom was fifty-five, and dad was fifty-eight.

T: They were a bit older. So your help around the farm was most welcome I imagine.

P: Right.

T: It's interesting to hear that, in a sense, your dad might have wanted to hire someone, but it didn't really matter.

P: There was nobody around to hire. What the farmers did, though, was they would help each other. If someone had something that they could help dad with like cultivating or whatever they would help each other. Threshing we would help each other.

T: Was that new?

P: No.

T: They had done that before as well?

P: Yes.

T: Was there more of that in an attempt balance the labor shortage do you think?

P: Probably.

T: On farm work. There is a lot of machinery on a farm, some powered, some not. Was it difficult, do you remember your dad having a difficult time, getting parts for things when they broke or needed repair?

P: I don't think so. We had John Deere tractors. I don't recall that he had trouble. He had one of those first John Deere tractors where they had that big flywheel on the side. You had to turn that flywheel to get the dumb thing started.

T: Like a huge starter wheel?

P: Yes. Right. Such memories (*laughs*). You never get them back.

T: Is that good or bad?

P: I don't know.

T: You were in ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades right during the war. Can you describe, during the school year, an average day for yourself? When did it start? What did you first do? In general terms.

P: When I didn't have to go out and help milk, I would just get ready for school and pick up the three kids along the way.

T: You mentioned you were driving.

P: I was a junior. I had a driving license when I was fifteen. My folks knew I was a good driver.

T: Was there anything such as driver's education [classes] in those days?

P: No. Absolutely not. No.

T: So you had to learn by the seat of your pants and if you could drive, you did?

P: I learned driving the tractor and I learned driving a truck around.

T: What did you have on your farm? Tractor, truck?

P: Both. And a car.

T: The car that you were driving to school, was that the only car in the family?

P: Yes.

T: The fact that you were picking up other kids suggests that this ability to have a car and drive one was not one that most of the kids had.

P: No. I was one of the very few that did that. A lot of kids wouldn't have done it.

T: And luckily there was gas for the tractor, which meant gas for the car.

P: Yes. Right. Right. Plus the gas that we got from the ration coupons.

T: So there was always enough?

P: Yes. It was enough.

T: You were driving to school every day.

P: Yes.

T: If you were milking the cows, did that mean you had to get up earlier?

P: Yes. Actually after he got the milking machine he could really do it himself. It was only when we were milking by hand that I had to get up early.

T: What time are we talking to milk cows?

P: Probably about six in the morning.

T: Is that labor intensive? I've never milked cows.

P: No *(laughs)*.

T: Is it hard?

P: *(laughs)* No. It's easy.

T: But the milking machine made a difference?

P: Once you've done it, you'll never forget.

T: Like riding a bicycle?

P: Yes *(both laugh)*.

T: Did the milking machine make it faster or easier or both?

P: It was easier, because he could actually milk two cows at one time. I helped him at night.

T: So chores weren't just before school?

P: Chores were after school too.

T: What time did school start and finish?

P: I think probably school finished at four. We used to go to school longer. We went from about maybe nine to four.

T: When you came home from school, what kind of chores then did you typically have to do?

P: Anything that needed to be done. Dad would bring the cows in and we would shovel silage or whatever to feed them. Give them oats and whatever they had. Corn. Just a variety of things. During harvest time I can remember we had this little elevator going up into the granary. Someone had to be up in the granary to shovel the grain apart so it wouldn't just land in one big pile. I was scared stiff one time. I thought I was going to get sucked in. It's high up. Like the surf coming in. It sort of drags you.

T: That could be kind of intimidating.

P: Yes, it was. A few people were killed doing that.

T: Get sucked down in there?

P: Yes.

T: This is another one of those things that we could call typically a man's work on the farm, but you were doing anyway.

P: Yes.

(1, B, 520)

T: If you had any homework was that after dinner or what?

P: After dinner. Actually, at that time we really didn't have that much homework. We had homework, but not like they do now. We didn't.

T: Thank goodness, in a sense, because of the way your time was structured.

P: We didn't have a TV at that time. There was nothing to do but play cards or read.

T: Did you like to read?

P: Yes. I do if I have time.

T: You mentioned school a bit ago, and that by the time you were a senior there was a pretty large imbalance between boys and girls.

P: Oh, absolutely. There were thirty-six members in our graduating class, and I think probably we had six boys at the most. I remember the Prom, the girls would all dress up. We would all drive to the Prom and dance with each other.

T: Those guys who were still in school, what was the story with them?

