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University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, Virginia

John Cain
Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Jared Smith
in 2012

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project: An Oral History with John Cain conducted by Jared Smith, October 24, 2012 and November 2, 2012, Department of History and American Studies, University of Mary Washington, 2012.

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Interview with John Cain
Interviewed by: Jared Smith
Transcriber: Jared Smith
[Interview: October 24, 2012]

1-00-00-00

Jared Smith: Could I have you state your name and date of birth?

1-00-00-04

John Cain: John W. Cain. C-A-I-N. Date of Birth: October 11th 1927.

1-00-00-10

Jared Smith: Could we start off by discussing the community you lived in during WWII?

1-00-00-21

John Cain: Community? I lived right outside of Boston, Massachusetts. The city called Summerville. I went to school in Cambridge, St. Johns High. I joined the Army Reserves in April of 1945. I was called in to service in November of 1945.

1-00-00-42

Jared Smith: Could you describe the town you lived in?

1-00-00-45

John Cain: Bigger than Fredericksburg. It was a regular city and I don't know what to say. City of Fredericksburg has houses and people living in them. I just happened to go to school, not where I lived, but in Cambridge, Massachusetts which was probably a mile and a half from my home.

1-00-01-27

Jared Smith: Would you take the bus to get there?

1-00-01-30

John Cain: I'd walk. I did a lot of walking and a lot of working.

1-00-01-42

Jared Smith: You worked while you were in high school?

1-00-01-45

John Cain: Yeah. I worked in the morning and I had one in the evening.

1-00-01-49

Jared Smith: Could you describe those?

1-00-01-51

John Cain: The one in the morning was for a milk company delivering milk and in the evening I worked for a fruit and produce company delivering the fruit and produce to the stores. You make about 25 cents an hour back then.

1-00-02-20

Jared Smith: So before you went to school, you would..

1-00-02-24

John Cain: I worked at 6 until I went to school. I'd go to school at 8 ish and I'd work at 2 after school in the fruit and produce and worked there until 6 or 7 at night.

1-00-02-40

Jared Smith: You said you delivered milk, right? Would the routes be in the neighborhood you lived in?

1-00-02-51

John Cain: They were all over, really. Nowhere specific, not where I lived.

1-00-02-59

Jared Smith: Was it close to your school?

1-00-03-03

John Cain: Yay and nay, I don't remember to tell you the truth.

1-00-03-10

Jared Smith: Would you consider the place a suburb?

1-00-03-17

John Cain: Yeah, it was a suburb. In other words... it's hard to place. You know Richmond? Fredericksburg of a suburb of Richmond is kind of far-fetched is what I'm trying to tell you. Like in Washington too, but it was the suburbs. The big city was Boston. Like here is Richmond and Washington, it's kind of hard to say. Like say I lived in Arlington, you with me? That's where I was, like a city like Washington or Arlington, Boston, the Summerville.

1-00-04-00

Jared Smith: What was the ethnicity of your neighbors? Was everyone generally the same?

1-00-04-13

John Cain: Yeah, we were majority Irish and Italian, French too, but mostly Irish.

1-00-04-17

Jared Smith: Did you have any siblings?

1-00-04-32

John Cain: Oh yeah. I had, trying to think, 4 sisters and 3 brothers. 8 of us together. 8 in the family.

1-00-04-43

Jared Smith: where were you in relation to them?

1-00-04-47

John Cain: I was the oldest.

1-00-04-50

Jared Smith: You were the oldest. Did they also have jobs like you or were they not old enough to have a job?

1-00-04-54

John Cain: No they didn't have a job. My brother under me probably had a paper route as I recall, but they didn't do much. My father worked of course and that was about the size of it. That was the idea of it. Money in those days was tight and we worked to help the family. In other words I might make whatever I made and probably get \$5 a week for spending money and I'd turn the rest into the house. I never had money per say. Let's face it, when I went into the Army I only made \$21 a month and out of the \$21 I would turn it into the house. I didn't get any of that. Times are rough in other words. You didn't have money and that's why you worked and stuff. With a bunch of kids and stuff. Money was tight but that's the way it was.

1-00-06-04

Jared Smith: What did you father do for a living?

1-00-06-08

John Cain: It's rough to say this but, my father was well educated, he spoke 5 languages, he was principle of a high school in Canada, and he came to the United States and they didn't recognize nothing. He had to work labor in a bakery because he could count boxes. He was a shipper in a bakery. In this country they didn't recognize Canada. It was kind of rough for my father because he took a downtrend. He was well educated and stuff but he had to do what he had to do to make a buck and that's the way it went.

