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## Timmer, Barbara Oral History Interview: Parents of Baby Boomer Generation

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2001 Oral History Project  
Parents of the Baby Boomers, 1941-2001  
Interviewee: Barbara Timmer  
Interviewer: Geoffrey Reynolds  
July 13, 2001

GR: Barbara, what were you doing when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, 1941?

BT: It was December 7th, Sunday night. We were in the dorm in Voorhees Hall; heard it on the radio. That was the day that we did our first Vespers at Hope College. I played the piano for that, and Mrs. W. Curtis Snow played the organ. And then ever after that it sort of turned into this memorial for that day.

GR: What was the climate like that night?

BT: We didn't have the news that we have now. Most of the women had radios, but we didn't pay that much attention to news. Maybe they do on college campuses now, but I don't think it affected us that much. Of course, my father was already in service. He had been recalled in '41. He took one year's leave of absence from his church; he was a chaplain at the Fort Devens, Massachusetts. It was just going to be one year. So I don't think I can say more than we were, "Well, isn't that too bad," or something, "it's far away, it's on the world." The only ones we knew that were ever out of the country were the missionaries.

GR: So what did you do from that day forward at Hope?

BT: I was a junior. To be perfectly honest, we were more interested in what was going on in the campus, and getting through our courses and studying. I went to practice teaching the next year. We read the paper to some extent, but it wasn't right in our faces like it is now.

GR: Did you see men leaving and not coming home?

BT: They didn't start to go until maybe the next year. A lot of my classmates went on to graduate in 1943, and then they went on. I think after that, if you talk to some of the women that graduated like in '46, then there weren't many men. They had a women's football team, and a women's this, that, and the other. I graduated in '43, and then I went back to Fort Devens and stayed with my family.

GR: So you were really just at Hope College to be at Hope College, you didn't live in the area?

BT: No. I was from New York.

GR: When did you meet Norm, your husband?

BT: I met him...to hear you call him John, just kind of shook me. It's been Norm all my life. His sister was a classmate of mine at Hope, my senior year at Hope. He was through cadet school. I was invited to her home in Grand Rapids for Thanksgiving, and then I met him. But I first met him in the dorm at Hope. He came down to see her, and he saw me coming downstairs in Voorhees. Supposedly he said, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." She said, "Oh, we'll see about that." And so, fifty-seven years later, here we are.

GR: Did you have classmates that didn't come home?

BT: Yeah, I think we probably had a few, but that wasn't until after I was out of college. See we didn't get news like that until later, much later.

GR: You and Norm were married in 1944, in the midst of the war. Was that a conscious decision on both of your parts because of his position in the Northeast?

BT: Well, he was in the Northeast and he had two terms, two assignments up there, and then he had about eight months of home leave before he was going to go somewhere again.

So we were engaged in May and married in June. My father married us because he was a chaplain.

GR: Where did that take place?

BT: Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

GR: Was that in a church?

BT: In a hospital chapel. It was a big, big general hospital at Fort Devens, a local general hospital. That was my first real acquaintance with it because I worked for the Red Cross when I got out of college, in recreation. So I would go around to the wards and see these veterans who had just come back. It was a real experience. They were young; they were younger than I, most of them. We had a rolling piano, and we took that around and I'd play. This one fellow lifted up the bedsheet and here was the stump of his leg, you know. And he was just kind of laughing about it. And another one said, "Oh, look at this—I've got a handle," and he'd pull his waist out; it was going to be a skin transplant. They cut that and then they work it down so it ended up on his leg eventually I suppose. Then I remember I took French all through high school and college because I liked it. There was a French soldier that came over to this country to that hospital. He was very near death; he was in an oxygen tank. And nobody could speak to him. Right away my father said, "My daughter took French in high school and college," and so I was at least able to get his name and a few things. I think he was gone either the next day or the day after.

GR: Why was he in America?

BT: I don't know. I don't know why he came. You know, that kind of thing just never entered my head. I was so happy I was able to do that. In that hospital also there was a

section 8, which was where they put the fellows that had been mentally...what did they call them? Well, they called it section 8.

GR: Shell-shocked?