P: I really don't know. I never investigated why they were there. I don't know. But they weren't drafted.

T: Was there any sense of looking down on them because they weren't in the service?

P: Oh, no. We didn't even know. Not at all.

T: Did they seem guilty to you?

P: Not that I know of. It wasn't their fault that they couldn't go I'm sure. They might have flat feet. I don't know.

T: It sounds like they sure took a number of the young men when they were eighteen.

P: Yes.

T: It was during your junior year, on April 12, 1945, to be exact, that President Roosevelt died. Do you remember hearing that news?

P: Yes.

T: What can you remember about when you heard it and how you reacted?

P: I really don't know how I reacted. I knew that he had died. What month was it?

T: April 1945.

P: When was V-E Day?

T: The next month.

P: The next month. I think everybody was, not everybody but probably a lot of people, were more interested in what was going on in the war than him particularly, because someone always takes his place. I really can't recall anything, except the movies had all the events on the newsreels.

T: Did you go to movies a lot?

P: No. No.

T: So seeing these newsreels even then was only sporadic?

P: Yes.

T: Those were the only moving picture images you had of any of these things though.

P: That's right. We had some probably pictures in the paper. Seeing it on a screen was much different.

T: Was there a daily paper at that time?

P: Yes.

T: Were you a person who kept up with what was going on in the war?

(1, B, 575)

P: [The comic strip] *Blondie and Dagwood* (laughs).

T: Very popular comic strip at that time.

P: Right.

T: Did you read the comics first?

P: Yes, I did.

T: What about the news of the war? Is that something that, it was in the papers, did you find yourself looking at that every day, some days?

P: Yes. I looked at it. I don't think there was a daily paper then. I think we had a local weekly paper. I don't think the daily paper started until later. I think it was a weekly paper at that time.

T: After President Roosevelt died in April, the next month the war in Europe ended.

P: We also had a parade down Main Street then. In May, after V-E Day.

T: Who marched?

P: The high school band marched.

T: And you were in the band?

P: Yes.

T: Do you remember that parade?

P: Playing my big tuba.

T: You played the tuba, and I think you recounted before we were on the tape that you didn't start out playing the tuba. How did that work?

P: I started playing, and I wanted to take the trumpet. The band instructor needed someone to play the tuba because there were not very many boys. I was tall and I was strong, so he asked me if I'd play the tuba.

T: Is it hard to learn?

P: No. Very easy. Just oom-pah, oom-pah (*laughs*).

T: Were you playing the tuba then in this parade?

P: Yes. Yes.

T: Do you remember that parade specifically?

P: Oh, I remember both of them.

T: Because there was one after V-J Day as well that you mentioned.

P: V-J Day, too.

T: What can you say about those parades?

P: I guess everybody was happy. People were standing on the side watching. I'm sure the mayor was down in the car, I don't know. There wasn't much except the band. There were no horses or...

T: Was it pretty spontaneous?

P: Yes.

T: Do you recall any kind of speeches or what have you?

P: No.

T: But you were in the band and you definitely played and marched?

P: Right.

T: How did you or your parents react to the news that the war in Europe was over? This was in May.

P: Everybody was elated. Very much so. Same with V-J Day. It was over.

T: Was there more of an impact for you with that because it meant that the whole war was over and your older brother wouldn't be shipped out somewhere?

P: I guess that didn't phase me (*laughs*).

T: What was the mood around town after the end of the war against Japan, when the war was finally over? There was a parade you mentioned.

P: There were no changes yet at that time. Nothing changed in lifestyle. It was still hard. It was a hard life. Almost everybody I think, felt relieved, just the fact that nobody was being killed and that things might get better.

T: How long was it before young men started to reappear who had been in the service?

P: I guess I really didn't notice it until I went to school that next fall, the fall of '46, when I went to South Dakota State College. I guess everybody had started coming back that summer, and we had a lot of men that were starting freshman year in college that were much older than we were. I guess that had an impact on me. The fact that they were home. There were more older men [when I started college in 1946]. I don't know about the difference between the numbers of men and women. I didn't pay much attention, I don't think.

T: But slightly older men.

P: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

T: Did you get to know any of these people and then learn that they had been ex-servicemen?

P: Oh, yes. Definitely. Met people, guys that were on Iwo Jima and the landing in France. Some were in that. Lots of experiences to tell.

T: Were these ex-servicemen willing to talk candidly about these things?