1-00-06-55

Jared Smith: Did he ever tell you why he left Canada to come to the United States?

1-00-07-01

John Cain: Like everybody else. My people come from Ireland, England, Canada, and came to the United States, that's how it was.

[Phone Call]

1-00-07-43

Jared Smith: So your family is from...

1-00-07-46

John Cain: Yeah, my mother and father are from Canada. They all come from Canada. In other words all of my aunts and uncles are all from Canada. In fact I'm the first American in the family I guess is the way to put it. I have a couple cousins older than I am.

1-00-08-12

Jared Smith: You're the first one that was born in America out of your family?

1-00-08-14

John Cain: Yeah, in fact my father served in the Canadian Army in World War I and registered for the draft when I went in World War II. With all the kids and everything they didn't get him but they grabbed me but that's irrelevant. That's the way it goes.

1-00-08-37

Jared Smith: In your school did they ever practice air raids or anything like that?

1-00-08-45

John Cain: They did, but I don't think, looking back, that we were as concerned about air raids. I think we're concerned more now than we were. It was kind of relaxed. People didn't think about stuff like that. We went about our business and we weren't shook up. People lived a normal life, but we did have school and air raid drills and stuff like that.

1-00-09-30

Jared Smith: Were the people that went to school from your neighborhood or were they the same ethnicity? Irish?

1-00-09-41

John Cain: Yeah, Irish, Italian and there was some French in there. I hate to say this but you know how today it is with the blacks and the whites? I didn't know blacks where I lived. The Irish used to fight the Italians.

1-00-10-10

Jared Smith: There would be more segregation between the two ethnicities, not racial?

1-00-10-17

John Cain: It was like the French, they were off the ball. They were sissies but we used to have our rumbles with the Italians. Not that I had much time to do that, I was working most of the time so I didn't have much to do with it but that's what it was. To do something. In fact, the school I went to, the high school, was mostly, and I'm thinking

back. My graduating class, I didn't get to graduate because I went into the service, but I'm saying in my class there was probably 14 boys. It was a small little school, mostly girls.

1-00-11-19

Jared Smith: So no African Americans went to your school?

1-00-11-22

John Cain: No. In fact where I lived, there was one I'm going to say a mile from my home. One African American but it was a black woman and a white guy. Their house was on my way to school but there were no blacks in my city. Cambridge had blacks but not where I lived.

1-00-11-54

Jared Smith: Cambridge is where...

1-00-11-57

John Cain: The next city over. In other words, Cambridge was here and my city was the one next door, and Boston was here. They were both suburbs of Boston. Borders, you know what I mean? Some of it was here and the other end of it was here in Boston. Cambridge the same way and Boston was at the end of it. Borderline or whatever you want to call it.

1-00-12-20

Jared Smith: In these fights would you say that there were ethnic remarks that one would say to the other?

1-00-12-35

John Cain: Yeah, there was that. Grab a club and go at it. It was kiddie stuff if you think about it now.

1-00-12-50

Jared Smith: You said living conditions were rough. Were there 10 or 11 kids over all?

1-00-12-58

John Cain: My family was 8. 4 boys and 4 girls.

1-00-13-07

Jared Smith: So the income would father doing backer shipment and your job? And your mother?

1-00-13-19

John Cain: She didn't work. She was a house mother I guess you'd call it.

1-00-13-40

Jared Smith: How in a family of 8 kids and 2 adults, when rationing came around, how would that have worked?

1-00-13-50

John Cain: Rationing didn't affect us much to the degree... I'll put it to you like this, you use to get subsistence. I'm trying to remember, like milk and bread was rationed and you picked them up and you got it. When I was a kid we'd have a roast, a yay big roast, and you have to grab it fast. You know what I mean? You waited too long and you're out of luck. That was the way it was, get it or do without. (Laughs) We ate well. My father provided all for us so I can't complain. I always had 3 squares a day and the whole 9 yards. We weren't hurting in that degree but I know there were families that didn't have much. Everybody was hurting. In fact, we never had a car in my family. We used the bus or local transportation.

1-00-15-13

Jared Smith: How effective was that in your area?

1-00-15-19

John Cain: There was bus transportation right down the street from where I lived. A regular bus. I walked. I couldn't afford a nickel for the bus ride. (Laughs)

1-00-15-32

Jared Smith: So your father would take the bus into work?

1-00-15-35

John Cain: Yeah.

1-00-15-39

Jared Smith: How far away was his work place?

