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Mildred “Mickey” Gompf
Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

Interview conducted by
Alex Brudno
in 2012

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Interview with Mickey Gompf
Interviewed by: Alex Brudno
Transcriber: Alex Brudno
[Interview: October 15, 2012]

(1-00:01:22)

Brudno:

Okay. Today is October 15th at exactly 4:00 and of course to introduce any people who are hearing this or going to see it, the person I'm interviewing is Mildred Leatherbury Gompf, but everybody calls her Mickey. She is the sister of my grandfather as well as my mother's godmother. Mickey, can you hear me?

(1-00:02:15)

Gompf:

Yes, fine.

(1-00:02:18)

Brudno:

Okay. I wanna tell you first and foremost that the focus of my research will be on working women in traditional careers on the American home front during WWII. I, the researcher, will also examine the courtship and early years of marriage during the WWII time period. I just want to set you up with what the interview will be talking about, but I wanna start with a few brief basic information like would you mind stating your full name please, Mickey?

(1-00:03:12)

Gompf:

Stating my what?

(1-00:03:14)

Brudno:

Your full name.

(1-00:03:16)

Gompf:

I'm Mildred Leatherbury Gompf.

(1-00:03:18)

Brudno:

Would you mind telling us where you were born?

(1-00:03:26)

Gompf:

I was born in Northampton County, Virginia in 1922.

(1-00:03:33)

Brudno:

Would you mind telling me the exact date, when in 1922?

(1-00:03:45)

Gompf:

February 19th.

(1-00:03:49)

Brudno:

Okay. Would you mind telling me briefly about your early family life, just briefly about your childhood?

(1-00:04:09)

Gompf:

Well I grew up carefree and happy on a farm on a tidal creek on Chesapeake Bay and spent my days boating in the summer, riding horseback. They were happy, carefree days.

(1-00:04:32)

Brudno:

At what creek?

(1-00:04:35)

Gompf:

Mattawoman Creek.

(1-00:04:39)

Brudno:

All right.

(1-00:04:43)

Gompf:

I think I can spell it for you.

(1-00:04:49)

Brudno:

I could ask maybe when we reach the end of the interview I can talk about the spelling, but for now would you mind telling me about the schools you went to while you were growing up?

(1-00:05:09)

Gompf:

Well I started elementary school when I was six years old in the first grade and went to a school in Machipongo, Virginia and then I went to high school in Eastville, Virginia, which is the place where the oldest records in Virginia are, and then I went to college first

in Harrisonburg, Virginia at what is now Madison College. It was then Harrisonburg State Teachers College, and for my junior year I transferred to Virginia Tech, which was then known as VPI. It was in my junior year that Pearl Harbor was bombed.

(1-00:06:05)

Brudno:

Oh. It's okay to focus on how you managed to get into Harrisonburg College you said?

(1-00:06:16)

Gompf:

Yes. I was on scholarship there and it was at the end of the Depression, so everybody had to scramble to get the money for college while I was able to get a job on campus.

(1-00:06:38)

Brudno:

And what kind of job on campus did you took?

(1-00:06:51)

Gompf:

I took a supervisor's job with the dining room.

(1-00:06:59)

Brudno:

And you said you transferred to what is then VPI. Why did you transfer in your junior year to VPI?

(1-00:07:20)

Gompf:

Well I decided I wanted to go there because they were just taking in women for the first time.

(1-00:07:28)

Brudno:

Really?

(1-00:07:31)

Gompf:

It had been principally a military school and my father thought women shouldn't be there but with typical teenage defiance, I was determined that I would be one of the first women.

(1-00:07:46)

Brudno:

Really? It's okay if I talk to you about why do you decide to venture in early children education?

(1-00:08:07)

Gompf:

Well I had majored in nutrition and the child development program was under the home economics department. There was the beginning of training for people in child development. They were just beginning to have nursery schools and preschools every where, so I switched, and it was essentially child psychology but under the home economics department.

(1-00:08:42)

Brudno:

And so you were originally trying to major in nutrition?

(1-00:08:56)

Gompf:

Yes.

(1-00:09:00)

Brudno:

And somehow you got interested in doing early childhood education.

(1-00:09:11)

Gompf:

Yes, but I was probably influenced by the fact that by that time I was engaged to be married. I was engaged to a senior who was in the military and when Pearl Harbor was bombed I remember the evening very well because we had a youth program at the local church and all of the young men who were there were in the military and knew they were gonna be commissioned as officers when they graduated in June. So there was much talk of what the future would be because of the war.

