

Department of History and American Studies
University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, Virginia

Zelda Newsome
Rosie the Riveter and the World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Mary Ogle
in 2012

Copyright © 2012 by The University of Mary Washington

This interview was conducted by a student in an oral history seminar in the Department of History and American Studies at the University of Mary Washington. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this interview transcript are covered by a legal agreement between the interviewee and the University of Mary Washington. The interview transcript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the University of Mary Washington. No part of the interview transcript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Department of History and American Studies, University of Mary Washington, 1301 College Avenue, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 22401, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user. Excerpts up to 1000 words from this interview may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited.

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 Zelda Newsome conducted by Mary Ogle, October 17 2012, Department of History and American Studies, University of Mary Washington, 2012.

Discursive Table of Contents – Zelda Newsome

00:00:01

Family background, born 1928, childhood, growing up in West Point Virginia, family life, father's job, mother's daily life, moving to Walnut Point, town descriptions.

00:05:10

Relocating after Walnut Point, getting married and moving to Lottsburg, siblings, the Depression, working with her father in the grocery store, school, friends.

00:10:08

Learning about the war, rationing, effect on family, end of the war.

Interview with Zelda Newsome
Interviewed by: Mary Ogle
Transcriber: Mary Ogle
Interview 1: October 17, 2012

00:00:01

Ogle: Today is October 17th 2012, and I am here with Mrs. Zelda Newsome to interview her for my oral history project. I'm just going to start out with some really straight forward questions for you. What is your full name and date of birth?

00:00:17

Newsome: Zelda Williams Newsome. October 15th 1928.

00:00:24

Ogle: Where were you born?

00:00:26

Newsome: Reedville.

00:00:27

Ogle: Is that in Virginia?

00:00:28

Newsome: Uh-huh.

00:00:36

Ogle: You grew up in West Point, is that correct?

00:00:38

Newsome: No, I grew up all over. We moved around a lot, lived in Warsaw first and moved from there on. But my happiest times were in West Point.

00:00:52

Ogle: Can you describe growing up in West Point?

00:00:57

Newsome: It was just a lot of fun, because you could walk anywhere you wanted to go. They had two drug stores and a movie theater and all that.

00:01:10

Ogle: What was the town like? Was it a big town? A little town?

00:01:13

Newsome: No, it was just a small town.

00:01:17

Ogle: Did you have any extended family that lived nearby? Aunts, Uncles or Grandparents?

00:01:20

Newsome: No, mm-hmm, no.

00:01:28

Ogle: What was a typical day like in West Point for you dad?

00:01:32

Newsome: Just working [laughs].

00:01:36

Ogle: Where did he work?

00:01:37

Newsome: The ABC store.

00:01:40

Ogle: Was he the manager?

Newsome: [nods head yes].

00:01:43

Ogle: What about your mother. What was a typical day like for her?

00:01:46

Newsome: She boarded. She had boarders, so she done a lot of cooking and tending to babies.

00:01:56

Ogle: How many boarders did she take in usually? Usually one at a time or?

00:02:00

Newsome: Sometimes there were four, had two bedrooms, extra bedrooms.

00:02:07

Ogle: Do you specifically remember any of the boarders more than others?

00:02:12

Newsome: Oh yes, but not their names.

00:02:17

Ogle: You mentioned that there was a military base nearby . . .

00:02:21

Newsome: Yeah, oh yeah [unknown word] you know where they had those dances and all, of course I was too young to go.

00:02:32

Ogle: Where any of the boarders that your mother took in, were any of them in the military? From the base or . . . ?

00:02:41

Newsome: Yeah, uh-huh.

00:02:43

Ogle: Could you tell me a little about them if you remember?

00:02:45

Newsome: No, I remember the way they look, but I can't remember the names. I didn't pay a whole lot of attention [laughs].

00:02:59

Ogle: What was a typical day like for you in West Point?

00:03:02

Newsome: Well, of course there was school. And then all of my friends lived close by. It was just a fun place.

00:03:16

Ogle: Were there any specific activities that you and your friends liked to do?

00:03:21

Newsome: No, just talk about others [laughing].

00:03:29

Ogle: You mentioned that your family moved around a lot. Where did you move to from West Point?

00:03:35

Newsome: West Point, I think we moved to Walnut Point, that was a near no place.

00:03:45

Ogle: Do you remember what year it was that you moved?

Newsome: [shaking head no].

00:03:50

Ogle: Could you describe that town?

00:03:53

Newsome: That wasn't a town. They had . . . [asks son in other part of the house: what would you say Walnut Point was Randy?] all they did was fish and it stunk down there too.

00:04:07

Ogle: Did it stink in West Point?

00:04:08

Newsome: Oh yes, but I got used to it.

00:04:11

Ogle: What caused the smell?

00:04:15

Newsome: The paper mill. But down in Walnut Point, it was the fish boats coming in, oh did they stink. And they canned tomatoes, had canning factories, he worked in a grocery, my daddy worked in a grocery store down there.

00:04:40

Ogle: Were there any other major differences between the two towns, other than they both stunk?

00:04:45

Newsome: Oh yeah, yeah. Walnut Point didn't have anything, just a couple houses down on the point right on the river, down on the water. Which I never did like the water. There weren't any place to go down there you had to ride every place you went.

00:05:10

Ogle: After Walnut Point, where did your family move?

00:05:14

Newsome: Seems like to me, I got married. I was married, I had just turned 18.

00:05:22

Ogle: Could you tell me a little more about that? And your husband?

00:05:26

Newsome: He worked down there too.

00:05:29

Ogle: Was he a fisherman?