1-00-15-49

John Cain: I'm going to say 10 to 15 miles, I don't know exact. It wasn't that far. In other words, we lived in west Summerville, closer to east Summersville was the bakery place. It was the first national bakery. The first national store.

1-00-16-15

Jared Smith: So even though you were in west Summerville, east was far enough away that...

1-00-16-19

John Cain: Yeah, in other words, I was living here and he worked down there. Spotsylvania or something or maybe past that. It's like from here to Bowling Green.

1-00-16-50

Jared Smith: I'm going to move to discussing the war. When the war was going on in 1939 and 1940, before the United States got involved, did you or your family have any feeling towards it? What were you and your family's thoughts on the war before the U.S. involvement?

1-00-17-26

John Cain: Like people today, you turn around and say what the hell are they doing to us? You know, trying to get back at them, but I don't think we discussed it that much at home. It was just a normal thing. Life went on. You always had that thought behind you.

1-00-18-00

Jared Smith: Would it be over radio that you heard the war?

1-00-18-07

John Cain: You didn't have TV. (Laughs) Radio, yeah.

1-00-18-12

Jared Smith: On the radio would they talk about battles?

1-00-18-18

John Cain: Yeah, they'd talk about how the war was going. Like the invasion and junk like that.

1-00-18-26

Jared Smith: How often would the radio mention Hitler? Would he be mentioned every day in the radio broadcast?

1-00-18-35

John Cain: They talked about him but he didn't talk.

1-00-18-46

Jared Smith: Did they also discuss the Axis of Power, the forming between Germany, Italy and Japan?

1-00-18-52

John Cain: Yeah, that was discussed too. The biggest thing is when were we going to get into it. When are we going to get into it to do something.

1-00-19-23

Jared Smith: I know there was this sense of isolationism; did your family or community feel like America was going to get involved?

1-00-19-32

John Cain: Yeah, they figured we were going to get into it, we just wanted to know when. That's what happened you know?

1-00-19-50

Jared Smith: So I imagine, with the policies Roosevelt made to help the allies, everyone knew what was going on?

1-00-20-02

John Cain: Yeah, Americans helped the allies and stuff.

1-00-20-11

Jared Smith: Pearl Harbor. Did you hear Roosevelt's speech?

1-00-20-18

John Cain: Too busy working. (Laughs) I didn't hear too much of nothing. I was gone. I'm serious, I hustled. Worked. You know? I'd hear about it but I didn't sit down and hear it on the radio. I'd read about it in the paper or something. I was busy all the time. I was gone in the morning and I was gone at night. When I got home it was time to go to bed. I'd do my homework and hit the sack.

1-00-20-48

Jared Smith: So would you say you got the majority of your news through newspaper?

1-00-20-52

John Cain: Yeah.

1-00-20-56

Jared Smith: You were busy, but do you remember the attack on Pearl Harbor?

1-00-21-03

John Cain: Oh yeah, it's like anybody else, you talk about how you're going to get back at them. That's what the name of the game is. I tried to join the service early when I was 17 years old. I tried to go in the Navy, the Marine Corps, in fact the Army. I tried to join them all and I was turned down. I had bad eyes so I was turned down for bad eyes. I was color blind and when I went into the Army they were like "come on, come on, come on" but they turned me down before so I said to hell with you. I stayed in the Army. A lot of my friends went into the Marine Corps and Navy, but I was considered a 4 F. I couldn't pass the physical is what it was. Of course, the Army takes anyone I guess. (Laughs) That's how I ended up there.

1-00-22-16

Jared Smith: Would you say you tried to Army, Reserves?

1-00-22-23

John Cain: Army Reserves at 17. I joined the Reserves in April of 45' and they didn't call me to active duty until November. Then I went to active duty in November.

1-00-22-39

Jared Smith: But you tried before April as well?

1-00-22-40

John Cain: Yeah, I tried when I was 17. That was a year before.

1-00-22-45

Jared Smith: So in 44' you were trying?

1-00-22-50

John Cain: To join.

1-00-22-52

Jared Smith: So they weren't just taking anybody?

1-00-22-54

John Cain: Oh heck yeah.

1-00-23-00

Jared Smith: You said you had friends that went into the service?

1-00-23-03

John Cain: Oh yeah.

1-00-23-03

Jared Smith: Did they go in at 17?

1-00-23-06

John Cain: Some at 17, some at 18. They went in and some were drafted. In fact I lost 4 or 5 of my friends that were killed in action in different branches. Navy, Marine Corps, Army; a lot were killed in action.