And then I persuaded my mother at the end of that junior year to let me postpone my senior year and be married in 1942 in October because my husband was commissioned as a second lieutenant and was stationed at the air force base in Dayton, Ohio at Wright Field. And so we were there for most of the first two years of the war. He worked in the big wind tunnel testing airplanes.

(1-00:10:36)

Brudno:

And you're talking about George, your husband George?

(1-00:10:45)

Gompf:

Correct.

(1-00:10:47)

Brudno:

Do you mind if I focus on George a little bit? How did you meet your husband? How did you meet George?

(1-00:10:55)

Gompf:

At a dance at college. He cut in to ask me if I knew a girl he'd been dating at Madison College and we saw each other a great deal after that. He soon stopped asking about the other girl. We were in Ohio at Wright Field for the first two years of the war and then he was assigned to North Africa and I returned to Washington and then went and finished my junior year in March of 1945 and for the rest of the war I was in Washington DC, which was a very interesting place to be during the war. It was mostly a city of women.

(1-00:12:00)

Brudno:

Really?

(1-00:12:02)

Gompf:

The only men who were there were the high ranking officers that were at the Pentagon. The Pentagon had been finished in 1943, but most of Washington was working women, and I worked in a childcare center that was open from 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night. We worked eight-hour shifts.

(1-0012:28)

Brudno:

Oh.

(1-00:12:30)

Gompf:

And it was very interesting to be in Washington. You had a question? It was very interesting to be in Washington at that time because it was FDR's, Roosevelt's, third term.

(1-00:12:54)

Brudno:

Mm-hmm.

(1-00:12:56)

Gompf:

I remember a few special events in Washington that were really historical. One was General De Gaulle of France came to visit. We took the day off from work.

(1-00:13:16)

Brudno:

Can you hear me?

(1-00:13:30)

Gompf:

Yes.

(1-00:13:31)

Brudno:

It is our mic.

(1-00:13:51)

Gompf:

You have a delay of some kind. Your next question?

(1-00:13:54)

Brudno:

Can you hear me?

(1-00:13:58)

Gompf:

I can hear, but there is some static.

(1-00:14:03)

Brudno:

I know. There's a little bit of issues, but I think you – you said that Charles De Gaulle visited Washington DC while you were in Washington DC?

(1-00:14:23)

Gompf:

It was very interesting. I remember that he came across 14th Street Bridge from what was at that time called National Airport and he stood up in an open convertible, and he was a very tall man, well over six feet, and then he had that French military cap, and he waved to all the crowd along the way. Later, very soon after was the death of Franklin Roosevelt and Washington was a very somber place. In fact I remember there was a hum over the whole city because mostly the Black people had been very much attached to him and that was a murmur of grief for Roosevelt.

(1-00:15:30)

Brudno:

Mm-hmm. Do you have any – were you stunned when Roosevelt passed away?

(1-00:15:48)

Gompf:

Yes, I was sad. The interesting thing that went on in Washington soon after was when Dwight D. Eisenhower came home after the victory in Europe was declared, and I was so much a fan of IKE that I took the day off from teaching because the streets were lined along the parade for Eisenhower coming into Washington. In fact it was so crowded I climbed up on to a tree limb to see him. They were three particularly interesting times to be in Washington, but I see you were interested in working women and most of these were mothers of the children that I had in school were working mothers for the government. And soon, at the end of the war veterans began to come back from Europe. Some of them were injured but not as many at Walter Reed as have been at later wars.

(1-00:17:17)

Brudno:

Yes. Don't mind if I go back on George for a bit. I'm just wondering how old was George when you and George first met?

(1-00:17:45)

Gompf:

He was 20, soon 21 and I was 20. I wonder if you'd be interested in the type of work he did in North Africa?

(1-00:18:03)

Brudno:

I think I'll get into that later in the interview. Where was George originally from, by the way?

(1-00:18:18)

Gompf:

He grew up in Alexandria, Virginia, but his family moved to Richmond, Virginia while he was in college because his father worked for the Chesapeake and Ohio telephone company, he was the main engineer. Later in George's life his family came back to Alexandria because his father was on the board of AT&T.

(1-00:18:57)

Brudno:

I'm just curious, what did the two of you have in common?

(1-00:19:10)

Gompf:

Oh, I guess –

(1-00:19:16)

Brudno:

When you two first met I mean.

(1-00:19:20)

Gompf:

Just young love I suppose. Interested in school dances and visited each other's homes.

(1-00:19:36)

Brudno:

And how did the relationship with George develop?

(1-00:19:46)

Gompf:

Well we dated very steadily for about a year.

(1-00:19:56)

Brudno:

What do you mean by the term "standard", "standardly"?

(1-00:20:03)

Gompf:

Steadily. We saw each other almost every night. We studied together in the library. We went to dances. We went to programs on the college campus. There were very spectacular, military parades and the drill grounds.