00:05:32

Newsome: I think he canned, I guess they canned tomatoes and stuff like that.

00:05:41

Ogle: Was he the same age as you? Or were you both young?

00:05:42

Newsome: No, he was about 7 years older than I was or 6 years older.

00:05:49

Ogle: How did you guys meet?

00:05:51

Newsome: I was in the store down there, they had a store down there that my daddy worked in, of course I worked in there too with him and that's how I met

him. And besides my best friend liked him so I decided I'd get him [laughs] I didn't pay any attention to her, I knew she really went for him.

00:06:19

Ogle: Did you have a big wedding?

00:06:21

Newsome: No uh-uh, no indeedy.

00:06:29

Ogle: After you got married, where did you move to?

00:06:32

Newsome: Lottsburg.

00:06:35

Ogle: Did you stay there long?

00:06:36

Newsome: 20 some years. We stayed there until my husband died.

00:06:45

Ogle: How was the town there? Was it a fun town?

00:06:49

Newsome: No, there wasn't much to do there either, that was just, it's built up now, but there it wasn't anything.

00:07:00

Ogle: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

00:07:02

Newsome: Oh yeah, 3 brothers and 1 sister.

00:07:05

Ogle: Could you tell me about them? Where were you at age wise, who was oldest?

00:07:10

Newsome: Me, I was 7 years older than my sister. She died about 7 years ago and they boys were all younger. But I took care of them.

00:07:26

Ogle: Could you tell me a little more about your brothers?

00:07:32

Newsome: No, not really. I know I had to babysit a lot but you know nothing there.

00:07:44

Ogle: Were there aggravating?

00:07:45

Newsome: Sometimes, most of the time they were pretty good.

00:07:57

Ogle: I know you would have been pretty young, but do you remember your parents mentioning anything about the great depression?

00:08:04

Newsome: They didn't talk too much about it, just that they didn't like you know they were short on stamps and I think shoes were rationed I think everything was. I know gas was, of course there was a lot of black market stuff around too and I'm sure my dad bought some I would think cause' momma used to make a lot of cakes.

00:08:43

Ogle: You mentioned that you worked with your father in the grocery store, could you describe what that was like?

00:08:49

Newsome: It wasn't bad, you met a lot of people doing that.

00:08:54

Ogle: Were you paid?

00:08:55

Newsome: Oh yeah.

00:08:57

Ogle: What were the working conditions like? What were your daily tasks at the grocery store?

00:09:02

Newsome: Just waited on customers, yeah I liked it alright.

00:09:14

Ogle: What about school?

00:09:17

Newsome: I didn't school, I hated it.

00:09:19

Ogle: Why did you hate school?

00:09:23

Newsome: I don't know I just did [laughing].

00:09:26

Ogle: Did you have any favorite subjects, or teachers that you liked?

00:09:29

Newsome: Uh, no not really. Or I can't think of any now.

00:09:42

Ogle: Did you do any school activities with friends? Football games?

00:09:48

Newsome: Oh no, we just had to go home on the school bus, we didn't have too much of that stuff going on then. That was years ago Mary.

00:10:08

Ogle: How do you remember first hearing about the start of the war?

00:10:13

Newsome: [shaking head no] I don't know.

00:10:20

Ogle: How did you learn about Pearl Harbor? When they bombed Pearl Harbor.

00:10:24

Newsome: [laughing] I don't remember that! I don't know.

00:10:28

Ogle: Was it different learning about those kinds of things without a TV? Like how it is for us now.

00:10:36

Newsome: I would think it would have been, but I really don't remember much about it.

00:10:42

Ogle: Do you remember what grade you were in when the war started?

00:10:45

Newsome: [shakes head no] No indeedy. I told you I didn't pay too much attention.

00:10:58

Ogle: What do you remember about the ration booklets?

00:11:04

Newsome: Oh I just couldn't get the stuff I wanted, like chewing gum and it seemed like to me that you could only get a certain amount of candy and stuff like that.

00:11:16

Ogle: Did it have an effect on your family?

00:11:19

Newsome: I'm sure it did.

00:11:21

Ogle: Your mom couldn't cook as much for the boarders?

00:11:24

Newsome: Yeah, yeah.

00:11:28

Ogle: Did it affect your dad working at the grocery store?

00:11:33

Newsome: Well when I worked at the grocery store it was over with then, that's when we were in West Point, just about that time, it was just about over with.

00:11:52

Ogle: What do you remember about how the war ended?

00:12:00

Newsome: [shakes head no] I told you I didn't remember much. You'll just have to add something to it [laughs].

00:12:13

Ogle: Where there any specific changes in your daily life once the war ended?

00:12:20

Newsome: I would think so because I was dating a lot and we could travel a little bit, when I first started dating they didn't have gas either, like anything, so we were always running out of gas, which momma never did believe.

00:12:42

Ogle: Did you come home late?

00:12:43

Newsome: uh-huh.

00:12:49

Ogle: Were there any changes with school when the war ended?

00:12:53

Newsome: I don't think so.

00:13:08

Ogle: Did your brothers work at all, that you remember?

00:13:13

Newsome: My brothers were all so much younger than I was.

00:13:35

Ogle: Is there anything else that you would like to add.

00:13:38

Newsome: No indeedy. You can add what you want, but that's all I remember and that wasn't much.

00:13:53

Ogle: That's quite alright, you gave me a good portion.

00:14:03

Newsome: I guess if I really did sit down and think about it I could remember more my mind is blank, I'm full of pain medicine [laughs].

00:14:51

Ogle: That's ok, if there is nothing else you would like to add, we'll go ahead and stop there. Thank You.