1-00-23-37

Jared Smith: Did you learn about them being killed in action before you joined?

1-00-23-40

John Cain: No, no, no. I had already been in and then I heard about them afterwards. I left, between you me and the fence pole, I left home when I went into the Army. I went into the Army and I went overseas. The first pod of 46'. I went to Germany. I stayed in Germany for 7 years. I didn't come back until 53'. 52', 53', something like that but I stayed in Germany all that time. When I came back I was assigned to the States. I was

up at West Point for a year. Then I came down and went to Korea and then I went from Korea to Germany and stayed there another 4 years. I was never actually home, you follow me? I wasn't stationed per say in the States. I was at the military Academy in West Point and I was in Fort Story in Virginia for a period of time but that was about it. The Pentagon at the end, I retired at the Pentagon.

1-00-25-12

Jared Smith: That was all after 45'?

1-00-25-14

John Cain: Oh yeah. I retired in 69 at the Pentagon.

1-00-25-25

Jared Smith: Okay, so the mentality of getting back...

1-00-25-35

John Cain: Yeah, everybody was hot to trot as the saying goes.

1-00-25-42

Jared Smith: Did the war have any personal effect on the job you had? Did you have to switch from delivering milk?

1-00-25-58

John Cain: No, my jobs were part time. Like jobs in high school, I had a part time job doing this that or the other thing. That's all it was. I guess somebody else could do it but for after school it was a little job that didn't pay much. You didn't make much. I think I made about 25 cents an hour if I was lucky.

1-00-26-32

Jared Smith: So the war had no effect...

1-00-26-34

John Cain: No.

1-00-26-48

Jared Smith: So everyone was feeling that we would get back at them. Once we did start fighting in the Pacific and the war in Germany was there a sense of the American Spirit?

1-00-27-05

John Cain: Oh yeah. Everybody was Gung Ho as the saying goes. There were some people saying "Jesus Christ I don't want to be here" but that's the way it goes. I guess my Mama was worried about me. No one wants you to go. I went in, my brothers went in, all except for my little brother. My youngest brother didn't go in but the two below me did. My youngest didn't go in the service. My one brother was a college Professor a "la di da."

1-00-27-59

Jared Smith: What were the ages of your brothers?

1-00-28-04

John Cain: There was 2 years difference between us. I'll give you an example: I'm 85; the next one was my sister. She'd be 83 but she's dead now. I got another brother, he's 81 and after him is another sister. She's 79, so approximately 2 years difference between brothers and sisters. It was like a boy and a girl and a boy and a girl. Sometimes there was a girl and a girl and another boy.

1-00-28-43

Jared Smith: So your brothers would go in when they were 17 as well?

1-00-28-47

John Cain: Oh yeah, all my brothers were in the service besides my younger brother. They were all in the Army too.

1-00-29-08

Jared Smith: The atomic bomb. I heard that there were mixed feelings like half thought yeah and the other half...

1-00-29-21

John Cain: Yeah, I guess it was. In a sense people just wanted to end the war and that was the end of the war. Of course, on the other side they were asking why kill so many people. You know what I'm talking about? But that's the only way you win a war. You have to kill people whether they're civilians or combat type people. That makes them quit, you know? That's what the name of the game was. Dropping the atomic bomb ended it. People got killed and they said "Oh Jesus, we don't want this to happen." Some felt it was good others thought it was bad. It's like anything else you know? Even today, you know? Like all my sons belong to the National Rifle Association; gung ho. (Laughs) Like my son next door has more guns then they have in an armory. He's got a whole arms room with machine guns and stuff and my other son is loaded with weapons too. I'm the only idiot that doesn't have any. (Laughs) I have to laugh because it's so funny but they do believe in it. In fact, they got the NRA calling me all the time.

1-00-31-00

Jared Smith: Was there any portrayals of the Japanese in your town?

1-00-31-12

John Cain: Oh yeah. They were around. Posters.

1-00-31-16

Jared Smith: Do you remember any?