(1-00:20:34)

Brudno:

And what kind of courtship did you and George have?

(1-00:20:44)

Gompf:

A fast and furious one. The war speeded up everything for everybody. We knew the young men were going off to war. That was the reason that I postponed my senior year so that we could be together for some time before he was sent to Europe.

(1-00:21:18)

Brudno:

And when did you two get married?

(1-00:21:41)

Gompf:

We were married about October 3, 1942.

(1-00:21:45)

Brudno:

And where was it, may I ask?

(1-00:21:50)

Gompf:

We were married in Christ Church Eastville, Virginia.

(1-00:22:58)

Brudno:

Oh yes. That's a kind of interesting place to get married in.

(1-00:22:11)

Gompf:

It was. My family had transferred to Hungars Parish, but I wanted to go back to Christ Church and get married because that's where I had gone to Sunday school for years and years and the church was very dear to my heart.

(1-00:22:32)

Brudno:

And you said you had to take a year off so you could get married. What did you do during your year off from college?

(1-00:22:47)

Gompf:

I postponed going back until 1944 after my husband went to North Africa and I started the summer semester and graduated with a B.S. in science in March 1945. And it was easy for me to get the job, Alex after leaving college because there were few people who were trained in childcare programs. It was new because the mothers were working during the war and needed care for their children for a long day, so I was able to get a job with the AWVS, which was the American Women's Volunteer Services day care school Sidwell Friends later bought the school.

(1-00:24:01)

Brudno:

Interesting. You said when talking to my mother that you spent a brief time with your in-laws in Richmond?

(1-00:24:22)

Gompf:

Yes.

(1-00:24:24)

Brudno:

Why did you move to Richmond to be with your in-laws?

(1-00:24:35)

Gompf:

I think it was because I knew my husband was coming home from Europe after V-E Day and he did come in about May 1945 and his brother had been a pilot in the navy, and the brother was killed landing on the carrier, Roosevelt, and then I went to the memorial service with my husband and we sat through the funeral. Then we came to California where he was doing his graduate degrees at Cal Tech.

(1-00:25:25)

Brudno:

Do you mind if we have to go back to your stay in Richmond? How long did you stay in Richmond?

(1-00:25:40)

Gompf:

It's hard to remember because a few months, probably about three months.

(1-00:25:49)

Brudno:

All right. It's a good approximate time. I didn't need to be exact. May I ask, why did you leave Richmond?

(1-00:26:03)

Gompf:

We left in June 1946 and drove to California. So actually most of the war time was spent in Washington.

(1-00:26:23)

Brudno:

I mean why did you leave Richmond I mean? That's what I'm trying to say.

(1-00:26:35)

Gompf:

We left Richmond for my husband to go to graduate school.

(1-00:26:41)

Brudno:

Did you teach while you were in Richmond?

(1-00:26:52)

Gompf:

No. I was just there a short while, but I did teach when I got back to California while my husband was in graduate school. Then in 1947 he got his first job and I gave up my teaching career to be a homemaker.

(1-00:27:23)

Brudno:

Oh.

(1-00:27:26)

Gompf:

And after the war most women were giving up their jobs because the veterans who came back needed jobs and at that time most households had one wage earner.

(1-00:27:45)

Brudno:

Don't mind if I – you said in my conversation with my mother that you taught at Sidwell Friends?

(1-00:28:10)

Gompf:

Well at that time it was run by the American Women's Volunteer Service, but Sidwell Friends School bought it as the war ended.

(1-00:28:20)

Brudno:

So you got your job through this organization?

(1-00:28:32)

Gompf:

I was hired by them, yes, from college.

(1-00:28:37)

Brudno:

Tell me what was Sidwell like when you were teaching there?

(1-00:28:44)

Gompf:

Well it was a small compact building on Wisconsin Avenue and there were about 16 teachers and a director and a nurse on the staff, and as I told you before it opened early in the morning at 7:00 so the government workers could get to their office and leave their children first. So we gave the children lunch at school, and these volunteers were very interesting women. Many of them were from the embassy. I remember particularly there was a Chinese woman from the Chinese embassy and she would come to help serve lunch, and it was very evident she'd never done anything but be a hostess at the embassy, but she enjoyed working with children on the lunch hour.

(1-00:30:12)

Brudno:

It's kind of unusual that you had people from different embassies volunteering at the Sidwell School.

(1-00:30:26)

Gompf:

Well the atmosphere during WWII was very different from wars that have taken place since. Everybody was feeling a very patriotic duty to help the country in any way. In fact, I came across a statement by Eleanor Roosevelt that I thought was so interesting. I wondered if you'd like me to read that paragraph. Would you like me to read that paragraph, Alex?