BT: Yeah, that was what they said in World War One. This was, there was another term for it, but anyway, we would go in there and my father would hold services for those men. But he'd always have his hand on their knee, because he wasn't sure what they might do when they were praying with eyes closed. I'd play the piano for that too. There was one soldier I remember sitting way in the corner. I don't think he said a word ever since he got in there. He was just kind of morose, I guess. One of the old hymns I played, really ignited a spark in him, and he really came to life. Whether he went back to that situation, I don't know. I was only twenty-two years old.

GR: So you were really participating in music therapy for veterans. What was the emotional climate of a man that had come back early because of his injuries...What was it like in the ward emotionally? Was there patriotism? Was it sadness?

BT: I think they were all getting anxious to get home; I think they were anxious to get out of there. In fact, I think there may have been a sort of a perverse joy in them that they could get home and didn't have to be on the front lines anymore. I don't mean they did it on purpose or anything, but they can stand up just so long.

GR: Were there therapists that were in there working with them?

BT: Not as such, not as we have now, I don't think.

GR: Were they being retrained?

BT: No, this was a general hospital so they were fixed up enough to go back to near their homes. It sort of took care of all the people in the Northeast. As I recall, they were sent

back to their hospitals at home for further therapy or training. But they didn't do the therapy that they had...

GR: Were these veterans from liberty ships that had come home?

BT: I think they were transported that way, probably. They came into Boston, which was only about thirty miles away. Some may have been airlifted, but that wasn't as prevalent as I recall. Mostly on the ships.

GR: You'd go to work everyday and then you'd go home. Was knowing that your husband was probably safe, either at home or in the Northeast, comforting?

BT: Probably, but we didn't know if after that tour he was going to go somewhere else. There was just an uncertainty with it all the time.

GR: Did you share with Norm some of things that you saw and experienced everyday?

BT: I have all the letters. I don't know, I should read them over. I think it affected us more personally that he was up there, and when was he coming back.

GR: You were aware of the war going on, did you consciously wait to have children because of that?

BT: Yes. And then at Fort Devens, my parents lived on the post, and everybody had a victory garden. We did not have the shortages that you would have had in civilian life. I remember mother going to the commissary; we had regular ration cards like everyone else. She'd get her ration of meat—she'd have no idea what it was, bring home a frozen something or other that just said meat. I remember the officers wives, whoever had the first radish would wear it as a corsage, or a cucumber or something. It affected us in that way; we had rationing like everybody else.

GR: Was there a lot of movement of personnel in and out of that base?

BT: Yeah, and there was very much racial discrimination.

GR: In what way?

BT: There was a whole regiment of blacks, we called it the boogey regiment, which was a terrible thing as I think about it now, but that's the way it was. And they were on a different side of the base.

GR: So tell me a little bit about how that.

BT: It was very racist.

GR: So the interaction among white and black personnel was very limited?

BT: In fact, you'd get two or three of them downtown and they would take over the sidewalk, and we'd get out of the way kind of thing.

GR: You mean the black personnel?

BT: Yes.

GR: Was that a feeling that you had been brought up with?

BT: I guess to some extent it was. I was brought up on Long Island, which is not too far from Harlem, which is just a whole different scene.

GR: Was there ever any talk of these young men wanting to fight as much as the Caucasians on base?

BT: Not that I know of.

GR: So there wasn't a lot of communication between the whole group at all?

BT: Well, my father was an officer, my brothers were enlisted, and Norm was an officer. There was a great chasm, great chasm, and I was not supposed to date the enlisted people—that was just out of the question. And most of those were draftees in college, or

just out of college, my age. So I ended up dating some second lieutenant who was a real jerk, but just to get to go to something.

GR: Working in the hospital, did you see black personnel returning home with injuries?

BT: I suppose there were, I don't recall.

GR: Did you see any other ethnic groups that had been injured during battle?

BT: No, in the Northeast that was not a real ethnic situation. No, I just don't recall that at all.

GR: The war is over, and your first child is born. Tell me, as young mother, how that affected you.

BT: She was born here in Holland because Norm had gotten out by then. And he had come back here to get his teaching certificate. So we lived here.

GR: So you were working at that time?

BT: No.

GR: How was the family able to send Norm to college while you didn't work?