P: Yes. The fact that they were there, and it wasn't a very nice scene. That kind of thing. They didn't go into grimy details about it, no. But they would talk about it. I think that people that had fought in the war, even at the VA hospital—I worked there for fifteen years—they still talk about it constantly. They can't forget it. You go around the wards and listen to some conversations, it's just about what they did in the war. Where they were.

T: Even though it's decades ago now.

P: Yes.

T: In that experience, was it more a positive thing or a negative thing the way they were talking about it?

P: I think it was positive because of the ending.

T: One of the reasons the war against Japan ended so suddenly was the use of atomic weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and August 9, 1945. At the time, what did you know about the use of those weapons?

P: I knew nothing about them. I shouldn't say I knew nothing, because they were dropping them out in the west. The big clouds. I knew that. I knew there was fallout, because people were complaining about the fallout of those clouds. All I can say is, when they dropped it on Hiroshima I guess I was... I think I was shocked at first, and then when you stopped to think of it, if they hadn't done that, how many thousands of lives, US lives, would have been lost? I still think that way. I still feel that way. I don't know if I ever want to see another one being dropped anywhere, but that, I think, that was the only possible way to end that war.

My husband was on his way over. He enlisted in the Navy at the end of the Second World War, and he was in boot camp. When V-J Day ended the war, when the news broke, he was actually at sea, heading to the Pacific as a replacement. The scheduled invasion of Japan would definitely have included him. Then he came back and joined ROTC at the University of Minnesota. He graduated, and then he didn't have two years in the service, so they got a hold of him. They shipped him over to Korea, in the Army.

T: He didn't make it to Japan even for occupation duty after the war?

P: No, he was at sea when the war ended.

T: Just into Korea the second time around.

P: Yes.

T: In a larger sense, what did the war mean for you personally at the time? What was it all about for you?

P: I guess in my mind Hitler was such a "bad guy" and Mussolini was worse. I guess in my mind, we ought to get rid of them. The war was necessary to get rid of them. And the same with Japan. I guess what got to me was the *kamikaze* pilots. Which is right now sort of like the Palestinians [reference to suicide bombings in Palestine/Israel]. I guess my reaction was that the war was necessary.

T: On the subject of the Germans or the Japanese, what kind of images, mental images, did you have of those people?

P: I really didn't have, have never had any connection or contact with Japanese except later on. One of my husband's hospital friends and another gentleman who was working at another hospital was Japanese. He was in one of those internment camps. The Japanese were all interned. They put them in a group. And he was not unhappy about that. He was unhappy being there, but he thought it was probably good, because how could we trust anybody?

T: So he wasn't necessarily bitter about that?

P: No. No, I don't think so. I'm sure he would rather have not been there.

T: Well, sure, but nonetheless... almost understandable for him what had transpired.

P: Yes. Roger knows him better than I did. He's dead now.

T: Priscilla, was there any propaganda at your school, or in the papers, or in your town, that you remember that talked about the Germans or the Japanese and the kind of people they were?

P: No, because it was a German community, more or less German-Irish community. Everybody in our church was German. Germans were good people, except for Hitler. Hitler got control of them. I think there was a different feeling about the Japanese than the Germans. Mainly, I think, because the people didn't know them. I didn't know a Japanese. They just weren't in our life.

T: Not at all in that part of the country in the 1940s. If someone had asked you back then in high school, what kind of people are the Japanese, how might you have answered them?

P: What would I answer them? What kind of people are the Japanese? Boy that's a hard one. I really can't answer that. I don't know. It never came up.

T: Was there a picture in your mind during the war of what the Japanese were like? They were our enemy in this war.

P: All I can think of them is what we saw on the newsreels in submarines and the *kamikazes*. I never really thought at the time how Japanese home life would be. That's a part of the Japanese that I just saw.

T: Do you remember any of the caricatures of the Japanese and how they were portrayed?

P: The *kamikazes* had those helmets on and the planes had the big round red...

T: Rising Sun.

P: Rising Sun. I guess all I really saw was pictures of Japanese in uniform doing bad things.

T: Last question. In a larger sense, what's the most important way that the war changed your life?

P: I guess you grew up faster. I don't think it changed my life, but it influenced my life.

T: Were you a different person in any way because of what you did go through during those years?

P: I don't think I was a different person but I think I thought a little more. I think I lost the selfishness. When you're in high school it's me, me, me. I think the war brought out helping people.

T: Do you think it brought your community closer together in any sense?

P: Not that I know of. I wasn't involved in that much community at that time. High school you're not involved.