(1-00:31:04)

Brudno:

I think it's okay.

(1-00:31:12)

Gompf:

Eleanor Roosevelt was the first President's wife that really began to take an interest in how people work in the country and she said something that's particularly interesting in this election year about the Presidency, she said, "No man who is a candidate or who is President can carry this situation alone. This is only carried by united people who love their country and who will live for it to the fullest of their ability with the highest ideals, with the determination that their party shall be absolutely devoted to the good of the nation as a whole, and to doing what this country can bring the world to a safer and happier condition." There was much sacrifice in Washington at that time. Everything was rationed and it was particularly hard to get meat because most of the meat that came to Washington was allotted to the embassies and to the new higher-ups in the services that were stationed at the Pentagon.

(1-00:32:30)

Brudno:

Speaking of the rationings and shortages, did the rationings and shortages affect your life?

(1-00:32:43)

Gompf:

Oh, very much. Fats were rationed, so if we ever had bacon we saved the bacon fat. Sugar was rationed. Tires were rationed. It was particularly hard ... and gasoline.

(1-00:33:04)

Brudno:

It's a lot difficult to drive around in Washington DC back then.

(1-00:33:16)

Gompf:

Well we didn't do any driving that wasn't extremely necessary because we would run out of ration coupons for gas. Most of the women who worked for the government took public transportation.

(1-00:33:36)

Brudno:

What other hardships did you face during the war besides the rationing and the shortages?

(1-00:33:55)

Gompf:

Well it was very difficult to communicate with people overseas. We had what we call aero mail because paper was difficult to get. They had a special mail for the military post that you could get as much on the page as you could. Then you folded it over to make an envelope. Where my grandchildren are able to use Skype and communicate face-to-face from Afghanistan to the States. We were, during WWII, two weeks for mail.

(1-00:34:53)

Brudno:

Did you contact George with this land mail?

(1-00:35:09)

Gompf:

Yes. It was really snail mail in those days.

(1-00:35:22)

Brudno:

It was what you said?

(1-00:35:28)

Gompf:

Aero mail did go faster because it got priority and went on a plane instead of a boat. Most regular mail for civilians in the U.S. it went by boat and took at least six weeks.

(1-00:35:54)

Brudno:

Oh.

(1-00:35:56)

Gompf:

Of course some of the ships were sunk by submarine and if they had mail on them you never got that because the Germans were very active with submarines in the North Atlantic. In North Africa, George worked at an aeronautical school to teach the airmen to repair planes. They were taking things over the Hump is what they call the mountains to Burma. We were sending supplies from North Africa to Burma. This was after the days of Rommel in North Africa.

(1-00:37:00)

Brudno:

Don't mind if I ask about your contact with George. How did the contact impact your marriage with George?

(1-00:37:30)

Gompf:

Well he was able to write very little that would not be censored. He did tell me about daily activity in North Africa and he was there when Churchill and Roosevelt met with Stalin, so it was an interesting time, but the war was over when he arrived. It had become very much up in Europe, in Germany.

(1-00:38:10)

Brudno:

And you mentioned about –

(1-00:38:15)

Gompf:

And France.

(1-00:38:16)

Brudno:

You mentioned FDR, Churchill and Stalin. Did they met? I didn't hear you.

(1-00:38:33)

Gompf:

As I remember they met on a ship off of Casablanca, Algeria I believe. I'm not sure of those facts.

(1-00:38:44)

Brudno:

That's all right. I'm not worried about those facts. Why did George write so little? Because he didn't have any time to write a letter or did he had any –

(1-00:39:09)

Gompf:

Well, he was very busy during the day running a school. They had to find parts of airplanes that had been left from the war in North Africa and put the airmen together and try to make do with parts that they scrounged from wreckage, and they were flying petrol over the hump to Burma. Some of the airmen got in trouble because they filled the empty Gerry cans with some kind of alcoholic beverage which they sent back and sometimes there was some of the petrol left in the cans, and it made them very sick, but they still were desperate for alcohol.

(1-00:40:16)

Brudno:

Don't mind if we go back to your wedding with George? What was the wedding like?

(1-00:40:52)

Gompf:

Well he could only get leave on very short notice. He had 3 days leave to come back from Ohio to Virginia. My friends rallied around and decorated Christ Church with beautiful fall leaves and a friend of mine played the organ, and I only had one attendant, my cousin, and George had a childhood boyfriend of his as the best man. We left right after the wedding and at that time the Chesapeake Bay Bridge was not built. The only way across the bay was by ferry, and we left by ferry to go to Norfolk and spent the night in Norfolk and took the train back to Ohio because he had to be back in 3 days.