BT: I didn't know him then anyway, and he lived in Grand Rapids. So I imagine he commuted a lot. My brothers both went to Rutgers, and I came here. At the end of my sophomore year, it was time for my brother to go to college. By then I didn't want to leave Hope. I didn't want to go back to college in New York City and commute on the subway. So my mother came out for General Synod in 1941, and she talked to Dr. Wichers who was the president. They got me some scholarship money from somewhere. We spent the rest of our lives paying that two hundred dollars back. My brother had two years at Rutgers, and then he was drafted.

GR: Was married life a big change for you?



BT: Yeah, sure. We were married in June, and so we had sort of a long honeymoon in Maine until he went back overseas. I went back and stayed with my parents again and did some substitute teaching in that area.

GR: Was that hard to be newly married and...?

BT: Oh sure, he couldn't write everything because his letters were censored and mine were censored to him. I think it was the absence of it, you know.

GR: So you're together again, and your first child is born. Tell me about how that affected you as a young woman.

BT: I had a career. I was a college graduate, and I had a teaching certificate. But I just expected when we had children that I was going to be a stay-home mom. It didn't occur to me to do otherwise.

GR: Did you do that through the entire raising of three children?

BT: Whenever I could, yes. After she was born, we went to Muskegon. He taught, and I taught music a couple hours a week, and had a woman take care of our daughter. Then I got pregnant with our son. When he was six weeks old, we went back to Michigan State where Norm got his masters. So we lived on the campus there. And then we went back to Muskegon.

GR: So you enjoyed being outside of the home doing things?

BT: Oh yeah. If I wasn't teaching, I was doing something else. All the time we were in service I taught—off and on. I either substituted in Germany, I taught in the dependent school, and I taught kindergarten, which was not my field at all, senior high school. When we were in Paris, I tried to teach in the dependent school, but they would rather

have somebody with an English proper accent. So I taught English in a French school, which was just super for my French and for me and for everything. So I did that.

GR: Mentally, was that healthy for you to continue to work a little bit outside of the house?

BT: Very, and it was right along my career lines.

GR: Can you venture a guess of how you would have handled full-time homemaking?

BT: I would have been in a lot of volunteer stuff—church work, playing the piano, doing programs, and all that stuff.

GR: Were there points at which Norm would come home and you would say, “Norm, I need to go out and just do some things on my own,” after a long day with a very young child? Was that something that happened?

BT: No, I never felt that way at all.

GR: Your children were raised in Europe for the most part, or around Europe. It seems they have done very well because of that. Is that something you would attribute to that experience, or to being parents the way you were?

BT: I think a lot of it was our attitude, OUR attitude, of when we were in service for a year, and then we’re going to have this wonderful experience, we’re going to Europe. There were a lot of privations too. But, it was very good for the family, we got to travel. And then when we went to Paris, we were all excited about it. We knew people that went there but went grudgingly. There was a family underneath us in Paris, in the apartment, her kitchen faced west, so she thought, “Well, it’s far enough west, that’s where the United States is. She never made an attempt to do anything, with the French or anything else. Our kids did, and I played in the Franco-American Bridge club. We did a lot of traveling. Of course, I already spoke the language, but even so, I took more. I studied at the

Sorbonne. We had the French friends. Our two older children were in high school, and they took it in high school. And they studied at the Aliance-Francaise in the summer time. There was a hardly a part of Paris that we didn't see.

GR: Did you find that living in Europe during the Cold War to be somewhat stressful?

BT: Not in France, but we chaperoned a bunch of high school kids to Berlin and that was a closed city then. That was very stressful because of the eastern zone. We took the train from Paris to Germany, and then changed to an East German train, run by the Russians. The kids weren't supposed to throw anything out the windows. That was stressful.

GR: Did you find that hard, even as a relatively worldly person, to understand that our allies, just a few years ago, were now part of our base of enemies in Europe? Did that bother you?

BT: Well, a lot of my mother's family was from Germany, so there was that too. Norm probably told you, we were only about thirteen miles from Dachau, when we were in Germany. That was in 1952, just a few years after the war, and they hadn't cleaned it up in any way. There was still blood on the ground and the ovens were there. Boy, that really brought it home.

GR: So you were able to tour those camps even then. Did you use those as learning tools for your children?