1-00-31-20

John Cain: Eh, like I said I was hustling myself. I didn't get the chance to politic. I was too busy trying to earn a dollar if you want to know the truth. I looked at it like this: I was the oldest, my father was busting his butt to keep us fed and I figured the best I could do was to do what I did which was to bring money into the household so we could have a better life. And we did, we ate well and all that stuff. We had a big house and so on and so forth. But like I said, I left and it was all home. When I left I was gone, you know what I mean. And when I left, as I told you I didn't get home for Christ's sake. That's the way it goes. I enjoyed life, it was rough sometimes. I'm happy with my life and the way it turned out. I did well for somebody that didn't have a high school education. I guess I learned in hard knocks. I had a good job once I retired from the military with the government. I made good money there. The world has treated me well, I'll put it to you like that you know? It's there for those who want to get it. If you sit around and don't do nothing and have the blues all the time then that's a problem. You can get out and make a dollar and make it pay off. I look at it like this: there are a lot of people out there saying they don't have any money but there's work out there. Even if it's just waiting tables, you know? Everyone wants a million dollars but doesn't want to work or they want a job that pays a million dollars. You have to start some place you know? Right now I have two sons and they both have their own business. They're not knocking on my door, you know? They have their own thing. I have a daughter and she's married. I don't have a problem as far as that goes but money is there. I got money. I could help them out but they don't need my help. Maybe someday they will.

1-00-34-56

Jared Smith: The jobs you had before, did that have a great effect on your time in the service?

1-00-35-08

John Cain: No, the jobs I had were remedial jobs, you know? You worked your butt off but... if you were a welder's helper, you'd go into welding or something but what am I going to do, get a milk route or something? You know what I'm talking about?

1-00-35-28

Jared Smith: So it had no effect?

1-00-35-30

John Cain: No, it didn't have an effect at all.

[Interview Interruption]

1-00-36-21

Jared Smith: So what was the community doing? Were they effected by the war? Did they start having war effort jobs?

1-00-36-30

John Cain: Oh yeah. They had the war effort going on. Ship building. See where I was from there was ship building. Lots of it. They built ships and armies for the war effort.

1-00-37-07

Jared Smith: Did you know any of the people that went into the shipyard?

1-00-37-12

John Cain: Yeah, my father. He left the bakery and wet to the shipyards. A lot of people were tied into the war effort. I never did.

1-00-37-35

Jared Smith: Was there more money in the shipyard than the bakery?

1-00-37-38

John Cain: Oh yeah. Big money. My dad woud go to the shipyards and stuff like that.

1-00-38-01

Jared Smith: So during VE Day you were already in reserves, a month in..

1-00-38-06

John Cain: VE Day?

1-01-04-49

Jared Smith: Victory in Europe Day May 8.

1-00-38-11

John Cain: That was in 45'. Yeah it was 45'.

1-00-38-22

Jared Smith: Did the reserves have you do anything up to that point?

1-00-38-25

John Cain: No.

1-00-38-29

Jared Smith: Do you remember anything about the victory?

1-00-38-32

John Cain: Oh yeah, I was out there with the rest of them.

1-00-38-38

Jared Smith: What was that scene like?

1-00-38-40

John Cain: Everyone was out there. The streets were crowded. We won, we won. To make a long story short my wife was German. (Laughs) Yeah, I met her over there.

1-00-39-15

Jared Smith: So you met your wife in Germany?

1-00-39-17

John Cain: Hell yeah! And all my kids were born there. Well, I have one that was born at West Point. That was way back when. In fact I guess my wife was more American than me.

1-00-39-56

Jared Smith: Was Victory in Japan Day, September 2nd, the same?

1-00-40-00

John Cain: Yeah, you want to know the truth? It was a chance to go get drunk. (Laughs) It was one of those.

1-00-40-21

Jared Smith: Do you have any else you'd like to add during World War II or maybe your experience?

1-00-40-45

John Cain: I went over there when the war had ended. It's funny. Germany wanted to make room for the dependents so that's what I did. I was running people out of their houses. They can take one thing of furniture and we take the rest. That's what I did over there. I chased war criminals for war crimes.

1-00-41-19

Jared Smith: So you were in charge of clearing out?

1-00-41-21

John Cain: Yeah. I'd go down; say they wanted a section of the city. We'd take all the houses and knock on doors and clear them out. Then let the dependents come in.

1-00-41-42

Jared Smith: Dependents of Germany?

1-00-41-44

John Cain: Americans. Wives and stuff.

1-00-41-47

Jared Smith: So you guys started making Army bases?

1-00-41-52

John Cain: Yeah, we would take a base. For example, Quantico, we'd take over the base and capture that thing. Then the surrounding areas needed rooms for the families. A place to sleep and live for when they came over there.

1-00-42-15

Jared Smith: So they'd be the same houses? No touching up or rebuilding?

1-00-42-19

John Cain: No, No. We'd move right in, yeah. It was alright. There was a lot of crying people getting kicked out of their house with no place to go. That's the way it is, the victors take the spoils. It was kind of rough after the war. And then chasing war criminals, they'd say there's Joe Blow down there, put him in the clink and bring him in for trial. They tried Goering and all them when I was over there. I didn't know half of what was going on at the time.