(1-00:42:04)

Brudno:

Is that after you took the ferry? You spent the night where?

(1-00:42:10)

Gompf:

In Norfolk, Virginia in a hotel there.

(1-00:42:13)

Brudno:

And you took a train to where?

(1-00:42:18)

Gompf:

Back to Dayton, Ohio.

(1-00:42:20)

Brudno:

Oh.

(1-00:42:21)

Gompf:

Which was the main city near Wright Field. It was called Wright Patterson Field, and at that time it was known as the Army Air Corps. It became a distinct branch of the service later and became the Air Force, but at that time it was the Army Air Corps.

(1-00:42:54)

Brudno:

Okay. Don't mind if we focus on Sidwell? Who were the typical kindergarteners at Sidwell? Who were the kindergarten children?

(1-00:43:24)

Gompf:

Well they were the children of the government workers and mothers who – in Washington you always have lots of paperwork and it hasn't changed through the years, just increased, but then the only people doing it were the temporary women due to the wars in Europe and in the Pacific. I was there the night they celebrated V-E Day and Washington went crazy. Everybody was in the streets and they were bathing in the fountains and in the tidal basin and there was general jubilation, and then it was repeated one day in the summer at the end of the war in the Pacific.

(1-00:44:18)

Brudno:

Since you're talking about the end of war, how did you learn that the war was over?

(1-00:44:31)

Gompf:

I think it was broadcast by radio because it happened near the end of a weekday I remember, and I think the newspapers wrote special editions.

(1-00:45:02)

Brudno:

Would you mind explaining again who were the typical kindergarteners, Mickey?

(1-00:45:39)

Gompf:

I remember there was one woman on the teaching staff who was Hungarian and she was Jewish and she and her family had managed to get out and not been put in a concentration camp, and she had to take a job but she was really a very well trained psychiatrist, but she was very anxious to get the job when she came to this country. So she worked on the teaching staff, and I remember there were certain days she seemed very, very sad, and not much was told to us in the U.S. about what was going on with the Jews.

We did not really get much news about the concentration camps. In fact I wonder if we knew very much of them at all until near the end of the war. On the day she was very sad she had heard enough news from Europe to know that things were going wrong for the Jewish. She knew people were going into concentration camps.

(1-00:46:50)

Brudno:

How dreadful. Had you tried to comfort this Hungarian or had you tried to help her out in any way?

(1-00:47:15)

Gompf:

I cannot represent her and her husband, but I think they had enough money that they didn't depend in the U.S. except for being granted visas. I was invited to their apartment many times for dinner. At that time I was living with my sister-in-law, the wife of George's brother. His brother was out on carrier Roosevelt. We both had our husbands in the military and away. It would be interesting for you I think to know that also on the staff at the school where I taught was your mother's mother Charlene and her sister Marjorie. I introduced your grandmother to your grandfather.

(1-00:48:38)

Brudno:

Really? I was going to ask you if Charlene was teaching at Sidwell during this time.

(1-00:48:50)

Gompf:

Yes she was.

(1-00:48:52)

Brudno:

And tell me how you managed to introduce my grandmother Charlene to my grandfather Cliff.

(1-00:49:09)

Gompf:

He was visiting me one evening and I'd had a previous engagement and I didn't know he was coming. So I called Charlene and asked her if she would entertain my brother for the evening, and that was when they met, and I think they began to see each other rapidly after that. I believe he was in the navy out at ... somewhere in Maryland. He was a JG.

(1-00:49:51)

Brudno:

Oh. Would you mind telling me what is JG?

(1-00:49:58)

Gompf:

Junior grade lieutenant in the navy. I remember that it was particularly interesting. He'd been trained in aeronautical engineering but made him a legal officer in the navy. I think the place he was stationed was Patuxent, Maryland. I think that was the big navy base.

(1-00:50:42)

Brudno:

That's very interesting.

(1-00:50:49)

Gompf:

So he was able to – excuse me, I was talking over you. He was able to get leave and come into Washington frequently to meet Charlene.

(1-00:51:01)

Brudno:

And I'm just curious, did Charlene and Cliff and maybe some other – did you have a kind of support system? Did you have a system of support from people like my grandparents, Charlene and Cliff, while George was away?

(1-00:51:44)

Gompf:

Well when Charlene and Cliff met it was shortly before my husband returned from Europe. We went to California and I was in California when Cliff and Charlene were married, so I really never knew your grandparents Fieldner. I did know Arnold Fieldner, an uncle of Charlene's, who lived in Washington, and since not many people had cars, Charlene and Marjorie did. They had called the uncle to drive them around on the weekends. I had been in California for almost two years I think when they married, and I had a new baby so I couldn't go.