BT: I'm not sure we took the kids to those camps, they were too young. But any visitors we did. It was a really mind-changing experience. They had one whole section which had a big Jewish cross, and that's where they put all the Jewish bodies. They were just thrown in there. I had a woman who was assigned to help us clean, as part of the German reparations, and she lived right near Dachau. In fact, we're still friends; she's in

California. I said, “Certainly you knew what was going on there, it was only a couple miles from where you lived.” She said she didn’t as a child, but she would get on the train—maybe to go from her place into Munich—and she maybe would bug her grandmother for a drink of water or something. Her grandmother would say, “If you do this to me one more time, I’m going to put you off in Dachau.” She didn’t know why she didn’t want to get off in Dachau, but she didn’t want to get off there. So I think the whole thing was a real learning experience for them. They still loved to go back to Europe. Johnny went on and flew internationally for American Airlines. Paul was a diplomat stationed in China, France, and the Soviet Union. I think it really, really marked the kids. But there again, it’s the attitude of the parents toward it too. Alright, so we have roaches in our apartment, so what, you know. Look at where we are.

GR: So you think the children have gained more than they ever would have in America?

BT: Oh, very much.

GR: Did you have a hard time readapting to American lifestyle?

BT: In some ways, but it will always be with us. We had a total of seven years living overseas.

GR: In Europe, as the war started to fade, what were the attitudes toward what had gone on in Germany? Especially when you were living there, how did people address, not only what they had done to the world, but what they had done to a segment of the population that they called there own. How did they look upon that, historically?

BT: Having been there, we knew what they had done. It was not a figment of somebody’s imagination. We also knew how poor the Germans were, because we were in Munich and Playtex girdles had just come out with a girdle that was a one-piece of rubber. And

the garters were attached to that rubber too. When one of the garters went, you know, you threw the thing out. But I remember looking out of our window and seeing the trash people come, and one guy was just thrilled with this thing. They went through all the trash. They picked up all cigarette butts. It was just absolutely unreal. My cleaning lady then, this German woman, would butter her bread with my leftover bacon grease.

GR: So they were still feeling the effects of the war?

BT: Oh it was horrible, just horrible.

GR: Was that because what they had learned during the war years, or because that's the way it was still going?

BT: Because they didn't have anything.

GR: Even then they were still...

BT: This was in Bavaria, which is not the militaristic area in Germany, like the northern part of Germany. The Bavarians are more fun-loving and Oktoberfest and all that kind of thing, you know. I think there was probably a sense of disbelief among a lot of the Germans.

GR: That Americans were there?

BT: No, that they had done such horrible things.

GR: In your conversation with the German population, did they look upon on this as a deserved fact on their part?

BT: We weren't allowed to fraternize, at all.

GR: Even though you were there to help keep them be free?

BT: Not in the '50s; we were not allowed to fraternize.

GR: Was there any reason why you were told not to do that?

BT: Because they were our enemies, and they could not be trusted. The French, if they didn't like it, they'd tell you they didn't like it. But the Germans you never knew where they were coming from. We were all severely rationed with coffee and cigarettes and sugar and all that stuff because there was a tremendous black market. The Americans would excuse that by saying we're helping the Germans out. But Norm's and my feeling was that we were not supposed to do it, so we didn't do it.

GR: But you had been approached by...?

BT: Oh sure. Or you'd go into a store, and they'd say this is X number of marks or so many cartons of cigarettes or something else. And we said absolutely not. But we were in the minority of most of them. And the Americans justified it, and a lot of them came home with beautiful, beautiful things—rugs and furniture. One of our friends got a Steinway piano. That was a little different from selling food, but on the other hand, they justified it by helping the Germans.

GR: Were you relieved to be going out of Germany in the end? Had you had enough?

BT: I think it was time to come home. In France we stayed until our daughter got out of high school, and then Johnny was in his sophomore year. That's hard on kids; ours didn't happen to be in that age. But we knew that, from when our son Paul entered the foreign service because there aren't the opportunities to attend schools near home when living abroad. A lot of the kids that were in Munich—American kids—had to live in a dormitory because their parents were in some German base somewhere out in the boonies where there weren't any schools. And that was rough. That was really tough on those families.

GR: But you don't think the military life has jaded your kids in any way?

BT: No, but you'd have to talk to them. They could be looking at it differently too.