T: Anything you want to add before we conclude?

P: I guess I was going to talk about the German soldiers that helped out, during World War II. Because of no help available, German POWs came from New Ulm. They came with their uniforms, their black boots.

T: They were still in their uniforms?

P: Yes.

T: Did you have them on your farm?

P: Yes.

T: Thanks for mentioning this. When did they come, and what did they do there?

P: They were brought there in the morning. I think as I recall, there was a guard that brought these two or three gentlemen to the farm. Then he had more in the truck and he was dropping them off at different farms. They would come, in particular this one time, they were shocking grain because we just needed help doing it. They worked for, I think they came out a couple days doing it.

T: Had your dad ordered them in a sense?

P: I think he did. He asked for help.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: So you think your dad ordered these people.

P: Yes. I know he did.

T: Could they do all chores around the farm?

P: No. They just shocked the grain and that was it. I think, of course being German, my parents could talk to them. I think they felt so much at home. Mom fed them like she would feed anybody else. She treated them just like she'd treat anybody, like her own sons.

T: Certainly not like someone who's lesser than them.

P: No. No. They were really nice guys, as far as what I can remember. They were very handsome blondes.

T: So you saw them too.

P: Oh, sure.

T: Could you speak German as well?

P: No. I wish I could.

T: So you couldn't speak with them.

P: No. No. Then the next time we saw them we were taking a load of sweet corn into the factory, and they were working there with the big forks pulling sweet corn off the trucks. I don't know what else they did at the factory, but I just happened to see them there. I think I was driving the truck at that time too. *(laughs)* I can recall standing back there while they took the sweet corn off and they would smile at you.

T: They weren't much older than you probably, were they?

P: Oh, yes. A little more. I heard that a lot of them came back. Someone told me that in another instance where they had these German POWs and after they went back to Germany and they were married and had a family, then they communicated the whole time with this farmer that had them out. I think they had a good deal.

(2, A, 45)

T: You said when you saw them they were smiling and waving at you.

P: Yes.

T: Did it make you, or your folks, at all uncomfortable having them?

P: No, not at all.

T: Were you at all nervous?

P: No. There was no reason to be. No reason to be. Not that I knew of at that time. Young, you don't think about anything that could happen.

T: How many times in all do you remember them being at your farm?

P: They were just there two days.

T: Two days on that once occasion to shock grain.

P: Yes.

T: Did you see other POWs or did you know from your friends at school or whatever in the neighborhood that there were more Germans around on other farms?

P: There must have been. We didn't talk about it, but I know that they had more people going out.

T: You mentioned a truck that dropped some of them off and obviously they...

P: I don't know where they went. I suppose whoever asked for help.

T: So for your dad, that was welcome help on the farm.

P: Absolutely.

T: Do you know if he paid for that help?

P: I don't know. I don't know.

T: That's very interesting. Anything else you'd like to add that we didn't talk about?

P: My sister-in-law lived on a farm by New Ulm, and a German prison camp was between their farm and the New Ulm city limits. She couldn't recall what kind of detainment device, was it a fence or a brick wall or whatever, but she said they were there. Another friend from Rugby, North Dakota, said that US soldiers came out to help in the fields during the war. Also, to get manpower to help on the farm they went to the hobo junction in Abercrombie, North Dakota. So help was hard to find all over, not just here.

T: What a turnabout—from having not enough jobs on farms during the Depression years, to really having to scrounge for whatever labor was available.

P: I guess we got most of our news through the newsreels as we mentioned before. Listening to Ernie Pyle.

T: Did you listen to a lot of radio in those days?

P: That's all we had.

T: Was it on frequently at your house?

P: Oh, yes.

T: Did you have a telephone at your house?

P: Yes. We had one like that.

T: Right. I'm looking at one on the wall which actually has the receiver on the side and the two bells up on top. When you talked to your girlfriends or other friends at school was the war ever a topic of conversation?

P: I don't think so. The only thing that was mentioned was who was going in. Who was going into the service. I think people in the city had a tougher time with shortages than we did. One thing I saw, this was in a paper, from World War II, it was called a war cake. It didn't contain any eggs or any milk or butter.

T: I'm looking at a recipe here, and indeed the butter and the eggs and the milk are removed from the recipe.

P: But there was some brown sugar, but other than that, no butter, no eggs. I have made that. It's a very good cake.

T: You have made that?

P: Yes.

T: Priscilla, let me thank you again for your time this evening.

END OF INTERVIEW