(1-00:52:48)

Brudno:

And I'm just curious, what kind of support system did you have while George was away?

(1-00:53:05)

Gompf:

My sister-in-law and my in-laws, and I was able to save up gas coupons enough to go see my family occasionally because they were 160 miles from Washington.

(1-00:53:27)

Brudno:

I could see why. It's really a lot of energy nowadays to travel between here and Northern Virginia and going to Eastern Shore. It's really a lot of travel.

(1-00:53:48)

Gompf:

Well it's more traveling, more people on the highways now, but it was hard for us to travel during WWII because of the gas rationing, and tires were getting pretty threadbare by the end of the war because they had not been able to buy any tires, the military needed all of the rubber goods. I wonder if I've been able to tell you about as much as I remember too. Do you have more specific questions?

(1-00:54:43)

Brudno:

Well actually I just need to go back on Sidwell. Would you mind explaining to me what kindergartens were like during WWII, kindergartens that you're teaching?

(1-00:55:04)

Gompf:

Younger than kindergarten age. These were two-year-olds, three-year-olds, and four-year-olds. They were divided in different groups according to age. Grandmother Charlene was teaching a different age group from the ones that I was teaching, but we all worked eight-hour shifts. Even the children were there for a 12-hour day.

(1-00:55:48)

Brudno:

Oh. Where did you live in Washington while you were teaching at Sidwell?

(1-00:56:04)

Gompf:

What did I wear?

(1-00:56:06)

Brudno:

Live I mean.

(1-00:56:08)

Gompf:

Where did I live?

(1-00:56:10)

Brudno:

Mm-hmm.

(1-00:56:11)

Gompf:

I lived in an apartment in Alexandria, Virginia and I went over Key Bridge through Georgetown each day to work, which was difficult when it was snowy and icy because I didn't have a garage in Alexandria and had to park the car outside. So getting ready to go to work in the morning meant chipping ice off of the windshield in winter. But I drove by the National Cathedral every day, it was still being built in those days.

(1-00:56:55)

Brudno:

Really? Well traveling for my mother from here to Washington it's very similar to what she faced when traveling from Great Falls to Washington in some way.

(1-00:57:23)

Gompf:

Well my house was such that I didn't get into traffic from the Pentagon even though I had to go past it to get to Washington. So it wasn't a difficult drive in that respect, not heavy traffic as you see today because as I said earlier, very few people could drive their cars if they even had one because of the gas rationing.

(1-00:58:04)

Brudno:

Oh yes. Don't mind if I ask, what was your school classroom like during the war?

(1-00:58:18)

Gompf:

Well, it was a typical one-story building, big classrooms with small closets and small bathrooms for the children and they each had a cubby, and they each had a cot because it was such a long day. They took their naps there.

(1-00:58:42)

Brudno:

Took their what? You said took their what?

(1-00:58:52)

Gompf:

They had to take naps in the afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00 and the teachers would alternate having time off during the naptime and there'd only be one teacher to supervise the sleeping children. So I'd go over to the local DC library on Wisconsin Avenue and read magazines for relaxation.

(1-00:59:26)

Brudno:

How did you spend your free time besides spending time in the DC libraries?

(1-00:59:40)

Gompf:

Well by the end of an eight-hour day with small children I was very tired, so there was nothing to do but occasionally on the weekends soldiers and sailors and friends of my husband's and his brother would come back and they would take me out and we'd go to the Shoreham Hotel and listen to music and dance. The bars and everything would close in Washington at midnight, so some of these men came over to pay us a belated visit after the bars closed, tell us what had been going on in Europe or on the ships they'd been on.

I visited the museums a great deal. I really enjoyed the National Museum and the Folger and all of the museums that are in Washington. Once we arranged to take the children to the National Zoo and they were fascinated with the snake house, but I was not very fond of snakes. So I directed my gaze to the walls as I led the group to see the snakes.

(1-01:01:28)

Brudno:

And may I ask, when the war is over, just tell me how you and George were reunited.

(1-01:01:56)

Gompf:

Well he came back on what was called a liberty ship, and it broke down in the Atlantic and they were delayed. He'd given me an approximate date that they would get over to the USA. He had left a port in France and when he was delayed many days I wondered what had happened. So a friend who was later the godparent of my children was stationed at the Pentagon and he was able to look through the records and he found out that this liberty ship had broken down in the mid-Atlantic and that they were waiting for the navy to give them a tow and fix it. So he eventually came back. It was a surprise one afternoon. He arrived by taxi to the Alexandria apartment.