GR: Obviously your family was different than most American families, we've gone through some of that. Did you have any unsolicited advice coming from overseas from your parents talking about the fact that you were kind of in a war zone, you were far away from home, and you were raising kids?

BT: After seminary, my father came down to St. Thomas, so he was there at the end of World War One. I think I was brought up in more of an international atmosphere. Then being in a minister's family, we had missionaries from all over the place. I think we were probably more internationally minded than many people. And we lived in a metropolitan area, New York City. So I think that colored our attitude too.

GR: So there wasn't advice being given over the phone?

BT: I don't think so, well, we didn't use the phone very much to begin with. And then Norm's mother, who was like second or third generation Dutch, said, "Oh you'll be so far away." We said, "Oh Mom, you're going to come and see us." "Oh no," she said, "I'm not going to," because by then Norm's father was dead. Well, she made two trips to the Netherlands, had a ball. Went on Holland American line and remembered a little Dutch from her childhood, talked to the people. She spent six weeks with us over there, and we toured around with her. Then she came back the next year, which was just a few months before she died. And then my folks were over there once too; they came over in 1954. My father had a heart attack on the ship, which is another story. But they stayed with us three months in Germany. My mother had German roots, my father had English roots. They were all internationally minded—schoolteachers and musicians. No, I think they thought it was a wonderful opportunity. I remember my mother saying when we came

back from Germany, and here we had a full-time maid, but that was part of reparations.

The Germans had to do that for us. She said, “Just don’t tell too many people that because they’ll get the wrong attitude about what was going on over there.” And then I’ll tell them how we had to boil the water and a few other little things.

GR: Have your children come to you as they began raising children and asked questions about how to do things, or how to deal with situations that have arisen?

BT: Just in general? No. They know everything. (laughs)

GR: You haven’t offered any?

BT: Well, I’m sure there are things that we thought they should know. But not too much, no. We didn’t appreciate it, and they have examples of their own parents.

GR: Has your attitude with your own children and experience with raising children in that setting helped you or hurt you in dealing with your American-raised grandchildren? Do you wish they would go overseas?

BT: They all have. Paul, as I said, was in the foreign service and so their first child was born in San Francisco, but they took him to China when he was six weeks old. So he spent the first year of his life in Beijing. Then they were in Paris for two and half years, and our granddaughter was born in Paris. And then they were stationed in Soviet Union, St. Petersburg. Our son’s wife just is a wonderful person. She loved it, just like he did, and got into everything—studied the languages and shopped in the local markets. It has to be a family thing, Geoffrey, they have to want to do it. The parents have to have the right attitude, not fakey. But, if you show those interests, you know, it’s going to... And they seemed to have had good experiences too. Our daughter has been over there a couple of times. Johnny went to the Air Force Academy. After he got out of the Air Force, after



eleven years, he went and flew for American. He flew the international route for several years. He was a fountain of information for a lot of these pilots and crewmembers that didn't know anything about being abroad.

GR: Now with the loss of a daughter-in-law and a son, has that drawn you closer to the surviving spouses and helping them with raising their children?

BT: Our daughter-in-law, after a year in Washington, she moved back to California. She has her doctorate in psychology, and she's near her family—her folks and her two brothers—and we see her as often as we can. She's just like our daughter.

GR: With your son John, who lost his wife, have you been asked to kind of fill in periodically when questions arise?

BT: No, because she just died last year. And our granddaughter is getting married in January. So they have a support group in Kansas. It's not like they've been here like a lot of these families.

GR: Do you wish you were closer to, not only your kids, but...?

BT: Sure.

GR: So you have a pretty good relationship with your grandchildren?

BT: Very good, excellent.

GR: Do they talk about the fact that they are kind of living the life that their parents lived, in the foreign service and...?

BT: No, we're not together that much. We see them for a two or three day visit. Gloria wanted to be buried here in Holland, so he brought the ashes up in April. They were all here for a day or two. But you don't get into any depth of conversation that way. And we go to California, and they've got their own lives too, the kids. John will be seventeen,

and Caroline is fifteen. They've been alone for almost six years now. I think you have to see them often, and you can't just sit down and say, "Now we are going to talk about something deep," you know. So I don't think we really know.

GR: As you saw your children leave, did you and Norm...