1-00-43-17

Jared Smith: So the Nuremberg Trials happened when you were over there?

1-00-43-

John Cain: Oh yeah. When I first went over there I was in infantry and then I was in a police force. That's what we did, police. We did all that jazz and then that subsided. Then they were reorganizing the Army getting back to how it was.

1-00-43-52

Jared Smith: How would tracking down be? How would tracking down war criminals work?

1-00-43-56

John Cain: Well you'd go down there and say we're looking for you. If you lived over here then we'd grab your house and take you in, put you in the clink for your crimes. There was men and there was women too. We didn't have anything to do with them.

1-00-44-28

Jared Smith: So you were in charge of clearing the house and arresting them?

1-00-44-31

John Cain: I was a flunky, what are you talking about? (Laughs) No, I wasn't in charge of anything. I was one of the doers.

1-00-44-44

Jared Smith: Do you remember anything about the monuments men? How there were treasures in Germany and the Army redistributed them.

1-00-45-01

John Cain: Oh yeah, places like that. You'd find stuff that people had left. I wasn't into uppity uppity. I was like the flunky carrying stuff out. That was about the size of it. People had a lot of stuff that they stole or confiscated.

1-00-45-43

Jared Smith: Was there anything your community was known for other than it's ethnicity. You know how some cities are known for their food?

1-00-46-00

John Cain: No.

1-00-46-09

Jared Smith: And you said your parents both immigrated to the United States. Do you know when? Like what time frame?

1-00-46-22

John Cain: The came in the 20's. 1923 I think.

1-00-46-32

Jared Smith: Did they ever tell you about the depression?

1-00-46-33

John Cain: No, they lived it. (Laughs) I'd seen it. That's the way it was. Life goes on I guess.

1-00-47-13

Jared Smith: Would you say when the war started the 3 slabs a day got more consistent? Like how you said you always had something to eat.

1-00-47-27

John Cain: Oh yeah. We ate well. 3 Squares a day. It was in the 30's and I was born in 27'. It stayed on until the War so that was it.

Interview with John Cain
Interviewed by: Jared Smith
Transcriber: Jared Smith
[Interview: November 2, 2012]

2-00-00-00

Jared Smith: Today is November 2nd, 2012. Did you know when the depression happened? Do you have a memory of papers you might have seen about the market crashing?

2-00-00-28

John Cain: I never read the papers. (Laughs) If you want to know the truth. The only reason I knew is because everything went to hell. That's the only reason I knew. Nobody had any money, people lost their jobs, and people were getting laid off like crazy. You make what you can. You had to hustle for a buck one way or the other. Legal or illegal. (Laughs)

2-00-01-01

Jared Smith: So you would say that just through experience, you were able to see people getting laid off?

2-00-01-11

John Cain: Yeah, my father got laid off. It was rough.

2-00-01-23

Jared Smith: Your father got laid off of his bakery job? What did you guys do during that time?

2-00-01-27

John Cain: At that time they had the Welfare. My father ended up working at a farm for old folks and they had livestock. He worked there.

2-00-01-48

Jared Smith: Were you able to keep your 2 jobs?

2-00-01-52

John Cain: Yeah, my stuff I did on my own. It was work but you had to hustle to get it. You took what you had. You didn't sit around all nice and plush. You took what you had to take to make a buck and that's why I say money was scarce and jobs were scarce. You did what you had to do.

2-00-02-17

Jared Smith: How many brothers and sisters did you have by that time? 1929

2-00-02-28

John Cain: 29' I'm trying to think. At that time it was me and I had one sister. The rest were born afterwards. 29' then I had, let me see, I was born in 27' and then the rest came down. 30' right down the road. I was the one first hit is the way to say it. And when you think back on it, it wasn't that bad. At the time it was bad. You think back. I'll always say we ate good. We had plenty of food on the table. But you did without a meal but there was always food on the table; maybe not the greatest food. That's how it went. That's why I welcomed the service. (Laughs) To get the hell away from it all.

[Phone Call]

2-00-04-05

Jared Smith: How long did your dad keep the job on the farm?

2-00-04-12

John Cain: He did that until the Navy yard and was working on ships, working for the war effort. What the hell was he? A welder I guess.

2-00-04-35

Jared Smith: And he kept that until the end of the war? Did he go back to his bakery job?