(1-01:03:06)

Brudno:

Oh. What was life like when George returned?

(1-01:03:15)

Gompf:

Well we went to Richmond to be with his parents at that time, and while we were visiting was when we was notified of his brother's naval accident while they was landing on the carrier Roosevelt. There was a memorial service in Norfolk, Virginia within a few days of our notice. The navy chaplain that we knew conducted the service for his brother Charles.

(1-01:04:09)

Brudno:

And did George stay any longer in the military after the war or did he get himself a quick discharge?

(1-01:04:23)

Gompf:

He was transferred to the reserves from active duty and he maintained his status in the reserves for many years. He was promoted from major on active duty to lieutenant colonel in reserves.

(1-01:04:52)

Brudno:

Oh.

(1-01:04:54)

Gompf:

Do you think this just about covers the period that you were interested in?

(1-01:05:08)

Brudno:

Some areas, but I have some more questions. Particularly there's a few more questions about George. What if any skills did George learn from the military? What skills, if any?

(1-01:05:27)

Gompf:

Well, I think he had been a private pilot since he was 16 and he had hoped to fly on duty, but they needed him as a trained aeronautic engineer more than they needed pilots. They had plenty of young pilots. So he used to do the aeronautical engineering for the air corps.

(1-01:05:56)

Brudno:

How did he manage to become his own pilot?

(1-01:06:04)

Gompf:

When he was in college. As soon as he was 16 I think it was when he was a freshman in college in summer school. He attended flight school at Virginia Tech and got his license, private license. He enjoyed flying all his life whenever he could.

(1-01:06:33)

Brudno:

Oh, really?

(1-01:06:36)

Gompf:

But his family was very glad since his brother was a naval pilot that George was on terra firma.

(1-01:06:46)

Brudno:

Do you mind if I ask the question of why did you and George move to California?

(1-01:07:02)

Gompf:

He was going to attend graduate school at Cal Tech.

(1-01:07:06)

Brudno:

And you for a time continued to work?

(1-01:07:14)

Gompf:

He attained two extra degrees above his bachelor's at Cal Tech, an aeronautical engineering degree and a master's.

(1-01:07:27)

Brudno:

And I presume you continued to be a kindergarten teacher after the war until you had your first child?

(1-01:07:45)

Gompf:

Until I had my first child.

(Two Quotation Lines Removed)

(1-01:08:41)

Brudno:

And in the post-WWII world, how did George feel about you continuing to work?

(1-01:09:07)

Gompf:

Well he was glad that I could be occupied and we were living on a very limited budget while he was a graduate student, so my salary helped, but he was quite content when I had a baby and was glad to stay home for a while.

(1-01:09:35)

Brudno:

And of course I managed to – for the most part trying to save some analogical questions for the last. I'm just wondering, here's the first one. Did you expect to become a career woman when you were studying to become a kindergarten teacher?

(1-01:10:17)

Gompf:

No. I always anticipated that I would be a housewife or a homemaker.

(1-01:10:27)

Brudno:

May I ask why you wanted to become a housewife instead of becoming a career woman?

(1-01:10:42)

Gompf:

Well it was sort of the thing to do in those days. Raising your family was a full-time job.

(1-01:10:50)

Brudno:

And how did the fact that the United States was at war during the time influence your decision to get married?

(1-01:11:16)

Gompf:

Well it hastened it. If there hadn't been a war and George wasn't due to go overseas for service I would've finished college and then gotten married, but we felt that we had this precious time together before many of the soldiers who left didn't come back. There was always the possibility that they'd be lost in the war.

(1-01:11:47)

Brudno:

Was the timing of the wedding influenced by the war?

(1-01:11:56)

Gompf:

We had less time to send formal invitations. We invited people, notes on short notice, and I think my marriage was just typical of many that went on at that time. They took place during the time that the men had leave for the service. Usually they were very short leaves, like three days. So not many people who were married during WWII had honeymoons until much later during married life.

(1-01:12:41)

Brudno:

I presume you and George didn't have a honeymoon after?

(1-01:12:46)

Gompf:

We had three days on a train. I mean two days on a train.

(1-01:12:51)

Brudno:

Don't mind if I ask this question. You know there were a lot of women who have never worked before but yet started working in defense jobs, and the question is why did you work as a kindergarten teacher rather than as a defense worker during the war?

(1-01:13:25)

Gompf:

Well I was not one to be interested in mechanical things at all, and as I say there was a big demand for childcare workers because of the moms going back to work. So I was filling a slot that was very much desired by the society at the time.

(1-01:13:54)

Brudno:

Didn't getting married change your views on work?

(1-01:14:18)

Gompf:

No, I was content to carry on as usual.