[End of side one]

BT: [Continuing] I don't think so, comparatively to other families, you know. I talked to a woman the other day, her grandchildren live right around the corner, and she takes care of her grandchildren every Thursday and Friday. We've never done that; we never had the opportunity.

GR: So have you and Norm kept quite busy?

BT: Oh, sure. We came back to Holland when Barbie graduated in '69. Then she went to graduate school in North Carolina, so she was gone. And after two years in Maryland, Johnny went to the Air Force Academy, so he was gone. We came back here when Paul was a sophomore in high school. He decided to go to Hope, but we didn't see him much when he was at Hope. We've always been involved in church work, and I've always been involved in programs, two plays at the college summer rep theatre—I played the piano for the first one. Norm's been busy doing all kinds of stuff too.

GR: So full retirement for both of you really saw no change?

BT: I don't think it's ever happened. I'm waiting for it. (laughs) No, not really, because he has relatives from Grand Rapids whom we see sometime. We still travel a lot. When we were first back here, we did a lot of traveling "space available" in the Air Force. But when we came out here, it was hardly worth it, because we had to go to a base on the East coast somewhere. But we still love to travel, and we'd like to do more, but as you get

older and you get health problems, then you start thinking we had a pretty good life and we've seen more than most.

GR: So do you find yourself to be getting more involved now than, you would, say if you weren't retired? Or have you continued a pretty high level of community involvement?

BT: I think a pretty high level. We have a lot of stuff going on at Hope. There's a Hope Academy of Senior Professionals, and Norm is one of the original members of that with John Hollenbach. So with that, which is over here, and Hope Church, which is over there, and we're in several college groups—we belong to Second Century Club and the Century Club in Holland. The summer is the time when we feel sort of retired, but then moving here, there are always things going on in here too. Do you know where our house used to be?

GR: No.

BT: On the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and College—that big four-story Victorian house across from the campus—it's called Timmer Cottage, because we sold it to the college. So that was just super.

GR: Was that a big change for you to move into a smaller area?

BT: From 4,000 square feet to one? (laughs) Absolutely, but, so you do it. And you do it while the two of you still can, and you don't wait until somebody breaks something. Because it was a typical big old house with a washing machine in the basement and the bedrooms and bath upstairs. And as long as he could have a good desk, and I could, and we could have the piano. You get rid of things. And what's stuff anyway? A friend of ours just broke his Achilles tendon, so he's laid up for six weeks, at least, just to start

with. They have a colonial house, with a washing machine in the basement and the bedrooms upstairs. It's hard to make a decision at that point.

GR: Do you find that the lifestyle you led has enabled you to be that clear about your goals and priorities versus someone that maybe had lived in Holland most of their lives?

BT: Yeah, I think so.

GR: You were able to put away things, or sell things, without too much effort?

BT: Yeah, I think so.

GR: I noticed you have quite a collection of scrapbooks.

BT: That's about half of it.

GR: Is that something that was an active pursuit of yours during the younger years?

BT: Yeah, I just enjoy doing it. I'll show you my father's scrapbook from 1915. He started it, I guess, and I just liked to do it. It's been a good record. So when we left the house, we turned back a lot of them to the kids. In fact, with Susan, any scrapbook from when we visited them in these different posts, we sent back to her. And we did the same with the other two. Barbie doesn't have a place to live yet, she's still in Washington, so. But we got rid of a lot of them, but there's still a lot more to go.

GR: Your youngest child, is she remarried?

BT: Barb is the oldest.

GR: Oldest, I mean.

BT: No, she was just married for six or seven years.

GR: Was that a divorce from a military man?

BT: He was just in for a year or two. He went to Hope; he's an artist. That was a long, long time ago, and she's been single ever since.

GR: Was that hard for you as a parent to see one of your children go through that?

BT: Well, we were sorry about it. We couldn't really see it coming; he was a very nice person. But the personalities just didn't work. I think he was friendly, but it just didn't work.

GR: So her independent lifestyle really is probably...?

BT: It's right down her alley. She loves it. She drove all the way from the East Coast to the West Coast when she lived in California, and then she drove all the way back here and just stopped in places. She just loved it. So, she's very happy. It's harder to see a son die so suddenly and leave a family with two kids who are—six years ago—eleven and nine.