2-00-05-27

John Cain: No, he never went back there. I'm trying to think. I was gone then, I don't know what he did. I stayed in the service and stayed gone. (Laughs)

[Interview interruption]

2-00-07-11

Jared Smith: You know how you said there was always food on the table? Once the war kicked off was there more abundance of food or did it stay the same?

2-00-07-18

John Cain: It stayed the same. There was no change really. There were items you couldn't get. And I didn't drink it like coffee was rationed, butter was rationed. A lot of stuff was rationed, sugar. All in all, you had enough. Like we used to get milk from the, I don't know what you call it, welfare recipients. I use to go down with my wagon and pull the thing. You put milk in it, and put oatmeal in it. What else could I tell you?

2-00-08-26

Jared Smith: What about your school? You said it was private and saw no effect?

2-00-08-33

John Cain: No, the school was no effects. Like I said, we didn't have many boys. It was mostly girls in the school but like everything else. You got out of school at 2 but it was okay. It was good. I got a good education. There was far and in between. Most of the boys in the school were like me. They had to hustle for a buck. They were out working their but off. That was for everybody. There were no rich people or poor people. We were all poor. You get these big time lawyers and doctors pulling up in their nice cars but they weren't making a lot of money.

2-00-09-53

Jared Smith: How many grades were in your school?

2-00-09-56

John Cain: The school I went to ran from kindergarten to the 8th and 9, 10, 11, and 12 were in high school. 1 building was here and the other building was there.

2-00-10-11

Jared Smith: So everything up to 9th was in the first building?

2-00-10-15

John Cain: Yeah, they call that grade school and then high school. We didn't have junior high.

2-00-10-20

Jared Smith: Was the kindergarten through 9 also private?

2-00-10-27

John Cain: Yeah, it was a religious school. It was Catholic. They were Catholic schools.

2-00-10-36

Jared Smith: Did they have any corporal punishment in those schools?

2-00-10-42

John Cain: Oh yeah. One time I got whipped by a 2 by 4.

2-00-10-48

Jared Smith: What did you do to get the punishment?

2-00-10-52

John Cain: Just bullshit, you know? They catch you screwing around, they get you for this and they get you for this. They use to use a switch. The nuns that taught us, they were nuns had their own way of dealing with the punishment. They use to give you red peppers on your tongue.

2-00-11-26

Jared Smith: Was there any teacher specifically remember that you didn't like?

2-00-11-30

John Cain: No, we all got along.

2-00-11-34

Jared Smith: Did you have a favorite?

2-00-11-36

John Cain: No. They were all doing their thing I guess. I can't say much, they're all dead by now.

2-00-11-59

Jared Smith: So within your school do you remember classes. Would you have religious classes?

2-00-12-16

John Cain: In the morning we had religion for an hour and then you'd go to your regular classes like math and geography and history and all that crap. English. That was about the size of it.

2-00-12-42

Jared Smith: And I imagine your family went to church on Sundays?

2-00-12-45

John Cain: Yep.

2-00-12-47

Jared Smith: Was there a community church that everyone would go to?

2-00-12-56

John Cain: Yeah.

2-00-13-00

Jared Smith: What was that like? It was a Catholic Church?

2-00-13-03

John Cain: Yeah, St. Johns. We all went there. In fact, that's where I went to school. Grade school and high school.

2-00-13-11

Jared Smith: The church was by your school?

2-00-13-16

John Cain: Eh, when you say by... downtown was here and the church was here. It was a little bit of a distance between them.

2-00-13-41

Jared Smith: Do you remember when you went to get communion and all of the other practices that they made you do?

2-00-13-56

John Cain: Do I remember? That's why I got punished one time. I got into the wine. (Laughs) During church, I knew where the wine was. I was what you call an S.O.B. One of the bad boys I guess. We didn't have anything better to do. We use to go down and beat on college students at Harvard. It's all you could do, pick on them.

2-00-14-50

Jared Smith: So you'd get with a group of your high school friends...

2-00-14-56

John Cain: We had gangs, that's what it was. Just something to do. We'd go down to the Charles River and screw around but you worked hard you played hard.

2-00-15-22

Jared Smith: Do you have other stories like drinking in the church?

2-00-15-41

John Cain: We used to drink. Get us a jug and get with it. All and all it was just kids trying to act big. What the kids do today just back then. Oh well.

2-00-16-19

Jared Smith: you were able to find somebody to get you drinks?

2-00-16-22

John Cain: Yeah, I had a guy in high school with me. He looked like he was 30 years old, he was a big sucker. Where there's a will there's a way.