(1-01:14:30)

Brudno:

Why is that though?

(1-01:14:33)

Gompf:

I'm sorry, I didn't hear that question.

(1-01:14:36)

Brudno:

Why is that?

(1-01:14:37)

Gompf:

Repeat that please.

(1-01:14:43)

Brudno:

What?

(1-01:14:46)

Gompf:

Repeat your question please.

(1-01:14:49)

Brudno:

I'm trying to ask about why is that to getting married change your views on work? Why is that, your answer to my earlier question?

(1-01:15:10)

Gompf:

Well I think marriage is the first consideration, but you fit it into your work day. It's possible that as young women today to be a career person and a homemaker. It's more pressure and less free time.

(1-01:15:45)

Brudno:

Yeah.

(1-01:15:48)

Gompf:

I really think I've just about told you all I know. I've been thinking about it for two days.

(1-01:16:20)

Brudno:

I think I missed a couple questions. How did you interact with your coworkers on the job?

(1-01:16:26)

Gompf:

How did we relate?

(1-01:16:31)

Brudno:

How did you interact with your coworkers?

(1-01:16:37)

Gompf:

Well as I said I was in Washington while George was overseas. My life centered very much around the teachers I worked with and my two families, my own family and in-laws, but when I worked after he came back and was in graduate school it was very much a busy time getting out of the house in the morning to get to work as he was going to Cal Tech, because in those days there was no such thing as a two-car family. So we had to leave together in the morning. Then he would pick me up at the end of his school day and fortunately coincided just about with my school hours.

(1-01:17:36)

Brudno:

I presume it must have been tough going to work with only one car, being transported with one car with your husband doing most of the driving.

(1-01:17:58)

Gompf:

Yes, he did most of the driving.

(1-01:18:02)

Brudno:

And how did you interact with your coworkers. I asked you about them on the job, but how did you interact with your coworkers in your free time, in your –

(1-01:18:23)

Gompf:

Well we didn't have that much free time. My husband had to study at night, and we did not have television at that time. I've always been a reader, so I enjoy reading while he was studying, and we always enjoyed classical music. We did have a good collection of records to listen to, and we enjoyed popular music too. It was the days of Frank Sinatra and the crooners as they were called, Crosby and others.

(Sixteen Quotation Lines Removed)

(1-01:22:07)

Brudno:

All right. I have a few more questions. I'm nearly done. I'm just curious about George. How did he get into the military?

(1-01:22:28)

Gompf:

Well Virginia Tech had the ROTC program and he was in the ROTC program and they were doing military drills for four years at college, and then the young men were automatically commissioned as lieutenants in the service. So he was part of the officer training program in college, and so was your grandfather Cliff.

(1-01:23:07)

Brudno:

Really?

(1-01:23:08)

Gompf:

He was in a naval ROTC program and was commissioned as an ensign and did his graduate work at Georgia Tech as part of the navy.

(1-01:23:22)

Brudno:

Oh, really?

(1-01:23:24)

Gompf:

And then was commissioned as an ensign.

(1-01:23:27)

Brudno:

I see. Then he was later promoted to junior grade officer, junior grade lieutenant?

(1-01:23:42)

Gompf:

I think he attained the junior grade about a year and a half later. All promotions were quicker during the war. In peace time, promotions are very slow, but people were being promoted very fast during WWII.

(1-01:24:01)

Brudno:

And may I ask, do you think beginning your marriage during the war had any impact on your successful marriage with George?

(1-01:24:34)

Gompf:

Well I think marriages were more stable in those days, but I understand that there were a lot of marriages that did not survive WWII because one or other of the partners would have changed so much during the war, but I felt that we had not changed and we lived our lives the same way after several years apart.

(1-01:25:11)

Brudno:

And how long were you and George married?

(1-01:25:22)

Gompf:

How long were we married?

(1-01:25:27)

Brudno:

Yes.

(1-01:25:29)

Gompf:

I think we were married 57 years when he died in 1999.

(1-01:25:38)

Brudno:

And as you know the focus of my research is on courtship and early marriage as well as the role of working women during WWII. Is there anything you'd like to share that I have not asked yet?

(1-01:26:02)

Gompf:

Well I think in those years most people met their mates in college and it was quite a usual custom for young people to be married within a year or two of finishing a four-year college degree. People married younger than they do now.

(1-01:26:32)

Brudno:

Thank you for really answering many of my questions. I hope this interview will be of great use to my research.

(1-01:26:52)

Gompf:

I would be quite interested in seeing how it turns out. It's been very interesting.

(1-01:27:03)

Brudno:

Yes, I agree.

(1-01:27:09)

[End of Interview]