GR: Now, your oldest daughter...

BT: She's the oldest.

GR: Right.

BT: Then John is the next, and then Paul is the one who was killed.

GR: So, your oldest, your daughter, she had an aversion to the Vietnam war, according to your husband, Norm. Can you tell me a little bit about how that was handled?

BT: She was at Hope in the '60s. So what can I say? She was here all the time, really. She got involved in that to some extent, I think. Paul was in college from '72-'76. I don't think he would have gone. He, especially, was even more against it than she was.

GR: With a military man still in the house, or recently retired, did that ever cause any problems?

BT: No, because he didn't like Vietnam either.

GR: So were there conversations in the house?

BT: I don't know, not that I was aware of in particular.

GR: To close, is there anything you would like to say, about what it was like not only to be a woman who experienced World War Two, but had a lot of years afterward to raise children in a very strange time in America and Europe? Is there anything that really sticks in your mind about that period of years up until today? Regrets, positives?

BT: There probably are. I remember, we bought a van when we were in Paris because we knew we couldn't afford to take five people camping or hotels and see anything. So we did it as much as we could. I would sit in the front seat—it was like a Volkswagen van—and read the guide book, and the kids were in the back sort of yawning. Then I would just say, “Now you just wait, when you're grown up and you're out of there, you'll remember these days, and you'll wished you'd asked your mother questions and all this stuff.” So now every once in a while they'll say, “Gee mom, why didn't you tell us about what we were seeing in Milan or Rome.” We certainly had a lot of wonderful opportunities that most people don't get. But, you know, when he was recalled, and we went to Mitchell Field, and then he was sent to Germany. So I had to take care of two little kids, who were five and three, sell our house on Long Island, get them on a ship—well, first of all, one of them had the mumps—our little boy. Went to New York, lived with my folks for a little while. Then he got over the mumps, so we quickly got on a ship. Then we had a fire coming into the Netherlands—we were supposed to land in Bremerhaven—so that delayed the ship. We put the fire out, and of course, it was a troop ship and the troops were all up on deck in their survival gear. I'm playing the piano for all these kids that were going over to be with their fathers. And they put the fire out and that was fine. We headed on to Bremerhaven, but just that day of delight, our daughter

came down with the mumps the next morning. So she ended up in a hospital in Bremerhaven, in a German hospital. Scared her half to death. So, you know, you think back they are things like that. So it wasn't all like... I hope I'm not indicating that it was so wonderful all the time, because there were those things too. But you're going to get that anywhere, Geoffrey. You're going to get it here, you're going to get it wherever.

GR: No regrets, then?

BT: I don't think so. We've had a very happy marriage, and were happy to be here; we've got friends here, and I don't want to go back to New York. I don't even talk the language anymore. (laughs)

GR: I asked Norm this too—what is the recipe that you and he enjoyed that got you through a lot of travel and some angst along the way?

BT: One of the things my mother said, "It's not fifty-fifty, it's about seventy-five, twenty-five all the time. One way or the other." One of the psychology things—I don't know if it still is but—let it all hang out, don't keep anything in. Well, that's hurtful. I think we've both been more inclined to keep in it for a while, and either we work through it, or we don't, but I don't think either one of us in confrontational. And that could be good, it could not be good, but that's just the way we operate.

GR: Did you ever have to do any reading along the way to sort out some problems with the kids?

BT: We were brought up with Spock. We took Parents magazine and went to things like that. Some of the Calvinists around here say you don't use the word luck. But why us and not somebody else? That doesn't make any sense to either one of us. And I think we've basically shared values, and we've never had any reason to distrust each other.

GR: Has the church played a big part in that?

BT: I think to some extent, and we always took the kids. It wasn't "if" we're going, we just went. They were in youth group—we took them and we picked them up and participated in that stuff too. I don't know if there is a recipe. You look at some families, you think, why are they having so much trouble? But you don't know what goes on inside somebody's house either. Some kids from wonderful homes will go off the deep end and just drive you crazy. And then there are other kids from horrible homes that somehow make the grade. You look back and somebody says, "If you knew you were going to lose a son, would you go through it?"

GR: You mean in having Paul at all?

BT: Yeah. And you would.

GR: Well, thank you.

BT: You're welcome.