2-00-16-48

Jared Smith: So you'd just meet with him once a week?

2-00-16-56

John Cain: Whenever you had the chance. I used to hang around Harvard Square down there at Harvard.

2-00-17-15

Jared Smith: What would you do there?

2-00-17-20

John Cain: Just hang around. Hang in a corner. It was typical of the kids today, the same thing just years ago. It was rougher. Kids today, their parents give them money. Back then you had to hustle for your own money. You had to bust your butt to get a buck. Like me if I made \$20 in a week I kept 5 and turned the other 15 into the household. You didn't have much but you had to put money into the house. A little piece of the action. Today kids look for their parents to give them an allowance. Everyone raises their kids differently. Like you said, your dad was in the military, I was too for 26 years. My kids got up there and knew they had to hustle and I didn't give them shit, in plain English. I helped them when they needed help. My son came to me and said I want to do this and I need money for this and I said here's a loan. I loaned him the money but I said pay me back though. So they both got their own businesses and they take care of me. I got 3 sons, 2 have businesses, and the other one is disabled. He had a stroke and he's in Texas milking the government's money. (Laughs)

2-00-19-40

Jared Smith: Which businesses do they have?

2-00-19-42

John Cain: I got one that owns a pizza parlor and the other one owns an automotive shop. The worst part about it is when they were growing up, the one wanted a pizza parlor and the other one wanted an auto motives. When it came to businesses they switched. The one down in Texas was in construction, transferred the job from here down there. That's about it. There's not much more I can tell you. It was good, but it was rough. You look back as if it was crappy but it wasn't. It could have been worse.

2-00-21-05

Jared Smith: Who was the group you would hang with?

2-00-21-08

John Cain: Guys I went to school with.

2-00-21-13

Jared Smith: were they the same background as you?

2-00-21-17

John Cain: Most of my friends, their fathers were either policeman or fireman, that's where they ended up. My mother's family, they were well to do. The funny part about going down there, I didn't want to stay with my mother's family. They had electricity and running water and indoor toilets. The whole nine yards. My father's place had the outhouse and the lanterns. But I use to like that. I got to play with the hogs. I ate that up. My mother's parents, he was a rancher. Fox farms, the big thing back then was fox farms. He had fox ranches, he had plenty of loot. It was funny but I didn't like to stay with them, too uppity up for me.

2-00-22-31

Jared Smith: And that was in Canada?

2-00-22-34

John Cain: Yeah, both my mother and father came from Canada.

2-00-22-37

Jared Smith: What age would you be when you went to go visit them?

2-00-22-56

John Cain: Probably 10 or 11, something like that. I was younger. But I haven't been there in 70 years but most of my family lives there.

2-00-23-11

Jared Smith: Like your distant family? Like cousins and stuff?

2-00-23-16

John Cain: Yeah, cousins and aunts. Both grandfathers lived in Canada. My father came down in the 20s and I'm the first born in the United States. It's funny because back then we'd be Irish and we'd fight the Polacks and the Degos.

2-00-23-46

Jared Smith: Degos?

2-00-23-51

John Cain: Italians. You had to fight somebody.

2-00-23-56

Jared Smith: That's what you would do for fun?

2-00-24-08

John Cain: Yeah, you'd have gang wars with different people. Where I lived was mostly French, Italians and Irish. That's the way we lived. I had friends that were Italian. I had a brother in law in the family. I've been integrated. (Laughs)

2-00-24-40

Jared Smith: Did you have neighbors that were Italian and French?

2-00-24-52

John Cain: Oh yeah. The funny part about when I was a kid, my family lived in a 3 decker. I can't remember what floor of the house we lived on but the owners were Italians. They use to feed me all the time and I got to know them really well. I was like adopted I guess but they took care of me a lot.

2-00-25-21

Jared Smith: So there were like 3, you were on top?

2-00-25-27

John Cain: No, I think we were on the 1st floor or they lived on the first and we lived in the 2nd or 3rd. I'm trying to remember. I know it was in Summerville and the name of the people was the Venallies. They had a boy and a girl.

2-00-25-56

Jared Smith: Were there many of those type of houses?

2-00-26-00

John Cain: Oh yeah, down the road. That's where you had 3 deckers. Tenements. It was city, we had single houses but the majority of them were 3 floors.

2-00-26-31

Jared Smith: Was there anything else you wanted to add?

2-00-26-35

John Cain: No.

2-00-26-41

Jared Smith: Thank you for your time.

2-00-26-42

John Cain: I'm sorry I couldn't be a little more forthcoming.

